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Constructive Involvement and Harmonious World.

China's Evolving Outlook on Sovereignty in the Twenty-first Century

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1 Introduction

Currently the world, and China in particular, are undergoing complex and deep transformations. As part of these tremendous changes and adjustments, China's foreign strategic notions and policies have also undergone an historical shift, especially during the past thirty years of reform and opening up.

2 Clarifying Strategy

In recent years, the international community has witnessed new ideas and concepts emerge from China on issues such as national and energy security. During this process of evolution, China's foreign policy framework is being redefined, though this has not been widely documented in major foreign policy analyses. These trends are the result of fundamental new strategic considerations.

Among other issues, the concepts of "peaceful development", "win-win cooperation", and the "harmonious world" support the three pillars of China's foreign strategy, which has developed gradually to the present point.

The first is to keep firmly to the path of peaceful development. The second is to follow unswervingly a win-win strategy of opening up. The third is dedicated to building a harmonious world of lasting peace and common prosperity.

The core idea of these three concepts is that China plays a safeguarding and constructive rather than destructive role in the existing international system, and her strategies and policies both at home and abroad need to be reconciled and coordinated accordingly. This core idea has become a principal guideline of governance in China.

These concepts, ideas and guidelines are written into the final report adopted by the 17th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and its newly revised charter, which are political documents of great importance; almost all of China's foreign doctrines and policies evolve and develop around them.

3 Distinction Between Doctrine and Policy

Just as concepts differ from strategies, doctrine is distinct from policy; doctrine is rigid while policy is flexible.

China has pursued an independent foreign policy of peace for the past thirty years, and will continue to do so according to her foreign strategy framework in the twenty-first century.

First and foremost in this policy are respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-aggression, and non-interference in internal affairs. These are the key elements of the "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence", echoing universally recognized norms by the Charter of the United Nations. Theoretically, the doctrine of sovereignty, independence and non-intervention will continue to be emphasized by China and other developing states, as long as nation-states continue to form the basis of the Westphalian international system. A change in this doctrine will surely bring more conflicts and instability rather than peace, which would be harmful to China and the international community as a whole.

But on the level of practices and case dealings, China's outlook on sovereignty restriction and concession shows more evolution and flexibility. There are two main reasons for this.

The first is that globalization has made national interests more interdependent. More and more domestic issues easily become regional and international ones, and only multilateral regimes can find solutions to regional and global problems such as terrorism, nuclear proliferation, environmental degradation, and climate change,

The second is the result of the generally positive and ever closer interaction between China and the rest of the world over the past thirty years. On the one hand, as a permanent member of Security Council of United Nations, China should build on its track record of engagement and play a more active and constructive role in international affairs and contribute more to regional and world peace and stability. On the other

hand, help from the international community is necessary for China's own development and security, as the relief aid for the catastrophic Sichuan earthquake has demonstrated.

During the past thirty years of reform and opening up, China's national interests have become more closely linked with the interests of international community as a whole. Increased global engagement of Chinese citizens, companies and an increase of Chinese investment abroad result in growing interests overseas. In recent years, these overseas interests have been threatened by regional conflicts, internal conflicts of host states, and terrorists' activities. The task of protecting overseas interests is becoming more pressing and of greater importance. In this context, China is increasing its involvement in regional affairs.

The 2008 Beijing Olympics (a historical milestone in the relationship between China and the rest of the world) will push forward this kind of interaction. Thirty years after the initial opening up of China, China's outlook on world affairs (including nation-state sovereignty) will continue to evolve, with Chinese elites further emancipating their minds.

4 Constructive Involvement

In accordance with this evolution of concepts and principles, China's policies and activities in foreign affairs have changed considerably in recent years.

In the 1990s, China argued for a new outlook on security and took a positive attitude toward multilateral security cooperation, such as joint military exercises, anti-terrorism activities, sea rescues, etc.

In the twenty-first century, China has actively participated in political problem solving in regional hot spots, including hosting the six-party talks on the DPRK nuclear issue, taking part in 5+1 regime on the Iran nuclear issue, and acting as moderator and bridge on the Burma issue.

China's role in UN peacekeeping has grown continuously since the end of Cold War. In 1989, China began to participate in UN peacekeeping missions. By

the end of 2007, China had sent 7000 blue-helmet soldiers to sixteen peacekeeping operations. Currently, Chinese peacekeepers have joined the United Nations peacekeeping operations in Lebanon, Sudan, Haiti, and other places in the world, placing the country first amongst the P5.

In 2005, China signed the Outcome Document at the UN's sixtieth anniversary summit. This document includes Articles 138 and 139, which cite the responsibility of the international community to protect civilian populations against mass atrocities. This means that China partly endorses the Responsibility to Protect, on the condition that both China's national interests and regional stability are guaranteed. China subscribes not only to conflict prevention and the responsibility to react, but against the use of force as the last resort. In the aftermath of the summit, China became a member of updated UN Human Rights Council, where it has played an active role.

These new practices can be interpreted as constructive Involvement, although China does not use this concept officially.

From a Chinese perspective, there are four prerequisites for "constructive Involvement":

First, it needs to take place under the framework of the United Nations. All activities in which China participates should be proved, authorized, or supported by the UN. Whether it is peacekeeping, peacebuilding, or economic sanctions, whether it is to stabilize the region and international system, or to act in response to mass atrocities and humanitarian crises, China's choice represents common expectations and goals of the international community, especially of developing states. In cases of failing states, internal violent conflict or the occurrence of mass atrocities, intervention can only be mandated by the United Nations (rather than one state or group of states).

The second prerequisite is acceptance and cooperation of the state concerned. From a Chinese perspective, outside intervention is only effective if the state

concerned accepts and cooperates. If the concerned state does not accept constructive intervention, China prefers to respect and persuade rather than impose or threaten with sanctions and the use of force. To the Chinese understanding, the international community is a supporting actor and arbitrator, or monitor at best. Further, the acceptance and cooperation of regional groups of states are increasingly important and significant for the success of interventions by the international community. For instance, the African Union is one of main parties concerned in the international peace effort in Sudan's Darfur region. The peacekeeping efforts in Lebanon need the cooperation of the Arab League. And UN moderating and reconciling efforts in Burma need the understanding and support of ASEAN. Only under these circumstances has China played active roles in the above tasks.

The third condition is to be helpful to the stability and development of the state or region concerned. One of China's main foreign policy goals is to maintain world peace and to promote common development. However, China does not see itself as a guarantor for regional and international peace and stability. Therefore, China will not agree with, nor participate in any international interventions that will make conflicts among concerned parties worse, and potentially harm the territorial integrity of the host state. Whether a conflict escalates, and which factors trigger an escalation should solely be determined by the UN Security Council or other related multilateral regimes empowered by UN, and not by any individual state or group of states.

The fourth prerequisite is China's capacity. Although China appears to be developed, she is largely still a developing country. Despite the success of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, there are quite a few difficulties and problems ahead, some of which are difficult and pressing. Although her international standing has risen notably in recent years, China's influence in world affairs still has some limitations. Chinese leaders are well aware of the fact that they must pay close attention to various internal prob-

lems and must devote their primary efforts to solving them, and that as a result their country still falls short of the expectations of the international community. Therefore, China should not shoulder more international responsibility and commitment than her capability to do so allows.

5 Moderation and Integration

In the long run, China is becoming increasingly open-minded. She will continue to surmount the traditional concepts, go along with the tide of the times, and thus show more innovation in her foreign policy.

Under the four prerequisite conditions above, China will have more interest in and motivation for constructive Involvement, and engage more effectively in UN efforts such as peacekeeping, peacebuilding, and the prevention of mass atrocities. In fact, this is a major part of her role in the international arena, and also of her efforts to build a harmonious world. To some extent, this is one of the trends of China's foreign policy shifts.

However, it will be critical for Chinese scholars to extract a new doctrine from the latest foreign policy developments, and to sort out potential tensions between the two concepts of "peaceful development" and "harmonious world". Further, it is equally important to integrate the new doctrine with the traditional principles of sovereignty, independence and non-intervention.

For decision makers, the pressing task is to develop and protect China's interests, while at the same time advance in step with the times and apply more "constructive Involvement", which do not compromise sovereignty.

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