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China's Changing Engagement in Global Peacebuilding and Conflict Resolution: Drivers and Future Trends

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Abstract

The study aims to provide an in-depth analysis of the drivers of China's peace-building engagement and examine the interactive nature of the various drivers and factors that played a remarkable role in increasing China's economic rise and leadership in the international system. The descriptive-analytical method and Hudson's foreign policy analysis are fruitfully adopted, illustrating China's aims and motivations for engaging in peacebuilding. The paper concludes that China seeks to shape its great power, leadership, and identity. The case studies revealed that China's economic engagement as part of its peace-building efforts is increasingly driven by Chinese great power status and geostrategic security interests. Simultaneously, as seen in the Darfur War, Myanmar, Mali, South Sudan, and Afghanistan, China's policy towards conflict zones has undergone a tangible and salient transition from one of avoidance to one of increasing interest and engagement.

Keywords: Global Peace, Conflict Resolution, China Foreign Policy, economic investments, Diplomacy.

مشاركة الصين المتغيرة في بناء السلام العالمي وفض النزاعات: الدوافع والاتجاهات المستقبلية

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جميع الحقوق محفوظة، فلا يسمح بإعادة طباعة هذه المادة أو النقل منها أو تخزينها، سواء أكان ذلك عن طريق النسخ أم التصوير أم التسجيل أم غيره، وبأية وسيلة كانت: إلكترونية، أو ميكانيكية، إلا بإذن خطي من الناشر نفسه.

ملخّص

تهدف الدراسة إلى تقديم تحليل متعمق لدوافع مشاركة الصين في بناء السلام ودراسة الطبيعة التفاعلية لمختلف الدوافع والعوامل التي لعبت دوراً ملحوظًا في زيادة نهوض الصين الاقتصادي وريادتها في النظام الدولي. للوصول الى أهداف الدراسة، تم استخدام المنهج الوصفي التحليلي إضافة إلى أعمال هدسون في مجال تحليل السياسة الخارجية، حيث سيتم استخدام هذه الطرائق المنهجية لتوضيح أهداف الصين للانخراط في جهود بناء السلام ودوافعها. وخلصت الدراسة إلى أن الصين تسعى إلى تشكيل قيادتها وهويتها باعتبارها قوة عظمى في النظام الدولي إذ كشفت دراسة أن المشاركة الاقتصادية للصين، كجزء من جهود بناء السلام، مدفوعة بشكل متزايد بوضع الصين كقوة عظمى وبمصالح أمنية جيوستراتيجية. في الوقت نفسه، كما رأينا في حرب دارفور، وميانمار، ومالي، وجنوب السودان، وأفغانستان، وأنّ سياسة الصين شهدت تجاه مناطق الصراع انتقالًا ملموساً وبارزاً من حالة تجنب الانخراط او التدخل في النزاعات إلى سياسة الاهتمام والمشاركة المتزايدة.

الكلمات الدالة: السلام العالمي، فض النزاعات، السياسة الخارجية للصين، الاستثمارات الاقتصادية، الدبلوماسية.

Introduction

Upon the advent of China's 1978 reform and opening up rebirth in the international community, China's commercial interests and engagements across the world, especially in the developing world, began inexorably increasing. However, despite these interests and engagements often occurring in or proximate to conflict zones, the first couple of decades after 1978 saw China assiduously avoid letting these commercial engagements in such fraught regions see Beijing drawn into any form of substantive involvement in these conflicts or their peace processes (Hirono, Jiang, & Lanteigne, 2019, pp. 573-593). However, as seen through China's first substantive peacebuilding involvement in the Darfur War, followed by similarly comprehensive and multifaceted peacebuilding involvements in the conflicts in Myanmar, Mali, South Sudan, and Afghanistan, China's policy towards conflict zones has undergone a tangible and salient transition from one of indifference and avoidance to one of increasing proactivity, interest, and engagement.

China's increasing engagement in peacebuilding efforts is built around three pillars: peacekeeping, conflict mediation, and economic investments (primarily infrastructure-based, and in the vast majority being commercial rather than aid) (Abb, 2018). Peacekeeping was the first means through which China became involved in global conflict resolution or mitigation efforts: China first funded a UN peacekeeping mission in 1981, sent its first observers on a UN peacekeeping mission in 1990, and deployed its first combat troops on a UN peacekeeping mission in 2013 to Mali (Institute for Security & Development Policy, 2018) (Hirono, Jiang, & Lanteigne, 2019, p. 584). However, the latter two Chinese peacebuilding pillars of conflict mediation and economic investment in conflict zones are becoming increasingly prominent in China's grappling with instability in these territories (Abb, 2018). While China's conflict mediation engagements historically tended to focus on nations in which China had significant economic interests, these mediation efforts in recent times have also begun to expand into nations in which such economic interests are not prevalent (Abb, 2018).

The Chinese peacebuilding pillar of economic investments embodies the growing Chinese paradigm of "developmental peace." Developmental peace is a term that is still under conceptual development in Chinese academic and policy circles and, indeed, is not official terminology yet (Zhou, 2019) (De Blas Marin, 2015)(Abb, 2018)). However, despite its inchoate nature,

developmental peace is the most notable development in China's engagement in peacebuilding, as it deliberately represents a distinct disparity to the incumbent Western peacebuilding and development model. Here, developmental peace purports that, once conflict resolution has occurred, then the imperative process to build from this 'negative peace' – negative peace being the maximum that peacekeeping and conflict mediation can achieve on their own – to a 'positive peace'[1] involves an economic investment that will lead to economic opportunity and acceptable livelihoods (Lei, 2011, p. 353).

Accordingly, developmental peace represents China's distinct peacebuilding paradigm (De Blas Marin, 2015, p. 60). In its approach of focusing on stability and economic development instead of the traditional, Western, 'liberal peace' model that focuses on the construction or imposition of democratic and market institutions as well as human rights, China's peacebuilding paradigm here is in clear contradistinction to the Western peacebuilding model (Kuo, 2020) (Abb, 2018) (Zhou, 2019). The importance of this Chinese policy distinction from the Western model is illustrated by how Chinese policymakers emphasize how a universal, homogenous model does not embody the Chinese peacebuilding approach and is instead specific to the particular conflict setting in which China is engaging (De Carvalho & De Coning, 2013). The values which circumscribe developmental peace are based on, firstly, enabling the conflicted country to make its own decisions and set its agenda to spur its post-conflict emergence, and secondly, rebuilding the antebellum state functions and bodies (Lei, 2011) (De Blas Marin, 2015, p. 62).

The paper will begin by briefly synthesizing the general findings of the literature regarding the drivers of China's emerging peacebuilding engagement. It will delineate them into preliminary levels of the foreign policy analysis framework. This will enable an initial framing of the nature and interaction of these drivers that can then be applied to the case studies of China's major peacebuilding engagements to date, which constitutes the following section. These levels of analysis are derived from Hudson's seminal work on foreign policy analysis, where she lists the following as the various levels of analysis that can be used to explain foreign policy: cognitive processes; leader personality and orientation; small group dynamics;

[1] *"Negative peace refers to the absence of violence. When, for example, a ceasefire is enacted, a negative peace will ensue. It is negative because something undesirable stopped happening (e.g. the violence stopped, the oppression ended). Positive peace is filled with positive content such as restoration of relationships, the creation of social systems that serve the needs of the whole population and the constructive resolution of conflict." Dijkema (2019)*

organizational process; bureaucratic politics; culture and identity; domestic politics; national attributes; regional/international system(s).[2] The final discussion section will consider the findings from section one and the case studies to delineate what drivers – and the levels of analysis of which they are a part – operate to what extent in specific different types of conflict/post-conflict settings in which China engages. Through this analysis, we can better understand the characteristics and types of trajectories that Chinese peacebuilding engagements might assume in these circumstances.

Preliminary levels of analysis survey

A preliminary survey of the nascent literature on China's growing peacebuilding involvement immediately reveals the integrated nature of the various levels and types of drivers spurring and shaping China's involvement. As the below synthesis of the extant literature in this section will show, the four levels of analysis that integrate to constitute an explanatory milieu of China's emerging peacebuilding approach are:

- ***Regional/international system(s)***[3]
- ***National attributes.***[4]
- ***Domestic politics***[5]
- ***Culture and identity***[6]

One of the central aims of China's emerging global peacebuilding approach is to enable China to have a more secure overseas environment to pursue its economic interests. As these overseas economic interests are increasingly crucial to the continued economic development of China – continued integration in the global economic system being crucial to ameliorate Chinese economic maladies ranging from industrial overcapacity to the imperative for technology transfer – these overseas economic interests are thus central to the continuity of Chinese Communist Party (CCP) legitimacy and domestic Chinese stability (Hirono, Jiang, & Lanteigne, 2019, p. 584) (Lei, 2011). These interests are also driving China's emergence as a more cogent

[2] *For details on each level of analysis, see Hudson (2014, p.34)*

[3] *For instance: regional and international distributions of power; anarchy and its mitigation by international regimes; enmities and friendships, etc. (Hudson 2014, p.34)*

[4] *For instance: geography; resources; economic variables (development, trade flows etc.), etc. (Hudson 2014, p.34)*

[5] *For instance: regime type; political interest groups; electoral politics; two-level games; public opinion, etc. (Hudson 2014, p.34)*

[6] *For instance: nationalism; identity politics; historical and discursive identity; value preferences; action template, etc. (Hudson 2014, p.34)*

and leading peacebuilding actor in its contiguous territories, but so is the need for the Chinese state to assume more responsibility as a security problem-solver in order to meet domestic Chinese expectations on the state to act commensurate to its emerging great power status and hold sway in addressing vexed issues like conflicts in the immediate region that could directly impact China's territorial interests (Lei, 2011).

An additional element to consider here is that China's proliferating economic engagement and investment across the developing world, often in highly insecure regions, increasingly drives Chinese expatriate labor to potential or actual conflict zones. The growing patriotism of Chinese citizens means they are unwilling to accept instances of these overseas Chinese being harmed and of Chinese investments being attacked. The legitimacy of the CCP is therefore impacted by its ability to prevent such occurrences (Wong, 2013) (Parello-Plesner & Duchâtel, 2015) (Hirono, Jiang, & Lanteigne, 2019, p. 587) (Calabrese, 2016) (Scobell & Nader, 2016, p. 18) (Fulton, 2019, pp. 153-154)(De Blas Marin, 2015, p. 90), especially as the Party has assumed the role as a champion of Chinese nationalism. Accordingly, it is evident how domestic politics is a crucial level of analysis to be considered when broaching China's peacebuilding approach and policy.

However, the most illuminating dynamic that needs further examination regarding foreign policy analysis on this topic is the increasing extent to which the CCP's domestic legitimacy depends on its international legitimacy. China's growing involvement in conflict and peacebuilding zones across parts of the world in which China has little economic interest, a trend that will be extrapolated in the below case studies, is geared to build China's legitimacy amongst the international community through China assuming the sort of responsibility and leadership expected of great power (Cui & Buzan, 2016) (Hirono, Jiang, & Lanteigne, 2019, pp. 584-588) (Alterman, Alter, Hall, & Roy, 2013, p. 2) (Chen, 2018, p. 80) (Andersen, Jiang, & Sorensen, 2016). Nevertheless, Chinese citizens also more and more have expectations of the Chinese state to build China's leadership in the international community, this sentiment being escalated in no small part by the "Chinese Dream" aspiration that is increasingly central to the domestic and international Chinese identity (Hirono, Jiang, & Lanteigne, 2019, pp. 583-589). As such, the domestic and international system levels of analysis must be understood in collaboration here. For the sake of clarity of distinction, however, the international system level of analysis and the

domestic politics level of analysis will be delineated separately in the case study analysis and discussion, even if the latter often drives the former to an extent.

From the above discussion on China's efforts to distinguish developmental peace from the Western liberal peace model, we already see here how the Chinese peacebuilding paradigm is, as a 'foreign policy' at least partly motivated by China's sense of a need to distinguish its contribution to global governance from incumbent Western approaches (Sorensen, 2019). This first relates to China's need to build its great power status by assuming more proactive leadership in global governance (Hirono, Jiang, & Lanteigne, 2019, pp. 575-583) (Sorensen, 2019). Accordingly, China is being driven by the incentive to assume the role of the norm entrepreneur in the international system and the leadership power this can enable (Abb, 2018) (Hirono, Jiang, & Lanteigne, 2019, p. 588). However, the second dynamic this Chinese attempt at distinction involves concerns how, by spreading the Chinese peacebuilding paradigm, China can action its need to spread its desired international governance values of absolute sovereignty, non-interference, and regime/governmental stability – all of these having perceived security or stability implications for the Chinese state (Kuo, 2020).

As China's peacebuilding model is centered on its unique developmental experience, whereas the Western model is anchored in democratic and free market values (Kuo, 2020), China's promotion of its peacebuilding paradigm can thus arguably be understood, in a sense, as a Chinese response to the governance constraints China perceives in the international system that might hamper China's continued rise as a great power. Similarly relating to the driver of facilitating China's continued successful rise, the Chinese synthesis of development with peace in order to create developmental peace was part of Beijing's desire to promote a more positive narrative regarding this rise, thus mitigating the growing prevalence of the 'China threat' sentiment across the international system (Abb, 2018) which enervates Chinese power, and potentially security, through outcomes like the balancing against China it can inspire.

As was beginning to be broached above, the expanding web of Chinese infrastructure networks, energy projects, and trade routes across the developing world are central to BRI ambitions and Chinese domestic development, as well as to China's ability to strengthen its place in the international system, has brought with it the need for China to expend more material and nonmaterial resources on their protection (Hirono, Jiang, & Lanteigne, 2019, p. 587). For

instance, China's 2012 White Paper on Energy Policy detailed how safeguarding regional stability in energy-rich regions was a central aim (Information Office of the State Council, 2012). There is an interesting two-way dynamic here, however, as while China's expanding economic interests across the developing world thus necessitate greater peacebuilding and conflict prevention engagement, China's growing economic influence and strength on the global stage also means Beijing is now endowed with more commercial and political resources, experience, and skills to engage in conflict mitigation and developmental peace (Breslin, 2009) (Hirono, Jiang, & Lanteigne, 2019, pp. 583-588). In other words, there are push and pull factors regarding the role of China's increasing economic rise and leadership in the international system.

While economic interests often drive or incentivize China's subsequent peacebuilding engagement, it is not solely a unidirectional relationship. As will be extrapolated in the case studies, China's economic engagement as part of its peacebuilding efforts is increasingly being driven by Chinese great power status and geostrategic security interests (Zhou, 2019). The case studies, presented in chronological order, will further illustrate the inherently interactive nature of the various drivers discussed in this section and will provide additional material to enable the final discussion section to more precisely delineate what drivers operate to what extent in specific different types of conflict/post-conflict settings in which China engages.

Case studies

Sudan

Compared with China's historical engagement with conflict resolution, the multifaceted and proactive approach China employed towards the Darfur War, which commenced in 2003, has represented a salient departure from China's traditional approach of distancing itself from conflict resolution and peacebuilding processes (De Blas Marin, 2015, p. 66). This transition in China's approach was observable, as it occurred during the conflict. Throughout the first year of the War, China remained aloof and indifferent (Jian, 2012, p. 7). However, starting in late 2004, Beijing began pressuring Sudan's President Omar Bashir to accept, firstly, the various UN resolutions that were produced regarding conflict resolution measures, and secondly, the African Union-UN joint peacekeeping force that had been established (Jian, 2012, pp. 7-8) (Sina , 2006).

Additionally, Beijing pushed both Khartoum and the rival faction to engage in peace talks in 2007 (Hirono, Jiang, & Lanteigne, 2019, p. 585) While China's approach was one of political dialogue, diplomatic initiatives, and consultation, it is important not to discount the pressure Beijing applied to Khartoum through this approach and the departure of such pressure represented from past Chinese practices (De Blas Marin, 2015, p. 66).

Beijing's initial stance of indifference was primarily due to China's extensive economic interests in Sudan and the subsequent desire not to harm the bilateral relationship (Jian, 2012, p. 10). Nevertheless, when the War descended into a dire humanitarian crisis, the international community pressured China, one of the leading foreign stakeholders in Sudan, to meet the expectations of significant power and assume responsibility for mitigating the crisis. As a rising power sensitive to maintaining an acceptable global image, China changed its tact to become a proactive leader in conflict resolution (Jian, 2012, p. 10).

However, it is important not to discount the role of China's economic interests. Not only was the China National Petroleum Corporation the dominant foreign investor and project holder in Sudan, but China's oil imports from Sudan also had increased by a factor of 25 from 1990 to 2006, and Chinese business had expanded across numerous Sudanese sectors – this all meaning there was a clear economic rationale driving China's efforts to secure peace (Sultan & Degang, 2020, p. 11). Beijing's efforts to bring both sides to the negotiating table in 2007 were due just as much to the realpolitik desire to engender stability for China's ongoing investments as expeditiously as possible as it was due to the desire to build China's international image (Hirono, Jiang, & Lanteigne, 2019, p. 584). Accordingly, protecting commercial interests, cultivating and improving its great power status, and promulgating China's unique governance values were the key drivers of China's peacebuilding engagement in the War (Sultan & Degang, 2020, p. 6) (UN Comtrade Database, 2007)(Lanteigne, 2019).

Regarding promulgating China's governance values, China used its role as an important conflict resolution actor War, to actively promote for the first time key elements of China's emergent and unique peacebuilding paradigm: focussing on peace through development but done in a manner that relies on multilateral institutions and upholds sovereign independence (Jian, 2012, p. 10). Here we see the advent of an important pull factor that would continue to incentivize China's future engagement in foreign peacebuilding settings: the need for China to promote its

global governance values amongst the international community to begin building a more amenable environment for China's rise by cultivating China's ability to shape the system.

Myanmar

China's substantive involvement in Myanmar's Kachin and Shan State conflicts began in 2013 when China appointed a special envoy to the peace talks. This envoy position emerged as a consistently central actor in negotiations between Naypyidaw and the armed ethnic groups. Moreover, again demonstrating Beijing's newfound willingness to shelve its tradition of only dealing with incumbent administrations or regimes, China began a dialogue with the then-opposition Party in Myanmar before they were elected in November 2015 (Hirono, Jiang, & Lanteigne, 2019, p. 585). Beijing's efforts to establish itself as the key influential player in the peace process have also involved pressuring armed groups along the Myanmar-China border to engage in the negotiations as well as pushing to prevent other external actors, primarily the US and UN, from becoming involved (USIP China Myanmar Senior Study Group, 2018). This unilateral approach by China, whereby it also withholds its involvement in multilateral peace mechanisms in Myanmar (USIP China Myanmar Senior Study Group, 2018), is salient in its incongruity with the preference for multilateral peacebuilding processes Beijing has often favored in its other global peace process engagements. Indeed, in terms of the more recent conflict in Rakhine State, Beijing has extended this marginalization of UN efforts by using its position on the UNSC to shelter Naypyidaw from punitive UNSC measures.

Geo-economic drivers were notable in spurring China's involvement in Myanmar. Myanmar is a crucial conduit from the Indian Ocean to the Chinese province of Yunnan and hosts extensive Chinese natural resources investments (De Blas Marin, 2015, p. 82). The geo-economic dimension was plain to see when Beijing sheltered Naypyidaw from UNSC punitive measures regarding the Rohingya crisis to protect China's development project of the Kyaukphyu port and special economic zone in Rakhine State (USIP China Myanmar Senior Study Group, 2018).

The domestic politics level of analysis was likewise prevalent. In terms of domestic Chinese security, the location of the Myanmar conflict in Kachin and Kokang, both sharing borders with China, meant that China risked the untenable potential of the conflict affecting Chinese territory, even accidentally in the form of collateral damage or the form of the number of Burmese refugees

increasing from its already notable level (Sun, 2013) (De Blas Marin, 2015, p. 83). The other dynamic in which this level of analysis holds substantial explanatory value relates to how the US began increasing its engagement in the Kachin conflict in December 2012, combined with impending signs that Washington was planning on playing a leading mediation role. Having the US lead the conflict resolution process in a territory contiguous to China, one in which China has a broad spectrum of economic and security interests, was indeed perceived as politically untenable by the CCP. Thus China escalated its intervention in Myanmar soon after (International Crisis Group, 2013).

Mali

Alongside Sudan, Mali represents a clear inflection point in China's peacebuilding and conflict resolution policy. Firstly, as mentioned above, the conflict in Mali was the first in which China deployed combat troops to a peacekeeping mission, representing a significant escalation in the extent to which China perceived its need to contribute more as a political-security actor in the international community (Benabdallah & Large, 2020, p. 4). However, unlike Sudan and most other cases of China's decisions to engage in conflict resolution processes, Mali was not driven by direct economic interests, as the country has minimal trade or resource prospects for China. Instead, and in representing the second key aspect of this inflection point, a key dynamic to consider instead is the driver of Beijing's desire to build more comprehensive regional relationships – i.e., becoming a comprehensive partner of African subregions that – that cover the spectrum of the security, the economic, and the ideational that is befitting of great power (Lanteigne, 2019, p. 635).

The ideational aspect is crucial in the case of Mali, as China was incentivized by the opportunity to promote a model of peacebuilding that was in clear distinction to the traditional and incumbent French approach, which China has painted as "neo-colonial" in the past (Lanteigne, 2019, p. 636) (Benabdallah & Large, 2020, p. 4). Indeed, Mali was the key initial comprehensive case of developmental peace being unfolded by China. Accordingly, Beijing implemented numerous substantial development projects alongside its contribution of peacekeeping troops. It framed its effort in Mali as following the tenet that economic development was "the key to solving all problems" (Benabdallah & Large, 2020, p. 4).

This is not to say that these ideational incentives, and desires to meet expectations placed on China as a great power, are not related to economic drivers. Africa is a key focus of the BRI. Beijing would therefore seem to be operating under the belief that increasing its peacebuilding leadership in areas in which there are no direct, substantial material interests is increasing China's credentials in the eyes of African states as a genuine, responsible long-term partner – a collective sentiment that, if realized, will be key to maximizing BRI success (Lanteigne, 2019, pp. 649-650) (Cui X. , 2016). Indeed, and in seeming further illustration of Beijing's increasing assumption of great power thinking and identity, China's intervention in Mali was in apparent recognition of the fact that, as China was now a power with broad regional interests, the interconnected nature of developments within a region thus meant Beijing needed to act as a political actor in a broad regional sense (Benabdallah & Large, 2020, p. 5).

South Sudan

China was one of the central foreign parties involved in trying to contain and end the 2013-2020 South Sudanese civil war. The depth and width of China's engagement in the War was a salient departure from its traditional peacebuilding or conflict resolution approaches, with China: providing arms to the South Sudanese military (Verjee, 2016) deploying the first battalion of Chinese combat troops to a UN peacekeeping mission as well as providing the deputy force commander to the UN mission (Blasko, 2016) through funding, operational support, and policy coordination, becoming perhaps the most important non-regional supporting nation to the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) – the east African bloc serving as the chief mediating body in the War (Jorgic, 2014)(Firew, 2015) (Nyabiage, 2019) (Verjee, 2016) repeatedly deploying China's special envoy for African Affairs to push South Sudan's government to engage in dialogue and exercise restraint (Reuters, 2016); having Foreign Minister Wang Yi chair a meeting of the conflicting parties in order to delineate a peace process plan (VOA News, 2015) (Nyabiage, 2019) (Hirono, Jiang, & Lanteigne, 2019, p. 585) and lobbying for a Chinese diplomat to be appointed as a deputy chief of staff to the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission – the peace agreement's oversight mechanism (Verjee, 2016).

China's previous investments in the South Sudanese oil industry meant that there was a certain economic motivation for China's efforts to stem the conflict (Lanteigne, 2019). However, while nearly half of South Sudan's oil production ceased due to the War, South Sudanese oil was no

longer a particularly important part of China's oil supply (Verjee, 2016). This factor needs to explain the comprehensive response China implemented in the country. Ethiopia's position both as the leader of the IGAD and as a critical economic partner of China in Africa can explain the efforts China expended on the IGAD process. However, this dynamic cannot explain the depth of China's remaining contribution to the overall effort (Verjee, 2016). Accordingly, direct material interests cannot explain China's engagement in South Sudan.

The remaining explanatory deficit can be begun to be filled with the driver of China's aim to shape its great power leadership and identity (Sultan & Degang, 2020, p. 6) by assuming a central role in South Sudan and deploying a uniquely Chinese approach in the conflict. A central part of this leadership drive was China's leading role in the conflict mediation with the various conflicting factions to the extent China historically had avoided (Hirono, Jiang, & Lanteigne, 2019, p. 584) while emphasizing the multilateral and non-interference character of the process. However, it needs to be said that this changing proclivity towards mediating between conflicting parties is also driven by Beijing's understanding of the need to hedge in conflict situations in order to preserve the continuity of its interests in whichever post-conflict status quo emerges (Hirono, Jiang, & Lanteigne, 2019, p. 584).

Afghanistan

Alongside the US, China has been one of the key players working to engender a political settlement between the Taliban and Kabul. China's consistent efforts to this end since 2014 resulted in successful discussions between conflicting parties on multiple occasions (Hirono, Jiang, & Lanteigne, 2019). China has also coordinated with Pakistan to conduct trilateral trade and security talks with Afghanistan as well to facilitate a ceasefire agreement between the Taliban and Kabul in June 2018, and is also reportedly in the process of establishing China's second overseas military base in Afghanistan, primarily to provide counterterrorism training to the Afghan military (Siegel, 2019)(Ramachandari, 2018).

However, this mediation has all been framed by the driving logic of China's engagement in the country, mainly Afghanistan's integration into the BRI (Kelemen, 2020). China has pursued Afghan stabilization through its efforts to strengthen its economic ties with the country, particularly through aiming to increase Afghanistan's capacity for export-led economic growth (Kelemen, 2019)(Kelemen, 2020)). A key project here has been establishing the China-

Afghanistan air corridor in November 2018, which primarily aims to boost the export capability of the Afghan pine nut industry (Shi, 2019). Additionally, by virtue of its large-scale investments in the Afghan mining sector and the other two key Afghan sectors of transportation infrastructure and agriculture, China has become Afghanistan's primary foreign investor (Kelemen, 2020) (Haider, 2020).

The drivers of China's engagement in the Afghanistan peace process are primarily twofold: economic interests and domestic Chinese security. Beijing views Afghanistan as a potential haven for Uighur militants. China also has significant mining interests in the country and an even more significant interest in the advent of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (Jafari, 2020) (Hirono, Jiang, & Lanteigne, 2019) – the BRI conduit that is emerging as perhaps the most important corridor so far for the Initiative. The lack of a comparable (relative to Mali, for instance) Chinese rhetorical focus on "developmental peace" and the lack of a systemic approach to these economic investments – the investments tend to be isolated projects that have not seen due effort from China to integrate them into their contiguous Afghan localities and markets (Kelemen, 2020) (Hampstead, 2018) or to stabilize the surrounding socio-political environment (Sun, 2020) (Azad, 2020) – means it is questionable to what extent Beijing's approach in the country is one of genuine developmental peace versus extracting short-term economic gain.

Final analysis and discussion

The following analysis will delineate what drivers – and the levels of analysis of which they are a part – operate to what extent in the different conflict settings in which China has engaged.

Sudan: Darfur 2004		
Level of analysis ***(listed in the order in which they drove China's engagement)***	**The specific driver**	**Type of peacebuilding/conflict resolution engagement from China**
International system	International pressure on China to begin acting befitting of great power and shed its approach of avoiding responsibility in mitigating the conflict	1. Direct mediation and consultation, including significant political pressure on the incumbent Sudanese regime 2. Multilateral mediation 3. Deployment of combat peacekeeping troops
	Beijing's sensitivity to meeting international expectations in order to improve its image, better facilitating China's accumulation of great power status	
National attributes	The continuation of violence marginalized China's ability to extract value from its significant economic investments in Sudan	
Culture/identity; international system	Once China was involved in the conflict resolution process, the opportunity to start promoting China's unique governance values (part of China's desire to build ideational leadership in the international community) drove China's rudimentary promulgation of the developmental peace idea in Sudan	

Myanmar: Naypyidaw and the armed ethnic groups 2013		
Level of analysis ***(listed in the order in which they drove China's engagement)***	**The specific driver**	**Type of peacebuilding/conflict resolution engagement from China**
Domestic politics	Signs of potential US leadership in Myanmar and militant activity on the Myanmar-China border that affected Chinese territory were perceived as a threat to domestic CCP legitimacy	1. Unilateral mediation, which involved political pressure on opposition militant groups 2. Sheltering the Burmese government from UNSC dictates
National attributes	The still-increasing scale of China's geo-economic interests in Myanmar has spurred the continuity of China's comprehensive involvement	

Mali: Northeastern Mali 2013		
Level of analysis ***(listed in the order in which they drove China's engagement)***	**The specific driver**	**Type of peacebuilding/conflict resolution engagement from China**
Culture/identity; international system	As China was now firmly a great power, Beijing felt that to continue to meet the international community's expectations and thus enable China's continued acquisition of leadership capital; China needed to assume more responsibility over issues where no Chinese material interests were directly at stake.	1. Deployment of combat peacekeeping troops 2. Tangible implementation of developmental peace through the establishment of development projects
	The opportunity to leverage China's increasing leadership in the international community to promote China's unique governance values (e.g., developmental peace)	
National attributes; international system	The need to build China's regional reputation as a genuine comprehensive partner in a region where extensive Chinese economic interests are proliferating (e.g., BRI)	
	Preventing the spread of instability across a region where extensive Chinese economic interests are proliferating	

South Sudan: South Sudanese civil war 2013-2020			
Level of analysis *(listed in the order in which they drove China's engagement)*		**The specific driver**	**Type of peacebuilding/conflict resolution engagement from China**
It's not clear which of these drivers held primacy over the other	National attributes; international system	The desire to strengthen the image of China as a genuine partner to Ethiopia and the rest of East Africa (a key BRI region)	1. Multilateral and direct mediation and consultation, including significant political pressure on the incumbent South Sudanese regime 2. Deployment of combat peacekeeping troops
	Identity/culture	The opportunity to leverage China's increasing leadership in the international community to promote China's unique governance values	
National attributes		The desire to protect notable, but by no means key, energy investments and supply sources	

Afghanistan: Taliban and Kabul 2014			
Level of analysis *(listed in the order in which they drove China's engagement)*		**The specific driver**	**Type of peacebuilding/conflict resolution engagement from China**
It is unclear which of these drivers held primacy over the other	National attributes	The need to, firstly, protect the spread of instability that could marginalize the crucial China-Pakistan Economic Corridor geo-economic asset, and secondly, to begin spurring activity in this Corridor	1. Playing a leading role in multilateral (but not UN-related) mediation and consultation 2. Apparent initiation of military assistance and training to the Afghan military 3. Efforts (although haphazard) to spur the capacity of Afghan natural resources industries
	Domestic politics	The need to prevent the Uighur militant movement from strengthening in Afghanistan and then threatening the Chinese mainland – a significant perceived threat to domestic CCP legitimacy	

From the above tables, we can see a general pattern in the drivers that differentiates between countries that are contiguous to China versus countries that are farther abroad.

Non-contiguous countries

In countries further abroad, the level of analysis of the international system is a constant presence as a part of, if not the initial or primary driver of, Chinese involvement. The specific variable here largely relates to China's desire to improve its international reputation as a responsible leader and meet the expectations of it as a great power. Beijing is deeming success in this endeavor to provide China with the social capital to more easily pursue its goals of expanding China's norm-making abilities regarding international governance as well as China's ability to facilitate more opportunities for comprehensive bilateral relationships serving China's economic interests.

Following the international system level of analysis, the next most important level of analysis tends to alternate between the national attributes level and the culture/identity level. Both of these levels naturally have significant areas of overlap with the abovementioned primary dynamic of China's aim to build its international reputation and great power status: the manifestation of the national attributes level often relates to the abovementioned dynamic of China looking to improve its social capital to pursue comprehensive economic partnerships, and the manifestation of the culture/identity level typically relates to China aiming to promote its unique governance values to try and increase China's norm-making ability in the international system. It is important to note the other enduring secondary relevance of the national attributes level: the dynamic of China needing to protect its proliferating investment and economic assets (including expat Chinese) across these developing regions.

This collection and interaction of drivers in conflicted countries further abroad from China typically result in a relatively similar form of Chinese peacebuilding engagement: direct and multilateral mediation (the latter of which particularly naturally aligns to improve China's abovementioned great power status aims through building China's reputation as a responsible actor upholding international institutions); and deployment of combat peacekeeping troops as part of UN missions (similarly regarding this same desire for reputational dividend). However, the place of developmental peace in these engagements is not applied consistently enough in a tangible sense across these cases to be considered an operational trend yet, with this likely relating to the still inchoate and emerging nature of the concept of developmental peace in Chinese policy circles. Nonetheless, stressing China's unique governance norms with which

Beijing consistently frames its involvement in these peace processes relates to developmental peace as a paradigm.

Contiguous countries

Regarding conflicted countries contiguous to China, the primary level of analysis, as a trend, needs to be more resolutely distinguishable between the domestic politics level of analysis and the national attributes level of analysis. However, the domestic politics level edges out the national attributes level due to the difficulty in parsing the primary level of analysis in the Afghanistan case study. This largely relates to the dynamic that maintaining CCP legitimacy is always front and center as a driver of Chinese policy when considering Chinese foreign policy. The national attributes level is a close second, however, as China's economic integration with the rest of the world – in itself likewise a determinant, but a less direct one, of domestic CCP legitimacy – depends increasingly due to the central role of the BRI, on China's contiguous land territories being stable.

A further salient difference distinguishing the contiguous countries category is the type of engagement exercised by China. Perhaps caused by the primacy of the driver of the CCP looking to protect its domestic legitimacy, China's engagement typically favored the unilateral, or at most trilateral, orientation in Afghanistan and Myanmar, with Beijing preferring to eschew multilateral UN processes in order to have greater control over the direction and outcome.

Conclusion:

The primary offering of this piece is that the distinction between the type and drivers of China's engagements in contiguous conflict zones and conflict zones further afield offers some interesting implications and questions to take forward into future research. A key starting place is the Syrian War. While China's engagement in the War was not substantive enough to be considered alongside the case studies included in this piece, China's continued vetoing of UNSC resolutions that were aimed to undermine the Assad regime seems to run somewhat counter to the trends seen in the above case studies. Moreover, China's vetoing trend in Syria saw it run significantly afoul of a significant portion of the international community with whom China's previous peacebuilding engagements had aimed to favor (Singh, 2018, p. 12) . Accordingly, the great power status driver that is ever-present and primary across China's substantive peacebuilding engagements further afield from China, with Syria likewise falling into this geographical category, did not seem to materialize in the same manner in the Syrian context.

Because economic or material interests can be ruled out as an explanatory variable, as Syria holds minimal economic or investment value for China, further research could examine whether China's different approach in Syria can be attributed to the intractably crowded – in terms of the number of major powers contesting the Syrian arena – nature of the Syrian conflict milieu. In other words, the crowdedness limited the opportunities available for China to expand its great power status. At the same time, the intractability exposed China's still insufficient conflict resolution or peacebuilding heft, or indeed desire, to assume leadership in complex areas where China's core interests – i.e., domestic security/stability and CCP legitimacy – are not directly challenged. A further potential dynamic to examine might be that, while China's past status as a major rising power meant Beijing was driven by the structural need to curry as much favor across all states as possible, China's emergence into superpower status might mean Beijing feels less driven by the need to improve its reputation across the expanse of the international community, and instead can pick and choose to build its status or reputation in those states, or blocs, that best serve China's needs at any one point in time. The implications of these proposed considerations would seem to be potentially significant for future analysis that aims to forecast the likelihood of China's assumption of substantive leadership in more complex areas of international political governance where China's core interests are not front and center.

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