

China's Non-Intervention Question

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Abstract

While it continues to adhere to the rule of 'non-interference/non-intervention' in the internal affairs of other countries, in a rapidly changing world, a steadily rising China is exploring how it can play a more constructive role in relation to international engagement with major political and humanitarian crises. The transformation of China's role in relation to international intervention has been driven by the nation's growing integration into the global political economy. To date, however, China has still not become deeply involved in unilateral or multilateral coercive intervention, but has in recent times selectively participated in international efforts mandated by the UN Security Council and has also joined or organized many regional efforts. Facing big challenges, great pressures and many uncertainties, China has to balance its traditional commitment to 'non-interference' with its responsibilities as a great power.

Keywords

2005 World Summit Outcome Document, United Nations Security Council, UN Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, UN Peacekeeping, UN Charter, African Union (AU), Association for South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), Darfur, Myanmar, North Korea, humanitarian intervention, principle of non-interference, United States

Although there are many aspects of continuity, Chinese foreign policy has changed in many important respects. One of the most notable ways in which Chinese foreign policy has changed can be seen in its evolving attitude and practice towards international engagement with political and humanitarian crises. Nowadays, it is well understood that China has been rising as a global economic and political power. It is increasingly a force to be reckoned with in relation to the global economy and international security. China's new economic power has been felt in global trade negotiations, a key role in dealing with global financial turmoil, and its multilateral diplomacy goes beyond the United Nations Security Council, where China holds a permanent seat. As part of its more assertive role in world politics, China is forging new economic and strategic partnerships with the United States, European Union, ASEAN, Russia, Africa as well as recently Japan.

Unlike other great powers from the West and elsewhere, China plays a unique role in international cooperation and conflict because its adherence to the principle of ‘non-interference’ in the domestic affairs of other countries has conditioned and constrained its direct and big involvement with, or responses to, international crises, conflicts and their settlement. Indeed, China has long observed and defended the principle of ‘non-interference’ or ‘non-intervention’ and is widely known as the principle’s main adherent. Today, China continues to use the principle to resist the Western intervention into its own domestic politics. Moreover, in its bilateral and multilateral relations with many developing and non-western countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America, China continuously and repeatedly insists that it will not abandon these principles but instead maintain them – a position which has generally been well received in the developing world.

Beneath its persistent rhetorical commitment to non-interference and non-intervention, however, in practice it seems that China is changing its position in relation to international engagement with political and humanitarian crises and is rethinking its stance on international intervention. Most notably, since the end of the Cold War, China has gradually become increasingly involved in multilateral interventions mandated and organized either by the UN or other appropriate regional organizations operating with the UN Security Council. As a result, China has become one of the largest troop contributing countries to UN peace operations, contributing more troops to UN operations than the other permanent members of the Security Council with the exception of France. China has also made a commitment to assist in supporting multilateral post-conflict reconstruction efforts in many ‘civil war’-torn states and societies. As the Chinese people gradually go global for business, education, travel and employment, the Chinese government has been forced to recognize that protecting growing Chinese overseas interests requires a more outward looking and engaging foreign policy that supports global and regional institutions that help resolve international/transnational disputes including such ones between the Chinese and others. In addition to China’s growing engagement with the UN, China and the US have been effectively exploring foreign policy and security cooperation in areas such as nuclear non-proliferation, anti-terrorism and other areas of shared concern.

Within this context, while China does not endorse the new Western-initiated and promoted idea of the ‘Responsibility to Protect’, China has endorsed many international resolutions and statements, which have actually been influenced by the idea. Clearly, these practices are not fully consistent with the traditional ‘non-interference’ principle but there are signs that China’s understanding of this principle is beginning to change – and not only

in relation to the Responsibility to Protect. For example, the ‘non-interference’ has been described as an unhelpful ‘burden’ upon China’s all important energy relations with the world.¹

Whether rapidly or slowly, therefore, China’s foreign policy in general, and its adherence to the principle of ‘non-interference’ in particular, are in a deep process of transition. As its economy grows and becomes more exposed to global risks and uncertainties, Chinese foreign policy makers are being forced to react to the changes and challenges at home and abroad. This raises the question of what the rise of China and the transformation of its foreign policy means for the global debate about international engagement and intervention in political and humanitarian crises. This article aims to examine China’s changing attitudes and policies towards international intervention and their implications for global cooperation. The first part of the paper focuses on the transition of China’s commitment to the principles of non-interference and non-intervention, towards a new paradigm that is more accepting of international engagement and sometimes intervention in domestic affairs. It argues that the principle of non-interference is now undergoing a profound change in Chinese thinking. The second part of the article explains why China has begun to rethink its position on non-interference and become increasingly tolerant towards intervention in the domestic affairs of states. The third part raises several key questions about what all of this means for China’s role in international intervention. In the conclusion, the paper tries to define China’s current position and future trajectory on the question of international intervention.

The Transformation of China’s Commitment to Non-Interference

Many China’s foreign policy principles were formed in the old times through 1950s to 1980s. The principle “non-interference” is such an example. It was formally established in 1950s together with other Chinese foreign policy principles such as the national sovereignty and its equality. There has been no fundamental revision on it since then.

In 1950s, China was in a firmly defensive position to help establish a post-Second World War international principle of “(mutual) non-interference” with other newly independent countries in Asia and Africa. But before the

¹ Linda Jakobson, “The Burden of “Non-Interference””, *China Economic Quarterly*, Q2, 2007, available at http://www.upi-fia.fi/doc/0351_csq2007q2_021foreignpolicy.pdf (date accessed 1 October 2008).

emergence of the principle, China significantly involved into the deadly Korean War.

Although this, from 1950s to 1970s, China conducted a limited military and political intervention in Asia, especially reference to Southeast Asia. After the Korean War, China deadly got involved into the regional conflict between then Indo-China countries and France and the United States, especially reference to the Vietnam War. In addition to such conflicts, China had some interventionist role in politically and morally supporting the international communist movement in some regional countries.

Since the late 1970s and the almost the whole 1980s, China had played little substantial role in international intervention. After the opposition to the Soviet Union's Afghanistan War and the establishment of diplomatic relations with the United States in 1979, China formally declared its "independent foreign policy for peace" in 1982. The policy significantly strengthened China's "non-interference" position. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, under the tightened sanctions against China imposed by the West, in the whole 1990s, China strictly pursued a "low key" foreign strategy while continued to resist the West's interference into China's domestic affairs.

But, since late 1990s, China's attitude to international intervention has been entering into a process of change. While it still maintains the principle of non-interference or non-intervention, China no longer simply challenges/opposes international intervention sponsored or organized by the West. One indication is Beijing not opposes the necessity of very legitimate international intervention. In this regard, some signs of China's policy change were witnessed.

In 2001, a new doctrine of "the responsibility to protect" (R2P) was developed by the report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS). Initially, some Chinese scholars strongly criticized the concept and worried this would justify the military international intervention taken by America or some European powers. But gradually, Chinese analysts recognized that the concept "R2P" might be not bad to bridge a sharp difference between supporters of a "right of humanitarian intervention" and supporters of principles of state sovereignty and non-intervention. But they stress that international intervention based on "R2P" must be only carried out under given conditions. Particularly, they argue that the UNSC mandate for a military international intervention is a strictly precondition.

In China's "Position Paper on the United Nations Reforms" issued in 2005, it states China's official attitude towards the R2P:

"Each state shoulders the primary responsibility to protect its own population. However, internal unrest in a country is often caused by complex factors. Prudence

is called for in judging a government's ability and will to protect its citizens. No reckless intervention should be allowed. When a massive humanitarian crisis occurs, it is the legitimate concern of the international community to ease and defuse the crisis. Any response to such a crisis should strictly conform to the UN Charter and the opinions of the country and the regional organization concerned should be respected. It falls on the Security Council to make the decision in the frame of UN in light of specific circumstances which should lead to a peaceful solution as far as possible. Wherever it involves enforcement actions, there should be more prudence in the consideration of each case".²

In 2004, there was a senior Chinese member on the UN Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, which produced the very influential policy report: *A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility*. The report famously adopted 'emerging norms' like the 'R2P'. Chinese leaders also agreed and approved the World Summit Outcome Document, which stated that: "[t]he international community, through the United Nations, also has the responsibility to use appropriate diplomatic, humanitarian and other peaceful means, in accordance with Chapters VI and VIII of the Charter, to help to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity".³ In the same year (2005), China also endorsed a Security Council mandated arms embargo, imposed on Sudan because of the humanitarian situation in Darfur. In 2006, China supported the Security Council's reaffirmation of 'R2P' in Resolution 1674. Later that year, China backed a unanimous Security Council Resolution that supported the deployment of a UN peacekeeping operation to Sudan (Resolution 1679). Symbolically, China has participated in several international sanctions such as those imposed on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). After the DPRK conducted nuclear tests in 2006, China supported the Security Council's Resolution 1718, which imposed limited sanctions on Pyongyang.

Indeed, China has a strong record of supporting the deployment of UN peace operations and since the early 1990s, China has made important troop contributions to UN peacekeeping operations in conflict-stricken areas in Southeast Asia, the Middle East, Latin America and Africa. In 1992 the UN conducted a major peacekeeping operation in Cambodia (UNTAC). China contributed around 800 engineers and over 100 military observers to the operation. In 2000, China contributed to the UN peacekeeping operation in East Timor (the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste).

² The paper is available at www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx/t199318.htm.

³ United Nations General Assembly, '2005 Summit Outcome', A/60/L.1, 20 September 2005, para. 139.

Although China had established itself as a contributor to UN peacekeeping in the 1990s, its contribution has expanded markedly in the twenty-first century. Indeed, participation in UN peacekeeping operations is now considered a major indicator of China's foreign policy shift. Overall, China is the thirteenth largest contributor of peacekeeping troops and the second largest among the permanent members of the Security Council.⁴ China is alone among the Permanent Five members of the Security Council in making a significant troop contribution to the United Nations-African Union (UNAMID) hybrid peacekeeping force in Darfur. It has announced that it is ready to deploy an additional 172-member engineering battalion to Darfur, bringing China's contribution to a total of 315 troops in support of the UN-AU hybrid peacekeeping force.⁵ China has also made extensive use of diplomacy to assist international efforts in Darfur and it was Chinese diplomacy that persuaded the Sudanese government to consent to the deployment of the hybrid peacekeeping mission.

Beyond its growing commitment to international peacekeeping missions, more importantly and meaningfully, China has also been involved in other international interventions. China played a civilian and military relief role in the international rescue activities that followed the 2004 Tsunami in Southeast and South Asia and has become involved in other humanitarian crisis management. In 2008, while it provided more than \$10Million in aid to Cyclone devastated Myanmar, China welcomed international assistance – including military assistance – in the wake of the devastating earthquake in Sichuan Province. As a member of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), China supports global efforts to control, reduce, and remove the danger of nuclear proliferation to human and global security. China has been cooperating with the international community and major powers such as the United States and Germany to negotiate nuclear issues with the DPRK and Iran separately. As the chair of the Six-Party Talks, China has played a key role in securing an effective multilateral process in relation to the DPRK (North Korea). Moreover, as a member of the UN's newly created advisory body, the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), China has lent its support to the post-conflict peace building process in various countries.

In Central Asia, China initiated the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and hosts its secretariat in Beijing. The SCO is not defined as an exclusively military organization or a new alliance system, but it is a new mode of

⁴ Rebecca Jackson, 'There's method in China's peace push', *Asia Times*, 21 December 2007.

⁵ Chin-Hao Huang, 'China's Evolving Darfur Perspective: The Significance and Policy Implications', CSIS PacNet Newsletter, No. 40, 24 July 2008.

international security cooperation akin to the ‘security community’ concept. Within the SCO framework, the Treaty on Long-Term Good-Neighborliness and Cooperation has been signed by the member states. The SCO facilitates confidence building measures such as annual military exercises and several thousand soldiers from the Chinese People’s Liberation Army soldiers participated. Besides the SCO, China has also participated in other military exercises with some ASEAN countries, Pakistan, India, the United States and Japan.

Broadly speaking, China’s role in regional institutional mechanisms in Asia and the Pacific such as the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), ASEAN Plus Three (China, Japan and South Korea), and the East Asia Summit (EAS) has resulted in a level and type of engagement that goes beyond its principle of ‘non-interference’. Such regional institutions, it should be remembered, are not simply confined to economic matters or trade, but are also political and strategic.

In the eyes of the West (particularly the EU countries) and Japan, which have dominated official development assistance to the developing world, China’s increasing official development assistance (ODA) also alters the nature of its commitment to non-interference stance. In sharp contrast to Western aid, Chinese aid is offered with ‘no political strings attached’.⁶ But, there are growing Chinese voices calling for a re-examination of the country’s policy of non-conditionality in relation to ODA. Some Chinese scholars maintain that China’s ‘non-interference’ and ‘no political strings attached’ policies in the Third World have worked well in the past but now face many new challenges. As such, they maintain that China needs to explore its own forms of political conditions that should be attached to foreign aid.⁷ Internationally, the US, EU, Japan, the OECD, as well as the World Bank⁸ have pressed China to reform its aid policy in order to harmonize it with the policies of other major donors. China’s partnership with the World Bank⁹ is helping adjust China’s unilateral aid policy to support the ‘good governance’ initiatives in the world’s poorest countries, which the Bank has been calling for.

⁶ China proudly and repeatedly declared that its ODA is absolutely without political strings attached at the 2006 China-Africa summit in Beijing.

⁷ Guo Peiqing, ‘Reflections on China’s “No Political Strings Attached”’, *The 21st Century* (in Chinese), 9, 2007, The Chinese University of Hong Kong.

⁸ Japan raised the issue of China’s ‘no political strings’ during China’s Premier Wen Jiabao’s official visit to Tokyo in April 2007.

⁹ The World Bank and China now jointly operate projects in Africa and other developing areas to promote transparency and anti-corruption. The two sides hope to share common responsibilities in the field of development.

Some Chinese scholars have supported China's cooperation with the US on global energy security. They argue that, 'the Chinese navy may take part in protection of international oil supply lines' and 'China may share America's economic burden in order to enjoy strategic oil benefits'.¹⁰ Indeed, a number of foreign analysts have noticed that not unlike other countries in the West, China's concerns about 'energy insecurity' have become a major driving force to quietly bringing China into international intervention. A Singaporean thinker observes, '[t]here has been evolution in Chinese thinking on the question of freedom of passage through the Straits of Malacca and Singapore. China supported the claims of the littoral states to sovereign control over the straits when the Law of the Sea Convention was concluded in 1982. But its increasing dependence on imported oil shipped through the straits has led to a shift in favour of burden-sharing, the recognition of the rights of user states and the need for cooperation between littoral states and user states'.¹¹ In summary, therefore, as a Chinese scholar writes, through these transformations of its foreign policy, China is renovating the principle of 'non-interference'. Thus, he argues, China is conducting a form of 'constructive intervention' in international affairs.¹²

Explaining the Shift in Non-Interference

Today, China's persistent advocacy of the non-interference principle serves three purposes: First, it is seen as defending China's sovereignty from the 'superpower threat' and other foreign interferences into China's sovereign affairs.¹³ China believes that advocacy and adherence to the principle can help stem the West's interference in its 'domestic' affairs. Since 1949 when the People's Republic of China was founded, China has almost constantly facing such 'interference' from the West. The country was so targeted, for instance, by Western economic sanctions. Since the end of the Cold War, China has become the largest country in the world still ruled by a communist party with

¹⁰ Xiao Lian, 'The China-US Energy Cooperation as A "Relations between Stakeholders"', *International Trade* (Beijing), 2, 2008, p. 16.

¹¹ Barry Desker, 'Why war is unlikely in Asia', *The Straits Times*, 25 June 2008.

¹² Wang, Yizhou, 'Ten Characteristics of Chinese Diplomacy', *The World Economics and Politics* (Beijing) May 2009, p. 14–15.

¹³ The term 'superpower threat' quotes from Robert Sutter's Testimony before the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission's hearing titled 'China's Views of Sovereignty and Methods of Access Control', February 27, 2008.

the socialist ideal at the heart of its constitution. The post-Cold War ‘democratization wave’ or ‘democracy revolution’ did not reach China. Therefore, Beijing and the West are still confronted by profound political differences. These differences, and the lingering fears of Western interference, help explain why China has not abandoned its commitment to ‘non-interference’: it sees it as a weapon to resist the West politically.

To some extent, the West’s offence creates China’s defence. But, for China, a passive and reactive non-interference policy is not necessarily a good defence. In effect, China has failed to stop the West’s continuous interference into China’s domestic affairs including issues such as Taiwan, Tibet, Xinjiang, human rights, religious affairs and many others.

Second, the commitment to non-interference helps China create and maintain a deep political affinity with the wider developing world. As I noted earlier, many post-colonial states adhere to the principle because it guards against neo-colonialism. For example, Southeast Asian states, both in their constitutions and the newly approved ASEAN Charter, insist that non-interference or mutual non-interference remains important and valid principle for safeguarding national sovereignty and managing international relations within the emerging regional community of Southeast Asia. Similar views are held by India, Pakistan and many African and Latin American countries. Although it has modernized considerably, China remains part of the developing world. Relations with the developing world are therefore defined as a key ‘pillar of China’s foreign policy’. The extreme importance attached by Beijing to good relations with the developing world, makes it determined to maintain its commitment to non-interference.

Third, adherence to the principle of non-interference helps China to justify avoiding becoming involved in international crises that are not matters of Chinese national interest or in cases where it simply opposes international intervention on principled grounds. When China is highly reluctant to take part in international interventions orchestrated by other powers, which is either not in China’s interest or conflicts with China’s moral standards, Beijing resorts to the existence of the principle to justify its inaction or opposition. Indeed, this is a strategy shared by many other developing countries, which carefully weigh the costs and benefits of intervention or non-intervention. In pointing to the principle of non-interference, China’s policy is squarely in line with the majority of Southern African countries in relation to the situation in Zimbabwe and other ASEAN countries in relation to the situation in Myanmar. Unlike the West, these countries share China’s preference for avoiding direct criticism of their neighboring countries. Of course, China’s insufficient and belated action (not inaction) in the Darfur and Myanmar crises invited a lot

of criticism from the West and awarded a weapon to China's rivals and adversaries with which to fiercely and unreasonably attack or demonize China. An ill effect is that such 'China bashing' leads elements of the international community to seriously disregard and ignore China's positive, constructive, and important cooperation and contribution in most challenging and pressing international affairs.

Therefore, given this and the preceding discussion of the transformation of Chinese attitudes towards non-interference, it is fair to argue that today's China faces a 'non-interference' dilemma. Gradually, along with China's cooperation with the international system, the Chinese have begun to reflect upon and reexamine this so problematic principle.¹⁴ The three factors that are shaping this re-examination are global interdependence, China's changing national interests and changing geopolitical realities.

Global Interdependence: A Double-Edged Sword

China's role in globalization has been evolving: China's first stage in globalization was the self-opening up of its market to foreign investments (including overseas Chinese companies). As a result of these reforms, China became the world's 'factory' by providing a cheap and skilled labour force, profitable markets, and by sacrificing the environmental fundamentals as well as human rights. The second stage was that China sought membership in international and regional institutions, regimes and arrangements as well as forums. The world's admission of Chinese membership marks China as an integral part of the global economic, security and societal systems. The third stage – which is where we are at today – is one in which: 'the fast-growing economy and the consequent needs for energy, resources and markets' allow China to 'engage more deeply with supplier and customer countries'.¹⁵ Currently, China is a new source of foreign direct investment (FDI). China's state-run companies or 'sovereign wealth', especially energy giants and, increasingly, commercial and private companies are quickly going global. In addition, it is also often overlooked that many of China's state-run companies are becoming more commercial and profitable.¹⁶ But, such companies are often criticised by governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the West. For

¹⁴ Wang, Yizhou, "Ten Characteristics of the Chinese Diplomacy".

¹⁵ Linda Jakobson, "The Burden of "Non-Interference"".

¹⁶ Trevor Houser, "The Roots of Chinese Oil Investment Abroad", National Bureau of Asian Research (Seattle), Asia Policy, No. 5, January 2008.

example, the United States Congress stopped several proposed mergers between US-based companies and Chinese companies because of concerns about US ‘national security’. And western NGOs and human rights organizations have criticised China’s oil investments in ‘problematic’ countries in the poor world such as Sudan and Myanmar.

China is viewed to have benefited greatly from global interdependence. Beijing and many other political capitals outside the West have found common ground with respect to their views of international order and global governance. But China’s growing interdependence with the global economy has also come at a high price. For example, China’s economic presence in unstable, conflicting and volatile regions like the Middle East, Central Asia, Africa and even Latin America comes with high geopolitical risks, vulnerabilities and uncertainties. The West has quickly responded to China’s engagement with the developing world. Frictions and tensions over conflicting interests and principles between China and the West are emerging, especially in relation to resources in Myanmar, Africa and elsewhere. Fortunately, and positively, the two parties, sometimes together with the third parties (for instance, Africans), have begun to conduct policy dialogues to resolve their difference.

China’s Changing National Interest Abroad

China’s era of traditionally ‘independence, autonomy and self-reliance’ is over. Facing many geopolitical and strategic crises, risks and challenges from the globe, there is a growing awareness of international issues, as well as demands and pressures at home to protect the growing numbers of Chinese citizens and public and private interests abroad. China’s market-oriented and booming state-run and private sectors began to realize the importance of the protection provided by the Chinese government in their international transactions. Primarily, China’s central government has had to respond to such challenges posed to the nation’s overseas interests. It has done so by creating new institutions in government to protect Chinese overseas interests and lives. China’s research arms of international studies have also begun to focus on how to manage international crises and better protect China’s overseas national interests.

Because of the logic of national interest, this expanding global interest has meant that China has had to consider intervening in the domestic affairs of other states, but such behaviour remains carefully balanced. For example, China has engaged in a major push to stop and reverse the development of nuclear weapons by North Korea by maintaining the ‘six-party’ process but it has not joined the US-initiated Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) against Pyongyang.

Geopolitical and Diplomatic Realities

China faces a more complicated global and regional geopolitical context. Western countries, especially the US, have been playing what I call ‘pressure diplomacy’ in dealing with China. One example of such diplomatic approaches to China is the US Bush administration’s ‘responsible stakeholder’ policy towards China, which is designed to press China to contribute more in this America-led world. The standards of Chinese responsibility promoted by the US expect China to effectively interfere or intervene in the ‘internal affairs’ of ‘rogue’, ‘failed’ or ‘fragile’ states, ‘military juntas’, ‘repressive’, ‘totalitarian’, and ‘pariah’ states such as North Korea, Myanmar, Sudan, Zimbabwe, Iran, and Venezuela by using its ‘influence’, ‘muscles’, or ‘connections’ with them. China would be praised as ‘responsible’ if it complied with western demands, otherwise it would be harshly criticised together with these countries. The tension between China and the western-dominated international community over these countries is likely to continue if China does not act as the West hopes it will. ‘A policy of non-interference is not a credible policy for a nation that wants to be respected as a responsible global power’, writes one analyst.¹⁷ Of course, this approach can be counter-productive and overlooks the extent to which China has been playing a mediating role in the West’s dealing with these countries.

Although China and many other developing countries share a common position on ‘non-interference’, they have different interpretations of it. African countries’ attitudes and policies toward national sovereignty and international intervention/interference into internal affairs tend to be more flexible. African countries generally oppose intervention imposed by outside forces, especially former colonial powers, but they accept interventions by African forces organized by the African Union. The Constitutive Act of the African Union states that: ‘[t]he Union shall function in accordance with the following principles: Non-interference by any member state in the internal affairs of another’, ‘[t]he right of the Union to intervene in a member state pursuant to a decision of the Assembly in respect of grave circumstances, namely war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity’, and ‘[t]he right of member states to request intervention from the Union in order to restore peace and security’.¹⁸

China has signed ASEAN’s Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC). It seems the two sides mutually support non-interference, but, like the African

¹⁷ Linda Jacobson, “The Burden of ‘Non-Interference’”.

¹⁸ *The Constitutive Act of the African Union*, Lomé, Togo, 11 July 2000.

Union, the ASEAN Charter accepted and approved in 2007-08 by totally ten Southeast Asian countries also modifies the mutual non-interference article. As one analyst put it: '[k]ey provisions of the Charter call for the promotion of democracy, human rights and obligations, transparency, good governance, and the strengthening of democratic institutions'.¹⁹ Learning from the African Union and the ASEAN, China needs to reassess the question of intervention in some circumstances, for example, at least, in cases of major humanitarian crises and severe attacks in other countries on China's interests and nationals.

In short, therefore, what these three factors suggest is that for China, there are many substantial reasons to revise, to an extent, the style and substance of the 'non-interference' principal.

New Questions about China's Role in International Intervention

Today, China is much more open to cooperating and establishing reliable partnerships on matters related to world peace, prosperity and stability than it was several years ago. The international community, even the 'sole superpower' (the US), has to seek China's cooperation and constructive contribution in order to cope with global insecurity ranging from security concerns to financial/economic problems. In this new context of Chinese engagement with the world, adaptively, China is both passively and actively revising its old principles and the practice of non-interference. But new questions are emerging as a result of China's transforming approach to international intervention. If we are to avoid being naïve or wishful, we need to recognize that there are no quick and easy answers to these questions.

The first issue is that as China becomes stronger and more confident, its concerns about external powers intervening in China's domestic affairs will gradually lessen. At the same time, China will either passively (by acquiescing in intervention conducted by other members of the UN) or actively engage in the use of intervention in international relations in varying degrees, occasions and forms. So, how should it balance this with the principles of 'non-interference' and 'non-intervention'? Can China find a new paradigm to maintain the value of the principle and meantime get around some of the dilemmas created by the principle? Moreover, how can China improve its relations with the West in relation to their different attitudes towards and practices of international intervention?

¹⁹ Barry Desker, 'ASEAN: Time to Suspend Myanmar', Honolulu: PacNet, No. 39A, 2007.

The above mentioned changes in the way that the AU and ASEAN think about non-interference and international intervention may provide a model for China: let the principle co-exist with other new principles. In other words, China's foreign policy can introduce new international principles and norms such as that which I label 'conditional interference' in order to practice China's responsibility to protect.

China's 'uncharacteristically and proactive conflict management diplomacy in the US-North Korea nuclear standoff'²⁰ and its use of its ties with Sudan and Myanmar to assist international engagement there may have helped us to think that China can create a 'third way' or new paradigm of international intervention. 'There are also strong pressures on Pyongyang to take actions towards denuclearization that they had long promised. Among those pressures let us never forget was the People's Republic of China which quietly but powerfully reacted to the North Korean test on October 9'.²¹ On the Darfur issue, China is playing a constructive role.²² On Myanmar, in 2007, China vetoed a US draft resolution to punish the military regime, but China has significantly and constructively mediated on the issue among Myanmar, ASEAN, the United Nations and the West.

The second issue is that with the exception of China's participation and cooperation in multilateral interventions such as the six-party talks and the proposed 'Peace and Security Mechanism' (PSM) in Northeast Asia, can China exert itself unilaterally into crises, conflicts and disputes in other countries? Do China's immediate neighbours and other states accept, welcome, expect or oppose, resist potential Chinese intervention? In North American think tanks, there are many discussions on the future of North Korea.²³ China's Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance treaty with the DPRK is still valid, but is it only reserved for a worst scenario on the Korean Peninsula? Some contingency analysts in the US have already predicted China's possible

²⁰ Samuel S. Kim, 'China's Conflict-Management Approach to the Nuclear Standoff on the Korean Peninsula', *Asian Perspective*, 30 (1) 2006, p. 5.

²¹ US Ambassador Chares L. J. Pritchard, Speech at the book launch seminar 'Failed Diplomacy: The Tragic Story of How North Korea Got the Bomb', Brookings Institution, 11 July, 2007.

²² See Lydia Polgreen, 'China, in New Role, Uses Ties to Press Sudan on Troubled Darfur', *New York Times*, 23 February 2008.

²³ For example, Jonathan Stafford, 'Finding America's Role in a Collapsed North Korean State', *Military Review*, January-February 2008; Victor Cha, 'We Have No Plan', *Nautilus Policy Forum Online*, 15 June, 2008

post-North Korea collapse plan.²⁴ As ‘refugees’ flows from the DPRK, developments on the Korean Peninsula may force China to respond beyond the six-party talks.

The third issue revolves around whether China has the capabilities to intervene in a troubled world? Clearly, China is still not ready to project its “hard” (mainly military) power in the world. China’s coercive tools have still not been fully modernized. In today’s world, international intervention implemented by the West, in many cases, is about coercion. Although external observers have created alarm by exaggerating China’s military modernization, in reality, China’s military modernization is still an unfinished business. Unlike the US and others, China has never been a principal ‘sender’ of sanctions around the world.²⁵ It has rarely used economic and military sanctions unilaterally to achieve China’s foreign policy goals. On the other hand, China has long experience of being a target of sanctions. The US and EU have often pursued their China policy goals by threatening or imposing economic and military sanctions (embargos) against China. China’s participation in UN-mandated international sanctions regimes can be seen as an early sign of the emerging world power’s transition from a target of sanctions to a ‘sender’.

The fourth issue is that whilst some in the West criticize China’s non-interference in the Third World, a more interventionist China is likely to increase the potential for conflict between it and the West. If China’s intervention goes beyond intervening in the affairs of countries deemed ‘problematic’ by the West, there is the danger of misperception on the part of the other major powers might create conflict. Objectively speaking, until now the West has also benefited from China’s neutral stance on international intervention. As such, China’s gradual rethinking of the principle of non-interference may create a new friction between China and the West if the Chinese role in international intervention takes on a relatively unilateral character like that of the US. As such, it is clear that China and the West need to coordinate and even harmonize their attitudes and actions on international intervention.

²⁴ For example, see Glaser, Bonnie, Scott Snyder, and John S. Park, ‘Keeping an Eye on an Unruly Neighbor: Chinese Views of Economic Reform and Stability in North Korea’, A Joint Report by: Center for Strategic and International Studies and U.S. Institute of Peace, 3 January 2008.

²⁵ Gary Clyde Hufbauer, Jeffrey J. Schott, Kimberly Ann Elliott and Barbara Oegg, *Economic Sanctions Reconsidered*, 3rd edition, (Washington, DC: Peterson Institute for International Economics, 2008), p. 2.

The fifth – and related – issue is whether the West is ready to see China as a genuine partner in the ‘Responsibility to Protect’ initiative. When he commented on the development of Myanmar affairs, Gareth Evans used the term ‘our responsibilities’ in reference to how the West should respond to the Myanmar government’s refusal to accept humanitarian aid from the West in the wake of Cyclone Nargis.²⁶ This may imply that the ‘our’ still means the West or the Western-led international community. As China still opposes what Evans called ‘coercive intervention’ under the ‘Responsibility to Protect’, it is clear that China is not included as a part of the ‘our’. In fact, although China has become a pivotal member of the international community, some in the West still consider China to be a part of the ‘them’ rather than the ‘us’. So, if the ‘Responsibility to Protect’ mainly refers to the ‘our’ rather than the truly ‘global’ and ‘inclusive’, it will be difficult for China to play a role in collective actions in the name of a shared ‘Responsibility to Protect’. A solution to this problem depends squarely on whether or not the West really treats China as part of the ‘our’ when it comes to assigning sovereign responsibilities.

Conclusion

Since 1979, when China conflicted with the Soviet Union-backed Viet Nam in the Cold War context, China has avoided intervening in the affairs of others. To date, China’s involvement in intervention has been mainly related to keeping the peace, managing conflicts and seeking international/regional security. Where it has intervened, it has only done so strictly under the authorization of the UN Security Council or other multilateral frameworks. In short, to the extent that there is a new Chinese interventionism it is highly conditional, cooperative, and constructive.

With its continued commitment to non-interference, a rising China will evolve as a new kind of force in relation to international intervention based on the UN Charter, China’s revised foreign policy principles and other international norms and regimes such as the African Union Constitution, the ASEAN Charter and new international rules such as the ‘Responsibility to Protect’. It is important to note that China’s flexibility in dealing with international intervention issues is mainly framed by an interest in achieving a final settlement or the effective management/control of international conflicts, rather than intentionally seeking to complicate the situation.

²⁶ See Gareth Evans, ‘Facing Up to Our Responsibilities’, *The Guardian*, 12 May 2008.