

BOWLES'S *VIEW* OF AN *ACCURATE MAP OF THE WORLD, OR TERRESTRIAL GLOBE*, laid down from the *BEST OBSERVATIONS* and *NEWEST DISCOVERIES*; particularly those of other celebrated *CIRCUMNAVIGATORS*: Illustrated with a variety of useful *PROJECTIONS* and *REPRESENTATIONS* of the *HEAVENLY BODIES*: the most approved *ASTRONOMICAL* and *GEOGRAPHICAL DEFINITIONS, TABLES, and PROBLEMS*. With an easy and familiar *Explanation* of the most curious and interesting *PHENOMENA* in the *UNIVERSAL SYSTEM*.  
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# The Changing Strategic Design of Chinese Peackeepers

In Line with UN or Chinese Goals?

CINDY HURST



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Open Source, Foreign Perspective, Underconsidered/Understudied Topics

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# **THE CHANGING STRATEGIC DESIGN OF CHINESE PEACEKEEPERS IN LINE WITH UN OR CHINESE GOALS?**

By Cindy Hurst

## **INTRODUCTION**

The year 2015 marked the 25th anniversary of China's participation in United Nations peacekeeping (UNPK) missions. Since 1990, over 30,000 Chinese peacekeepers have served in over 30 peacekeeping missions around the world. At first China held an openly slow and antagonistic viewpoint toward UNPK. Over time, however, the middle kingdom has gradually changed its pace due to the evolving international situation and to further its foreign policy agenda. Recent missions indicate an even more dramatic shift toward the commitment of its forces.



By MONUSCO Photos (Photo of the Day 10 November 2013) [CC BY-SA 2.0](#), via [Wikimedia Commons](#)

For example, on 26 March 2015 China sent a peacekeeping infantry battalion to Juba, South Sudan. This commitment of armed and more capable personnel set a new standard and marked a profound shift in the country's attitude toward UNPK missions. China has long held firm to its policy of not interfering in the domestic affairs of other countries. Becoming directly involved in such operations could potentially be perceived as interference of some sort. However, it can just as easily be defended through the fact that peacekeeping operations can only move forward once all parties agree to them.

A closer look at China's recent participation in UNPK missions offers insights into a number of strategic variables that are driving Chinese peacekeeping missions. First, with the absence of modern day conflict experience (at least since the 1979 Sino-Vietnam war), China's newly acquired military technologies and capabilities remain untested under contemporary conditions. Second, the country's economy has grown by leaps and bounds and is able to support these technological advances, which offers incentives to participate. In its peacekeeping missions, China is able to put many of these capabilities, such as communications, logistics, and to a certain degree combat capabilities, to real-life use under various scenarios. This paper, through a case-by-case analysis of China's involvement in some of its most prominent peacekeeping missions (or in some cases lack of involvement), offers definitive clues about how Xi Jinping and the military intend to use peacekeeping to further their objectives and goals as the country seeks global recognition and respect.

## **BACKGROUND: FROM CONDEMNATION OF UNPK TO FULL PARTICIPATION**

In a 1996 article titled "China and UN Peace Keeping: From Condemnation to Participation," author Yongjin Zhang breaks apart the evolution of China's policy on peacekeeping into four periods. The 1950s and 1960s mark the period of condemnation. The decade from 1971 to 1981 marks the period of non-disruption, followed by the period from 1981 to 1988, which marks the period of cooperation. Finally, the period of participation (commitment) began in 1988.<sup>1</sup>

The period of condemnation was largely a result of the People's Republic of China's (PRC) discontentment over its rejection to become a member of the United Nations. The United Nations was established in October 1945, following the end of World War II. At that time, the five permanent members of the UN Security Council were the United States, United Kingdom, France,

the Soviet Union, and the Republic of China (ROC, known today as Taiwan). In 1945 the ROC, run by the Kuomintang (KMT), governed all of China. At the end of World War II a full-scale civil war broke out between the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the KMT, with the CCP becoming the eventual winner and the country was named the People's Republic of China. However, the United Nations continued to recognize the ROC as one of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, even though the PRC now ruled mainland China. This caused the country to greatly resent the United Nations and its Security Council members.

Zhang points out that during the 1950s and 1960s, China condemned the United Nations and the United States. Zhou Enlai, the first premier of the PRC, had argued that the United Nation was “under the manipulation of US imperialism” and “must be thoroughly reorganized.”<sup>2</sup> Foreign Minister Chen Yi stated, during a press conference, that the United States and the Soviet Union had long used the United Nations to conduct political transactions and called for the establishment of a “revolutionary UN.”<sup>3</sup> As a result of these perceptions, both China and the West went through a time of mistrust during this period. The fear and animosity was mutual. Despite the ROC having lost control of China in 1949, Western powers refused to allow the PRC to join the UN Security Council, trying to prevent another Communist government from gaining a place in the organization. By 1971, however, the PRC had gained enough international support to gain admission into the United Nations, replacing the ROC as one of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council.<sup>4</sup>

During the period of non-disruption, throughout the 1970s, despite its entry into the UN Security council, the PRC persisted in its negative view of UNPK operations, opting to neither vote in resolutions nor contribute monetarily. Then, in 1981, during the 36<sup>th</sup> session of the UN General Assembly, Ambassador Ling Qing, China's permanent representative to the United Nations, announced that China would take a positive and supportive position and give careful consideration to UNPK operations. This marked the beginning of the period of cooperation, an important turning point in China's policy toward UNPK operations. In December of that year, when a mandate of the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) was under consideration, China cast its first affirmative vote for a resolution to set up UNIFIL, although no Chinese troops were committed at that time.<sup>5</sup> Zhang explains that China's change in its position came after the country's leadership conducted a thorough review of the changing international political situation.

Finally, the period of participation began in 1988 when China became a member of the UN Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations. Two years later, in 1990, China assigned its first five military observers, joining 285 other international personnel, to the UN Truce Supervision Operation (UNTSO), a mission that had been set up decades earlier to maintain a ceasefire during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War.<sup>6</sup> Military observers have been described as the eyes and ears of the UN Security Council. Some of the tasks of these officers include monitoring cease-fires, withdrawals, and demilitarization, patrolling demilitarized zones, and assisting with other tasks as needed by the United Nations.



"MINUSMA Holds Medal Parade for Chinese Contingent in Gao," United Nations Photo, [Via Flickr, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0](#).

In 1992 the country committed its first organic military unit to a peacekeeping mission, dispatching an engineering corps of 400 personnel to the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia, a mission that was active between February 1992 – September 1993 to ensure the implementation of the Agreements on the

Comprehensive Political Settlement of the Cambodia Conflict.<sup>7</sup> In 2003, China dispatched its first peacekeeping police force to Africa, sending them to Liberia.<sup>8</sup> In 2004, China committed its first anti-riot peacekeeping force, sending them to the UN mission in Haiti.<sup>9</sup> The Haiti mission also marked the first time China participated in UNPK operations in the western hemisphere.

Despite its step up in participation, by October 2004, only 92 of the approximate 50,000 active UNPK uniformed troops around the world were Chinese. The country's low level of participation prompted then UN Secretary General Kofi Annan to urge it to take a greater peacekeeping role and responsibility. Annan argued that China's role in the missions should reflect its growing world status. As a result, by mid-2006, the total number of Chinese global peacekeepers jumped to approximately 1,500.

As the size of its peacekeeping forces grew, so too did the country's roles and responsibilities. In 2013, China committed its first security troops, sending them to Mali.<sup>10</sup> Then, in 2015 China sent its first ever infantry battalion to a peacekeeping mission, sending them to South Sudan in a combat zone.

By December 2015, China had become the 10th largest contributor to UNPK missions and the sixth largest contributor to the UNPK budget. In a real paradigm shift, Chinese officials have since openly aired their intention to increase the country's global role and presence through UNPK missions. China's recent willingness to commit higher numbers of peacekeeping forces as well as more capable and heavily armed troops not only demonstrates a new way of thinking, it is also an important step toward achieving the "China Dream," a term popularized by President Xi Jinping. The "dream" is to build a moderately prosperous society, a reformed military, and realize national rejuvenation of the country. Not only is peacekeeping an effective diplomatic tool, but Chinese peacekeeping forces could potentially help protect key Chinese assets.

## **INCENTIVES TO PARTICIPATE IN PEACEKEEPING**

There are many reasons a country might opt to participate in UNPK missions, outside of a desire to contribute to world peace. Possible reasons include protecting assets abroad, the opportunity to gain real-life experience in military operations, an opportunity to gather intelligence, a desire to spread diplomatic influence, and an opportunity for financial gain. Several of these reasons appear to have motivated the PRC.

### **Protecting Assets Abroad**

China's leadership consistently emphasizes the importance of engaging in bilateral relations that have a win-win scenario. It is not unusual to see the country provide assistance or services when there is an adequate return on investment. That return on investment for China could be in the form of important natural resources.

China has generally been quick to contribute peacekeeping forces to missions where it already has invested in natural resources, industry, and infrastructure. The 2015 white paper, *China's Military Strategy*, specifically states one of the strategic tasks China's armed forces will shoulder is to "safeguard the security of China's overseas interests" and "to participate in regional and

international security cooperation and maintain regional and world peace,” as one of its strategic tasks.<sup>11</sup> Areas of interest include energy and natural resources, according to the document. Analysts have added that Chinese interests also include the protection of overseas companies, their staff, and other Chinese nationals.<sup>12</sup> It goes to reason that these two actions work hand-in-hand. Instability in any given region in which China has interests and investments puts them at risk.

Additionally, China’s foreign direct investments (FDI) abroad have been experiencing a dramatic increase since the beginning of the new millennium. According to a report released by the World Resources Institute, in 2014 “China’s overseas investments, known as outward FDI, rose 14.1 percent to \$102.9 billion...”<sup>13</sup> While China’s overseas FDI is largely concentrated in Asia (68 percent of it), investments in Africa, where most of Chinese peacekeeping forces can be found, are increasing significantly. In 2004, China’s outward FDI in Africa was \$1 billion. In 2013, that number rose to \$24.5 billion. The largest amount of investments in Africa went to the extractive industries (31 percent), such as mining and oil extraction. Other areas include finance (20 percent), construction (16 percent), and manufacturing (15 percent).<sup>14</sup>

Topping the list of countries that have significant value to China are Liberia, Mali, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, and South Sudan. Other countries of growing interest and potential to China are Ivory Coast and Western Sahara.

### **Military Experience through MOOTW, Gaining Intelligence, and Diplomatic Influence**

China has placed great importance in achieving rapid military modernization. Along with acquiring and developing the technology necessary to maintain its progress toward modernization, China must also build up its operational knowledge and capability with these new systems and strategies. Participating in peacekeeping activities abroad includes the use of important military applications, which can provide key lessons for the PLA. According to Yang Zhao, commander of

*Participating in peacekeeping activities abroad includes the use of important military applications, which can provide key lessons for the PLA.*



the mission in Juba, South Sudan, “The peacekeeping missions are good platforms for us (the PLA) to improve our training level. This is also a chance for us to exchange experience with other armies.”<sup>15</sup>



“Chinese Battalion patrols perimeter of UN House and POC sites,” UNMISS, [Via Flickr](#), [CC BY-NC-ND 2.0](#).

Having not been involved in a major conflict since the 1979 Sino-Vietnam war, the next best opportunity to train is through military operations other than war (MOOTW). Through MOOTW, China is able to apply its knowledge and capabilities in logistics, communications, cyber, etc.... to real life situations.

In addition, China’s increased peacekeeping activities have paralleled the PLA’s growing interest to expand MOOTW both within the country and abroad.<sup>16</sup>

China has placed great importance in MOOTW, a concept that can be found in key publications and white papers written about China’s defense strategy. For example, in a 2015 white paper on military strategy, the authors write, “As a necessary requirement for China’s armed forces to fulfill their responsibilities and missions in the new period as well as an important approach to enhancing their operational capabilities, the armed forces will continue to conduct such MOOTWs as emergency rescue and disaster relief, counter-terrorism and stability maintenance, rights and interests protection, guard duty, international peacekeeping, and international humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR). They will work to incorporate MOOTW capacity building into military modernization and PMS [preparation for military struggle]...”<sup>17</sup>

Through MOOTW, China is likely leveraging peacekeeping operations to gain valuable intelligence and insight into the military operations of other countries. Through its participation in UNPK, the PLA has an opportunity to work with foreign militaries, which allows it to learn about the operations and trends in advanced equipment and technologies of other nations.

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Finally, China has been increasing its participation in UNPK to increase its diplomatic influence. With its growing economic status, possessing the largest population, and being one of the five permanent members on the UN Security Council, China is compelled to become a more responsible party. Over the past few years China has repeatedly highlighted the fact that it contributes more personnel to peacekeeping operations than any other permanent member of the UN Security Council. According to a report released by Japan's National Institute for Defense Studies, China's increasing participation in UNPK can be "seen as an effective counterargument to the 'China threat theory,' because it highlights the country's efforts to play a role in maintaining peace and stability alongside other countries through UNPK."<sup>18</sup> Hence, as China continues to press forward its agenda to expand internationally, reducing the "China threat theory" will raise international trust and therefore more readily open international doors.

### Financial Benefit: Peacekeeping to Earn Money

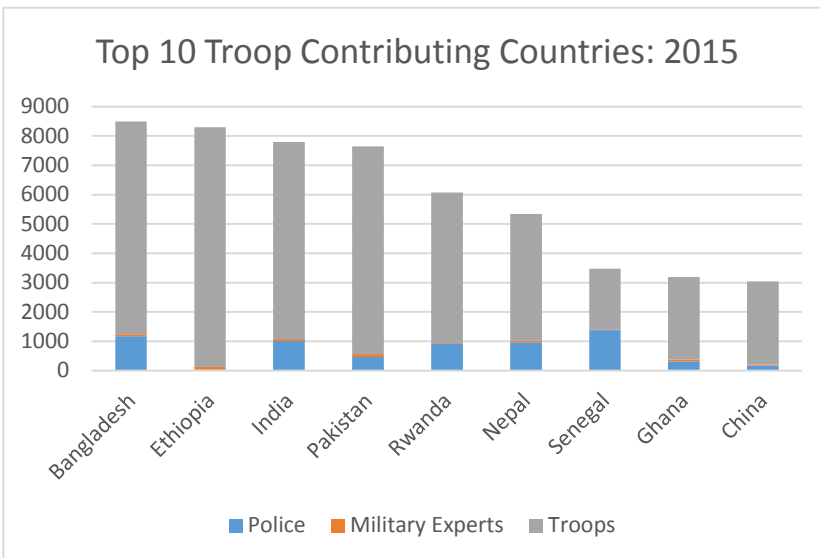


Figure 1: Top 10 countries contributing troops in 2015

The most significant benefit to the top contributors of peacekeeping forces are economic ones. In July 2014, the United Nations was paying the governments of countries contributing personnel to field operations \$1,332 per person per month.<sup>19</sup> This serves as an excellent opportunity for third world and developing

countries to raise revenue, which can be used to fund their militaries among other things. This implies that much of the money never reaches the force itself.

Bangladesh and Ethiopia are the two top contributing countries. Basic pay for a sergeant in Bangladesh with six years of service is approximately \$113 per month. A Captain with six years earns \$236. Even with special duty and incentive pay, after paying its peacekeeping forces, the Bangladeshi government still makes a profit of over \$110 million per year.

The total approved budget for worldwide peacekeeping operations from July 2015-June 2016 was \$8.27 billion.<sup>20</sup> China currently is the sixth biggest financial contributor for peacekeeping missions, contributing 6.68 percent, or approximately \$549,128,000, following the United States (28.38%), Japan (10.83%), France (7.22%), Germany (7.14%), and the United Kingdom (6.68%). For China, which has the second largest economy in the world and is an important contributor to the overall peacekeeping budget, the financial gain from such missions is not likely one of the incentives drawing the country to participate.

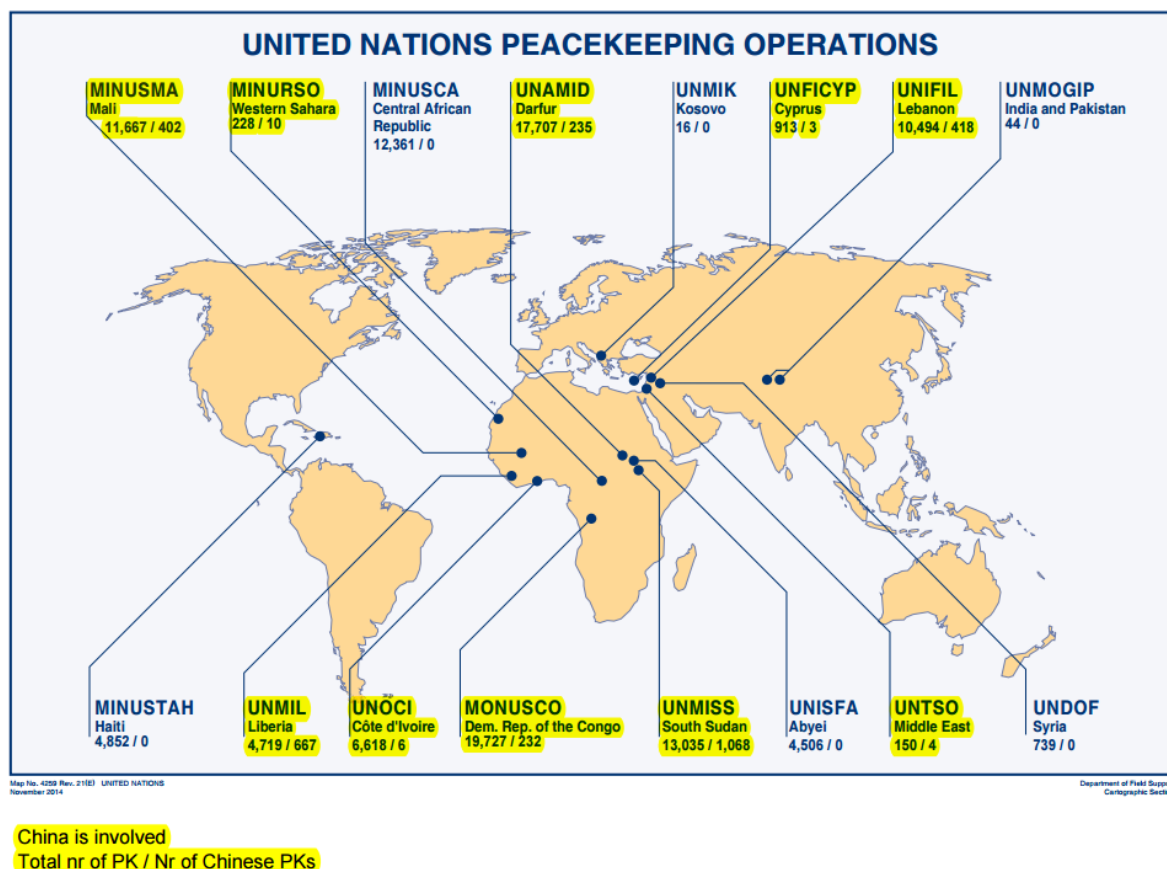


Figure 2: Global UN Peacekeeping Operations as of December 2015

While China's participation is not likely attributed to the possibility of achieving direct financial gain from the operations, an analysis of the current peacekeeping operations vis-à-vis China's participation can offer some clues as to what might be driving the country's decisions and how it plays into its overall economic, military, and geopolitical strategy. As figure 2 indicates, China is involved in 2/3 of the total UN missions and 86 percent of Chinese peacekeepers are in Africa.

## **CHINESE PEACEKEEPING CASE STUDIES**

### **Countries with Oil and Other Natural Resources**

#### *The United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia*

Along the Gulf of Guinea sits Liberia, a low-income country with great possibilities. However, over the past three decades the country has been plagued with civil war and government mismanagement, which destroyed much of its economy and infrastructure in the 1990s and early 2000s.

Upon successfully brokering a peace agreement between warring parties in 1993, the UN set up the United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL). China assumed a small role as military observer in that mission. Following various delays in the implementation of the peace agreement and overcoming a number of difficulties, the country finally managed to put into effect a democratically elected government in 1997, and UNOMIL came to an end.<sup>21</sup> However, due to differences between key party leaders, coupled with human rights abuses, harassment of political opponents, and an absence of security sector reform, civil war in Liberia once again broke out in 1999.

In September 2003, the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) was established. Less than one month later and after a series of setbacks prompted by Liberia's recognition of Taiwan, China and the African nation resumed diplomatic relations. Following these renewed ties, foreign ministry spokeswoman Zhang Qiyue announced that China would consider becoming an active participant in the UNPK force in Liberia.<sup>22</sup> Then, on 30 November, 2003, China sent a team of peacekeeping police (five of them), to the country.<sup>23</sup> On 9 December, 2003, 60 Chinese soldiers



belonging to a transportation company, traveled to Liberia. China would go on to send another 490 peacekeepers, which would include 180 more transportation personnel, a 275-person sapper company, and 35 medical staff, to Liberia. These peacekeeping forces were responsible for transporting UN peacekeepers and materials, constructing roads, repairing houses and airports, providing water and electricity, and treating the wounded.<sup>24</sup>

Since reestablishing diplomatic ties with Liberia in 2003, China has gone full throttle in its outreach, beginning with a list of contracts and support through peacekeeping operations. Chinese peacekeepers have been heavily involved in UNMIL since the mission's establishment. Between December 2003 and April 2004, Chinese troops repaired 1,200 kilometers of road, built four camps for local armed personnel and two parking aprons, erected 21 bridges, revamped two water disposal stations, and leveled off 70,000 square meters of land. The medical squad treated 2,300 outpatients, hospitalized about 250 people and operated on more than 50. The transportation squad transported over 30,000 tons of materials and 70,000 people.<sup>25</sup>

As relations between Liberia and China grew, so too did the number of Chinese peacekeeping troops in the country. By 2006, having started the third rotation of Chinese peacekeepers, 558 soldiers from the Beijing Military Area Command and 120 People's Liberation Army (PLA) officers and men stationed in Inner Mongolia, made their way to the African nation.<sup>26</sup> They consisted of an engineer contingent, a transportation contingent, and a medical contingent.<sup>27</sup>

According to the Liberia Ministry of Commerce and Industry website, in 2013 Liberia exported scrap metal, iron ore, and lumber to China, accounting for nearly 32 percent of the country's exports. Liberia is richly endowed with water, mineral resources, forests, and it possesses an ideal climate for agriculture, all of which China continually seeks to help sustain its growth and development in the years to come. In addition, the country's coastal location and having the infrastructure in place, offer easy export routes to China from Liberia.

Today, China has a lot invested in Liberia and Liberia has continued potential for China. In February 2012, a potentially large accumulation of oil deposits was found off the coast of Liberia. While preliminary studies seemed positive, it would take a number of years before development could begin, providing the oil's extraction was economically viable. According to Stuart Lake, Chief Executive Officer of African Petroleum, an independent oil and gas exploration company headquartered in the United Kingdom, a third-party assessment of the reserves off the coast of

Liberia and Ivory Coast indicate a net 58 percent increase in the site's offshore reserve potential. This would raise estimates offshore Ivory Coast by 118 percent of previous estimates and Liberian estimates by 33 percent.<sup>28</sup> According to the same report, in 2013, French oil exploration company Total discovered oil while drilling offshore Ivory Coast.

In 2014, trade volume between the China and Liberia exceeded 425 million dollars and today, China continues to be an important development partner to Liberia.<sup>29</sup> Over the past year, as the political situation has improved in Liberia, UNMIL has drawn down. Interestingly, however, China's rate of withdrawal has been slower than what has been observed in most other countries providing peacekeeping forces to the UNMIL. With the exception of Nigeria, all countries contributing peacekeepers, have withdrawn most or all of their support. China, on the other hand, is withdrawing its manpower at a much slower rate. In January 2013, the total number of peacekeepers in Liberia was 8,119. Of these, China contributed 584 formed police units, individual police, and contingency troops. In January 2014, out of 7,456 peacekeepers, 724 originated from China. In January 2015, 720 out of 5,819 peacekeepers came from China. In January 2016, there were 514 Chinese troops out of the 4,679. Finally, in June 2016, the total troop count was 1,952, out of which 284 were from China. This raises a question as to why China has seemingly opted to maintain a proportionately higher presence up until the last moment. While it could be simply random, it seems more likely to be an indication of China's commitment to continuing to support its relation with Liberia, and to prove that China is a reliable partner.

### *The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali*

Today, China is one of Mali's top trading partners, reaching \$622 million in 2012. Over the past decades, Mali, a highly unstable country, has experienced a number of coups, rebellions, and terrorist activity. Most recently, in March 2012, after Tuareg rebels had initiated a series of offensives to try to seize control over north Mali, a group of rebel soldiers calling themselves the National Committee for the Establishment of Democracy, staged a coup d'état in response to the government's inability to counter terrorism and suppress the Tuareg-led insurrection in the North.<sup>30</sup> Eventually, after Islamist fighters captured several towns, France intervened militarily and recaptured key towns from the rebels. Finally, in mid-2013 a peace agreement, although shaky, was reached and the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali

(MINUSMA) was established to support political processes in the country. Some of the objectives of MINUSMA included ensuring security, helping to stabilize and protect civilians, supporting national political dialogue and reconciliation, and assisting the reestablishment of State authority.<sup>31</sup>

At the end of 2013, China sent a 170-member peacekeeping guard detachment to the Mali mission area. By January 2014, China had about 400 PLA personnel assigned to the mission and that number has remained constant ever since. MINUSMA is significant in that it marks the first time China committed a security detachment to a UNPK mission. According to a Chinese military source, the guard detachment, made up mostly of infantries, has been responsible for the security and defense of the UN theater headquarters in Gao.<sup>32</sup>

China's support of Mali could be attributed to its longstanding bilateral relations with and investments in the African nation. Both countries established diplomatic relations in 1960. However, it was not until the beginning of the new millennium that bilateral cooperation began to take off. In 2002, trade between the two countries totaled approximately \$23 million. In early 2006, during a campaign to "cement ties" with West Africa, Chinese Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing met with Malian officials to further "strengthen relations between the two countries." At that time, Chinese entrepreneurs were involved in various sectors of Mali, including tobacco, construction, agriculture, textile, sugar, and hotels.<sup>33</sup> By 2012 bilateral trade between China and Mali reached \$622 million.<sup>34</sup>

Possibly fueling China's commitment to Mali is the discovery of confirmed and potential supplies of strategic natural resources within the African country. According to the Centre for Research on Globalization, a Montreal-based non-profit organization, Mali is Africa's third largest gold producer with large scale exploration taking place. The country also has encouraging signs of uranium deposits with exploration in full swing. Uranium is of particular interest to China, which currently has 35 nuclear power reactors in operation, 20 under construction, and more in the pipeline for construction.<sup>35</sup> Mali also has the potential to develop its diamond exploration, and is believed to have significant, unexploited reserves of iron ore, bauxite, and manganese. Other resources believed to be present include copper, lead, zinc, lithium, and petroleum,<sup>36</sup> much of which China needs to help sustain its economic growth and development.

Adding fuel to China's commitment to Mali is that in early 2014 the International Monetary Fund (IMF) halted aid payments to the African country due to concerns over its purchase of

military supplies and a \$40 million presidential jet, instead of spending the money on rebuilding the country after the coup and uprising of 2012.<sup>37</sup> Later that year, as the IMF and Mali began renewed talks to possibly reinstate the aid that had been halted earlier, China swiftly stepped in and reportedly signed 34 agreements with the African nation for projects and loans totaling \$11 billion.<sup>38</sup> In typical Chinese fashion, there were no questions asked and no stipulations. While little information was given about the specifics of the agreement, CNBC reported that the projects included an \$8 billion, 560-mile railway linking the capital of Bamako to Conakry, Guinea's port capital; a fourth bridge across the Niger River in Bamako; the construction of roads; and housing, energy, and education projects.<sup>39</sup> Later, in December 2015, Mali, Senegal, and China signed a \$2.7 billion contract for China Railway Construction Corp. Ltd. (CRC) to upgrade the rail line between Bamako and Dakar, Senegal.<sup>40</sup> The existing railway system has limitations. Train speeds can only go up to 20 km (12.4 miles) per hour, and many stations are not operational. The upgraded railway will allow passenger trains to reach 120 km (75 miles) per hour and freight trains to reach 80 km (50 miles) per hour. The rail line is significant because it links landlocked Mali to the port of Dakar, providing an ideal export route.

#### *The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo*

Another country of strategic significance to China is the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). China has been the DRC's top trading partner since 2008.<sup>41</sup> In 2014, trade between the two countries topped \$4 billion.<sup>42</sup>

The DRC is a major supplier of coltan (a dull metallic ore that is vital for communications and electronic systems), tin, and timber and the top producer of copper in Africa. Perhaps of most significance is that the DRC possesses the world's largest reserves of cobalt."<sup>43</sup> Cobalt has been mined in the DRC region for decades. However, due to the country's history of conflict and instability, supplies have been disrupted in the past and prices have been volatile. According to the United States Geological Survey, China possesses only one percent of the world's cobalt reserves. However, it has positioned itself to become the world's leading producer and supplier of refined cobalt. Much of China's production comes from ore and partially refined cobalt imported from the DRC.<sup>44</sup>



Cobalt holds significant economic, military, and industrial importance. According to an article published by Mining.com, cobalt is used in “high-speed, high-strength wear-resistant alloys that are used in aerospace and military technologies,” making them critical to defense applications. It also holds a growing critical role in green energy applications and is used in rechargeable lithium-ion batteries, electric vehicles, and consumer electronics.<sup>45</sup> With the rising demand for new green energy sources, the demand for cobalt is expected to eventually outgrow supply levels, with an expected gap of about 1,000 tons by 2020.<sup>46</sup>

As the production and export of these and other materials have grown, China, which possesses only one percent of global reserves of cobalt, needed to find alternative sources. The DRC has a history of conflict. The UN Security Council established the UN Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 1999 in support of a ceasefire and disengagement of forces. The mission would later be expanded to include supervision over the implementation of the ceasefire agreement. [Note: In May 2010, the mission was renamed to UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO), reflecting a new phase reached in the country.]<sup>47</sup>

While MONUC was stood up in 1999, China did not commit any peacekeepers to the mission until November 1, 2001, when it contributed one observer. The following month, China increased its participation by contributing nine observers and one troop member. China’s participation would remain low over the next year and a half until April 2003, when it increased the number to 219 troops and nine military observers. Since then, the number of Chinese peacekeepers in the DRC has remained at about 230, according to UNPK figures.

In 2004, China and Poland announced a strategic partnership to prospect for copper and cobalt deposits in the DRC and Zambia.<sup>48</sup> By 2005 and 2006, China was producing some cobalt in the country. In October 2007, China offered \$5 billion to the DRC to exploit the country’s mining resources. Some saw the huge deal as a way to kick-start the Congo economy while others saw it as a “second colonization” of the continent.<sup>49</sup> Chinese companies would go on to buy up mines and reciprocate through the building and renovation of essential infrastructure, much of which directly impacts the success of the mining industry, in the African country.

Chinese peacekeepers in the DRC have largely consisted of specially trained engineering and medical troops. Their support to the African country has included providing medical services to



*The Chinese contingent in MONUSCO, (Photo Cropped), MONSUCO Photos, [Via Flickr](#), CC BY-SA 2.0*

the local population and renovating hundreds of miles of roads. They are credited with building more than 10 bridges and engaging in landmine detection, and they have provided airport and transportation maintenance services.<sup>50</sup>

Today, in addition to being the world's biggest producer of refined cobalt, China is also the world's biggest consumer, with its consumption rate having grown nearly 15 percent year on year to 43,500 tons in 2015. Much of this more recent increase can be attributed to the growth in batteries.<sup>51</sup>

About 40 percent of the cobalt consumed is a byproduct of copper production in the DRC.<sup>52</sup> It is therefore interesting to note that in 2016, when the cost of copper was down and disrupted power supplies reduced output, China was sinking millions of dollars into the copper industry to become the "key actor in Congo's copper sector," according to an article released by Forbes.<sup>53</sup>

China's embassy claims there are between 4,000 and 5,000 Chinese nationals now living in the DRC. However, the actual number is believed to be far higher.<sup>54</sup> Based on the numbers, or potential numbers, of Chinese nationals, access to and role in the DRC's mining industry, and heavy investments in the country, it is highly understandable that China has become a regular and reliable contributor to the peacekeeping mission in the DRC as both a means to grease the skids of diplomacy as well as maintain the peace to ensure a more workable environment.

*The United Nations African Union Mission in Darfur and UN Mission in South Sudan*

Sudan and South Sudan are two more countries that well demonstrate China's commitment to provide security and support to countries in which it is heavily invested. Over the past century Sudan has fought various civil wars and the UN has stepped in to support peace efforts. Two current key peacekeeping missions in which China contributes significantly are the UN African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) and the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS). Today, there are approximately 235 Chinese peacekeepers participating in UNAMID and over 1,000 in UNMISS. Achieving another milestone, South Sudan is significant in that China committed its first ever infantry battalion in 2015, further padding its international peacekeeping portfolio.

Some have argued that China's participation in UNMISS is centered on oil, a claim that China is not ready to support. Yet, it is the one argument that makes the most sense. China has contributed billions of dollars in energy and infrastructure in both Sudan and South Sudan. Out of five major oil consortiums in Sudan and South Sudan, state-owned China National Petroleum Corporation is the majority stakeholder in three of them. China is by far the leading export destination for crude oil from both Sudans. In 2013, according to the Energy Information Administration, 86 percent of the oil from these countries was exported to China. However, oil supplies have been put in jeopardy over the past few years since South Sudan claimed independence. Ongoing tensions, conflicts, and disputes over fee transits have caused oil exports to fall between 2011 and 2013. In 2011 both countries exported 337,000 barrels per day (bbl/d) globally. The following year exports fell to 60,000 bbl/d. In 2013 the number rose to 133,000 bbl/d, which was still considerably lower than the amount of oil exported in 2011.<sup>55</sup>

Currently, most of the oil comes from South Sudan. However, both Sudan's and South Sudan's oil sectors are closely linked. With South Sudan being landlocked, it depends on pipelines traversing Sudan to the Bashayer Port along the Red Sea to export its oil. Sudan charges transport fees from South Sudan to allow the oil to traverse its territory. Oil, therefore, plays an important role in both countries' economies, although to a lesser extent in Sudan. In South Sudan oil accounted for 98 percent of the government revenue following the country's independence.<sup>56</sup> Meanwhile, the country has signed memorandums of understanding with Kenya, Ethiopia, and Djibouti to build pipelines through those countries. However, plans to move forward have stalled due to the conflict in South Sudan, which leaves Sudan as the only viable transit route in the near future.<sup>57</sup>

## **Countries with Potential for Future Exploitation**

### *United Nations Operation in Cote d'Ivoire*

In the case of some UNPK missions, while China does not play a major role in the mining or production of natural resources, there exists the potential that China might one day play a bigger role where resources, while abundant, have yet to be exploited. Examples of China's involvement in countries showing potential, include the Ivory Coast and Western Sahara peacekeeping missions.

Directly south of Mali and serving as another gateway to the Atlantic Ocean is Ivory Coast (Cote d'Ivoire). In February 2004, following the end of the Ivorian civil war, the United Nations Operation in Cote d'Ivoire (UNOCI) was established. The primary objective of the mission was to facilitate the implementation of a peace agreement signed by the applicable parties.

In the past, UNOCI employed over 9,000 peacekeepers. Over the past two years, however, the mission has been scaled back to under 7,000. Despite the large number of overall peacekeepers assigned to UNOCI, China has contributed only an average of six peacekeepers, serving as military observers, since about 2005.

Since diplomatic relations were first established in 1983, Ivory Coast and China have engaged in modest trade and joint ventures. For example, China renovated a water-conservancy project in Ivory Coast and both sides are involved in various joint ventures. In Ivory Coast, China had set up the Hua-Ke Vehicles Co. Ltd., the Agro-Machinery Assembling Co. Ltd, and a pharmacy while within its own borders, it set up the Qingke Chocolate Food Co. Ltd. According to the CIA World Factbook, Ivory Coast is the world's number one producer and exporter of cocoa beans and a significant producer of coffee and palm oil. In addition, both countries have reportedly completed a petroleum prospecting project in Ivory Coast.

The oil industry in Ivory Coast has experienced various ebbs and flows. Discovered in the early 1970s, oil production in Ivory Coast reached 63,000 barrels per day in 2006 and then began to fall.<sup>58</sup> (See Figure 3) According to a 2014 report released by Bloomberg, however, the nation is looking to significantly boost its oil output by 2019 to 200,000 barrels per day. Efforts in



exploration and offshore drilling are on the rise in the country. The country reportedly has 50 oil blocks, of which a majority have been awarded. Funding for the projects is supposed to come from the selling of Eurobonds, with China providing additional financing.

According to the Bloomberg report, Chinese agencies and banks, including the Export-Import Bank of China, had planned to lend \$10 billion to fund infrastructure projects between 2014 and 2020. These loans are given at low interest rates of between two to three percent. Finally, Ivory Coast possesses reserves of gold, diamonds, nickel, manganese, and iron ore.<sup>59</sup>

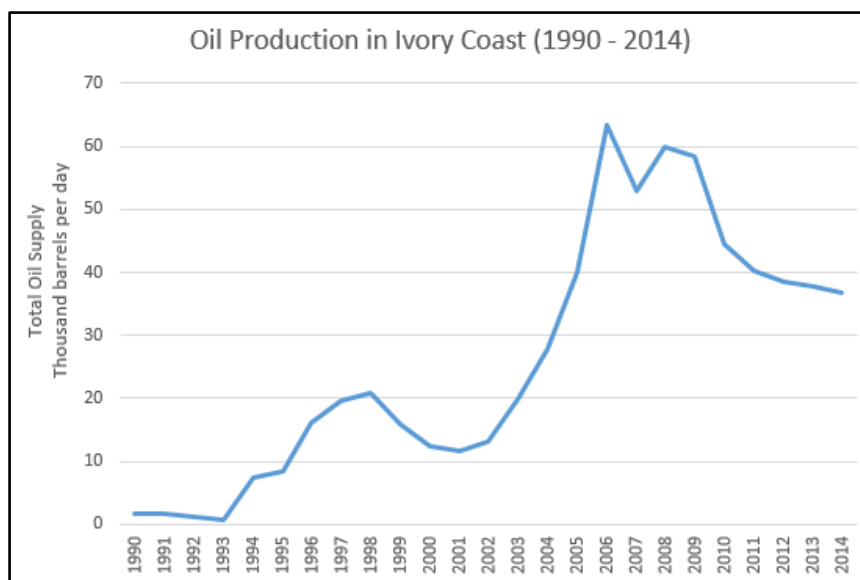


Figure 3: Oil Production from 1990-2014

China has not contributed many peacekeepers to the mission. However, its consistent support to the UNOCI mission over the past ten decades could be a precautionary step, to keep an eye on the local situation, and remain in good standing with the African government. There is still a way to go before the country is fully developing its resources, but there appears to be lucrative assets awaiting exploitation.

#### *United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara*

China also contributes a small number of peacekeeping troops to the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO). However, the mission is significantly smaller and the country far less volatile than countries such as Mali and South Sudan.

Once a Spanish province, Western Sahara, has been a disputed territory for over the past century. In 1973 the Polisario Front, an indigenous Saharawi independence movement, was founded. Two years later, after Spain withdrew from Western Sahara, Morocco annexed two-thirds

of the country and a 16-year-long war between Moroccan forces and the Polisario Front took place. In 1991, the UN brokered a cease-fire deal, ending the war. The UN then followed up by establishing MINURSO. While the mission originally included monitoring the ceasefire and organizing and ensuring a free and fair referendum, an agreement on independence for Western Sahara has yet to be reached.<sup>60</sup>

Since the mission's inception, China's contribution has averaged approximately 10 peacekeeping troops at any given time. These troops participate as military observers. Worth noting is that China does not approve of Western Sahara seeking self-determination and it has drawn considerably closer to Morocco over the past decade. In 2006 Chinese premier Wen Jiabao explained that it was China's "established policy" to "increase political trust with Morocco and expand cooperation in agriculture, fishery, communications, and personnel training." In 2005, bilateral trade between China and Morocco had reached 1.484 billion.<sup>61</sup> By 2013, trade between the two countries reached \$8.6 billion.<sup>62</sup>

China's role in peacekeeping in Western Sahara is small, but with so many unknown variables, despite China's strong stance against self-determination, it appears to be taking the diplomatic route and playing the waiting game while also offering words of encouragement. However, if Western Sahara were to achieve independence, it would not be surprising to see China withdraw its peacekeeping support.

## **Peacekeeping to Achieve a Strategic/Geopolitical Advantage**

### *The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon*

Seemingly out of character is China's involvement in Lebanon. Resources in Lebanon are limited and include limestone, iron ore, gold, and salt. However, while Lebanon possesses no significant natural resources, China is heavily involved in the country. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, both countries have made solid progress in their cooperation in economics, trade, culture, education, and press. By 2013, China became Lebanon's top trading partner.<sup>63</sup>

Worth noting is that while China formally established ties with Lebanon in 1971, it has only been during the last decade that the countries' bilateral relations have picked up. Relations began to strengthen in 2006, the same year that China began contributing to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), a mission that had been established eight years earlier.

In 1978, as tension along the Israel-Lebanon border increased, the Palestine Liberation Organization staged a commando attack against Israel, resulting in many dead and wounded Israeli citizens. As a result, within days, Israeli forces invaded Lebanon, prompting the Lebanese government to protest to the Security Council, claiming that it had no connection with the Palestinian commando operation. After Israeli forces ceased military action and withdrew forces from Lebanon, UNIFIL was set up to confirm the withdrawal of Israeli forces, restore international peace and security, and assist the government of Lebanon in ensuring the return of effective authority in the area.<sup>64</sup> Over the next three decades, UNIFIL underwent a number of iterations as Israeli forces invaded and then withdrew from Lebanon at various times. Then, in July 2006, as new hostilities on the Israeli-Lebanese border broke out, Hezbollah launched several rockets from Lebanese territory.

China first began sending troops to participate in UNIFIL in March and April 2006, four months before the 2006 Hezbollah attack against Israel. China's first peacekeeping contingent consisted of a 182-member engineering battalion, including a mine-sweeping company, an engineering company, a logistics company, and a field hospital.<sup>65</sup>

The question of why China did not commit troops to UNIFIL until 2006 is not exactly clear, but could somehow be attributed to economics, military cooperation, and strategic initiative. When looking at economics, the volume of bilateral trade between the two countries has risen considerably over the past decade with China becoming the number one recipient of goods imported from Lebanon in 2013. While Lebanon possesses no significant natural resources, it is a major exporter of gold, jewelry, diamonds, scrap iron, and scrap copper. Lebanon is also a major importer of Chinese goods, importing some \$2.53 billion in Chinese goods in 2014.<sup>66</sup>

On the military front, not only have peacekeeping forces been involved in Lebanon since 2006, but there have been allegations of Hezbollah using Chinese weaponry to attack Israel. Hezbollah reportedly had Chinese-made missiles in its arsenal as early as 2006. These missiles, according to a report published by Yitzhak Shichor, Senior Fellow at the Harry S Truman Research Institute for

the Advancement of Peace, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel, had been delivered to Iran in 1997 and somehow found their way into Hezbollah hands, who fired them after conflict broke out.<sup>67</sup> While China denies such claims, some analysts argue that China knowingly supplied the missiles that Hezbollah used against Israeli citizens in 2006.<sup>68</sup> In June 2013, Fang Fenghui, a member of the Central Military Commission (CMC) and chief of general staff of the PLA, met with Walid Salman, the visiting chief of staff of the Lebanese Armed Forces. During their meeting Fang encouraged the strengthening of military ties.<sup>69</sup>

Lastly, China's ultimate intention may well be to build up a partnership to help gain a strategic advantage in the region. In 2005, Bo Chen wrote, "A country cannot have complete national security without a stable supply of strategic resources."<sup>70</sup> While Lebanon has no energy reserves to offer, the country can be viewed as a geopolitical lynchpin through which access to energy could be protected. Along with having to secure oil shipments from major producers, Beijing also must establish strong partnerships with all parties in the region to ensure stability and thus allow the continued smooth flow of Arab oil to China.<sup>71</sup>

### **Central African Republic: A Mission of Little to No Advantage to China?**

Six of 16 missions worldwide employ over 10,000 peacekeeping forces each. China is involved in all but one of these top manned missions – the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA). While China showed its support in 2014 for MINUSCA by voting to send 12,000 UN peacekeepers to the Central African Republic (CAR)<sup>72</sup> it has never contributed any peacekeepers to the mission.

CAR has been plagued by decades of fighting and instability. In 2014, after months of violence, millions of people were on the brink of starvation, thousands were believed to have died, and more than half of the entire population was in dire need of humanitarian aid. The United Nations had intervened on multiple occasions with MINUSCA replacing an African Union-led International Support Mission to the CAR.

Diamonds, uranium, timber, gold, and oil are among the natural resources being exploited in the CAR, according to the CIA World Factbook. Various articles have discussed a type of tug-of-



war between France and China for oil assets within CAR. However, it is unclear whether or not China currently has any oil deals with the African nation.

The most plausible reason for China's non-committal of peacekeeping forces to MINUSCA is in the state of the country itself. The CAR does not have an influential government and is one of the least developed countries in the world. Transportation and electricity is extremely limited. The government has suffered repeated military coups throughout the years. Governance is weak with some areas being outside the government's control. Furthermore, the country, located in the center of Africa, is completely landlocked, making transit for exports an even more daunting challenge. With so little invested in the country and so much required to put into it before China can gain from a relationship with the African country, China likely does not feel the return-on-investment merits the risks involved or the efforts needed.

## CONCLUSIONS

China is clearly planning to become a leading figure in UNPK. In September 2015, while addressing the UN General Assembly, Xi Jinping announced that China would build an 8,000-strong standby peacekeeping force, adding that the country will join the new UNPK capability readiness system, and "take the lead in setting up a permanent peacekeeping police squad."<sup>73</sup> He further stated that China would train 2,000 foreign peacekeepers and carry out 10 mine-sweeping assistance programs within the next five years.<sup>74</sup>

There is no doubt that China plans to dramatically increase its involvement in international peacekeeping. What is most striking is the country's shift in attitude. Having once been a nation refusing to show any support for peacekeeping missions, China went on to eventually contribute military observers, followed by "force enablers," such as engineering, transportation, and medical companies, and finally its first major infantry battalion.<sup>75</sup>



Cindy Hurst, FMSO, Public Domain.

China's military leadership has opened the aperture on its peacekeeping perspective. The traditional missions have been upgraded to support a variety of operations that can potentially offer strategic advantages in several areas.

Primary goals of these expanded missions include protecting national interests and assets, courting potential partners with security, collecting intelligence on specific locations, and, perhaps most important of all, gaining military experience in the use of long-range transport capabilities, logistic support, communication links, and so on. Such missions improve China's international standing and support Xi Jinping's focus on his "China Dream" of a strong military.

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