



Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS)

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# CHINA'S COMMITMENT TO BOLSTER UN PEACEKEEPING MISSIONS: ALTRUISTIC INTERVENTION OR PREDATORY AGGRESSION

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Since its inception, the United Nations on one hand has been credited with negotiating peaceful settlements of regional conflicts, maintaining peace and security, promoting democracy and human rights, extending humanitarian aid to victims of conflict, while on the other have often been accused of double standards, dichotomous dispensation and power-political manoeuvring. While fulfilling its objective to promote and negotiate peaceful settlements of regional conflicts, the UN has used peacekeeping as one of the most effective tools to assist belligerent and warring states and groups to embark on arduous journey to seek peaceful resolution of conflicts. Generally, 'peace operations' is the umbrella term to cover a multiplicity of UN field activities in support of peace, ranging from essentially preventive deployment to long term state building

missions.<sup>1</sup> They include conflict prevention, conflict mitigation, peacemaking, peacekeeping, peace enforcement and post-conflict peace building.<sup>2</sup> During the Cold War, the short term and parochial interests of the sides, with unabashed threats of use of veto power, hindered the full potential realization of the UN. At the end of Cold War, the 'new world order' was seen as a panacea for full potential development of the UN and exploitation of opportunities for peace keeping and nation-building.<sup>3</sup> However, there is a perception and concern among the UN members that the United Nations is being exploited to police a world order based on the interests of the powerful few.<sup>4</sup>

In this whole debate, the role of China is now being observed and studied with renewed interest. Since the [People's Republic of China's](#) recognition as the only lawful representative of

China on October 25, 1971 (prior to this Republic of China (Taiwan) was representing China in UN and was expelled from UN with effect from same date) and as a [permanent member of the United Nations Security Council](#), China's role in the Security Council could be viewed as being on the fringes of indifference as compared to other permanent members. Though it has supported and participated in peacekeeping operations in Africa in Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, Mali and Sudan, the Chinese peacekeepers just add up to a 2000 in seven peacekeeping operations in Africa.<sup>5</sup>In comparison, as on 31 October 2013, India has deployed a contingent of 7864 personnel comprising of troops, military observers and civilian police in nine of the 15 current UN operations.<sup>6</sup> India has also provided eleven force commanders, five deputy commanders, three military advisers at the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and two police advisers at the UN Headquarters to date.<sup>7</sup>In this background, when President Xi Jinping of China announced on September 28, 2015 during his speech to the United Nations General Assembly that China would commit more funds and more troops to aid United Nations peacekeeping efforts, it caught many by surprise. President Xi added that China had planned to set up a United Nations permanent peacekeeping force of 8,000 troops and would provide \$100 million to the African Union to create an immediate response unit capable of responding to emergencies.<sup>8</sup> In addition to the

peacekeeping pledge, President Xi promised a one billion US dollar donation to the United Nations for a "peace and development fund." The move is being viewed as China's resolve to assume more assertive posture to expand its sphere of influence globally, particularly in Africa. In his speech, President Xi added that "...big, strong and rich should not bully the small, weak and poor."<sup>9</sup>

The Chinese efforts to bolster the effectiveness of UN Peacekeeping operations by contributing more troops and money though has been welcomed by many, the sceptics were quick to point out that China's renewed interest in international consensus and strategic reorientation is shadowed by its aggressive behaviour in its own neighbourhood. China's disputes with Japan, the Philippines, Brunei, Vietnam and Taiwan over strategic islands in the South China Sea have been marred by tense confrontations and by *accusations* and counter-accusations. To some, the Chinese move appears to be an exercise to secure its financial and energy interests in Africa. Out of 16 UN's peacekeeping missions presently underway nine are in Africa, where China has heavily invested in infrastructure and commodities. The questions are being raised over China's new found altruistic dispensation vs preservation of self-interest to protect its assets in Africa.

The UN peacekeeping operations have not always been sterling examples of conflict resolution, peace restoration or humanitarian

assistance. The UN peacekeeping forces comprising of soldiers from various countries, unable to relate with the cause of people whom they have to protect in another geographical location, without any *linguistic, ethical and cultural linkages* find themselves under motivated. This year, the U.N. peacekeeping failures in preventing massacres in the South Sudan and the Central African Republic prompted a debate to carry out a sweeping review of its peacekeeping missions. Besides, the *willingness to take casualties* in a humanitarian intervention has not found many takers in many nations. A case in point is US role in UN peacekeeping operations, which though is the biggest funder of UN peacekeeping efforts but has committed a paltry number of just 82 soldiers.

China's efforts to establish itself as recognized global power with a stake in Africa's stability has been instrumental in committing greater resources and personnel for UN peacekeeping missions. China has been sceptical of imposition of aggressive military actions of powerful nations on others such as NATO's attack on the forces of Muammar el-Qaddafi in Libya in 2011 and Russia's military actions in Ukraine in 2014. President Xi in his speech emphasized that "the big countries should treat small countries as equals, and take a right approach to justice and interests by putting justice before interests."<sup>10</sup> China's new found interest in peacekeeping is largely being viewed

as soft power enunciation and assertion of its growing economic and military might and its willingness to use these in pursuance and furtherance of its interest. The perceptible improvements and degree of accomplishment of various UN peacekeeping mission objectives likely to be achieved in future, as a result of increased Chinese's involvement, cannot be predicted as of now. However, new peacekeeping missions with China's active participation could be *definitely a shade better* than the UN missions we have had hitherto.

***(Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Centre for Air Power Studies [CAPS])***

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> James Cockayne, David M. Malone, "Peace Operations Then and Now. Global Governance: A Review of Multilateralism and International Organizations", *The Ralph Bunche Centennial*, Vol. 11 No. 3, 2005, p.350.

#### The Ralph Bunche Centennial

<sup>2</sup> Ray Murphy, *UN Peacekeeping in Lebanon, Somalia and Kosovo: Operational and Legal Issues in Practice*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.4.

<sup>3</sup> Adam Roberts, *Humanitarian Action in War: Aid, Protection and Impartiality in a Policy Vacuum*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1996), p. 13.

<sup>4</sup> Murphy, n.4, p.8.

<sup>5</sup> Permanent Mission of the People's republic of China to the UN, "Statement by Ambassador Liu Jieyi, Permanent Representative of China to the United Nations at Security Council Open Debate on the United Nations and Regional Partnerships in Peacekeeping Operations", <http://www.china-un.org/eng/chinaandun/securitycouncil/thematicissues/peacekeeping/t1186941.htm>, accessed November 12, 2015.

<sup>6</sup> Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, *India and United Nations Peacekeeping Operations*, by Lt Gen Satish Nambiar (Retd), <http://mea.gov.in/articles-in-indian->

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media.htm?dtl/22776/India+and+United+Nations+Peacekeeping+Operations, accessed on 12 Nov 15.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> JANE PERLEZ, "China Surprises U.N. With \$100 Million and Thousands of Troops for Peacekeeping", *The New York Times*, September 28, 2015

<sup>9</sup> Quartz Daily, "In his words :full text of Xi Jinping's first UN address", <http://qz.com/512886/read-the-full-text-of-xi-jinpings-first-un-address/>, accessed November 12, 2015.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

