

China Promoting Peacekeeping Agenda to Improve Image

By Jackson Martin
OE Watch Commentary

China is making a concerted effort to tout its contributions to international peacekeeping operations, almost certainly as a way to win support on the global stage or at least placate nations who are skeptical of Beijing's intentions. On 3 August, *People's Liberation Army Daily* reported the release of "Peacekeepers," a two-part documentary series highlighting China's contributions to UN peacekeeping missions in Africa. According to the article, "the program presents the spirit of China's peacekeeping forces to the world, as well as China's unwavering commitment to upholding global peace in its role as a great power. Filmed over 5 years, the program shows the experiences of Chinese military personnel as they carry out peacekeeping duties in South Sudan." The article concludes by saying "[the documentary] objectively presents the faithful fulfillment of duties by and mission conditions of Chinese peacekeeping forces." Produced by the Publicity Department of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the documentary is the latest in China's efforts to promote its influence within international organizations through positive depictions of its foreign policy in general and its military in particular.

Three weeks later on 26 August, the state-run *China Daily* reported the announcement by China's Ministry of Defense of the inaugural "Shared Destiny" international peacekeeping field training exercises. The training exercises, held from 6-15 September in Henan Province, involved more than 1,000 military personnel from China, Pakistan, Mongolia, and Thailand." According to the article, "main drills included battlefield reconnaissance, sentinel patrols, armed escort, protection of civilians, terrorism response, construction of provisional operating bases, battlefield rescue, and epidemic control procedure."

At the press conference announcing the training exercises, Ministry of Defense spokesperson Tan Kefei told reporters China, "will continue to increase its active involvement in UN peacekeeping missions." The term "Shared Destiny" has become increasingly common under the leadership of Xi Jinping to promote the perception that China is committed to upholding the rules-based international order. According to the UN, China is the second largest financial contributor

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to peacekeeping operations, trailing only the United States. There are currently about 2,250 Chinese peacekeeping personnel deployed to nine mission areas around the world.

Lastly, a post to the official WeChat account of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from 30 August provides a look at how the Chinese government continues to put a priority on UN peacekeeping missions. The post described an incident in which Chinese forces were deployed to prevent violent clashes at a refugee camp in South Sudan in 2015 and states how the crowd, "armed with clubs and knives," was brought under control "perhaps by the staunch heroism of China's military peacekeepers." Such accounts of Chinese military personnel abroad work both to build domestic pride in China's armed forces and reinforce the notion of China as a benevolent force motivated not by self-interest, but common prosperity in its dealings with other nations.

Source: Feng, S., "反映中国蓝盔风采的纪录片《和平使命》播出 (Broadcast of Documentary "Peacekeepers" Reflects Integrity of China's Blue Helmets)," *PLA Daily*, 3 August 2021. https://www.81.cn/vh/2021-08/03/content_10070369.htm

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Source: Ji, X., "中国军队将首次举办“共同命运-2021”国际维和实兵演习 (Chinese Military to Hold Inaugural "Shared Destiny-2021" International Peacekeeping Field Training Exercises)," *China Daily*, 26 August 2021. <https://cnews.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202108/26/WS6128431ea3101e7ce97609bb.html>

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Source: He, S., "蓝盔”守护非洲小女孩——中国维和部队的初心和使命 (The Blue Helmet and an African Girl - The Mission and Dedication of Chinese Peacekeepers)," Ministry of Foreign Affairs Official WeChat Account, 30 August 2021. https://www.81.cn/vh/2021-08/30/content_10082792.htm

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