

THE ROLE OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA IN THE UNITED NATIONS

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Abstract: As a member state of the United Nations (UN), the People's Republic of China (China) plays a very constructive role because it actively participates in its work in almost all aspects and areas of its activity, providing full support to the system of this universal organisation. Since China legitimately took a seat in the UN based on General Assembly Resolution 2758 of October 25, 1971, it has actively participated in the promotion of the goals and principles of the Charter and supported the role and authority of the UN, which, in its opinion, should be enhanced by the consistent application of international law and the reorganisation and reform of its main bodies. Through the vision of the development of the global governance system, which should be achieved by working together to realise the idea of “a community of shared future for mankind”, China strives as a responsible power to contribute to solving the most important international problems, among which is the preservation of international peace and security in the first place. Its influence is increasing in the UN system, especially among the countries of the Global South, which has been criticised by Western countries led by the United States of America. Since the growth of Chinese influence in the UN is only a reflection of its power on the geopolitical and geo-economic plane (as indicated by numerous Chinese arrangements with intergovernmental forums and regional organisations such as the BRICS, SOC, and others, as well as the goals of Chinese strategic initiatives such as the BRI, GDI, GSI, and GCI), it would be most advisable for both sides to join forces and share responsibilities for improving the global governance system so that the UN becomes a “force multiplier” for international peace and development. In this way, through an equal game, China and Western countries could achieve a constructive reform of the UN, which would be a significant

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step towards the realisation of global development goals that transcend their national interests.

Keywords: UN, China, role, influence, development, global governance system.

INTRODUCTORY NOTES OF CHINA'S ROLE IN THE UN DURING THE COLD WAR

During the Cold War, China was in a state of isolation due to the unresolved issue of representation in the UN. The lack of international recognition by US-led Western countries, along with frozen relations with the Soviet Union, caused many difficulties for China participating in the UN. After more than two decades of persistent struggle for the restoration of its legal rights in the UN, China has taken its rightful place in this universal international organisation. The legal basis for the restoration of membership rights to China in the UN was General Assembly resolution 2758 of October 25, 1971 (United Nations, 1971).¹

This marked a turning point in China's positioning in international relations, as it enabled it not only to regain its membership in the UN (instead of being the representative of the government of the Republic of China) but also to normalise its bilateral relations with a large number of countries of the East and West, which was of key importance for strengthening its role in the UN system (Bulsara, 1995; Conforti, 2005, pp. 50-53; Garver, 2016, pp. 113-145; Kim, 1979, pp. 102-103; Torelli, 2012, pp. 159-160).

In this sense, it should be noted that, at the very beginning, China was not fully familiar with the functioning of the UN system, and it took some time for it to learn how this system works. Hence, at the sessions of the UN General Assembly and other related institutions, it expressed its views on

¹ After the 26th session of the UN General Assembly rejected the proposal of the United States to represent "two Chinas" in the UN, the General Assembly adopted the draft resolution proposed by Albania (A/L.630 and Add.1 and 2) by roll call by a vote of 76 to 35, with 17 abstentions, as Resolution 2758. The resolution recognised the People's Republic of China as "the only legitimate representative in the United Nations", which was in accordance with the customary international practice of recognising the international legal continuity of states in the event of revolutionary changes or changes of governments (*forma regiminis mutata non mutatur ipsa civitas*). The Government of the People's Republic of China sent its representatives to the General Assembly and the Security Council of the UN on November 15 and 23, 1971.

open international issues with a degree of caution, mostly aligning itself with the views of developing countries of the so-called *Third World*.

On the other hand, when voting in the Security Council on peace and security issues, China often abstained, thus expressing its position on resolutions approving the application of coercive measures or sending peacekeeping forces to countries that did not give their prior consent. According to its understanding, the passing of such resolutions was part of the hegemonic policy of the great powers and a gross violation of the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other states. The main reason for this positioning of China was ideological because it, as a communist country, did not want to participate in the bloc division of the world during the Cold War period. Therefore, it refused to pay financial contributions for those peacekeeping operations that would be established by the Security Council in accordance with Chapter VII of the Charter, which could not lead to the overcoming of conflicts and the settlement of disputes.

Its engagement on the economic and social level in the Cold War period was not great. That situation had changed drastically since the eighties of the 20th century when China transformed from a passive observer to a proactive and constructive actor in international relations. That turn was associated with the *Open Door Policy* and *Opening-up Strategy* promotion, which was the “trigger” for China’s extensive economic reform aimed at social transformation from an agrarian to an industrial country and from a regional and continental civilisation to a global and maritime civilisation.

The then-Chinese leader, Deng Xiaoping, the main architect of the Chinese reform and opening-up strategy, once said that “China should contribute to world peace by developing its economy” (Hongyuan, Yun & Qifa, 2012, p. 128). Thus, the development of the Chinese economy became the main driving force behind the reshaping of its *Foreign Policy of Peace*, which greatly contributed to the maintenance of international security (Ge, 2017). That policy arose from its earlier diplomatic experience based on the concept of the “Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence”, by which it managed to establish sincere and friendly relations with a large part of the world that opposed the policy of power and hegemony in international relations.² In this sense, China remained steadfast

² The foreign policy concept of “Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence” was promoted by Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai in 1953, along with the principle of “harmony without

in defending its independent position based on respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, non-aggression and non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries, respect for equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence (Baijie, 2014; Keith, 2009, p. 135, MFA, 2017).

In the Seventh Five-Year Plan Report of 1986, China endorsed these principles that deeply permeated the UN Charter and promoted them to preserve international peace and development (Ziyang, 1986, p. 21). In this sense, China won the favour of the developing countries and the countries gathered around the Non-Aligned Movement (Dimitrijević, 2010, pp. 6-15).

At the 36th Session of the UN General Assembly held in 1981, China accepted a positive attitude towards the role of peacekeeping operations. That year, it voted for the adoption of the Security Council resolution extending the mandate of the peacekeeping forces in Cyprus. The following year, it took part in the costs of the peacekeeping mission in Lebanon. In 1986, China sent an observation mission to the Middle East, while in 1988, it officially submitted a request to join the UN Special Committee for Peacekeeping Operations, which was unanimously approved by the General Assembly (Niu, 2003). By the end of the Cold War period, China requested the sending of its military observers to the UN Truce Supervision Organisation (UNTSO), which was in charge of monitoring the ceasefire in the Middle East. Then, it also sent its observers to Namibia to assist the UN Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG) in monitoring the general elections. A changed approach to providing assistance to international peacekeeping operations was a good sign that China decided to expand its engagement within the UN system.

After all, it became more visible when China joined the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in the 1980s and abandoned its long-standing position as the only developing country that did not accept multilateral aid. Intergovernmental organisations within the UN system, such as the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the UN International Children's

uniformity". The concept served China to establish good neighbourly relations and then relations with other countries in the world. It was first incorporated into the 1954 China-India Agreement on Trade and Intercourse between the Tibet Region of China and India. At the conference of Asian-African countries held in Bandung in 1955, the concept was included in the Declaration on Promotion of World Peace and Cooperation, which was the conceptual basis on which the Non-Aligned Movement was conceived.

Emergency Fund (UNICEF), the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), the World Food Programme (WFP), and the WB, have become effective channels of financing its economic development. With its progressive economic growth, China wanted to help other countries, so it sought advisory assistance from the UNDP. This later enabled China to become a significant aid provider to the developing countries of the Global South (Zhang, 2017, p. 108).

It should also be noted that, since 1981, China has played a significant role in the UN Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR). It aspired to reshape the existing human rights protection system through participation in the work of this UN body. In China's view, each country has the right to choose the human rights principles and practices that best suit its unique national conditions. Rejecting the hard liberal understanding of human rights, China promoted the position that the protection of human rights should be aimed at the protection of economic and social rights on which economic development and social stability depend, which greatly contributed to strengthening its image as a responsible power in the UN that works in the common interest of all mankind (Foot, 2020, pp. 1-22).

Finally, it should also be noted that China played a significant role in the codification and progressive development of international law carried out by the UN International Law Commission, whose work led to the adoption of important international conventions (e.g., the Convention on the Law of the Sea). Also, the influence of its foreign policy commitment formulated in the concept of "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence" was officially accepted in important UN documents, such as the Declaration of Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Cooperation among States in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations of October 4, 1970, and the Declaration on the Establishment of a New International Economic Order of May 1, 1974 (Ge, 2017). In the end, all of China's engagements within the UN led to the growth of its influence in contemporary international relations after the Cold War.

CHINA'S ROLE IN THE UN AFTER THE COLD WAR

The world faced a great deal of uncertainty in the years following the Cold War. The question of whether the world will continue to advance democracy and the rule of law or stop at the relativization of the international order has

emerged in light of the recent geopolitical changes. Taking into account the continuity of the UN's activities, it could only be assumed that the UN will reaffirm the concept of maintaining peace and security and that it will follow up on the existing international legal order based on the Charter (Dimitrijević, 2009, p.10).

In such conditions, China opted for a much more active role in the work of the UN, determining the direction of its future action on a wider global level. Since this period somewhat overlapped with the intensification of the globalisation process, China decided to take a much more constructive approach in the General Assembly as the most democratic political representative body of the UN. It accepted a much wider responsibility in adapting this UN body to the demands of the times. Those requirements relate to the regulation of the most important world issues related to the maintenance of international peace and security, but also global problems in the economic and social sphere like poverty, pandemics, natural disasters, environmental pollution, climate change, energy shortages, arms control, terrorism, international crime, etc. Its participation in the work of the General Assembly has proven to be very effective over time, not only for its interests but also for the interests of other countries, nations, and humanity. Of course, this required China to be much more flexible and pragmatic in its relations with the world, which was in line with the foreign policy directive of Deng Xiaoping, who said that China must secure its position by "hiding its capabilities and biding its time", which in other words meant that it should keep "a low profile and never claim leadership" (Taiping, 1996, p. 7). That is where China's commitment to multilateralism came from, as part of its global strategy to strengthen the role and place of the UN in the global governance system. This strengthening, however, requires a previous reform of the UN system itself, which, according to China's point of view, cannot pass without a collective strategy of all its most important factors.

In this respect, China intensified its efforts in this direction during 1992. Namely, at that time, China assumed a relatively important role in the world organisation's peace efforts to resolve the issues of Cambodia, the Middle East, and Yugoslavia. Consequently, China attended the UN Conference on Environment and Development held in Brazil, where it contributed ideas on environmental protection and economic development. In the same year, China became an observer in the Non-Aligned Movement. It managed to

strengthen cooperation with the Group of 77, forming a special Group of 77 plus China. Since 2001, China has regularly participated in the UN General Assembly sessions in New York. In this way, it has become more present in the global governance system, in which important decisions are made in the economy, politics, and security fields (Niu, 2018, p. 70).

In the economic field, China insisted on establishing a new and fairer world economic order. This order, which would be established under the auspices of the UN, presupposes major economic reforms, including reforms of the international financial system through the implementation of the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). After China's admission to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and accession to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in 2001, this vision became more and more relevant, which confirmed the predictions of President Jiang Zemin that "the positive role of the UN should only strengthen and cannot weaken", which meant that the UN authority must be upheld without any prejudice in the future (MFA, 2005).

On the political front, China advocated for the reform of the existing collective security system of the UN. In its opinion, the changed appearance of threats and conflicts requires the UN to be much more adaptable, creative, and courageous to make more just decisions in accordance with international law. Along with these efforts in the security field, China advocated for disarmament in the UN. It actively participated in the meetings of the First Committee of the UN General Assembly dealing with issues of disarmament and international security, as well as the annual meetings of the UN Disarmament Commission. China acceded to the 1968 Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and other accompanying legal instruments. During this period, China became a member of the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) from 1972, the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) from 1980, the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) from 1993, and other important multilateral conventions (Ćinmin, 2015, pp. 74-76). In this sense, China took part in the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) (Control Arms, 2020). In this area, its advocacy for the "non-weaponisation" of the universe is also important.

In September 2005, on the 60th anniversary of the founding of the UN, Chinese President Hu Jintao presented a vision of a "harmonious world". He pointed out that only if all the countries in the world work together, can they

use the opportunity to respond to all challenges and build a harmonious world with lasting peace and common prosperity (Jintao, 2005). In this sense, the concept of a “harmonious world” was set as the ultimate goal of global governance, which was in line with the view that the UN should represent the core of multilateral organisations and mechanisms that should ensure world peace and common progress through the implementation of various forms of international cooperation. Since the realisation of this concept presupposes the reform of the UN system, in 2005, China adopted a document on the eve of the General Assembly session in which it presented its official point of view (NPC, 2005).

China expressed assurances that it is ready to work with all parties on a comprehensive reform of the UN, which should include the promotion of multilateralism and strengthening the authority and efficiency of the organisation to face new threats and challenges. According to its point of view, UN reforms should be all-dimensional and multi-sectoral and aim for success in both security and development. Reforms must be based on the principles and goals of the UN and must satisfy the suggestions and concerns of all its member states, especially those of developing countries. Considering that reforms should be based on democratic and fundamental consultations and the broadest-based consensus, China apostrophised that the reform of the General Assembly should be implemented through a comprehensive reform package that includes interactive cooperation with civil society. In this sense, it is not desirable to set deadlines and time limits or make forced decisions (MFA, 2005).

Regarding the UN Security Council reform, China pointed out that the reform should lead to the strengthening of its capacity to deal with global threats and challenges. In its opinion, the Security Council should remain the only body to decide on the legal use of force in light of the facts. The system of collective security managed by this body must remain under its control so that the implementation of coercive measures carried out outside this system and under the auspices of regional organisations or a coalition of states cannot be contrary to the UN Charter and cannot pass without prior authorisation. In this sense, China opposes proposals to expand the permanent membership of the Security Council with veto power (P-5). At the same time, it advocates for the expansion of its non-permanent membership while respecting the principle of geographical balance and the interests of

developing countries (especially African ones), as well as the interests of different civilisations and cultures. China believes that any such change requires a regional consensus. It does not think that it would be good to include financial contributions in the criteria for the expansion of the Security Council (Agyepong, 2019, p. 2; Cínmin, 2015, p. 81; Dimitrijević, 2009, p. 182; Lei, 2014, p. 14).

After the outbreak of the world economic crisis in 2008, the question of reforming the UN arose again, but on a much smaller scale and intensity. Certain limitations resulting from the structure of the world economy, the changed interests of developing countries, and the still-present ideological conflicts between the member states of the UN contributed to this. Such a situation led to the passivisation of the work of the UN, especially of its organs such as the Economic and Social Council, whose leading role in global development coordination was reduced to the discussion of the MDGs. As a result, management of the world's most important economic issues was moved outside the UN institutions.

This trend also influenced the change in China's official policy towards UN reform in the economic and social fields. Although formally advocating for wider international cooperation in these areas under the auspices of the UN, China became dissatisfied with the existing international economic system, which is why, as a member of the G20 group, together with Brazil, Russia, India, and South Africa, it agreed on mutual economic, financial, and political cooperation within the framework of the new BRICS intergovernmental forum. It represents an alternative to transatlantic organisations, which should serve the interests of the global majority of countries, regardless of which civilisation systems they belong to, which cultural values they share, and which economic and socio-political systems they have (Dimitrijević, 2023, pp. 6-21).³

³ In this sense, China strives to contribute to the global integration of the majority of countries through the development initiatives of regional organisations and forums such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), the Eurasian Economic Community (EEC), ASEAN plus China, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC), the Asia-Pacific Dialogue (APD), the Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD), the Conference on Interaction and Conference Building Measures in Asia (CICA), the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum, the Strategic Dialogue between China and the Gulf Cooperation Committee, the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), and the China-CELAC Forum (Community of Latin American and Caribbean States).

In explaining China's new positioning in the global governance system, President Xi Jinping emphasised, in his inaugural address to the UN General Assembly in 2015, that the interdependence of states in the world requires further pursuit of the goals and principles contained in the UN Charter to build a new type of international relations and the Community of Shared Future for Mankind (MFA, 2015; Jinping, 2015).

The concept of the "Community of Shared Future for Mankind" starts from the assumption that each country is on its own unique path to modernity and development and that the international community should embrace different civilisations and adapt to different ways of modernisation. Therefore, according to this idea, China needs to strengthen its leadership position in the new world order of global governance. It should become one of the main hubs in a flexible global partnership network of states that together should manage global affairs and shape the future of the world through mutual dialogue, non-confrontation, and win-win cooperation (Xulong, 2017). President Xi then emphasised that China should create a security architecture based on equity, justice, and mutual benefit. In this sense, he also promised to establish a Peace and Development Fund worth one billion dollars (Jinping, 2015).

In his speech entitled "Seek Joint and Sustainable Development and Creating a Win-win Cooperative Partnership", held at the UN session on sustainable development in the same year, President Xi clarified that the international community should consider the sustainable development goals as directions for its future action so that, together with China, it can seek a fair, open, comprehensive, and innovatively led development path in the interest of all countries (Jinping, 2015).

In his famous speech, "Work Together to Build a Community of Shared Future for Mankind", delivered at the United Nations Office in Geneva in 2017, President Xi further explained: "Building a community of shared future is an exciting goal and requires efforts from generation to generation. China is ready to work with all other UN member states as well as international organisations and agencies to advance the great goal of building a Community of Shared Future for Mankind" (Jinping, 2017).

From the afore-mentioned vision, which is the main premise of China's *Policy of Peaceful Development*, it follows that China has committed itself to working in the common interest as a constructive player and main actor in

building a “peaceful and harmonious world” (The State Council of the People’s Republic of China, 2011). At the UN, this meant redirecting its previously passive foreign policy orientation to a much more active one, which should lead to China becoming one of the main actors in global governance in the 21st century. This change came with the transformation of international relations and internal reforms that led to the idea that China must cooperate with all countries in the world, regardless of their size, ideological and political orientation, and level of economic development. In international practice, this meant replacing its previous foreign policy doctrine based on the concept of “peaceful rise” with the concept of “peaceful development” (Jiabao, 2007).

This change illuminates the historical development of “socialism with Chinese characteristics”, which in the modern period is reflected through the vision of the “Chinese Dream”, whose foreign policy manifestations are expressed in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the Global Development Initiative (GDI), the Global Security Initiative (GSI), and the Global Civilisation Initiative (GCI), which envisage different models of development and cooperation that should contribute to the establishment of an inclusive, harmonious, balanced, and peaceful “community of common destiny” (Ciborek, 2023, pp. 91-110; Dimitrijević, 2018a, pp. 34-38; MFA, 2022; Zhang, 2018, pp. 196-207).

This foreign policy turn significantly affected the strengthening of China’s role in the UN system. For example, in recent decades, China has been intensively working to improve the human rights protection system under the auspices of the UN. As mentioned earlier, China participated in the work of the Human Rights Commission until its transformation into the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in 2006 (United Nations, 2006). Later, it was elected five times as a member of this subsidiary body of the General Assembly, connecting its activities in this field with cooperation with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). When expressing its views on the UN reform, China insisted on the reform of these bodies in terms of improving their capacities, democracy, and transparency in their work. According to its understanding, in order to reduce confrontation and improve cooperation, there must be respect between the interested parties. The essence of the reform should be reduced to the depoliticisation of human rights issues, the rejection of double standards regarding their universality and particularity, and the replacement of the Cold War mentality for an equal

dialogue on human rights, regardless of whether they are economic, social, cultural, civil, or political rights (MFA, 2021; Wen, 2022).

In addition to the above, it would be important to mention that since the end of the Cold War, China has taken an active part in the implementation of peacekeeping operations. For China, UN peacekeeping operations are an effective instrument for mitigating regional conflicts and preserving collective security. According to its opinion, peace operations should give priority to a political solution and adhere to three main principles, which include “consent of the parties, impartiality, and non-use of force except in self-defence and defence of the mandate” (The State Council of the People’s Republic of China, 2018).

In the 1990s, China changed its earlier position towards Security Council resolutions approving so-called robust peacekeeping operations authorised by the Security Council under Chapter VII of the Charter. During 1992 and 1993, China played a key role in the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC). In May 1997, China joined the standby mechanism of UN peacekeeping operations. It took an active part in providing the observers and civilian, military, police, and other personnel needed to carry out these operations. It first sent police forces to the UN Transitional Authority in East Timor in 2000. In the following years, China took part in peacekeeping missions in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Congo, Liberia, Haiti, South Sudan, Lebanon, Mali, and other countries (Niu, 2018, pp. 73-75).

By gradually assuming a leading role among the members of the Security Council in the implementation of peacekeeping operations, China has gained the respect of a wider part of the international community for its willingness to contribute to the maintenance of international peace and security. This is indicated by the fact that after the 60th anniversary session of the General Assembly held in 2005 (*World Summit Outcome*), China was equally involved in the work of the Peace Consolidation Commission, a joint subsidiary body of the Security Council and the General Assembly in charge of planning and organising assistance to vulnerable countries in the post-conflict period of peacebuilding (United Nations, 2005a; United Nations, 2005b).

China’s new positioning has led to the strengthening of its role in the UN system, which was additionally manifested in its efforts to assume greater responsibility in the implementation of the seventeen goals (SDGs) contained in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations, 2015).

From the Chinese point of view, all countries should integrate SDGs into their national development strategies to achieve parallel and balanced progress in the fields of economy, society, and environment.⁴ The international community should strengthen partnerships for development and build a cooperation framework with North-South cooperation as the main channel and South-South cooperation as its complement. Developed countries should honour their obligations under Official Development Assistance (ODA) and help developing countries improve their developmental capacity.

The strengthening of China's position in the UN is also manifested through its efforts to secure executive leadership positions in its administrative apparatus. As early as 1997, China provided its first executive leadership, and in 2006 it managed to take over the leadership of the World Health Organisation. Since 2007, Chinese officials have led the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), which provides expert support to international discussions in the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council. China is currently the only country that runs more than one specialised UN agency. China has representatives at the head of the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO), and the Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) (Али & Тимощенко, 2023, p. 25).⁵ China also held two political leadership positions in the UN Secretariat: Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the UN Mission in South Sudan and Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region in Africa. In addition, China's influence

⁴ The SDGs include issues of eradicating poverty and hunger, ensuring good health and well-being, quality education, gender equality, clean water and sanitation, affordable and clean energy, decent work and economic growth, industry, innovation, and infrastructure, reducing inequality, sustainable cities and communities, responsible consumption and production, climate action, life underwater and on land, peace, justice, strong institutions, and diverse partnerships for goals. Fulfilling the SDGs while respecting dignity, equality, solidarity, and tolerance is an additional incentive for China to continue to pursue peaceful and harmonious global development. Achieving these goals also contributes to a better understanding of its concept of "socialism with Chinese characteristics", which represents a set of political reflections of Chinese leaders, starting from Deng Xiaoping through Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao to Xi Jinping.

⁵ China's attempt to take the leadership position in the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) in March 2020 was met with strong resistance from the United States of America and its allies due to economic security.

has also increased at UNESCO, where its development initiative (BRI) has been accepted and should serve as a support for promoting international scientific and technological cooperation. However, despite these positive trends for China, it remained in the minority in terms of the number of leadership positions compared to the other permanent members of the Security Council (Fung & Lam, 2021, pp. 1143-1163; Lee & Sullivan, 2019, p. 14).

The strengthening of China's position in the UN was also made possible by its financial contributions. As a member state of the UN, China finances the budget of the organisation through estimated payments, which represent its contractual obligation to the UN. With the strengthening of its financial power, China has risen to second place in terms of contributions to the regular budget of the UN, just behind the United States of America (Baumann, Haug & Weinlich, 2022, p. 7). On the other hand, China also makes voluntary contributions to the UN. An illustrative example is the funding of the UN's Global Centre for Geospatial Knowledge and Innovation to map human behaviour, infrastructure, and topography around the world, as well as support for the 2030 SDGs. Another example is the \$1 billion in funds earmarked for the establishment of the UN Trust Fund for Peace and Development, which is divided into two sub-funds: the Secretary-General's Peace and Security Sub-Fund and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Sub-Fund, managed by Chinese officials. A third, most recent example is the COVAX platform led by the World Health Organisation, for which China has provided a decent US\$100 million (Fung & Lam, 2022, pp. 15-22).

CRITICISM OF CHINA'S ROLE IN THE UN

Although the strengthening of China's role in the UN after the end of the Cold War is an undeniable fact, US-led Western countries do not look favourably on it or believe that China is sincerely committed to strengthening the UN system through consistent observance of the principles and goals of the UN Charter. They believe even less in China's sincere commitment to international peace and development, international legal order, and multilateral cooperation for mutual benefit. These countries perceive China as a "revisionist power" that views existing multilateral institutions as a means to increase its influence. They believe that China's increased role in the UN stems from its intention to exert more influence in various domains of this

universal organisation to change its goals, rules, and principles in a way that would be more suitable for a Sino-centric authoritarian model of global governance than a democratic one. China's intention to reshape the existing world order is allegedly in line with China's expectations that the global distribution of power will increasingly shift from the United States to China, that is, from the West to the East (Gale, 2024, p. 1).

The mentioned point of view also highlights the fact that China participates in the establishment of new multilateral organisations and institutions through minilateral arrangements, which gives it increasing strategic flexibility and influence. An example is the establishment of the BRICS and other regional organisations and forums, which should serve to reshape the existing system of global governance based on transatlantic liberal values such as democracy and the rule of law, responsibility, transparency, and neutrality of states. Also, this point of view cites an example of a sophisticated strategy for the formation of financial institutions (such as the BRICS New Development Bank, the Asian Infrastructure Bank, the China, Central & Eastern Europe Investment Co-Operation Fund, and the Silk Road Fund), which, through the diversification of Chinese funds, can represent an alternative to the existing funds of the Bretton Woods international financial institutions in which the West has a predominance (Zepp-LaRouche, 2014, p. 3).

The permanent members of the Security Council (P3) (United States, Great Britain, and France) believe that, in this way, China tries to avoid wider responsibility for the future of the world order by "combining resources into successful strategies in the new context of power diffusion" (Nye, 2011, pp. 207-208). For P3, this is not acceptable, just as the Chinese vision of the future of the UN based on the Chinese understanding of multilateralism is not acceptable because it has remained obscured by strategic projections of Chinese initiatives that do not foresee concrete proposals and models for the development of the existing system of global governance (Brinza et al., 2024, p. 21-23).

China rejects these criticisms, arguing that its role in the UN stems from its sincere commitment to reforming the global governance system, including the UN. It opposes the understanding of multilateralism as a means to advance the Western power architecture. In this sense, it stands for "true multilateralism" as opposed to preserving the *status quo* of the liberal international order. China rejects the view that it is a "revisionist power",

which views multilateral institutions as a means to increase its influence. It points out that it is a “responsible power” because it respects the sovereignty of other countries, unlike the Western powers that lead a hegemonic policy of interfering in the social systems of other countries (Dimitrijević, 2018b). Following not only its own needs, China has brought a series of strategic initiatives with which it seeks to connect the broader SDGs with its development goals, the realisation of which in the future could lead to the fulfilment of its vision of a more equal world order. Finally, China sees its role in the formation of new institutions and organisations as a tool for greater strategic flexibility and the strength needed to change the unipolar into a multipolar international order. In this sense, as one of the world’s emerging poles, China expects to play a greater role in defining the economic, security, and normative architecture that forms the foundations of the international order deeply embedded in the UN system (Buzan, 2004, p. 70; Qingqing, Keyue & Yelu, 2021).

Western countries do not support such Chinese expectations or approve of China’s efforts to take a wider part in the reform and construction of the global governance system. They point to China’s ideological platform supporting these aspirations, based on authoritarian principles rather than generally accepted rules and principles. In this sense, Western countries believe that Chinese expectations are in ontological contrast with the current international order embodied by the UN. As evidence, they state that the UN recognises the limitation of state sovereignty and encourages and promotes universal human rights and freedoms, including the right to self-determination. Accordingly, China’s attempt to reshape the existing human rights system in accordance with its ideological values is unacceptable behaviour that deserves all condemnation. China’s behaviour in UN human rights bodies is particularly critical. Attempts to align this system with its own political interests often lead to confrontations or overrides (Pauselli, Urdinez & Merke, 2023, pp. 1-7). That is visible in cases when China refuses the possibility for certain NGOs that criticise its human rights policy to receive consultative status and the possibility of appearing before UN human rights bodies (a good example in this sense is the practice of the Committee of Non-governmental Organisations) (The United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 2020, p. 40).

The practice by which China seeks to obstruct any meaningful criticism of itself is of particular concern to Western countries. By promoting an orthodox interpretation of non-interference in domestic relations, China weakens existing international norms, transparency, and accountability for human rights violations (Piccone, 2018). It is particularly worrying that China has refused to ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights for more than two and a half decades and that it has limited the possibility of individual appeal procedures under already ratified international instruments, which indicates the extreme uncertainty of its human rights protection system (Ploton & Books, 2022, p. 6).

China believes that the above criticisms are political. It assumes that Western countries apply double standards when it comes to the protection of human rights. Therefore, it is necessary to resolve misunderstandings between China's interpretation of human rights and Western viewpoints through equal mutual dialogue. However, Western countries reject this approach because they believe that China is trying to reshape the existing system of universal human rights in its own interest through the politicisation of human rights. China allegedly seeks justifications that rely on its ideological concept of "socialism with Chinese characteristics". Its realisation at the global level should lead to the realisation of the idea of "a community of shared future for mankind", which is fundamentally based on economic and social rights and not on civil and political rights. Since this ideological concept enjoys great support from developing countries with which China is building strategic unilateral arrangements based on "stick and carrot" and "chequebook" diplomacy, it is clear why its influence in the UN system is growing. This "multilateral tactic" certainly offers good lobbying support for China since the countries of the Global South represent the "global majority" of votes needed to strengthen China's leadership position in the UN and its specialised agencies. A good example is the progressive growth in the number of Chinese citizens employed at the UN in recent years. Although this trend in itself should not be controversial, there is a certain mistrust among Western countries because of indications that Chinese citizens are not impartial in the performance of their duties as international officials and that they act contrary to Article 100 of the UN Charter because they receive appropriate instructions from outside the UN, that is, from the Chinese government, which adversely affects the independence of the work of the UN (Schaefer, 2019, pp. 5-9).

In addition to the critiques already highlighted, China faces criticism from Western nations due to its growing financial contributions to the UN system, which serve to bolster its political influence. Although it is the second-largest contributor of estimated contributions to the UN budget, China complains that its voluntary contributions to the UN are not in line with its realistic financial capabilities to support various UN programmes and activities. The fact that China receives more recognition and respect from developing countries is particularly worrying, which is explained by the fact that China rarely demands budget restrictions or reforms that would bother these UN member states. The reasons for making certain financial decisions by which China seeks to promote sustainable development, peace, and security in the UN system (e.g., in connection with the Peace and Development Fund) are often hidden because they serve its interests (in this particular case, strengthening relations between the UN and Chinese Development Initiatives (BRI) (Feltman, 2020).

China views its growing influence inside the UN system—reflected in the number of its representatives holding leadership and other positions within the UN administrative structure and its specialised agencies—as non-controversial. It respects the claim of Western countries that the Fund for Peace and Development serves exclusively its interests since its purpose is primarily for peace operations and development projects in developing countries (primarily in African countries). As evidence, it points to the example of projects taking place through the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and projects related to conflict prevention in the Great Lakes and Sahel region and Sudan/South Sudan. China points out that the UN and certain specialised agencies have supported its strategic initiatives, which, in a sense, represents a recognition of China’s commitment to sustainable development and maintenance of peace and security (Fung & Lam, 2022, p. 4).

According to the understanding of P3 countries, China’s obligation to maintain international peace and security is called into question by its abstention from voting or its use of vetoes on draft resolutions of the Security Council regarding issues that, in its estimation, could threaten China’s “neutral position” or geostrategic interests. Although in the past, China was reluctant to use the right of veto, this practice changed after the end of the Cold War. China is becoming more assertive, which indicates a change in its position in international relations. In this sense, the tactical coalition of China and Russia

is noticeable, where both countries share the same views and provide each other full support when using the right of veto (Lađevac, 2020, p. 145; Machaffie, 2022, p. 431-447). An illustrative example is the use of multiple vetoes to block UN Security Council action in Syria since 2011, as well as the vetoes of resolutions on Myanmar in 2007, Zimbabwe in 2008, Venezuela in 2019, North Korea in 2022, and Palestine in 2023 and 2024 (Security Council Report, 2024). In other cases, when its interests coincided with those of the P3, China voted to pass the resolutions. However, on different issues, such as interventionism, interference in the internal affairs of other countries, the protection of territorial sovereignty, and the protection of human rights, China has regularly taken the opposite position from those of P3 countries (Feltman, 2020; Glaser & Fung, 2022).

Given that China has become significantly more involved in UN peacekeeping missions in recent years, Western countries fear that China is using this to assert its economic dominance and accomplish its strategic goals. For example, China has contributed peacekeeping forces to multiple missions where it has a significant interest in securing access to natural resources, including Western Sahara, Darfur, Sudan, South Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (The United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 2020, p. 44). In addition, China, often in alliance with Russia, uses situations to remove human rights observers from UN peacekeeping missions, further disturbing Western countries and causing certain resistance (Feltman, 2020).

On the other hand, China rejects these Western fears because it believes that its participation in peacekeeping operations represents its sincere commitment to preserving international peace and security. The fact that it is involved in several peace operations in which, in addition to maintaining peace, it has the obligation to protect its citizens as well as to support its interests (for example, to strengthen military capacities or to protect economic investments) does not represent any cause for concern, since the same practice is also applied by P3 members (e.g., France in Mali and Great Britain in Sierra Leone) (Lee & Sullivan, 2019, p. 10).

As for UN reform, there are still mutual disagreements between Western countries and China regarding the expansion of Security Council membership. Unlike China, which believes that the permanent membership of the Council should not be expanded, the United States believes that the reform should

include changes in its permanent membership so that the countries of Africa, Asia, and Latin America have their own representatives (in addition to the previously nominated representatives of Japan and Germany). For China, this proposal is unacceptable because, in its opinion, the Security Council should remain a concert of existing permanent members who represent a stabilisation mechanism of international relations, allowing, on the other hand, the possibility of expanding the non-permanent membership of this UN executive body with representatives of developing countries. France and Great Britain accept the possibility of expanding the Security Council with five permanent and four non-permanent members. Russia advocates for an even expansion of Security Council membership with the broadest consensus that would not cause new friction and political divisions in the world. All states declaratively support changes to the UN that would lead to greater efficiency and effectiveness of its system (Dimitrijević, 2009).

From previous criticisms of Western countries (primarily P3 countries that perceive China as a latent enemy or systemic rival), one notion that sums up their strategic considerations is that China uses the UN as a “force multiplier for its own interests around the world” (Nossel, 2024). To change this attitude towards China, according to the opinions of these countries, it will be necessary to change the strategic approach. The new strategic approach should follow a three-fold strategy of cooperation, competition, and deterrence (Gale, 2024). According to the United States, the strategic approach to China should be guided by principled realism so that America can continue to protect American interests and enhance American influence, which does not exclude closer cooperation in areas where their interests are aligned (Executive Office of the President, 2020). Given that China represents a significant economic power in the world, Great Britain believes that it would be expedient to cooperate with it in order to integrate it into the existing international system, which implies the co-option of China into the existing institutional system of global governance (Gale, 2024; Ikenberry, 2009, pp. 152-153). France believes that a “balanced approach” and not a confrontational one should be applied in relations with China, as is usually done by the United States. Offering an alternative to this approach, France insists on a constructive dialogue with China while avoiding anything that could deepen unnecessary antagonisms (Pajon, Julienne & Seaman, 2024). Finally, all these Western countries believe that, in competition with China, it is necessary to develop a cooperative strategic partnership to

protect common interests and values and jointly contain China's increased influence in the UN.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The previous analysis of China's role in the UN indicates that the future of the world is inextricably linked with the future of China and that its influence on the world today is unprecedented. China has grown into a global power with the vitality needed to occupy one of the leading positions in the global governance system. That is why Secretary-General António Guterres's statement that China is becoming "an increasingly important contributor to the work of the UN and the main pillar of international cooperation" seems correct (Guterres, 2021). Despite this fact, China continues to suffer criticism from Western countries precisely because of the strengthening of its role in the UN. Thus, when Western countries claim that China is a "revisionist power" that wants to reshape the rule-based world order by modifying the values of the UN, this dogmatic criticism unfortunately stems from the still-present ideological confrontation between the capitalist world and China. According to Western understanding, China wants to impose its authoritarian ideological concept of "socialism with Chinese characteristics" on the world, undermining the foundations of the liberal world order, which really does not correspond to reality. Most likely, the goal behind such criticism is to uphold the current political order, which goes against the principles of evolution that cause the "wheel of history" to turn in the direction of shifting international relations. Therefore, it is more logical to accept the opinion that China's actions on the world stage and within the UN correspond to its efforts to adapt to these changes occurring alongside the development of the international community. In this sense, it would be meaningful to accept that China, as an "emerging great power" (regardless of its political system and ideological orientation), supports the authority of the UN and the development of the global governance system. While appreciating China's "smart power", Western countries would thereby also accept the fact that China has a legitimate right to assume a greater share of responsibility on the international level, as well as the right to promote its vision of a future international community based on peace and development, respect for international law, and multilateral cooperation. Considering the increasing intertwining of national interests and global responsibilities, as indicated by the latest Chinese strategic initiatives and China's participation in

intergovernmental forums and regional organisations in which it makes multilateral arrangements to establish strategic partnerships with the “global majority” (the Global South), the question is how to encourage Western countries to work together with China to achieve global goals. The most rational way would be for the two sides to join forces and share responsibility for improving the global governance system so that the UN can truly become a “force multiplier” for international peace and development. In this way, through equal competition, they could make a positive step towards the realisation of global goals that transcend their national interests. Although the presented point of view may seem quite idealistic, it should not be completely rejected because, despite the current polarisation of relations between China and Western countries regarding the strengthening of China’s influence in the UN and the zero-sum game in international relations, there is still a need for both sides to overcome mutual disputes and misunderstandings. Finally, China does not hide its desire for constructive reform of the UN system through a transparent multilateral dialogue with the West while achieving a general consensus so that the UN can play a leading role in a just world order that would accept its principled vision of an open, harmonious, and peaceful “community of shared future for mankind” (Baumann, Haug & Weinlich, 2022, pp. 38-39; Hongjun, 2013, p. 9; Qingmin, 2021; Zhang, 2018, pp. 196-207; Zongyou, 2014, pp. 23-24).

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