

Can China Be a Leading Security Actor in the Global South?: Focusing on the Case of China's Growing Role in Africa

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This paper examines China's evolving role in peacekeeping operations in Africa, focusing on its bid to be recognized as a norm leader in global security within the international community. While China's participation in United Nations peacekeeping missions has significantly increased, particularly in Africa, this involvement serves dual purposes that are enhancing its international standing and securing its geopolitical and economic interests in strategically important regions. The paper also attempts to critically analyze China's peacekeeping activities through the lens of Xi Jinping's Global Security Initiative, revealing an intricate blend of humanitarian rhetoric and strategic motives. By aligning its peacekeeping strategy with broader foreign policy objectives, China seeks not only to contribute to regional stability but also to expand its influence and challenge the existing Western-centric security order. The study highlights the complexities of China's peacekeeping efforts and suggests that its increased engagement is part of a strategic plan to reshape global security norms and assert its power as a dominant force in the Global South.

Keywords Security, Global South, China, Africa, the Global Security Initiative, Peacekeeping

INTRODUCTION

The Chinese government released a White Paper titled *China's Armed Forces: 30 Years of UN Peacekeeping Operations* in 2020 to stress multiple strategic purposes that enhance China's image as a responsible global power, communicate its commitment to international peace and stability, and justify its growing influence in international security affairs as a part of a broader narrative that China is crafting to position itself as a key player in global governance. China's involvement in peacekeeping has changed dramatically in recent years alongside its evolving global security strategy (Fung,

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2016)¹. Since 2022, China has announced that it would participate in United Nations peacekeeping missions as a global power, with a focus on the objectives of the Global Security Initiative (GSI) proposed by President Xi Jinping. This is an elucidation by his own imagination of his vision of the security framework that he believes China envisages as an all-encompassing, cooperative, and sustainable security architecture for the purpose of advancing world peace and stability.

China has seen a surge in its peacekeeping role, going from the world's ninth-largest contributor in 2012 to the second-greatest financial supporter of UN peacekeeping, farther behind the US, especially in Africa. The increasing footprints of China's diplomacy, information, military, and economy, especially in Africa, can no longer be overlooked. Witnessed in the deepening of military cooperation with several African countries, the inaugural overseas military base in Djibouti, the reach of state-owned enterprises across the continent, the hordes of investments that have flown to the continent through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and lastly where China has employed some good old-fashioned COVID-19 diplomacy.

Over the past two decades, China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) has been growing alongside its involvement in UN peacekeeping operations in Africa. Unlike China's contention of commitment to international peace and stability, China has been criticized for expanding its military influence within the African continent in relation to UN peacekeeping activities (Carrozza, 2021)². It is also that this escalation is not just a display of commitment to Global Governance but also essentially is in line with the region's strategic economic and geopolitical interests. The establishment of China's first overseas military base in Djibouti and its growing involvement in African security affairs point to a strategic drift harnessing peacekeeping operations as a vehicle for projection of influence continent-wide (Gowan, 2020; Uzonyi, 2020)³. In other words, China will use the vehicle of UN peacekeeping to help themselves achieve their foreign policy imperatives while riding on the coattails of the UN's legitimacy and credibility.

Another element of the trend of the Chinese security strategy in relation to Africa is clearly much greater than the simple statement that we have to deal with more factors and the physical presence and deployment of military and strategic influence of the Chinese on the territory of the African continent. Below the surface of supporting international security, China's peacekeeping goes hand in hand with its broader foreign policy goals. China's security strategy in relation to Africa is also shaped through means beyond a mere military footprint and retrenchment of its influence in terms of the African landmass. Underlying the rhetoric of contributing to international security, Chinese peacekeeping deployments are inextricably tied up with the aims of Beijing's broader foreign policy.

¹ Fung, Courtney J. 2016. "What explains China's deployment to UN peacekeeping operations?" *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 16(3):409-441

² Carrozza, Ilaria. 2021. "Legitimizing China's Growing Engagement in African Security: Change within Continuity of Official Discourse" *The China Quarterly* 248(1):1174-1199

³ Uzonyi, Gary. 2020. *Finding soldiers of peace: Three dilemmas for UN peacekeeping Missions*. Georgetown University Press; Gowan, Richard. 2020. "China's pragmatic approach to UN peacekeeping." Accessed March 1, 2024. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/chinas-pragmatic-approach-to-un-peacekeeping/>.

These operations certainly help reinforce China's image as a major responsible power, but they are also designed to protect its investments and increase its power and reach in strategic areas of the world. The double-edged sword of peacekeeping initiatives indicates a strategized tactic wherein the purported humanitarian discourse is enforced for agendas that are inherently political and fiscal. China's peacekeeping as in strategic deployment, especially in resource-rich countries like South Sudan, has been of the connotation that peacekeeping is intertwined with economic interests. Critics such as Lynch (2014)⁴ argued that China's peacekeeping efforts are driven by an agenda to protect its substantial investments in oil and infrastructure in unstable regions, thus aligning its security strategy with its economic imperatives.

Furthermore, the alignment of peacekeeping with the Global Security Initiative (GSI) reflects an intention to reshape global security norms to favor a Sinocentric order, subtly challenging the existing Western-centric security architecture (Haenle and Sher, 2023)⁵. The approach not only aids China in forging stronger ties with developing nations but also enhances its ability to influence international policy discussions and norms concerning peace and security. In light of these observations, the development of China's role in UN peacekeeping epitomizes a larger strategy of integrating national interests with international security activity. While some of these developments serve regional stability and global peace, incorporating geopolitical strategy into humanitarian aid raises weighty questions about the implications of the broader trend of Chinese influence over global security governance. Thus, the article attempts to shed light on China's security activities as an actor in the Global South with Africa case for examining China's political purposes under the UN peacekeeping operations. The research also only looks into China's security policy under the Xi Jinping era.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

China's foreign policy strategy under the Xi Jinping Era

China's foreign policy strategy has evolved in line with the direction of its foreign strategy. Since the reform and opening-up period, the leadership of China has been keeping several goals to realize China peaceful rise: to build a peaceful and stable international environment for China's economic take-off, to prevent West hegemonic powers led by the U.S. from containing China, to increase China's global influence and to recover its status as a big power through socialism with Chinese characteristics (Xinhua, 2022)⁶. Chinese leaders have put forward their noteworthy guidelines for

⁴ Lynch, Colum. 2014. "UN Peacekeepers to Protect China's Oil Interest in South Sudan." *Foreign Policy*, June 16. Accessed March 2, 2024. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2014/06/16/u-n-peacekeepers-to-protect-chinas-oil-interests-in-south-sudan/>.

⁵ Haenle, Paul and Sher, Nathaniel. 2023. "Initiative Diplomacy: China's New Rules for Global Governance, Security and Development." *East Asian Policy* 15(4):7-21.

⁶ Xinhua. 2022. "Profile: Xi Jinping leads China on new journey" October 25, Accessed March 4, 2024. <https://english.news.cn/20221025/97bce6c7614242f5a6e0c3ecf5e837ee/c.html>

their distinctive foreign policy agenda. When we arrange in chronological order, Deng Xiaoping's 'keeping a low profile' (韜光養晦) and 'striving for achievement' (有所作為); Jiang Zemin's 'responsible great power' (責任大國); Hu Jintao's 'peaceful development' (和平發展), 'harmonious world' (和諧世界), and 'core interests' (核心利益).

During Xi Jinping's era, China's foreign policy strategy reflected a strong sense of nationalism. In his first term, Xi emphasized the importance of establishing a 'new type of great power relationship' (新型國際關係). It can be interpreted as an effort to present a discourse befitting China's international standing as it has risen to become a powerful country in international relations. In his second term, he also focused on establishing a new type of international relations that bypasses the U.S., focusing on peripheral diplomacy as well as protecting maritime rights and interests (Hao, 2015)⁷. As the strategic competition between the U.S. and China intensifies, China is attempting to enhance its influence in the international community by putting forward Chinese-led global governance. Moreover, Xi's agenda of 'community with a shared future for mankind' (人類命運共同體) is centered on strengthening ties with African countries. China's discourse on the agenda in diplomacy was first mentioned at the U.S.-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue in 2010 and later became one of the ten foreign strategies presented at the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2012. The concept of a community of shared future from the Hu Jintao era was later expanded to a community with a shared future for mankind (人類命運共同體) during the Xi Jinping era (Kim and Joo, 2022).⁸

China has been utilizing the concept of a community with a shared future for mankind to emphasize its ties with Africa and advocate for the necessity of cooperation. Since 2013, during the Xi Jinping era, the Chinese government has positioned Africa as 'a community of shared future for mankind' (人類命運共同體), as President Xi Jinping mentioned during his visit to Tanzania in March 2013. In a speech at the University of Dar es Salaam, he emphasized that "history tells us that China and Africa have always been a community of destiny and that common historical encounters, common development tasks, and common strategic interests have closely linked us. (这段历史告诉我们, 中非从来都是命运共同体, 共同的历史遭遇, 共同的发展任务, 共同的战略利益把我们紧紧联系在一起)" (人民网, 2013).⁹ Since then, the Sino-African ties were directly referred to as a 'community of shared future for mankind' in the White Paper of China's African policy in 2021 (Xinhua, 2021).¹⁰ China has underlined the vision of a community with a shared future for mankind at every FOCAC meeting to deepen cooperation with African countries in the fields of politics, economy, security, international cooperation, and others.

⁷ Hao, Qi. 2015. "China Debates the 'New Type of Great Power Relations'." *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 8(4):349-370

⁸ Kim, Yunhee and Joo, Jaewoo. 2022. "The Conception of 'Community of Common Destiny' with Africa through China's Multilateralism -Concentrating on the Forum on China and Africa Cooperation-." *Korean-Chinese Social Science Studies* 20(4):9-31

⁹ 人民网. 2013. "习近平: 永远做可靠朋友和真诚伙伴" March 26, Accessed March 4, 2024. <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n/2013/0326/c64094-20911841.html>

¹⁰ Xinhua. 2021. "Full Text: China and Africa in the New Era: A Partnership of Equals" November 26, Accessed March 4, 2024. http://www.news.cn/english/2021-11/26/c_1310333813.htm

The concept is also applied to Xi's recent security policy, the Global Security Initiative (GSI), which focused on the Chinese vision of common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable security. It was introduced as a concept at the Bo'ao Forum for Asia in 2022 and concretized through an official paper a year later (People's Daily, 2022)¹¹. It is one of three major(global) initiatives(三大倡议) that were proposed by Xi Jinping, including the Global Development Initiative (GDI) and the Global Civilization Initiative (GCI) introduced in 2021 and 2023 respectively. The three initiatives are for formulating China as a global security leader based on Sinocentric multilateralism and sharing values with the Global South (人民日报, 2023).¹² The core of the Global Security Initiative (GSI) is to emphasize the need for cooperation with various countries to respond to diverse security risks facing the international community, such as local conflicts, prolonged COVID-19, and others. Thus, the Chinese government calls for joint response efforts by the international community to global security threats such as regional conflicts, terrorism, and climate change.

Based on the Global Security Initiative (GSI), China seeks to promote bilateral and multilateral security cooperation with countries and international organizations across the world. It specifies the goal of strengthening security cooperation and solidarity with developing countries, particularly Africa. It emphasizes that existing multilateral cooperation platforms and mechanisms led by China, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and BRICS, will be used as cooperation platforms for the Global Security Initiative (GSI). Beijing stressed support for Africa's peace and development of security and the diverse activities related to the global conventional arms control process in Africa through platforms and mechanisms of cooperation such as the China-Africa Peace and Security Forum (MFA, 2023).¹³ The Initiative shows that it mostly reiterates existing Chinese policies and activities that will now be reframed as part of its framework. With regard to China's promotion of peace and development on the continent of Africa, China is to expand its involvement in UN peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts and play a growing role projecting China's military power in a direction toward more peaceful objectives on the African continent. China aims to fully embark on reshaping the global security order centered around itself ahead of the official start of Xi Jinping's third term. In response to China's containment by the U.S. and its allies, it is interpreted that China intends to strengthen strategic solidarity with the Global South through the establishment of a common security front (Haenle and Sher, 2023). Furthermore, through the Global Security Initiative (GSI), China is expected to solidify cooperative relationships with the Global South that share security values.

¹¹ People's Daily. 2022. "Commentary: Global Security Initiative offers China's solution to global security dilemmas" April 23, Accessed March 4, 2024. <http://en.people.cn/n3/2022/0423/c90000-10088023.html>

¹² 人民日报, 2023. "三大全球倡议的理论境界与深远意义" September 22, Accessed March 4, 2024. <http://www.rmlt.com.cn/2023/0922/683607.shtml>

¹³ MFA. 2023. "The Global Security Initiative Concept Paper" February 21, Accessed March 4, 2024. https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjbxw/202302/t20230221_11028348.html

The relations between China and the Global South, according to the ever-changing international situation

China's policy towards Africa has evolved from an ideology-centered one to pursuing practical interests and building a strategic partnership in accordance with international order. Broadly speaking, Beijing endeavors to realize the aims of China's foreign policy strategy by using Africa (MFA, 2021)¹⁴. When the relative power gap between the U.S. and China was significant, during the period of 'keeping a low profile' (韬光養晦), China sought to weaken U.S. influence in international society by strengthening ties with African countries. China, moreover, actively aimed to construct a regional order centered around itself with African countries in the era of 'striving for achievement' (有所作為), focusing on enhancing its peripheral diplomacy to build a regional order centered around itself as well as proposing the discourse of the vision of a community with a shared future for mankind to developing countries including Africa (He, 2020)¹⁵. It aims to construct a regional order centered on China and displacement for the U.S.-led order in international relations.

Africa was vital to China as Beijing was trying to realize foreign strategies in international society from the 1950s. During the 1950s-70s when Sino-Africa relations were characterized by Bandung spirit and Third World solidarity, China endeavored to break the ice of international isolation and forge an anti-imperialist united front with Asian and African countries, which influenced China's policy towards Africa in later years. The 1955 Bandung Conference was a historic moment that laid the foundation for unity among newly independent countries and Third World solidarity (McCann, 2019)¹⁶. However, during this period, the exchanges between China and Africa were heavily ideological instead of developing economic ties.

After Deng Xiaoping's reform and opening-up policy, China shifted away from an ideology-centered foreign policy and adopted a pragmatic approach, focusing more on expanding economic cooperation rather than political slogans in Sino-African ties. China pursued pragmatic diplomacy and economic interests from the 1980s to the early 2000s (Kim and Joo, 2022). The Chinese government's primary interests are resource acquisition and market entry in African countries, whereupon China emerged as Africa's largest trading partner. In 2000, China established a multilateral platform, the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), attempting to diversify its African policy. However, Beijing prioritized economically driven actions and its own interests; it could not escape criticism as neocolonialism in the 21st century (Rapanyane, 2021)¹⁷.

Drawing on China's previous efforts, the Sino-African ties moved to a strategic

¹⁴ MFA. 2021. "China and Africa in the New Era: A Partnership of Equals" November 26, Accessed March 7, 2024. https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/2649_665393/202111/t20211126_10453904.html

¹⁵ He, Wenping. 2020. "A Community with a Shared Future: Beijing's Vision of China-Africa Relations." *China Quarterly of International Strategic Studies* 6(1):37-52

¹⁶ McCann, Gerard. 2019. "Where was the *Afro* in Afro-Asian Solidarity? Africa's Bandung Moment." *Journal of World History* 30(1/2): 89-124

¹⁷ Rapanyane, Makhura B. 2021. "Neocolonialism and New imperialism." *Journal of African Foreign Affairs* 8(3):89-112

partnership in the mid-2000s. China has sought to elevate its relationship with Africa into a more comprehensive and long-term strategic partnership. The Xi Jinping era has developed a strategic partnership of mutual benefit and realizing a community of shared future based on Hu Jintao's achievement that led China and Africa to a relationship of mutual understanding and friendship (AU, 2021)¹⁸. The Chinese government has continuously strengthened its ties with Africa officially by publishing White Papers on its African policy that reflect Chinese leaders' political ideologies and diplomatic discourses. Prior to 2000, there were no white papers on African diplomacy, but three White Papers have been published so far (once during Hu Jintao's era in 2006 and twice during Xi Jinping's era in 2015 and 2021) (Kim and Joo, 2022).

Furthermore, the Forum and China and Africa Cooperation(FOCAC) are deeply connected to the Belt and Road Initiative to realize the concept of a community of shared future for mankind under Xi Jinping's leadership. China's underlying cooperation in peace and security has been significantly strengthened, including the deployment of peacekeeping troops and capacity-building support instead of economic gain, unlike in previous years. Africa has played a significant role, especially in China's security strategy. In Xi Jinping's first term, 2013-2017, the Chinese government made its intentions to participate in global security governance in Africa due to the visibility of competition between the U.S. and China as the U.S. Asia re-balance strategy is expanded. Africa is the main battlefield for China's greatly increased deployment in United Nations peacekeeping operations. In 2016, China became the second-largest contributor to the UN peacekeeping budget after the U.S. (Chinadaily, 2016)¹⁹. China's contribution of infantry battalions to South Sudan and Mali is a token of some ways in which its role is changing. The setting up of an overseas military facility in Djibouti in 2017 aligns with China's seeking to project a long-term military presence in Africa (Ibid.).

During Xi's second term from 2018 to 2022, China focused on strengthening Africa's Leadership amidst strategic competition. China deepened its security cooperation with Africa as strategic competition with the United States intensified. The Trump administration explicitly labeled China as a strategic competitor and strengthened its aggressive stance in various areas such as trade and technology; thereby, China also made clear its determination to defend its core interests. At the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation(FOCAC) in 2018, China proposed the Peace and Security Initiative, signaling its determination to strengthen its leading role in African security governance. At this summit, Chinese President Xi Jinping indeed formally launched the initiative as another tool in China's toolkit to strengthen its role in African security governance. The initiative is also in tune with China's larger strategic interests in Africa and illustrates how it is designed to deepen the cooperation framework with the African Union (AU) (MFA, 2018)²⁰. In this context, securing leadership in Africa emerged as

¹⁸ AU. 2021. "Strive to Build A China-Africa Community with a Share Future in the New Era" November 26, Accessed March 4, 2024. <https://au.int/en/speeches/20211126/strive-build-china-africa-community-share-future-new-era-address-he-ambassador-liu>

¹⁹ Chinadaily. 2016. "China to become 2nd largest contributor to UN peacekeeping budget" May 30, Accessed March 4, 2024. https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2016-05/30/content_25536207.htm

²⁰ MFA. 2018. "Beijing Declaration-Toward an Even Stronger China-Africa Community with

a strategic task for China. It is manifested by enhancing cooperation with countries along the Belt and Road Initiative and taking an active part in the settlement of African regional security issues. The Chinese government proposed the Global Security Initiative (GSI) at the start of Xi's third term in 2022. China has implemented peace and security development within the framework of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), playing a crucial role in deploying Africa's peace and security governance, under the main pillars of the initiative. China is actively engaging in building Africa's security ecosystem through practical cooperation, such as expanding military exchanges and training and providing military supplies to Africa.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF AFRICA IN THE CONTEXT OF THE GLOBAL SOUTH

The significance of Africa is increasingly emphasized in the limelight of the Global South in international affairs; thereby, the voice of the Global South is more influential nowadays. Recently, African countries articulated their perspectives regarding the Russia-Ukraine conflict and its implications for international norms at the 11th emergency session on the Ukraine crisis, titled 'Aggression against Ukraine', of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) held in 2022 to vote on Resolution A/RES/ES-11/1(UN, 2022)²¹. As the < Figure 1> shows, the results of the vote are that African countries were divided, with 28 voting in favor, 1 voting against, 17 abstaining, and 8 not participating at all, when 141 member states from all regions over the world supported the resolution.

How can we distinguish the region of the Global South? It is complicated to distinguish geographically which countries make up the Global South (Rising, 2023)²², but Taekyoon Kim (Jeon, 2024)²³, the director of the Asia-Africa Center at Seoul National University, argued that it is valid to classify it according to 'Brandt Line' by Brandt Report in 1980, albeit it does not precisely coincide with the geographical division of the North and South Hemispheres. He added that the world is divided into the US-centric liberal world (First World), the Soviet-centric socialist world (Second World), and the Global South countries, often referred to as the 'Third World,' which reject alliances with either of these two worlds. Among scholars in the scholarly discourse on international politics, three principal interpretations of the term Global South are noteworthy as follows. The first and most widely recognized understanding encompasses

a Shared Future." Accessed March 4, 2024. http://www.focac.org/eng/zywx_1/zywj/201809/t20180912_8079765.htm.

²¹ UN. 2022. "Aggression against Ukraine: resolution/adopted by the General Assembly" March 18, Accessed March 5, 2024. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3965290?v=pdf>

²² Rising, David. 2023. "Everyone's talking about the Global South. But what is it?" AP News. September 7, Accessed March 8, 2024. <https://apnews.com/article/what-is-global-south-19fa68cf8c60061e88d69f6f2270d98b>

²³ Jeon, Hyojin. 2024. "Strengthening ties with the Global South with soft power" Economy Josun Newspaper. April 1, Accessed March 8, 2024. https://economychosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2024/03/29/2024032900015.html



Source: Development Reimagined, 2023²⁴

Figure 1. African countries vote on the UN Ukraine Declaration

regions and nations characterized by pervasive poverty and entrenched socioeconomic marginalization. The next is the Global South, which refers to the Non-Aligned Movement at the Bandung Conference, as well as the UN Group of 77, which pursues cross-regional and multilateral alliances that show diverse cooperation cases based on platforms that go beyond the use of previous colonial powers. The last one is that the Global South is portrayed as an area of resistance to neoliberal capitalism that shows everywhere in international society as performing anti-hegemonic engagement (Huang, Braveboy-Wagner, and Maihold, 2021)²⁵. The term Global South is also perceived as a political concept that refers to a collective of developing countries emphasizing cooperation among Southern Hemisphere nations to counter the Global North's past colonial rule and current domination of the international order (Nye, 2023).²⁶

²⁴ Development Reimagined. 2023. "How African countries voted on calling for just and lasting peace in Ukraine" February 23, Accessed March 5, 2024. <https://developmentreimagined.com/africanvotesonukraine/>

²⁵ Haug, Sebastian., Braveboy-Wagner, Jacqueline and Maihold, Günther. 2021. "The 'Global South' in the study of world politics: examining a meta category." *Third World Quarterly* 42(9):1923-1944.

²⁶ Nye, Joseph S. 2023. *What is the world in the 'global south'?*. The Australian Strategic Policy

The international order has changed from unipolar, dominated by the U.S., to multipolar in compliance with diverse changes such as China's rise to prominence on the world stage, the threat of global climate change, and others. In 2024, the aspect of the world split into three main camps: the Global West, centered around the United States and other Western powers; the Global East, led by China and Russia; and the Global South, which has grown significantly as it pursues a neutral diplomatic path for maximizing its national interests and mapping out its own line of policies for its sake. In this connection, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi underlined, "This is the time when the countries of the Global South should unite for the greater global good [...] Voice of the Global South is one of the most unique platforms of the 21st century [...] it has received the voice of its own for the first time" at the 2nd Voice of Global South Summit in 2023 (Modi, 2023).²⁷ It shows that the Global South plays a savvy balancing act to maintain strategic equilibrium between the major powers. It is not just about adhering to traditional Western partners anymore but cementing and building ties with China and Russia, expanding their diplomatic horizons, and creating new opportunities for cooperation and influence in international relations. The representative example that shows the impact of it is that the Global South refused to comply with sanctions on Russia made by the Global West rules in the aftermath of the Russia-Ukraine war. On this account, a rethinking of the approach in the Global South has recently been discussed among U.S. policymakers so as to sustain its position within the international system and promote collaboration on worldwide affairs. In this connection, Deniel Kritenbrink, an assistant US Secretary of State, argued that the U.S. strategy toward the Global South needs to be with a lens of "a world where rules, norms, and institutions prevail over outdated and dangerous concepts of might making right" (Magnier, 2024).²⁸

Under the changing geopolitical landscape, China endeavors to augment its global influence by cultivating ties with the Global South that share its vision and align with its strategic objectives. From a security perspective, China also utilizes the Global South to consider strengthening cooperation with the Global South as a critical strategy to achieve multi-layered goals, such as keeping the United States in check, reshaping the international order, and safeguarding overseas interests. Specifically, as the strategic competition between the United States and China intensifies, China is seeking to balance against the U.S.-led order by forging solidarity with Global South countries. It clearly came to the fore when the Chinese government implemented the Global Development Initiative (GSI) (People's Daily, 2024).²⁹ While expanding economic cooperation and

Institute.

²⁷ Modi, Narendra. 2023. "Voice of Global South stands out as a distinctive platform in the evolving landscape of the 21st century," November 17, Accessed March 9, 2024. <https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-prime-minister-narendra-modis-opening-remarks-during-the-2nd-voice-of-global-south-summit-576088>

²⁸ Magnier, Mark. 2024. "China benefits from global stability even as it tried to undercut it, US official says" Feb 22, Accessed March 10, 2024. https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3252761/china-benefits-global-stability-even-it-tries-undercut-it-us-official-says?campaign=3252761&module=perpetual_scroll_0&pgtype=article

²⁹ People's Daily, 2024. "To usher in bright future of peace, security, prosperity, progress for world" June 3, Accessed March 10, 2024. <http://en.people.cn/n3/2024/0103/c90000-20117724.html>

infrastructure support in Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America, China is also broadening its support base by representing the stance of developing countries in multilateral forums such as the United Nations. Moreover, through the Global Security Initiative (GSI), China challenges the existing Western-centric security discourse and proposes alternative norms. China is building a normative consensus with the Global South by emphasizing principles that align with the stance of developing countries, such as sovereign equality and peaceful resolution of disputes. Furthermore, China needs to promote economic cooperation with developing countries as an important way, and the key way, to ensure China's economic security and to secure the development of China's guarantees of its own energy, food and other strategic industries.

THE CHINA-AFRICA SECURITY COOPERATION FOR PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT

China's participation in United Nations peacekeeping began in the early 1990s, and with the assignment of five military observers from China's military to the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization in April 1990, China's peacekeeping activities in Africa have been part of the resumed deployments by United Nations peacekeeping operations. It also serves as a prime example of the Chinese government demonstrating its role as a responsible country leading the international norm. The following cases are typical examples of how China carries out its peacekeeping activities under the label of humanitarian support.

China's growing role as a security actor in peacekeeping operations

A. Privatized representation and promotion of interests in Africa

A noteworthy implementation of China furthering its strategic influence and global presence with a specific focus on Africa would be the establishment of Frontier Services Group (FSG). While it may be marginal to focus on a single company given China's economic depth and breadth, the implications of FSG are potentially quite impactful as it distinguishes itself as an outlier from other companies. FSG was reportedly founded in 2014 by the former head of Blackwater Worldwide, Erik Prince. Although the company was initially founded as DVN Holdings Limited in Bermuda as an electronics firm (hkexnews, 2014)³⁰, the shift in industry focus and to the current establishment of FSG occurred later in the year. During his tenure at FSG, Prince led the company from its beginnings as a logistics firm with additional specialization in insurance to expand into private security as well as aviation. FSG has been described as a means for enabling Chinese businesses to operate efficiently and effectively in Africa. Naturally, given the reputation of China on the continent, it is interesting to observe that the country would need to exercise such practices. However, this could also be indicative of the projected capabilities and, by extension, influence that China would seek to wield. Of course,

³⁰ hkexnews. 2014. "incorporated in Bermuda with limited liability" January 10, Accessed March 11, 2024. <https://www1.hkexnews.hk/listedco/listconews/sehk/2014/0110/ltn20140110376.pdf>

high-risk operations such as evacuations from conflict zones are justifiable reasons for needing a company such as FSG that could provide specialized services in this regard and maintain the basis of logistics as well as insurance at its core.

The tie to the government of China is visible in that the single largest investor in the company (Cole and Emmons, 2020)³¹ is the CITIC Group Corporation, which is a state-owned enterprise. FSG is also listed on the Hong Kong Exchange and trading as SEHK: 500 (hkex, n.d.)³², thereby making the company a publicly listed state-owned enterprise. While it has been noted in the history of FSG that the company does not provide services involving armed personnel or training armed personnel, it has reportedly been the case at times that the company has provided training to non-armed personnel for close protection and security. However, it has also, in the same line, been argued that paramilitary training, inclusive of programs and services, has been offered and conducted, which would also fall under the scope of Prince's experience and expertise.

In an effort to expand operations in continental Africa in 2014, Prince planned to build a diesel refinery in South Sudan, which already had upwards of \$10 million dollars in prior investments (Gridneff, December 2014)³³. However, this project came to a halt when the contract with FSG was canceled by South Sudan and reportedly even supported personally by the country's president. FSG, in total, was to be paid over \$23 million dollars by the South Sudan Ministry of Petroleum to transport oil and gas materials as well as perform maintenance on oil production fields (Sudan Tribune, 2019)³⁴. Needless to say, such a contract would also need security services in order to ensure the integrity of the project, resources, and associated personnel. Also, in 2014, FSG purchased two Kenyan aviation companies to provide oil and gas logistics services to the country, but the local government did not approve the license renewals (Gridneff, May 2014)³⁵. The oil and gas industry were not the only area explored by FSG. The company was, for instance, seeking to obtain fishing rights in Mozambique, but this was also at a time when Prince was exploring the potential for securing defense contracts there too (Ibid.). In essence, while there are logistical elements involved in the operations of FSG, there is also a tangible and related security component to it as well.

With respect to the nature of FSG structure and operations, a question arises as to whether it could serve as a high-level model for replication that can promote the interests of China in Africa while also serving the dual position of defense bolstering.

³¹ Cole, Matthew and Emmon, Alex. 2020. "Erik Prince offered lethal services to sanctioned Russian mercenary firm Wagener" *The Intercept*. April 13, Accessed March 11, 2024. <https://theintercept.com/2020/04/13/erik-prince-russia-mercenary-wagner-libya-mozambique/>

³² hkex. n.d. "Frontier Service Group LTD." Accessed March 11, 2024. https://www.hkex.com.hk/Market-Data/Securities-Prices/Equities/Equities-Quote?sym=500&sc_lang=en

³³ Gridneff, Llya. 2014. "South Sudan hired ex-blackwater chief to restore war-hit oil" *Bloomberg*. December 18, Accessed March 11, 2024. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/2014-12-18/south-sudan-hires-ex-blackwater-chief-to-restore-war-hit-oil.html>

³⁴ Sudan Tribune. 2019. "Sudan receives \$ 24 million from South Sudan in oil transit fees" *Sudan Tribune*. January 22, Accessed March 11, 2024. <https://sudantribune.com/article65100/>

³⁵ Gridneff, Llya. 2014. "South Sudan chaos halts Prince's plan for oil refinery" *Bloomberg*. May 28, Accessed March 12, 2024. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2014-05-22/south-sudan-chaos-puts-ex-blackwater-ceo-s-refinery-plan-on-hold>

Of course, when concerning defense, the logical constituent connected to state affairs is the People's Liberation Army (PLA). For example, in May 2017, FSG acquired 25% of a private security training school called International Security and Defense College (Martina, 2017)³⁶. Logic dictates that connections that eventually lead to the PLA are present, and indeed, the capabilities of the PLA could become enhanced with the usage of private security firms, particularly with the traits of a militaristic character such as Erik Prince. While he resigned in 2021 as the executive director and deputy chairman of FSG, his historic role and influence in the company have given it frameworks for continuation and development. In the subsequent years following Prince's resignation, the US Department of Commerce, in June 2023, added FSG to the Bureau of Industry and Security's Entity List to provide military training and support to the PLA (Freifeld, 2023)³⁷. The significance of this move is straightforward in that FSG has effectively been operating, at least in part, as an entity that provides sensitive services crucial to state integrity.

Regardless of whether FSG is entirely credible for the diversified rise in Chinese military presence, what can be stated in confidence is that the Chinese military establishment is increasingly becoming viewed as a prestigious training destination for many African countries seeking to be better equipped and prepared in an ever-riskier international security landscape.

B. Military endeavors and the strengthening of multilateral ties

Besides FSG and other privatized sponsorships, there are also efforts by the PLA to train and develop the military capabilities of friendly African countries while simultaneously creating a platform for mediation between states, should it ever be required. Certainly, strengthening ties and building better relationships between countries is a practice that China has implemented effectively to its advantage and is especially visible across the expanse of Africa.

Already, the PLA has educated and trained influential figures in Africa with just one military academy, the PLA Command College in Nanjing, graduating 10 defense chiefs, 8 defense ministers, and several former presidents (Nyabiage, 2023)³⁸. Some of the high-profile graduates include former president Laurent Kabila of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, former president Joao Bernardo Vieira of Guinea-Bissau, former president Sam Nujoma of Namibia, former president Jaya Kikwete of Tanzania (Nantulya, 2023A)³⁹. Other capable commanders include General Lagos Lidimo of

³⁶ Martina, Michael. 2017. "Blackwater founder's FSG buy stake in Chinese security school" Reuters. May 30, Accessed March 12, 2024. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-silkroad-companies/blackwater-founders-fsg-buys-stake-in-chinese-security-school-idUKKBN18Q0WR/>

³⁷ Freifeld, Karen. 2023. "Flight training for Chinese military pilots targeted in latest US expert crackdown" Reuters. June 12, Accessed March 12, 2024. <https://www.reuters.com/world/us-limits-exports-flight-schools-others-training-chinese-military-pilots-2023-06-12/>

³⁸ Nyabiage, Jevans. 2023. "Africa sets sights on China as a top destination for military training" South China Morning Post. August 2, Accessed March 12, 2024. <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3229118/africa-sets-sights-china-top-destination-military-training>

³⁹ Nantulya, Paul. 2023A. "Chinese professional military education for Africa: key influence and strategy" United State Institute of Peace, Accessed March 14, 2024. <https://www.usip.org/sites/>

Mozambique, who was the longest-serving army chief of the country, and Major General Fred Mugisha of Uganda, who led the African Union Mission to Somalia from 2009 – 2011 before becoming joint chief of staff for the Ugandan military (Ibid). The PLA International College of Defense Studies is another military school that offers training to a significant number of African students, and nearly half of the class makeup comes from the continent (Ibid). Additionally, the PLA National Defense University receives hundreds of matriculants annually that are eventually graduated as officers. Therefore, it can be assessed that China is not only expanding its capabilities of training foreign graduates from Africa but also that Africans are viewing China as a premier destination for military training. Logic also dictates that Africans who meet each other in Chinese military institutions are also able to expand their international network and create multilateral relationships.

Another example of Chinese military education would be Eritrean president Isais Afewerki,⁴⁰ who also received a socialist education in 1967 (Ibid.). The result can be credited to not only enabling President Afewerki to successfully lead a guerilla movement against Ethiopia over a period of around 30 years but also to rule Eritrea with his interpretation of Maoist philosophy. In political meetings between President Xi Jinping and President Isais Afewerki, both acknowledged common interests and gratitude, while the latter highlighted the role China played in providing Eritrea with the means of obtaining independence. Motivations for China to train Africans on an ever-increasing scale are multifold. Firstly, the Chinese are able to expand their influence in an entire continent that has historically been mistreated by other international powers, namely those in the West. By creating an alternative, and one that is also often provided through scholarships, China is able to establish itself as an amicable player that also delivers. A new market can also be formed for China given that Chinese military equipment can be paired with the military education along with the contacts and sights of development for African countries. Indeed, having a dominant market presence with Chinese military equipment would also sideline other competitors that would seek any market share. There is also the ideological component of Chinese socialism, which can be seen throughout the strata of different African countries and is evidently apparent in resource-rich countries such as Angola or strategically placed ones such as Eritrea.

C. Peacekeeping and development through hard power

The international presence and strength that China wields today are due in part to the leadership and reforms of Deng Xiaoping, which was the time when the country began actively contributing to the UN peacekeeping budget and eventually towards direct involvement via troops in peacekeeping operations (ISDP, 2018)⁴¹. A driver for

default/files/2023-07/sr-521-chinese-professional-military-education-africa-key-influence-strategy.pdf

⁴⁰ Nantulya, Paul. 2023B. "China's military political work and professional military education in Africa" October 30, Accessed March 14, 2024. <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/china-pla-military-political-work-pme-africa/>

⁴¹ ISDP. 2018. "China's role in UN peacekeeping" March 18, Accessed March 14, 2024. <https://isdpeu/content/uploads/2018/03/PRC-Peacekeeping-Backgrounder.pdf>

initiating peacekeeping would be economic, as it provides a cost-effective method of demonstrating China's commitment to global stability and enhancing its position in the international system as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). Indeed, a stable international environment enables China to benefit from its cordial relations with resource-rich countries in Africa, such as South Sudan, which exhibits immense oil and mineral wealth that is attractive to the Chinese economy (Xinhuanet, 2017)⁴². When it comes to a country like South Sudan, which only recently gained independence from Sudan, China is able to not only stabilize the security environment of the country but also benefit economically from its resources despite the area being tense and insecure. For instance, Beijing is able to capitalize on its peacekeeping apparatus and relations with its neighboring countries like Sudan to ultimately benefit from the preexisting oil and gas infrastructure to extract hydrocarbons from the area. Such an example demonstrates the interplay that peacekeeping troops can have upon more significant international relations and, by inclusion, the Belt and Road Initiative (IISS, 2022)⁴³.

China is the second largest contributor to the UN in peacekeeping assessment and membership fees. It is also the most significant contributor of troops out of all the permanent members of the UNSC. In the past 30 years, the Chinese armed forces have contributed over 40,000 peacekeepers to 25 UN peacekeeping missions worldwide (The State Council of China, 2020). Beijing is the 7th highest in Africa as of 2023 <see Figure 2>, the third-largest contributor to the UN budget, and the second-highest contributor to the UN peacekeeping budget (Klobucista and Ferragamo, 2023)⁴⁴. In tandem with its economic rise, China has largely kept a role of impartiality and neutrality, particularly in the context of Africa. This obviously is sharp forecasting by China in that the country respects and cultivates harmonious relationships with diverse African states and even fosters interstate relations that would have otherwise been more difficult to achieve. Examples of personnel being deployed by China to the UN aside from troops would be in the form of passive military observers and support like engineers, medical teams, and logistics experts. Indeed, it is noteworthy to mention that African countries are well aware of the hard power capabilities of China and hold the country as a standard given that their authority is present not only in their own country but also in the communal international security forces of the UN. Peacekeeping is also implicitly inherent to armistice, harmony, and resolution, which are all admirable qualities regardless of context.

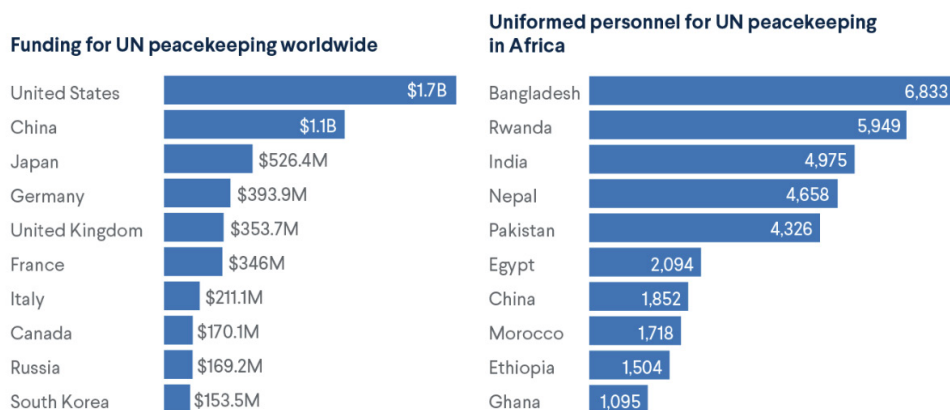
As <Figure 3> exhibits, recent key peacekeeping contributions by China include security forces deployed to Mali in 2013. 403 troops were tasked with primarily engineering projects, but China's commitment towards antiterrorism and stabilization

⁴² Xinhuanet. 2017. "Sudan, China keen on sound mining cooperation" January 4, Accessed March 19, 2024. http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-01/04/c_135955026.htm

⁴³ IISS. 2022. "China's Belt and Road Initiative: A geopolitical and geo-economic assessment" The International Institute for Strategic Studies.

⁴⁴ Klobucista, Claire and Ferragamo, Mariel. 2023. "The role of peacekeeping in Africa" Council on Foreign Relations. December 12, Accessed March 19, 2024. <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/role-peacekeeping-africa>

Top ten contributors of funding and of personnel



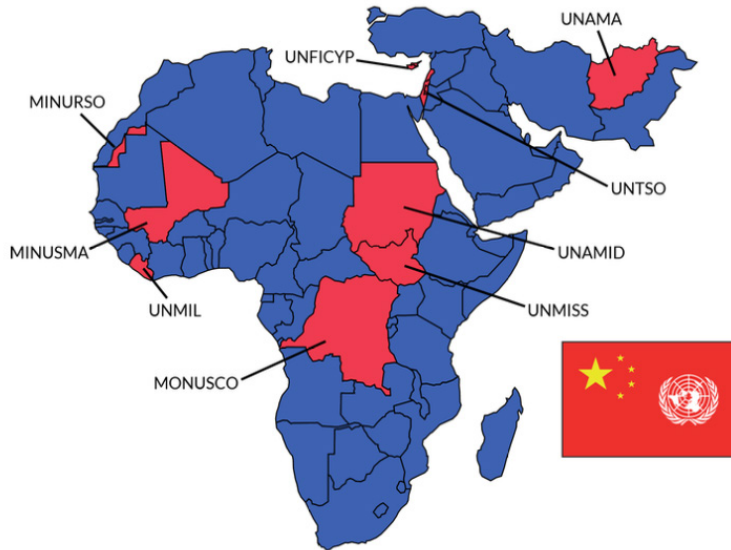
Source: Klobucista and Ferragamo, 2023

Figure 2. Peacekeeping Funding and Personnel Come from Different Countries

measures is evident and applicable to its international economic interests as well as domestic internal security. By 2020, the number of committed peacekeeping troops to Mali rose but only modestly to 426 personnel (Ibid.). Ever since 2014, China has also dedicated personnel to Darfur, Sudan, with a greater focus on active combat to compensate for the UN's limited military capabilities, such as with intelligence operations, drones, and attack helicopters to engage non-state actors (NSAs) that engage in asymmetric warfare. In 2015, China sent a helicopter squadron to Sudan along with 1,031 combat troops to South Sudan. Subsequently, in 2016, the Chinese brokered a ceasefire agreement between competing powers, namely the South Sudanese government and rebels. As of 2020, China has kept its peacekeeping troops stationed in South Sudan, with the number slightly rising to 1,072, whereas bordering Sudan has 370 personnel (Ibid.).

Looking forward to the future, it is apparent that China remains committed to its stance on UN peacekeeping operations. While active combat is not a regularly experienced event with the troops, other productive activities exemplify the country's strategic breadth. A peak of 3,045 personnel was recorded in 2015 by the UN, and the number declined in subsequent years to 2,630 in 2016, 2,644 in 2017, 2,515 in 2018, 2,545 in 2019, and 2,534 in 2020, but it is expected that China will continue to keep its currently high role of involvement (Ibid.).

Indeed, China is able to greatly project its power across the African continent and is moreover able to promote peacekeeping measures through its mediation and backing. As China is becoming more viewed as a prestigious destination by African countries it should be noted that the country will certainly expound upon its position advantageously, particularly when concerning security, development, and economics. Mutually beneficial endeavors, confidence-building projects, and the ambitious Belt



Source: ISDP, 2018

Figure 3. Distribution of China's UN Peacekeeping Personnel

and Road Initiative all converge to a formidable cache that other members of the international system should note in the future.

CHINA'S POLITICAL AGENDA THROUGH COOPERATION

China's foreign policy agenda is a product of the Chinese government's support for peace and security building in Africa. It also integrates well with Xi Jinping's recent security policy, the Global Security Initiative (GSI). According to the annual report to the Congress on military and security developments involving China by the U.S. Department of Defense, the U.S. viewed the initiative as "Chinese officials had yet to clearly define how [the Global Security Initiative (GSI)] would actually advance the vague security goals it espouses, such as safeguarding "comprehensive" security and protecting territorial integrity. International receptivity to [Global Development Initiative (GDI)] and [the Global Security Initiative (GSI)] has been mixed so far." The report added that "[Global Development Initiative (GDI)]'s links to [Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)] has made the initiative more attractive to developing countries." (U.S. Department of Defense, 2023).⁴⁵ Moreover, although the Chinese government carries out its peacekeeping operations with Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) in line

⁴⁵ U.S. Department of Defense. 2023. "Annual report of military and security developments involving the People's Republic of China," October 19, Accessed March 20, 2024. <https://media.defense.gov/2023/Oct/19/2003323409/-1/-1/1/2023-MILITARY-AND-SECURITY-DEVELOPMENTS-INVOLVING-THE-PEOPLES-REPUBLIC-OF-CHINA.PDF>

with humanitarian assistance in Africa, it cannot avoid criticism in international society. It is because China's political objectives to be inherent in China's peacekeeping activities.

One is enhancing the image of a responsible great power. China also wants to establish itself as a responsible great power in the eyes of the international community through the UN peacekeeping missions in Africa. While China conducts peacekeeping strictly on non-combat operations, protecting the safety of the people, medical assistance, and infrastructure construction. In 2013 in Mali, a peacekeeping medical team of China protected the health of Mali's people (Ministry of National Defense of China, 2024)⁴⁶. Through increasing dispatch of peacekeeping troops and financial contributions as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, China has displayed its proactive engagement in international security governance. With those Sinocentric political discourses as peaceful development, inclusiveness, multilateralism, peace through development, and the concept of a community of a shared future for mankind, China is trying to reinforce its image as a responsible country for leading the international norms (Ibid.). It is also related to fostering enhancing countermeasures against the U.S.-led international order. That is to say, China's participation in peacekeeping operations can also be conceived as an attempt to resist the current international security order led by the United States. China seeks to bring about changes in the regional balance of power by expanding its military and security involvement in Africa.

The other one is that China seeks to promote military and economic interests through peacekeeping operations. China is making greater use of peacekeeping troops deployment as an important way of further enhancing military and security exchanges with African countries. The projection of Chinese military power in conflict zones supports China's geostrategic positioning in Africa and hints at the underlying motives of a future economic gain. That peace in the region is crucial to China's economic relationship with Africa, particularly with respect to acquiring resource and market access. The Chinese government deploys UN peacekeeping troops to protect its investment in Africa. South Sudan, for example, as of 2020, more than 1,100 PLA peacekeepers were deployed for state-owned China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC). Although foreign companies in South Sudan's oil sector have departed from the country due to expanded internal conflict, CNPC is the leading investor when PLA has gradually and strategically increased the deployment of its troops to the area of oil pipelines and deposits since 2015 (Savkov, 2020)⁴⁷. China's expanding military footprint in Africa also aims to strengthen skills and knowledge transfer with its African partners. It also allowed China to acquire both hard and soft military skills. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for example, PLA troops representing softer non-combat specialties, such as military medicine and engineering, learn to operate in a complex

⁴⁶ Ministry of National Defense of China, 2024. "Chinese military dispatches peacekeeping troops to Mali for 10 consecutive years" January 4, Accessed March 19, 2024. http://eng.mod.gov.cn/xb/News_213114/Features/16278161.html#:~:text=In%202013%2C%20the%20Chinese%20peacekeeping,assistance%20for%20the%20local%20people.

⁴⁷ Savkov, Nikita. 2020. "China's discourse and interests related to its role in U.N. peacekeeping" The Jamestown Foundation. October 30, Accessed March 20, 2024. <https://jamestown.org/program/chinas-discourse-and-interests-related-to-its-role-in-u-n-peacekeeping/>

environment (Benabdallah, 2020).⁴⁸ In sum peacekeeping task is also an essential chance to build comprehensive capabilities of the Chinese PLA. China gains experience in joint operations with multinational forces through real-world deployments and examines its military logistics system for overseas deployments.

CONCLUSION

China's recently developed security strategy, the Global Security Initiative (GSI), reflects Africa's increasing geopolitical importance amidst China's expanding global influence. Sino-African relations are developed by China's domestic and ever-changing international trends. China's strategy for Africa in each period has been closely linked to the time's global situation and security agenda. Amid complex challenges such as the intensification of U.S.-China competition, pandemics, climate crises, and geopolitical conflicts, China has sought to enhance its global influence and build a new international order through strengthened cooperation with Africa.

Beijing's African security strategy in the Xi Jinping era has been systematized through the Global Security Initiative (GSI) for concretization of the competition for global security governance and norm leadership in the regional context of Africa. Particularly when examined by period, the expansion of China's role as an international security provider, strengthening its voice on African security issues, and presenting Chinese-style security discourse have evolved. It seems to imply that Africa is a key strategic space for China as a pre-eminent global power for the long-term external foundation of Chinese global influence. China's peacekeeping operations serve multiple objectives. They enhance their image as a responsible power at a global scale, impart safety to investments, and strategically expand starting from regions important to themselves. China's peacekeeping policy duality is a tug-of-war between its benevolent empowerment stories and the underlying realpolitik.

The Chinese engagement in the peace and security issues of Africa can be understood as an element of a complicated political performance rather than only for the sake of regional stability. It encompasses gaining the upper hand in international norm competition, seeking a balance of power through alliances with emerging countries, and building the foundation for China-led global governance. China is strategically linking universal peace talk with its unique peace path through the Global Security Initiative (GSI), thereby evoking an inevitable norm competition in Africa. In turn, cooperation with Africa serves as a stepping stone and outpost in projecting Chinese influence.

⁴⁸ Benabdallah, Lina. 2020. *Shaping the Future of Power: Knowledge Production and Network-Building in China-Africa Relations*. University of Michigan Press.

