

## Contributor Profile: The People's Republic of China

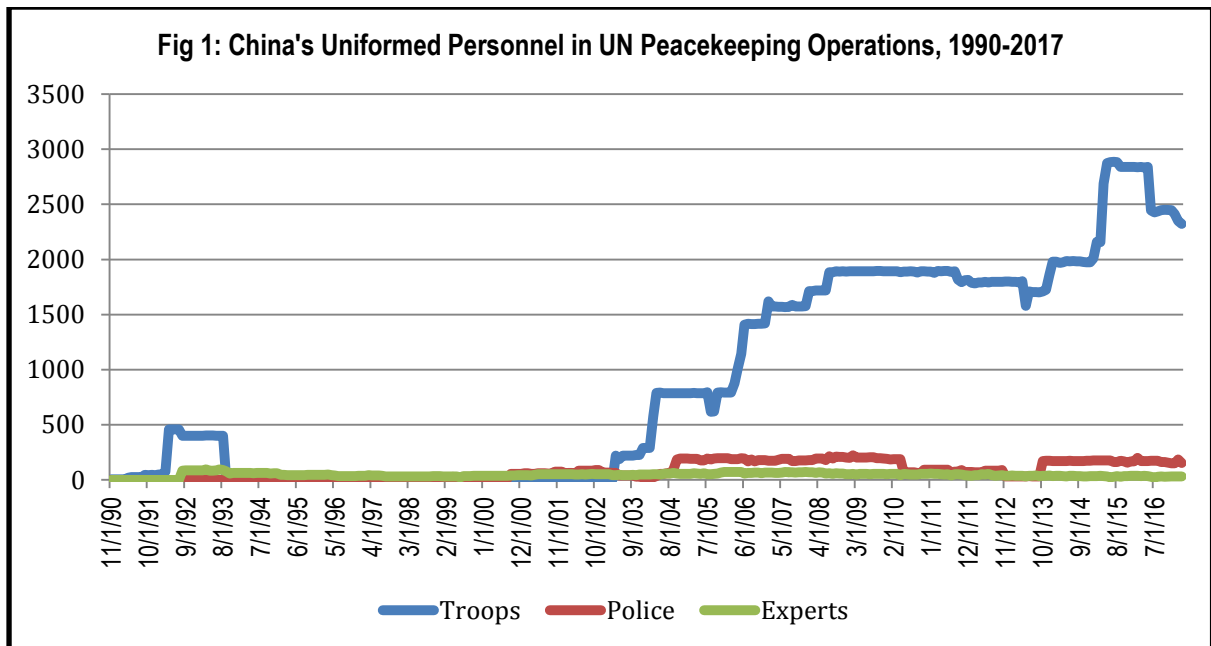
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Active Armed Forces <sup>1</sup>	Helicopters	Defense Budget	Uniformed UN Peacekeepers	UN Contribution Breakdown	Other Significant Deployments
2,183,000,000  World Ranking (size): <b>1</b>  Ground Force: 1,150,000 Navy: 235,000 Air Force: 398,000 Strategic Missile Forces: 100,000 Support Force: 150,000 Other: 150,000  Paramilitary: 660,000 Reserve Forces: 510,000	Attack: 240  Transport: 362	2016: \$145bn (1.27% of GDP)  2015: \$142bn (1.27% of GDP)  2014: \$131bn (1.24% of GDP)  2013: \$116bn (1.28% of GDP)  2012: \$103bn (1.25% of GDP)  World Ranking (size): <b>2</b>	2,510 (70 women) (31 Mar. 2017)  Ranking: <b>12</b>  (Largest UN Security Council P-5 contributor)	MINURSO: 12 experts MINUSMA: 398 troops MONUSCO: 234 (13 experts, 221 troops) UNAMA: 1 police UNAMID: 235 troops UNFICYP: 6 police UNIFIL: 417 troops UNMIL: 141 police, 1 troop UNMISS: 1,061 (7 police, 4 experts, 1,050 troops) UNTSO: 4 experts	Gulf of Aden: 1 submarine (reported), 1 destroyer, 1 frigate, 2 amphibious ships
Defense Spending / Troop: US\$ <b>105,000</b> (compared to global average of approximately US\$77,000) <sup>2</sup>					

### Part 1: Recent Trends

Since the mid-1990s, the foreign policy of the People's Republic of China (China or PRC) has evolved to become more pragmatic and in some respects more convergent with global norms of cooperation. Chinese armed forces—including the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and elements of China's domestic security forces—have been increasingly exposed to, and have supported, global norms of United Nations (UN) peacekeeping. Since the early 2000s deployment of Chinese uniformed personnel to UN peacekeeping operations—contingent troops, engineers, military experts, transport and logistical support units, individual police, formed police units, and medical staff—has increased more than twenty-fold. As of March 2017, China deploys around 2,500 peacekeepers in ten UN missions, including the political mission in Afghanistan; more than the other permanent members of the UN Security Council combined. Over 80% of its contributions are supporting missions in Africa, with approximately 1,000 troops in South Sudan, 400 in Mali, and around 230 each in DR Congo and Darfur (see Figure 1).

China contributes critically needed material assets. And, as the largest UN Security Council P-5 contributor and a fast-emerging power from the developing world, its participation in international peacekeeping also adds legitimacy to the entire enterprise at a time when UN peacekeeping is overburdened and underfinanced. China is thus increasingly in a position to strengthen peace operations, contribute to stability and security in Africa and beyond, and expand its multilateral military cooperation.



2014 saw China’s historic decision to deploy combat troops to UN missions. This included 170 infantry personnel to Mali to provide security to the eastern headquarters of MINUSMA. In September 2014, China deployed a 700-strong infantry battalion to support the mission in South Sudan, UNMISS. At the Peacekeeping Leaders’ Summit in New York in 2015, Chinese President Xi Jinping announced that China would set up a [permanent peacekeeping standby force of 8,000 troops](#) ready for rapid deployment whenever necessary. In addition, he pledged that China would contribute \$100 million in military assistance to the African Union over the next five years to help support the operationalization of the African Peace and Security Architecture to increase its capacity to respond to crises. If China continues on its current trajectory and maintains its level of commitment, it could be an [“important peace broker in conflicts around the world.”](#) as the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres noted in his meeting with senior Chinese officials shortly after taking over as head of the UN.

**Part 2: Decision-making**

China maintains a highly hierarchical bureaucratic structure on all foreign and security policy matters, including UN peacekeeping deployments. Broadly speaking, the decision to deploy peacekeepers is made by the most senior officials in Beijing, although they draw on policy elites for consultation and advice. These include former and/or current PLA officers, scholars, and regional experts that have operational peacekeeping experience or extensive background knowledge on the specific theatre of operations.

The [Ministry of National Defense Office of Peacekeeping Affairs](#) was established in 2001. It is tasked with the operational aspects of China’s peacekeeping, including pre-deployment training, selecting peacekeepers, and monitoring peacekeeping developments on the ground. It also serves as the central unit for communication and coordination among the different agencies and offices within and outside China. An important office outside China that coordinates with the Office of Peacekeeping Affairs in Beijing is the peacekeeping experts and military attaches posted at the [Permanent Mission of the PRC to the United Nations](#) in New York. There is usually one officer in charge of peacekeeping affairs at the Chinese mission, and s/he is tasked to represent and explain Chinese policies and to collect, update, and relay information on UN peacekeeping back to Beijing.

In addition to the operational aspects of Chinese peacekeeping, the politics behind peacekeeping contributions are set by some of the most senior officials in the PLA. Personnel in the Joint Staff Department, for example, take into consideration such issues as security, logistics, and safety in the decision-making process. Initial approval by the Joint Staff Department is then further deliberated with senior officials in the State Council and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which issues final authorization. On particularly sensitive mission deployments (i.e., in countries that have high security risks, political instability, or lack formal diplomatic ties with Beijing), the Central Military Commission and the Standing Committee of the Politburo would act as the final arbiters.

### **Part 3: Rationales for Contributing**

*Peacekeeping and China's rising international profile:* China's expanding participation and evolving role in UN peacekeeping helps to project a positive and constructive side to its rising status and power on the global stage. China's leadership is acutely aware that many countries, particularly in its region, remain uncertain and wary about the PLA's military capabilities and the country's overall strategic intentions. Hence, concerned with its image and global reputation, Beijing elites understand that China needs to be more responsive to international expectations, minimize tensions and conflict, and make tangible contributions to international peace and security. UN peacekeeping has been prioritized as one area where senior Chinese officials can demonstrate the country's commitment to "peaceful development." The 2014 decision to deploy infantry units provides an opportunity to display a more constructive side of the PLA's increasing military capabilities, reassuring neighbors and simultaneously signaling that China is trying to act as a responsible power.

*Normative influence:* China's more active participation in UN peacekeeping is shaped by its position on how to strike the right balance between state sovereignty and human rights. By the late 2000s, a loose international consensus emerged that the UN should take exceptional measures if states are unwilling or unable to fulfill their responsibility to protect their citizens. Although China was a relative newcomer to these debates, the issue has gained a degree of traction within China, with a number of international law scholars and foreign policy experts pointing to the changing nature of peacekeeping and the circumstances that warrant a more flexible interpretation and understanding of the principles related to sovereignty. Its evolving flexibility regarding civilian protection is rooted in a preference for political and diplomatic solutions, providing capacity building assistance, and Security Council authorization for any legitimate humanitarian intervention. China believes that more participation and dialogue, as opposed to disengagement, will help ensure that the future direction of UN peacekeeping, including debates about doctrine and strategy, will be compatible with its foreign policy preferences.

*Practical benefits for the PLA:* UN peacekeeping also helps the PLA in one of its priority areas: mobilizing resources and preparing for "military operations other than war" (MOOTW) both at home and abroad. This reflects the Chinese government's call for its security forces to more adequately conduct MOOTW as part of the [PLA's "new historic mission"](#). Doing so would help safeguard national interests and contribute to regional and global peace, security and development. UN peacekeeping also brings several other practical benefits for the Chinese security forces. Training and operating alongside other countries' forces provide invaluable experience that allows Chinese personnel to improve their responsiveness, crowd control capabilities, coordination of emergency command systems and ability to carry out MOOTW more effectively. Over time, participation in UN peacekeeping will also help to modernize and professionalize China's security forces. For example, a

sustained effort to deploy troops, including infantry battalion units, in Africa has meant that PLA forces are gaining greater operational knowledge of different operating environments as well as logistics, ports of debarkation, lines of communication, lines of operation, operational intelligence, local atmospherics and modus operandi and means of sustaining forces in Africa over prolonged periods. All these measures allow the Chinese security forces to display their professionalism and operational competence on the one hand, while also demonstrating their growing deterrent capability on the other.

*Economic rationales:* Some commentators have also observed that China's significant presence in UN peacekeeping operations in Africa is driven in part by its attempt to increase its strategic presence on a continent [“whose resources may prove crucial for meeting China's energy needs.”](#) While it may be true that Chinese peacekeepers are deployed in resource-rich countries like the DR Congo and the Sudans, peacekeeper deployments are not necessarily a strategic imperative to access those resources. Around 5% of China's total oil imports came from South Sudan, and its state firm China National Petroleum Corporation has a 40% stake in a joint venture developing the country's oil fields. But, as UNMISS spokesperson [indicated](#), “Nowhere in the current mandate and mission does it say that peacekeepers will be asked to defend oil industry installations. When circumstances arise ... our peacekeepers will be called upon to protect civilian oil industry workers but not the refinery or pipeline or storage tanks.” Over time, Chinese peacekeepers serve China's economic interests by promoting peace, restoring stability, and minimizing risks in countries where Chinese state-owned enterprises have also made significant investments.

#### **Part 4: Barriers to Contributing**

*Alternative political or strategic priorities:* China's foreign and security policy since the late 1990s has been undergirded by this notion of a [“new security diplomacy”](#) that supports multilateralism, including peacekeeping operations. In the 2000s, its foreign policy approach saw new developments when senior Chinese leaders began to talk about China's [“peaceful rise,”](#) a notion that seeks to reassure others that its growing power will not disrupt the existing international system. The [“Chinese dream,”](#) broached by Chinese President Xi Jinping, calls for the “great rejuvenation of the China nation” that can only be achieved through “good external conditions for China's reform, development, and stability.” More recently, however, China has begun to take a more assertive approach in protecting its own national priorities and interests, especially in defending its [territorial claims](#) in the East and South China Sea. It is still unclear whether or not this signals a paradigmatic shift in China's foreign policy approach where it prefers unilateralism over multilateralism and collective approaches to resolving conflicts. For now, however, it appears that maintaining a stable and peaceful external environment remains an important cornerstone of China's strategic foreign policy vision.

*Alternative institutional preferences for crisis management:* China remains supportive of the UN command and control in peacekeeping operations. It also supported the hybrid mission in Darfur and deployed forces under the AU/UN joint command. In principle, China supports regional security organizations taking on a larger role in peacekeeping. To date, most of this support comes through financial contributions and the provision of basic logistical equipment, as seen in China's latest [agreement with the AU](#) and the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). The Chinese government has also pledged to provide \$100 million in military assistance to the AU over the next five years to help operationalize the African Peace and Security Architecture, including the African Standby Force.

*Financial costs:* There are no financial barriers to China's participation in UN peacekeeping operations.

*Discomfort with the expanding UN peacekeeping agenda:* This is a potential issue of concern as the central purpose of peacekeeping operations has evolved and expanded over the decades. China's views on non-intervention and protecting state sovereignty remain central tenets in its foreign policy approach, but it has also supported peacekeeping operations in recent years that have broader and more expansive mandates that include security sector reform and disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration, as seen in Mali, the DR Congo, and Liberia. China's decision on such operations is thus contingent on a case-by-case basis; it tends to be supportive if there is consent from the host state and if there is an endorsement from the regional security organization as well.

*Exceptionalism:* This is not a major barrier for now, but as noted above, growing assertiveness in its foreign policy rhetoric and action may point toward a shift in China's policy preference to flex its military might unilaterally and possible reluctance to engage in deeper multilateralism.

*Difficult domestic politics:* Participation in UN peacekeeping is not a contentious issue in China. In fact, the government, military, and media tend to display a very positive coverage of Chinese peacekeepers prior to and after their deployments.

*Resistance in the military:* As noted above, participation in UN peacekeeping operations provides practical benefits for the PLA. As such, the military and security forces in China remain positive about China's continued participation in peacekeeping.

*Legal obstacles:* There are no legal barriers to China's participation in UN peacekeeping.

## **Part 5: Current Challenges and Issues**

*Politics of peacekeeping:* In August 2007, the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) approved China's Major General Zhao Jingmin as force commander for the Mission in Western Sahara (MINURSO), the first time a Chinese national had held such a senior position. In January 2011, Major General Chao Liu became the second Chinese force commander when he assumed the role in the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP). Elsewhere, PLA colonels are increasingly solicited as senior level staff officers in DPKO as well as in missions. Notwithstanding these positive acknowledgements and contributions, Chinese officials stress that the ratio of Chinese appointments to senior ranking posts in DPKO remains lower than that of other major powers. As of 2017, no Chinese nationals hold senior positions in the field of the sixteen UN peacekeeping missions. A recent [report](#) indicated that China has expressed an interest for the top post at DPKO, but UN diplomats believe that such a leadership bid will not happen for some time. This is a legitimate concern as the burden of troop contributions have increasingly fallen on developing countries, while Western states tend to deploy fewer troops but occupy key decision-making and support posts in DPKO and in UN missions. UN officials are likely to continue working closely with Chinese counterparts to see that China's interest in increasing its contributions is sustained. Chinese officials could play a more active role in policy planning, force generation, coordination, and other leadership positions. As former Under Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, [Jean-Marie Guéhenno](#), argued, such appointments would mark an important recognition of China's positive role and growing importance in UN peacekeeping.

On the whole, however, China could continue to strengthen its engagement in UN peacekeeping operations.

In financial terms, China has made important contributions. Just five years ago, it provided roughly 3% of the assessed contributions to UN peacekeeping, significantly less than most of the other permanent members of the Security Council. As of 2017, China is the second largest contributor (after the United States) and provides 10.3% of the overall assessed peacekeeping contributions. Between 2006 and 2012, China committed [US\\$6 million to the UN Peacebuilding Fund](#) (of which it deposited US\$5 million). In 2015, Chinese President Xi Jinping announced at the UN General Assembly meeting that China will provide a new [“10-year, \\$1 billion China-U.N. peace and development fund”](#) for peacekeeping operations. The increase in China’s financial contributions and recent announcement of an 8,000-strong standby force reflect its growing capacity commensurate with its Security Council and global status.

There are related questions concerning Chinese intentions in its participation in UN peacekeeping. More than 80% of China’s peacekeeping contributions are currently based in Africa, providing critical support for peace operations and peacebuilding activities in Mali, Liberia, the DR Congo, Darfur, and South Sudan. As the China–Africa relationship deepens, China’s expanding military, political and economic ties in Africa will need to be managed to complement China’s contributions to peacekeeping on the continent. There have been some [reports of frustration](#) at the lack of access to information about bilateral military ties between China and African countries where their peacekeepers are also deployed (such as the DR Congo, Liberia, Sudan, and South Sudan). It is sometimes unclear whether such [bilateral security transactions as arms transfers](#) complement or complicate Chinese peacekeeping activities and UN efforts to provide greater security and stability in Africa.

Since 2008 UN and Chinese officials have been exploring ways of supporting security sector reform and issues related to disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants in African states. The Chinese delegation in New York [has reportedly not been obstructive](#); but nor has it taken any major initiatives in this regard. The goodwill earned by Chinese peacekeeping contingents repairing roads, improving state infrastructure and offering medical assistance could be undermined by other bilateral activities of the Chinese government, state-owned companies, entrepreneurs and émigrés across the continent. As African states emerge from protracted internal conflicts, [China wants to be recognized as a partner in African development](#). The challenge will be to improve oversight and coordination to ensure that bilateral military engagements and a widening array of commercial links across Africa not only complement China’s peacekeeping presence but also contribute to development and stability.

## **Part 6: Key Champions and Opponents**

A small but growing number of policy elites have begun to debate such issues as state sovereignty and conditions for interventionism. Of particular interest is the increasing number of influential Chinese academic, scholarly, and policy-oriented journals such as *Zhongguo Faxue* (Chinese Legal Studies), *Fazhi yu Shehui* (Legal System and Society), and *Wuda Guojifa Pinglun* (International Law Review of Wuhan University) that print and circulate articles discussing state obligations to their citizens and arguing that a failure to uphold these responsibilities warrants international intervention to protect individuals. Other articles have argued that human rights are moral issues increasingly shaped by international factors and that all states have a right to monitor these issues. In turn, an increasing number

of Chinese researchers, scholars, experts and policymakers have adopted more flexible views of sovereignty and the conditions under which UN peacekeeping operations should be sanctioned to help enforce the peace in conflict regions and protect civilians. Nevertheless, Beijing's new political leadership has yet to indicate its broader foreign and security policy goals and strategies. If it maintains active support for multilateralism, then one can expect continued interest and participation from China in UN peacekeeping. If, however, more nationalistic voices prevail, as seen with recent trends in China's force projection in its territorial disputes in the South China Sea, then its UN peacekeeping participation could gradually wither. This would result in reduced personnel contributions and voting patterns in the Security Council that reflect China's strategic priorities in more narrow, and self-interested terms.

### **Part 7: Capabilities and Caveats**

As discussed above, China announced in 2015 that it will provide 8,000 troops to the UN as a standby force. This is an expanded contribution from its earlier agreement with the UN Standby Arrangement System where it placed a 525-strong engineering battalion, a 25-strong medical unit and two 160-strong transport companies on standby for deployment with other UN forces within 90 days.

Looking ahead, China will most likely be cautious and selective in its future participation in UN peacekeeping operations. Practical matters of political, military and bureaucratic will and capacity are sure to slow China's responsiveness. With about 2,500 peacekeepers deployed abroad, an equal number are currently undergoing training to prepare for rotation. This figure is not insignificant, given such constraints as the shortage of well-trained personnel with English or French language skills. Each contingent includes at least one or two interpreters. Although language constraints have not directly affected the Chinese troops' performance or their ability to carry out specific assignments, there is the issue that Chinese peacekeepers tend to keep to themselves and refrain from extensive interaction with other peacekeeping contingents or with local populations, due in part to communication barriers. Chinese officials also acknowledge that the PLA and the police force need to improve their understanding of peacekeeping standard operational procedures, international humanitarian law, and UN military regulations and manuals.

With increasing troop contributions, including infantry battalion units, Chinese peacekeeping contingents have also seen a growing number of fatalities. Eighteen Chinese nationals have been killed while serving in UN missions, including two in South Sudan, three in Liberia, and one most recently in Mali in 2016. The fatalities may serve as a warning to the Chinese government of the increasing dangers their troops face in these missions. To date, however, there is no major decision to withdraw support for China's continued contributions to UN missions.

Chinese peacekeepers' capacity is evolving and improving. As discussed earlier, its sustained effort to deploy troops in remote regions in Africa for prolonged periods has meant that PLA forces are gaining greater operational knowledge and competence in difficult terrains and challenging missions. Likewise, China's participation in [humanitarian exercises](#) and counter-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden has also shed new light on the increasing capacity of the integrated support capabilities of its naval and ground forces, as well as power projection capabilities. In turn, these developments help strengthen the PLA's overall capacity to carry out MOOTW, including peacekeeping operations.

To be sure, however, China remains generally cautious towards the use of peacekeepers and the broader issue of international intervention, especially in cases where it does not perceive a threat to international peace and security. It is unlikely that China will offer active support to an international intervention when the Security Council and other relevant international organizations are divided or the government of the country in question is opposed to the action. As it has in the past, China will continue to review calls for international intervention on a case-by-case basis.

### **Part 8: Further Reading**

A. Carlson, "China's Approach to Sovereignty and Intervention" in A.I. Johnston & R. Ross (eds.), *New Directions in the Study of China's Foreign Policy* (Stanford University Press, 2006).

He Yin, [\*China's Changing Policy on UN Peacekeeping Operations\*](#) (Stockholm: Institute for Security and Development Policy, 2007).

M. Hirono & M. Lanteigne (eds.), "China's Evolving Approach to Peacekeeping," *International Peacekeeping*, 18:3 (2011).

S. Suzuki, "Seeking 'Legitimate' Great Power Status in Post-Cold War International Society: China's and Japan's Participation in UNPKO," *International Relations*, 22:1 (2008).

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### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Table based on the data provided by IISS, *The Military Balance 2017* (Taylor & Francis, 2017). UN data are the most recent available on the UN DPKO [official website](#).

<sup>2</sup> Armed Forces spending is a country's annual total defense budget (in US dollars) divided by the total number of active armed forces. Using figures from IISS, *The Military Balance 2017*.