

# CHINA AND GLOBAL CRISES: THE “CULTURE OF RELUCTANCE”

## ABOUT

The Chinese have long been obsessed with strategic culture, power balances and geopolitical shifts. Academic institutions, think tanks, journals and web-based debate are growing in number and quality and give China’s foreign policy breadth and depth.

China Analysis, which is published in both French and English, introduces European audiences to these debates inside China’s expert and think-tank world and helps the European policy community understand how China’s leadership thinks about domestic and foreign policy issues. While freedom of expression and information remain restricted in China’s media, these published sources and debates provide an important way of understanding emerging trends within China.

Each issue of China Analysis focuses on a specific theme and draws mainly on Chinese mainland sources. However, it also monitors content in Chinese-language publications from Hong Kong and Taiwan, which occasionally include news and analysis that is not published in the mainland and reflects the diversity of Chinese thinking.

The French version of China Analysis can be accessed online at [www.centreasia.eu](http://www.centreasia.eu).

## Introduction by François Godement

What is China’s frame of reference for intervening in crises, or for judging intervention in crises by others? This issue of *China Analysis*, along with a seminar just conducted by ECFR in Beijing, shows that China makes decisions within the framework that one of our Chinese authors attributes to Germany on the very same issues: a “culture of reluctance”.<sup>1</sup>

China’s basic assumptions include the idea that “if you break it, you own it”, which applies to crises in former colonial or neo-colonial zones. Similarly, in Eastern Europe, incautious European Union and NATO statements are seen as a major cause of the region’s current problems. China also fears American or Western plots, for example, to draw China into the vortex of Iraq and the Middle East. In some cases, such as Ukraine, China seems to want to distance itself from the two “big powers” that are squeezing smaller countries. Chinese experts accurately see the United States’ failure to increase its commitment in Ukraine as a sign that the US has not reversed its “pivot to Asia”. And in the case of the Middle East, Chinese experts are suddenly full of snippets of military information that suggest China could not intervene militarily even if it were necessary. At the same time, they downplay the region’s strategic significance to China, a global trading power that draws its resources

<sup>1</sup> The ECFR seminar was held with the Institute of International and Strategic Studies (IISS) of Peking University on 14-15 October 2014. It was made possible by a grant from the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Beijing.

from many different regions.

Yet the nuances between the cases treated in this issue – Afghanistan, Iraq, Mali, Pakistan, and Ukraine – suggest a sliding scale of importance in China’s criteria for intervention, which became somewhat more explicit in ECFR’s recent dialogue in Beijing. For China, intervention requires a green light from the United Nations and consent by the parties involved (which means states, as opposed to factions or groups). Beijing strongly stresses diplomatic mediation, which has the advantage of leaving China free to explore all its options. Most of all, Chinese would only intervene if the situation had a clear and concrete effect on China’s immediate interests – and that means economic interests rather than ideological or even strategic views.

In a new twist, Chinese experts evoke the influence of public opinion, which might question the “gifts” that come from international commitments and create a backlash against interventions that fail. In short, whatever the occasional public discourse about being a “responsible power” or contributing to the “global commons”, China’s interventions remain heavily constrained, and it is deeply suspicious of ulterior motives in other powers’ involvement in international crises. The 2012 change of the guard in Beijing may have contributed to this extremely utilitarian and narrow view of intervention in international affairs.

In this context, therefore, it is unsurprising that the different authors cited in this issue seem keener on a Chinese (as well as Western) role in Afghanistan than elsewhere. Geographical proximity, deep economic involvement, and the prospect of terrorist contamination make Beijing very wary of a “black hole” appearing after the withdrawal of US and European troops. By contrast, our authors see it as a no-brainer that China should avoid getting drawn into Iraq, even if they are surprisingly shy about mentioning the involvement of a Chinese ally, Iran, in the fight against Daesh, the extremist Sunni movement that calls itself the “Islamic State”.

The authors find themselves conflicted with regard to Mali and the Sahel. They are not impressed by France’s involvement, since they see the country as acting on the basis of preserving its “sphere of influence”. Nevertheless, the threat of Islamic terrorism and the potential in China’s long-term relations with Mali were enough for China to contribute combat troops to a UN peacekeeping operation for the first time.

Pakistan is a completely different ball game – by any measure, it is the closest thing to a Chinese ally. But President Xi Jinping abandoned a trip to Islamabad because of demonstrations there; this, together with the postponement of a conference, suggest that China’s close ties to the country are to a steadfast ally, not to what could possibly one day become a more fragile coalition democracy.

The authors show the utmost reluctance to get involved in Ukraine. They choose to close their eyes to the immediate benefits to China – with sweetheart economic deals confirmed by Russia – and to focus instead on the “awkward situation” in which China finds itself. Again, China has interests rather than friends, and these interests suggest above all the need to exercise caution.

The overall picture that emerges is of a China that is too restrained to act as a great power, and that decides its involvement on a highly selective, case-by-case basis. Perhaps most importantly, it reserves its hard-power strength for China’s immediate neighbourhood. China’s internationalists will have to wait some time to see the country’s reach spread further afield.

## 1. China and Afghanistan after 2014

Jade Wu

### Sources:

Shao Yuqun, "An analysis of China-US co-operation potential in Afghanistan after the withdrawal of US troops", *Xiandai guoji guanxi – Contemporary International Relations*, No. 8, 2013.<sup>2</sup>

Xu Tao, "The impact of the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan on security in Central Asia", *Xiandai guoji guanxi – Contemporary International Relations*, No. 12, 2013.<sup>3</sup>

Interview with Sun Yuxi, "Sun Yuxi, special envoy on Afghanistan for the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, exclusively at the *Global Times*", *Huanqiu wang – Global Times*, 31 July 2014.<sup>4</sup>

Liu Zhongmin and Fan Peng, "The role of China in the reconstruction of Afghanistan", *Shijie zhishi – World Affairs*, No. 12, 2013.<sup>5</sup>

From presidential elections to the withdrawal of foreign troops, 2014 has been and will continue to be a crucial year for Afghanistan's transition. The country's South and Central Asian neighbours are concerned about the new reality in Afghanistan, and especially about the impact that any deterioration in Afghanistan's security situation could have on their own internal security. As a bordering country, China has a direct interest in Afghanistan's situation. It seems that, having long been accused of being a "free rider" (搭便车, *dabian che*) in the conflict, China now wants to be more actively involved in the process of rebuilding Afghanistan.<sup>6</sup>

### Afghanistan's strategic significance to China

Liu Zhongmin and Fan Peng say that the Afghanistan issue is closely linked to the Chinese government's regional, diplomatic, and internal security strategies. China believes that stability in Afghanistan has a direct impact on the security of the neighbouring Chinese province of Xinjiang. But the withdrawal of international troops could further weaken the security situation in Afghanistan. Shao Yuqun believes that in spite of the effort that the international community has put into creating, training, supporting, and equipping the Afghan security forces, the Afghan forces are not effective enough and are too corrupt to be safely given

<sup>2</sup> Shao Yuqun is the acting director of the Center for American Studies at the Shanghai Institute for International Studies (SIIS).

<sup>3</sup> Xu Tao is the director of the Institute of Russian Studies at the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR).

<sup>4</sup> Sun Yuxi is the special envoy to Afghanistan for the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He was appointed to this post on 18 July 2014, having served as Chinese ambassador to Afghanistan from 2002 to 2004.

<sup>5</sup> Liu Zhongmin is a professor of international relations at Shanghai International Studies University (SISU), Fan Peng is a researcher at the Gansu University of Social Sciences.

<sup>6</sup> See the article by Marc Julienne in this issue.

complete control of the country's security.

Shao notes that Afghanistan's political crisis and the uncertainties over the results of the presidential election have also caused concern in the region's other countries. Two candidates participated in the second round of the election in June 2014. But one of the two, Abdullah Abdullah, claimed widespread voting fraud after his opponent, Ashraf Ghani, won the second round. This led to a partial recount of votes.<sup>7</sup> The stand-off also heightened tensions between the different ethnic groups of Afghanistan at a time when, as Xu Tao says, the "national Afghan reconciliation process" (阿富汗国内政治和解进程, *Afghan guonei zhengzhi hejie jin Cheng*) is already facing many obstacles. All this increases the risk that terrorist groups will experience a revival.<sup>8</sup>

Liu Zhongmin and Fan Peng say that China hopes above all else to avoid the resurgence of terrorism. Over the past few months, China has had to deal with several outbreaks of violence within its borders, which the Chinese authorities have mainly attributed to Uyghur separatists. Beijing wants to prevent these separatists from establishing a base in Afghanistan. It also hopes to limit the spread of a jihadist agenda that could find support within the Uyghur minority.<sup>9</sup>

China also wants to protect its interests in Afghanistan. Liu and Fan say that China's state-owned companies have won major markets in the country. In 2007, China signed an agreement to develop the Aynak copper mine in the province of Logar, and in 2011, the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) was awarded a contract to operate three oil fields in the provinces of Faryab and Sari Pul in northern Afghanistan. China is also involved in infrastructure projects in Afghanistan, constructing roads, railways, and telecommunications systems. China's investments will only be profitable if Afghanistan is secure and under control.

<sup>7</sup> The political-electoral stand-off continued until 21 September, when Ashraf Ghani was proclaimed the winner of the election by the electoral commission in charge of recounting votes. Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah signed an agreement for the establishment of a national unity government, which might lead to the sharing of powers between the two candidates, with Ashraf Ghani becoming president and Abdullah Abdullah becoming the head of government. See Frédéric Bobin, "Ashraf Ghani, nouveau président afghan: 'Je serai le servent en chef du peuple'", *Le Monde*, 20 September 2014, available at [http://www.lemonde.fr/asia-pacifique/article/2014/09/20/ashraf-ghani-la-commission-electorale-devrait-me-proclamer-president-d-afghanistan\\_4491437\\_3216.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/asia-pacifique/article/2014/09/20/ashraf-ghani-la-commission-electorale-devrait-me-proclamer-president-d-afghanistan_4491437_3216.html).

<sup>8</sup> In the article, the author does not specify to which "terrorist" groups he is referring. It is possible that the Taliban has not been included in this grouping, since Beijing supports the principle of an "Afghan led, Afghan conducted" reconstruction policy, which has previously encouraged, and will continue to encourage, a "reconciliation" between the Afghan government and Taliban factions. It is also possible that if the Taliban were to return to power, Beijing would look to establish contact with them, with the aim of protecting Xinjiang from extremist insurgent networks based in Afghanistan (and Pakistan) as well as to protect Chinese economic interests in Afghanistan.

<sup>9</sup> See Su Xiaohui, "Creation and overview of Chinese-American cooperation in Afghanistan", in *Chinese Diplomacy within the new International Security Reality*, Shijie zhishi cuban she – World Knowledge Press, May 2013.

Xu Tao says that China's western provinces are affected by drug trafficking from Afghanistan, where poppy cultivation has created a "drug economy" (毒品经济, *dupin jingji*) that has made it difficult to rebuild Afghanistan's national economy. Twenty-five percent of the heroin entering China comes from Afghanistan, representing 15 to 17 tonnes of the drug per year. Liu Zhongmin and Fan Peng point out that the drug business has implications for China's internal security: the "East Turkestan Liberation Organisation" (ETLO, 东突组织, *dong tu zuzhi*, abbreviation of 东突厥斯坦解放组织, *dong tujue sitan jiefang zuzhi*), which the Chinese government has designated a terrorist organisation, is largely funded from the proceeds of the drug trade.<sup>10</sup>

### China is willing to be more active in Afghanistan

Shao Yuqun says that after international forces have left Afghanistan, China will have to become more actively involved in the Afghan peace process. It will have to act as a "responsible major power" (负责任大国, *fuzeren daguo*) without allowing this new role to affect its principle of non-interference. Xu Tao says that China supports a peace and reconciliation process led by and for the Afghan people. Sun Yuxi says that any support that China provides will primarily be in the commercial field. Outside of its commitment to teach and train Afghan security forces, China does not want to increase its military involvement in the country.<sup>11</sup>

China has close bilateral relations with Afghanistan. It was one of the first countries to establish diplomatic relations with the transitional government that was established in Afghanistan in June 2002. In that year, after an absence of seven years, China re-established its consular services in Afghanistan. This helped to increase exchanges of diplomats, official visits by senior officials, and personal contacts between Chinese and Afghan leaders. Afghan President Hamid Karzai signed a strategic partnership agreement with the then Chinese president, Hu Jintao, in September 2012. In July 2014, Sun Yuxi was appointed "Chinese Special Envoy for Afghanistan" (阿富汗事务特使, *Afuhān shiwu teshi*). Sun says that the creation of the role demonstrates the Chinese government's desire to involve itself more in international affairs and its wish to foster a stronger strategic partnership with Afghanistan.<sup>12</sup>

At the multilateral level, China is committed to supporting regional processes. For example, Shao Yuqun talks about China's role in the Istanbul process, and its hosting of the upcoming Fourth Foreign Ministerial Conference of the Istanbul Process, set to be held in Tianjin.<sup>13</sup> Xu Tao says

<sup>10</sup> ETLO is made up of separatists, particularly Uyghurs, and is active in Xinjiang and Kyrgyzstan. The group is closely linked to the East Turkestan Islamic Movement and is rumoured to have links with al Qaeda.

<sup>11</sup> China is mainly responsible for training Afghan troops in the fight against drug trafficking.

<sup>12</sup> China also has a special envoy for the Middle East, Wu Sike, as well as one for Africa, Liu Gujin.

<sup>13</sup> The Istanbul Process refers to a process begun at a conference in Istanbul in November 2011, during which Afghanistan and its neighbours undertook various "confidence-building measures" to contribute to

that China has good relations with its five Central Asian neighbours: it has established strategic partnerships with them and holds regular discussions with them on Afghan issues.<sup>14</sup> Co-operation with Central Asian countries takes place mainly through the Shanghai Co-operation Organisation (SCO). China helped Afghanistan to obtain observer status within the SCO in 2012. Chinese authorities also hope that the "Silk Road Economic Zone" (丝绸之路经济带, *sichou zhi lu jingji dai*) will help to develop and integrate the Afghan economy into the regional economy. Finally, China is holding trilateral talks with India and Russia as well as with Russia and Pakistan on the future of Afghanistan.<sup>15</sup>

### A new Chinese-American model of co-operation?

Liu Zhongmin and Fan Peng say that China's relationship with the United States on Afghanistan is complex and is halfway between collaboration and competition. Shao Yuqun says that although China and the US have a particularly tense relationship in the Asia Pacific region, Afghanistan could provide an opportunity to create a "new type of relationship between major powers" (新型大国关系, *xinxing daguo guanxi*). Even before his appointment as special envoy for Afghanistan, Sun Yuxi said that a new form of Chinese-American co-operation was emerging in Afghanistan.<sup>16</sup> He said that it was wrong to use Cold War logic to analyse the relationship of the two countries in Afghanistan, because China was not trying to counterbalance the US in the region. Sun Yuxi still believes this, saying that China has no desire to replace the US after the withdrawal of American troops. Since both countries have interests in the region, it would be good for both to co-operate and thereby to protect each other's interests. Shao Yuqun says co-operation could be developed in several areas: the war against drugs, assistance for refugees, border security, and the training of Afghan security forces. He says that some initiatives have already been undertaken. Beijing and Washington have jointly hosted and trained Afghan diplomats and the two sides are also working together on agricultural projects.

But Shao Yuqun adds that China-US co-operation has limitations. He explains that the policies of the Bush administration have caused a significant "anti-American

the stability and prosperity of the country and, consequently, of the the region. The process was expected to end in 2014, at the same time as the withdrawal of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). No official date has been set for the Fourth Foreign Ministerial Conference, but it should be held in the autumn of 2014.

<sup>14</sup> See Marc Julienne, "China's relations with Central Asia", *China Analysis*, No. 47, February 2014.

<sup>15</sup> See Li Tao and Liu Yang, "The Role of China and India in Afghanistan Following the Withdrawal of American Forces", *South Asian Studies Quarterly*, 2013.

<sup>16</sup> "China and the United States in Afghanistan: towards a new form of co-operation", *Huanqiu shibao – Global Times*, 23 September 2013.

sentiment” (反美情绪, *fanmei qingxu*) in the region. China, on the other hand, is well regarded because of its principle of non-interference and also because its economic development has benefited the region as a whole. Furthermore, Beijing has condemned US interference in the internal affairs of the countries of the region as well as in its own affairs. It has particularly spoken out against Washington’s criticisms of Chinese policies towards ethnic and religious minorities. For its part, the US has often rebuked China for profiting from the sacrifices made by Western forces, saying that China is exploiting Afghanistan’s economic potential without providing any military assistance.

Liu Zhongmin and Fan Peng point out that Beijing and Washington have many disagreements on what is supposedly a common priority: the fight against terrorism. They say that China accuses the US of “double standards” (双重标准, *shuangzhong biaoazhun*): Washington frequently refuses to recognise the violence in Xinjiang as terrorist activity and encourages Beijing to show more restraint in its response there. The Chinese government would like the US to condemn the Xinjiang violence as terrorism and to stop interfering in China’s internal affairs.<sup>17</sup> The authors add that China does not agree with identifying a terrorist group with a state, which was the basis for the original US intervention in Afghanistan. Xu Tao also says that China has strongly condemned US drone attacks for the high civilian casualties they have caused.

Given these points of disagreement, a sudden rapprochement between China and the US over Afghanistan could lead to some lively debates among US and Chinese commentators, and it could meet with strong resistance. However, any such reconciliation is far from certain right now. China does not seem particularly willing to engage more actively on the ground, even if the country does seem to want to safeguard its economic interests in Afghanistan and to avoid any overspill of regional instability across its borders.

<sup>17</sup> See Zhou Zunyou, “Why does the United States apply a double standard in its fight against terrorism?”, *China Daily*, 20 December 2013.

## 2. The US vs. China: Ideological conflict in Iraq

Marc Julienne

### Sources:

Zhong Sheng, “The axiom that reassures the public”, *Renmin ribao – People’s Daily*, 8 August 2014.<sup>18</sup>

Zhong Sheng, “America’s biased and narrow ‘free rider’ theory”, *Renmin ribao – People’s Daily*, 5 September 2014.

Lei Xiying, “Sending American troops to Iraq would be a blow to Obama and his strategy for containment of China”, *Huanqiu shibao – Global Times*, 20 June 2014.<sup>19</sup>

Liu Kun, “Will America fight? Prospects for Chinese military intervention in Iraq”, *Huanqiu shibao – Global Times*, 20 June 2014.<sup>20</sup>

Jiang Tao, “Xi Jinping welcomes all ‘free rider’ states, in an Asian-style neighbourhood policy”, *Zhongguo xinwen wang – China News*, 22 August 2014.<sup>21</sup>

The entire international community is concerned by the spread of the Islamic State (IS) in Iraq. For their own economic, energy-related, and geopolitical reasons, Washington, Beijing, Paris, Tehran, and Brussels all agree that IS represents a serious threat – but even so, the current crisis has not completely erased old conflicts. Instead, it has revived an ideological debate between the United States and China about past and future military interventions. The debate centres on the reasons for IS’s success as well as on the solutions that should be adopted to resolve the crisis.

### China, the US, and the “free rider” issue

In an interview with the *New York Times* on 8 August 2014, Barack Obama said that China has been a “free rider” for the past 30 years.<sup>22</sup> This opinion is widely held both among US observers and within the US State Department. The US criticises China for not being a “responsible stakeholder” in international affairs. China, it says, has relied on the US to manage international crises and to absorb the financial and human costs of intervention, while China benefits from economic development in the regions that the US works to stabilise.

The Chinese media reacted immediately to the interview. On the very same day, the *People’s Daily* published an acerbic editorial denouncing President Obama’s remarks. The piece was published under the pseudonym of Zhong Sheng, but

<sup>18</sup> Zhong Sheng is the pseudonym used by the International Affairs department at the *People’s Daily* to sign collective editorial articles.

<sup>19</sup> Lei Xiying is a researcher at the Charhar Institute and a regular commentator in Chinese media.

<sup>20</sup> Liu Kun is a military expert for the *Global Times*.

<sup>21</sup> Jiang Tao is a journalist for China News.

<sup>22</sup> “China as a Free Rider”, *The New York Times*, 9 August 2014, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/video/opinion/10000003047788/china-as-a-free-rider.html>.

was authored by the International Affairs Department of the newspaper. The authors commented on US “unilateralism” (单边主义, *danbianzhuyi*) during the 2003 invasion of Iraq and said that in the subsequent 11 years, the US has been responsible for creating a “state of deep chaos” (深陷乱局, *shen xian luan ju*). The US is both an “invader” (侵入者, *qinruzhe*) and a “deserter” (抛弃者, *paoqizhe*) in Iraq, while China has always been a “peacekeeper” (和平角色, *heping jiaose*), a “co-operator” (合作者, *hezuoze*), and a “rebuilder” (建设者, *jianshezhe*). Since 2003, the authors write, China has provided support to Iraqi refugees in Jordan as well as participating in an International Donors Conference for the Reconstruction of Iraq in 2003 at which China offered \$25 million in humanitarian aid for Iraq. After the war, when there were few Western companies in the country, Chinese companies were not afraid of dealing with the difficulties of setting up in Iraq. By establishing themselves there, they contributed to the reconstruction and modernisation of the oil and telecommunications industries. “Facts speak louder than words” (事实胜于雄辩, *shishi sheng yu xiongbian*), the authors say, so the “free rider” theory is both false and absurd.

On 22 August, Xi Jinping himself delivered the official response from the Chinese government during a speech he gave in Mongolia. Surprisingly, the Chinese president did not reject the “free rider” concept. Instead, he adroitly turned the concept into a positive, saying that he would “welcome any state that wanted a free ride on China’s rapid economic development” (欢迎大家搭乘中国发展的列车, *huanying dajia dacheng zhongguo fazhan de lieche*). The idea of “free rider” is literally translated into Chinese as “hitchhiker” (搭便车, *dabianche*), and in his speech, Xi Jinping altered and amplified the expression by changing two characters, so that the “hitchhiker” became a passenger “jumping on the fast train” (搭乘列车, *dacheng lieche*) of Chinese growth. Xi also said he hoped that Chinese growth would provide an opportunity for mutual development for China and its partners.

In early September the *People’s Daily* published another editorial on Obama’s “free rider” comments. The arguments had changed, but the animosity remained. This time, the commentators accused the US of being a free rider itself, saying the US built up its own power by piggybacking on the Second World War. They said that if the US wanted to join the free riders on Chinese growth, China could provide it with just as many opportunities for growth.

Lei Xiyang says that the new Iraq crisis has destroyed Obama’s hope of being the president who would end American conflicts abroad. After the difficulties he faced in withdrawing troops from Iraq, not only must he now return to Iraq, but his strategic pivot to Asia is also being undermined.<sup>23</sup> Lei says that Obama’s attitude towards IS

<sup>23</sup> Since Lei Xiyang’s article was published in June, Barack Obama has unveiled, on 10 September, his strategy for military intervention in Iraq. The US intervention should involve only a very limited number of troops on the ground and will essentially consist of aerial and logistical support.

contradicts itself. On the one hand, the president cannot allow terrorist forces to take control of Iraq, nor can he let them create a state and area in which they can thrive and grow. On the other hand, Obama has called upon these same extremist forces to help topple Bashar al-Assad’s regime in Syria. Lei notes that, throughout history, terrorist forces have often been used by the American military as a “weapon” (武器, *wuqi*) in regional conflicts. Osama bin Laden, for example, was a “close ally” (亲密战友, *qinmi zhanyou*) of the US against the USSR during the Cold War.

### Chinese intervention in Iraq?

In June 2014, while IS was taking control of a large part of northern Iraq and carried out its first killings, the international community began to talk about possible military intervention. On 15 June, the Chinese-American lawyer Gordon Chang, who is well known for his criticism of the Chinese regime, published an editorial on the *Forbes*

website.<sup>24</sup> In it, Chang asked: since China now has much more interest in Iraq than the US has, why is it not intervening in Iraq?

Chang asked: since China now has much more interest in Iraq than the US has, why is it not intervening in

Iraq? Official Chinese media sources were quick to criticise Chang’s piece. The *Global Times* military specialist, Liu Kun, said that both from strategic and operational points of view, it was impossible for China to intervene in Iraq.

Liu Kun says that the West believes that China is dependent on Iraqi oil, and that IS is therefore a direct threat to China’s interests. But Liu says this idea is incorrect. Chinese oil companies in Iraq do not own the oil fields where they work, but only provide extraction services there. Furthermore, Chinese oil companies are mainly based in southern Iraq, which has not yet been affected by the IS offensive. Finally, Liu says that Iraq is “only” the fifth largest exporter of oil to China, after Saudi Arabia, Angola, Russia, and Oman. Therefore, even if the situation in Iraq were to worsen, China would still be able to rely on its other energy partners.<sup>25</sup>

Liu Kun says that China does not at the moment have the capacity to lead a large-scale military operation so far from its borders. China has neither the projection capabilities of the US nor its network of allies in the region. Liu gives several examples of weakness in Chinese air and naval capacities. The most western Chinese air base is 3,000km from Iraq – beyond the combat radius of Chinese fighter planes. In terms of naval capacity, the Liaoning aircraft

<sup>24</sup> Gordon G. Chang, “If Anyone Bombs Iraq, Shouldn’t it be China?”, *Forbes*, 15 June 2014, available at <http://www.forbes.com/sites/gordonchang/2014/06/15/if-anyone-bombs-iraq-shouldnt-it-be-china/>. For several years now, Chang has believed that the Chinese regime is on the brink of collapse. See Gordon G. Chang, *The Coming Collapse of China* (New York: Random House, 2001).

<sup>25</sup> Gordon Chang, however, says that with 3.7 percent of its imports coming from Iraq (half of all Iraqi oil exports), China has a lot to lose from the IS threat.

carrier cannot be used for the projection of Chinese forces in the Indian Ocean, and moreover, it has not yet reached “combat effectiveness” (战斗力, *zhan dou li*). The Chinese navy is also short of supply ships – it only has four Type 903 ships, two of which came into service in 2012. This means the country cannot send many warships to the Middle East. Finally, Chinese destroyers (Type 052C) and frigates (Type 054A) are not equipped with cruise missiles, which means they cannot launch sea-to-land attacks (on the model of the US Tomahawk missile). And although Type 094 submarines (SSBNs) can launch cruise missiles, the navy has too few of them and their crews’ training levels are inadequate. In a combat situation, Liu says, this type of weaponry would be about as useful as “a glass of water on a cart of burning firewood” (杯水车薪, *beishuichexin*).

Liu Kun believes that the US is trying to goad China into acting. It is trying to “use China to get rid of the Iraqi mess” (把伊拉克的烂摊子甩给中国, *ba Yilake de lantanzi shuai gei Zhongguo*) – and by doing so, to slow down China’s development. Liu says that China should focus on more important regional strategic priorities, such as terrorism in Central Asia and the territorial disputes in the East and South China Seas.

However, even in China, some people support Chinese intervention as part of an international coalition, such as Chen Dingding who writes in *The Diplomat* that China should send soldiers to fight against IS.<sup>26</sup> He argues that China must protect its energy interests as well as its citizens.<sup>27</sup> And it must guard against the risk that the conflict could spread to its own neighbourhood. There is significant evidence that Chinese jihadists are fighting in Iraq and Syria.<sup>28</sup> These fighters could bring their training and their experience back to China. And, as Chen Dingding says, the People’s Liberation Army could benefit from participating in the international mission by gaining the operational experience that it currently lacks.

<sup>26</sup> Chen Dingding, “China Should Send Troops to Fight ISIS”, *The Diplomat*, 12 September 2014, available at <http://thediplomat.com/2014/09/china-should-send-troops-to-fight-isis>.

<sup>27</sup> For further information on this issue, see Marc Julienne, “La protection des ressortissants chinois à l’étranger”, *China Analysis* No. 50, August 2014.

<sup>28</sup> See for example Chris Luo, “Purported photos of ‘Chinese Islamic State fighter’ emerge online”, *South China Morning Post*, 3 September 2014, available at <http://www.scmp.com/news/china-insider/article/1584369/chinese-islamic-state-fighter-captured-iraq-iraqi-military-claims>, and “Indonesia arrests four Chinese Uyigurs with suspected Islamic State ties”, *South China Morning Post*, 15 September 2014, available at <http://www.scmp.com/news/asia/article/1593082/indonesia-says-4-chinese-uyigurs-caught-suspected-islamic-state-ties>.

### 3. China, France, and Germany: Models of engagement in Mali

Angela Stanzel and Abigaël Vasselier

#### Sources:

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Li Wentao, “The ‘Africa policeman’ mentality dies hard in France”, *Dazhong Ribao – Dazhong Daily*, 17 January 2013.<sup>30</sup>

Wei Xiangjing, interview with Wang Zhaohui, Xiong Hao, and Cui Jian, “Why did France shoot the first shot?”, *Nanfang Ribao – Nanfang Daily*, 16 January 2013.<sup>31</sup>

Yang Huawen, “Watching China’s first troops in Mali”, *Renmin wang*, 30 April 2014.<sup>32</sup>

Yan Shuai, “Impact and development trends of terrorism in Africa”, *Dangdai shijie – Contemporary World*, No. 6, 2013.<sup>33</sup>

Yan Jianwei, “Germany: Changing from a bystander to a participant in international affairs”, *Xinhua wang*, 2 February 2014.<sup>34</sup>

Zheng Chunrong, “New trends in German security since the Libyan crisis”, *Deguo yanjiu – German Studies*, No. 2, 2013.<sup>35</sup>

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In March 2012 a military coup took place in Mali. Discontented with the government’s lack of success against the Touareg rebels who were attempting to take control of northern Mali, Malian soldiers seized power. The north of the country soon became a battleground in which several Islamist groups fought to implement their version of a Shari’a state. In January 2013, France launched Operation Serval in response to a call for assistance from Mali’s president and in accordance with the United Nations

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<sup>31</sup> Wei Xiangjing is a *Nanfang Daily* journalist. Wang Zhaohui is a fellow at the Institute for European Studies at CICIR. Xiong Hao is a scholar at the Institute of International Relations at Tianjin Normal University. Cui Jian is director of European Studies at the China Institute of International Studies (CIIS).

<sup>32</sup> Yang Huawen is a journalist at *Renmin wang*.

<sup>33</sup> Yan Shuai is a researcher at the anti-terrorism research centre of CICIR.

<sup>34</sup> Yan Jianwei is a correspondent for *Xinhua*.

<sup>35</sup> Zheng Chunrong is a professor at the Institute for German Studies & the Institute for EU Studies and director of the Institute for German Studies at Tongji University.

<sup>36</sup> All the authors are researchers at CIIS.

Charter. Four months later, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 2100, establishing the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). In June 2013, China's foreign ministry announced that China would contribute to the UN peacekeeping mission and would send a force of 170 soldiers, 155 civil engineers, and 70 medical staff to Mali.

On 10 September 2014, China's Premier Li Keqiang met with Mali's President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, who was in Tianjin for the annual meeting of the Summer Davos Forum 2014. Li told the Malian leader that China supported Mali's efforts to rebuild and develop its economy and that China would increase its economic co-operation with Mali.<sup>37</sup> At the meeting, Mali and China signed partnership agreements in areas such as infrastructure construction, including an agreement for the creation of a railway line between Mali's capital, Bamako, and the Guinean capital of Conakry. Li also confirmed that China would continue to participate in peacekeeping operations in Mali.

Mali was one of the first sub-Saharan countries to establish diplomatic links with China. Officially, the two countries are engaged in a "constant deepening" (不断加深, *buduan jiashen*) of their "friendship" (友谊, *youyi*). China is an attractive partner for Mali because of its no-strings-attached policy on engagement and because of the activities it has undertaken in the country, mainly involving the establishment of industrial and economic infrastructure. The two countries have positive relations, although China's economic relationship with Mali is less dynamic than its relationships with more resource-rich African countries.<sup>38</sup> However, China's engagement in Mali is indicative of a change in Chinese behaviour in crisis regions. Mali is one of the first countries in which China has deployed combat troops in a peacekeeping mission.

When Chinese scholars look at European engagement in crisis regions, do they see an example to follow or to avoid? France and Germany are both engaged in Mali, but they have very different models of engagement. Chinese scholars and media are interested in these two different interventions, which raise key issues for Chinese engagement in Africa as a whole.

### Is France bringing stability to Mali?

He Wenping, like some other Chinese scholars, questions the legitimacy of France's intervention in Mali. She accepts that France's 2013 intervention had both legal and moral grounds, since Paris responded to a request from the

<sup>37</sup> See "Li Keqiang Meets with President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita of Mali", Website of the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Australia, 10 September 2014, available at <http://au.china-embassy.org/eng/xw/t1190510.htm>.

<sup>38</sup> Harrie Esterhuysen and Moctar Kane, "China-Mali relationship: Finding mutual benefit between unequal partners", Centre for Chinese Studies Stellenbosch University, February 2014, available at [http://www.ccs.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/CCS\\_Policy\\_Briefing\\_China\\_Mali\\_Relations\\_Kane\\_Esterhuysen\\_2013\\_HE\\_MC1.pdf](http://www.ccs.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/CCS_Policy_Briefing_China_Mali_Relations_Kane_Esterhuysen_2013_HE_MC1.pdf).

Malian government and its intervention complied with the UN Charter. But she also says that France had other motives for its military intervention. She says that France's deployment of troops in Mali was more than just an act of goodwill to fight terrorism and to help build stability. On these grounds, although the intervention was conducted in accordance with the UN Charter, she argues that the intervention may not have been legitimate. For example, she questions whether the "fight against terrorism" (打击恐怖主义, *daji kongbu zhuyi*) was in the circumstances a legitimate argument for military intervention. In Mali, she explains, the central issue was a civil war rather than a homogeneous attack led by a terrorist group. She worries that the French intervention in Mali could act to legalise "neo-interference" (新干涉主义, *xin ganshe zhuyi*) in Africa.

Li Wentao says that France used the "responsibility to protect" (保护责任, *baohu zeren*) as a pretext to intervene in Mali as well as in Libya and in Côte d'Ivoire. In fact, Li says, France simply wanted to protect its "sphere of influence" (势力范围, *shili fanwei*). Li writes that, for France, Africa is both an "outpost" (前沿基地, *qianyan jidi*) and the "backyard" (后花园, *hou huayuan*) of its power. For this reason, protecting France's interests in the region is a central concern for Paris. Both He Wenping and Li Wentao warn of the potential re-emergence of the perception of France as "Africa's policeman" (非洲宪兵, *feizhou xianbing*), an image that comes from the colonial and post-colonial periods. Wang Zhaohui says that France supports international co-operation in order to dilute this negative image as well as to try to find partners to share the financial burden of intervention.

He Wenping admits that France could improve the security situation in Mali, which would be to China's advantage. But Yan Shuai argues that the military mission is actually worsening the situation. Yan says that the "fight against terrorism" makes France and the other countries involved targets for jihadist groups. He also says that the Western presence in Africa, including the French involvement in Mali, attracts more Islamist terrorists who want to fight Western forces there. The cross-border flow of terrorists weakens border controls between African countries and the fighting has a detrimental impact on state management capabilities, which affects countries that have interests in Mali. Yan Shuai writes that China, for example, has suffered economic losses from the intervention.

### Germany's symbolic contribution to Mali

Germany sent troops to Mali to support the French intervention. But it has just 250 troops in Mali, which is not much compared to the more than 4,000 troops sent by France. And while France's military operations in Mali included air strikes, Germany sent only a few transport aircraft, which were reserved for logistical support. However, the support that Germany did offer is unusual in German foreign policy.

Chinese media and scholars have examined Germany's changing involvement in global conflict. Yan Jianwei talks about German President Joachim Gauck's speech at the Munich Security Conference in January 2014, in which he said that Germany should be more actively involved in international affairs, given various ongoing conflicts in places such as Ukraine on Europe's doorstep or the Middle East and Africa. However, Yan does not think that Germany is dramatically changing its foreign policy; instead, it is adjusting in response to global changes. Germany's pursuit of "active diplomacy" (积极外交, *jiji waijiao*) will be aimed at strengthening overseas military operations, but only in co-ordination with others.

Zheng Chunrong writes about the new direction of Germany's security policy as evidenced in the crises in Libya, Syria, and Mali. Zheng analyses the reasons for Germany's abstention in the vote on UN Security Council Resolution 1973, which created the legal framework for the creation of a "no-fly zone" over Libya in March 2011. He is confused by Germany's decision to abstain alongside the BRIC countries Brazil, China, India, and Russia. But he explains that German domestic politics was the main factor in the German government's decision. Zheng writes that very limited scale of the subsequent German contribution to Mali and Syria suggests that Germany is still strongly influenced by a "culture of reluctance" (克制文化, *kezhi wenhua*).

In February 2013, the German Bundestag voted to extend and expand the mandate for the Bundeswehr's involvement in Mali. It agreed that Germany would provide soldiers to act in training and advisory capacities but ruled out a combat role for German troops. Zheng writes that German involvement in Mali is reluctant and limited. He believes that Germany's contribution to Mali is merely a symbolic gesture to show the world that it is making an effort and does not indicate a major shift in Germany's foreign and security policy. Germany has also shown only limited engagement in other countries, such as Syria and Turkey. Its international reputation was damaged in the wake of its abstention from the UN vote on Libya, so its actions now are aimed at improving its image on the world stage. Zheng says that Germany's contribution to international efforts in crisis regions, however small it might be, evidences the gradual "normalisation" (正常化, *zhengchang hua*) of German foreign and security policy. But since the "culture of reluctance" still influences Germany's stance on military conflict resolution, it would be more appropriate to use the term "limited normalisation" (有限的正常化, *youxian de zhengchang hua*). Zheng says that the German government needs to balance its responsibilities beyond its borders, for example, engaging more in global conflict resolution efforts,

with domestic concerns such as the need to placate public opinion. Otherwise, Germany's foreign and security policy will continue to be ambiguous, and Germany's partners will find it hard to know where Germany stands.

### China's own position

The events in Libya in 2011 triggered a change in perceptions of engagement in global conflicts in both China and Germany. Afterwards, both countries saw the necessity of contributing to the UN mission in Mali. Germany's limited engagement in Mali is seen in China mainly as a means to improve its image to the outside world after its abstention in the UN vote on Libya. China's own position seems somewhat similar. China too has so far deployed only a small number of forces to Mali. Yang Huawen says that the few hundred soldiers sent to Mali can be seen as a gesture aimed at improving China's image as a "responsible country" (责任大国, *zeren daguo*) in Africa.

He Wenping questions France's "fight against terrorism" as an argument for military intervention, but it seems that Beijing's choice to take part in MINUSMA was also driven by concerns about terrorism. Beijing includes Mali in an "arc of instability caused by terrorism" (恐怖动荡弧, *kongbu dongdang hu*) along with countries such as Libya, Somalia, Tunisia, Nigeria, Egypt, and some Central African countries. This "arc" represents a regional and international security threat. In an article from the China Institute of International Studies (CIIS) on 2014's "ten international security aspects" (国际安全形势十大看点, *guoji anquan xingshi shi da kandian*), Mali is listed among countries such as Kenya, Nigeria, Libya, Yemen, and Iraq as one of the places where terrorist groups such as al Qaeda (基地组织, *jidi zuzhi*) could increase their activities again.

Chinese scholars view the events in Mali in a global context. Compared to Germany, China has more at stake in the region, but unlike France, Chinese interests are mainly economic. Since over half of China's oil imports come from the MENA region, crises such as those in Libya and Syria illustrate that China has global interests. It wants to avoid further escalation of conflicts that could disrupt trade within the region as a whole. China has therefore increased its engagement in and beyond the region, and its involvement is now more visible in places such as Somalia, Liberia, Sudan, and Mali. In early September, China reportedly sent a peacekeeping force of 700 soldiers under UN command to protect local and Chinese workers in South Sudan, where China is now the largest investor in oil fields.

China's global engagement seems to be motivated both by the desire to protect its own interests as well as by its wish to improve its international image. It remains to be seen whether this is only the beginning of Chinese engagement in crisis regions, and whether China will in future increase its engagement beyond its own interests.

#### 4. China and Pakistan: Crisis partner or a partner in crisis?

Angela Stanzel

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In its approach to global conflicts, China has traditionally been guided by the principle of non-interference. However, there are exceptions, and in recent years, China's engagement beyond its borders has increased. For example, it has taken part in UN peacekeeping missions in Africa.

Pakistan is not Syria, Mali, or Iraq. Even so, Pakistan has gone from crisis to crisis ever since its foundation, and its problems continue to the present day. The Kashmir conflict with India is still a live issue, the country still provides safe havens for Islamist militants and terrorists, and Pakistan also faces many and diverse domestic, social, and structural problems. At the moment, unrest is jeopardising the country's civil government under Nawaz Sharif, who was elected prime minister in May 2013 with a comfortable majority. It was the first time in Pakistan's political history that there was a smooth transfer of power after a prime minister had completed its term in office. Since then, however, the politician Imran Khan and the cleric Tahirul Qadri have accused the government of corruption and electoral fraud. They mobilised thousands of protesters to demand the resignation of Nawaz Sharif.

On 5 September, Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Qin Gang announced the postponement of President Xi Jinping's planned visit to Pakistan, which had been

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<sup>41</sup> Ye Hailin is the deputy head of the Department of South Asian Politics at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS).

<sup>42</sup> Zhang Yi is a reporter at *Xinhua*. Hu Shisheng is director of the Institute of South & Southeast Asian & Oceania Studies at the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR). Hua Liming is a distinguished research fellow at CIIS.

scheduled to take place later in September, because of the turmoil.<sup>43</sup> However, Xi visited India as scheduled from 18 to 20 September. The trip was the first visit by a Chinese head of state in eight years, underlining the increasingly important economic partnership between India and China.

Did this meeting, together with the cancellation of the Pakistan visit, hint at a change in China's policy towards Pakistan? The Pakistani government has denied that Xi's India visit would have any impact on Pakistan-China relations. And indeed, up until now, relations between the two countries, based on the principle of non-interference, have been positive. However, China must take into consideration the security situation and structural weaknesses in Pakistan, which not only have an impact on China's investments in the region but could also influence development within China, in the region of Xinjiang on the border with Pakistan.

##### Sweeter than honey

"Higher than the Himalayas, deeper than the Arabian Sea, sweeter than honey" (比喜马拉雅山高、比阿拉伯海深、比蜂蜜甜, *bi ximaliya shan gao, bi alabo hai shen, bi fengmi tian*) – Chinese and Pakistani officials often use this phrase to describe the relations between their two countries.<sup>44</sup> For more than six decades, China-Pakistan relations have been both stable and close, especially in the military sphere. In economic affairs, bilateral trade between China and Pakistan has increased by an average of \$1 billion per year since 2000, when it accounted for only around \$1 billion. In 2012, total bilateral trade amounted to around \$12 billion, and the two countries aim to increase trade to \$15 billion by 2015.

In an interview with *Xinhua wang*, Chen Jidong says that Chinese investment in Pakistan amounted to \$10 billion in 2013 – but even so, Chen says that it has not yet reached its full potential. Chen says that the development of people-to-people and trade relations is being held back by a number of problems in Pakistan, such as the ongoing social unrest and the uncertain security situation. China would like to increase its investment projects in Pakistan, but Chinese investors are concerned about structural and social instability in Pakistan. However, Chinese interests in Pakistan go beyond trade and investment relations: Chen points out that Pakistan is of "geo-strategic" (地缘战略, *diyuan zhanlüe*) and "geo-economic" (地缘经济, *diyuan jingji*) significance to China. When Communist China had difficulty accessing Western air routes, Pakistan helped China to break the blockade, and the route through

<sup>43</sup> "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Qin Gang's Remarks on President Xi Jinping's visit to Pakistan, postponed answering questions of the media", *Xinhua*, 6 September 2014, available at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2014-09/06/c\\_1112389117.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2014-09/06/c_1112389117.htm).

<sup>44</sup> As mentioned in an article on Li Changchun's visit to Pakistan, the Maldives, and Bangladesh in October 2012. Jia Peng and Li Shijia, "Deepen neighbourhood friendships and build a harmonious environment", *Contemporary World*, No. 11, 2012, available at <http://www.idcpc.org.cn/jwjs/1211.htm>.

Pakistani airspace now connects China with Africa, Western Asia, and the Middle East.<sup>45</sup> The strategic significance of the overland route through Pakistan will increase after the upgrade of the Karakoram highway, which connects China's western province of Xinjiang with Pakistan. Chen says that, once this renovation is completed, Pakistan will be China's "gateway" (通往, *tong wang*) to South Asia and the Arabian Sea.

Li Qingyan says that Pakistan could play a major role in China's strategy of "opening to the West" (向西开放, *xiang xi kai fang*). She sees great potential for the growth of China-Pakistan relations once the "China-Pakistan Economic Corridor" (中巴经济走廊, *zhongba jingji zoulang*) is established. A major long-term initiative of China, the economic corridor would begin at Kashgar in Xinjiang and lead to and through Pakistan. Li says the project would enhance the economic development of both countries. In 2013, total trade across the Chinese-Pakistani border at Khunjerab Pass

amounted to roughly \$1 billion, according to Li. But she says that the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor could

cause an immense increase in cross-border trade, since it would give Western China access to the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean. And because the corridor would carry on through Pakistan to Afghanistan and Tajikistan, it would provide trade and energy access that would solve both the geographic "bottleneck" (瓶颈, *ping jing*) of Xinjiang and the resources "bottleneck" of the "Malacca dilemma" (马六甲困局, *maliujia kun ju*).

### Pakistan's unstable security situation

Chen Jidong and Li Qingyan both examine the impact of Pakistan's security situation on China-Pakistan relations. Chen says that Pakistan is a frontier country in the war against terrorism, but that China is not. Although China has co-operated with Pakistan on counter-terrorism, China has never sent and will never send forces to fight militants.

Li Qingyan believes that terrorists and militants could put the economic corridor project in jeopardy. The threats to the project range from tensions between the Pakistani military and the Pakistani government to tensions between Pakistan and India over the Kashmir conflict. This summer's series of India-Pakistan border skirmishes provided an illustration of the continuing tension and mistrust between the two countries. In particular because each side has an arsenal of approximately 100 nuclear weapons, the conflict between

<sup>45</sup> Chen is talking about the 1960s, when Pakistan International Airline (PIA) became the first airline from a non-communist country to fly into the People's Republic of China (1964). PIA's first service to China was from Karachi to Shanghai via Canton, before the route to Beijing was established.

India and Pakistan puts the region's security at risk. Further, the economic corridor will lead through regions of Pakistan in which the presence of ethnic militants and Pakistani Taliban poses a threat to the construction of the corridor and to its workers.

Li writes that it is unclear what will happen in neighbouring Afghanistan after the withdrawal of United States and NATO forces by the end of 2014. The post-withdrawal situation there could pose another security threat to the economic corridor project. And Hu Shisheng says that drug trafficking from Afghanistan also poses a threat to China. Drugs from Afghanistan are trafficked through China, and they also act to "nourish" extremist forces in Central Asia. Li says that it is unlikely that the Afghan Taliban will stage a comeback in Afghanistan. But even so, without the US and without peace talks with the Taliban, it will be difficult to achieve lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan and the region.

Pakistan and China have increased "counter-terrorism co-operation" (反恐合作, *fankong hezuo*) to tackle the threat of terrorism, and Chen recommends building up this co-operation, which at the moment consists mainly of joint military exercises. Chen and Li both think stability in Pakistan will hinge on developments in Afghanistan after the withdrawal of US and NATO forces from Afghanistan. Chen suggests that Pakistan and China should also strengthen co-operation with the US and NATO. Mistrust towards the US in Pakistan is widespread, but at the same time, Pakistan considers its relations with both the US and China to be very important. Chen rejects the idea of geopolitical rivalry between US-Pakistan and US-China relations, because the two relationships exist in parallel. However, he thinks that Pakistan-China relations are important to balance (平衡 *pingheng*) Pakistan-US relations.

Ye Hailin thinks the decline in the US presence in Afghanistan and Pakistan suggests that other countries in the region will be left to solve the region's problems. He believes that the situation in Afghanistan will change after 2014, and that this will affect China's national security, especially in Western China. Ye adds that, as a global power, China's national security is affected by all important global developments. For example, the revolution in Libya in 2011 forced China to evacuate more than 30,000 of its citizens from the troubled state. China's security interests abroad not only concern the safety of Chinese citizens and of its overseas investments, but could also affect China's national security. Ye calls on China to change its national security policy and to drop its low-profile approach. He says that an elephant (meaning China) cannot keep a low profile; China should stop "biding its time" (韬光养晦, *taoguang yanghui*).

Ye Hailin seems to see China and the US as being at the same level – both are "elephants" that have similar global interests, which would justify Chen's call for a deepened relationship between the US and China. Chen thinks that

China should take a position closer to that of the US in terms of engaging in global conflicts. But to do so, it would have to re-think its principle of non-interference. Is China in fact changing its stance on non-interference? And can China-US co-operation provide a model of engagement in global conflicts in the future?

### Is China changing?

Chen Jidong's suggestion of US-China co-operation is not new, and some degree of change has happened already. In 2012, China announced that it would co-operate with the US to train 300 Afghan policemen – the first time China had ever co-operated with a third party in another country. Beijing also entered into talks with India on security co-operation in Afghanistan. Speaking about the visit of Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi to Afghanistan in February 2014, Hua Liming said that China would continue to provide assistance to Afghanistan and to support development and capacity-building efforts there. The construction of the “Silk Road Economic Belt” (丝绸之路经济带, *Sichou zhi lu jingji dai*), for example, would strengthen Afghanistan's infrastructure. In 2014, China is scheduled to host the annual “Heart of Asia” conference on Afghanistan, which was initiated in 2011 and includes 15 countries from South Asia, Central Asia, Eurasia, and the Middle East. Hua Liming believes that China's Afghanistan policy and its active role in the Istanbul process reflects the country's responsible attitude in international affairs.

The Chinese scholars seem to see Afghanistan as the greatest threat to security in South Asia. China wants to ensure that Afghanistan does not once again become a base for Islamist terrorism and is concerned that Taliban or Islamist groups could support the Xinjiang Uyghurs' resistance against the Chinese government. At the same time, Afghanistan and Pakistan offer opportunities as new markets for trade and economic ties. Afghanistan also has a wide range of unexploited energy and natural resources, and China has already invested in the world's largest copper mine in Aynak, south of Kabul. An unstable security situation in the region could also endanger China's multi-billion dollar investments in Pakistan such as the Gwadar port on the Arabian Sea and the planned construction of the economic corridor.

Some Chinese experts suggest that China should co-operate with both Pakistan and the US on security issues, and thus share the responsibility of ensuring regional stability. Others think that it is mainly China's responsibility to safeguard stability; they call on Beijing to increase China's individual engagement in the region. Either way, China may increase co-operation and engagement in the region in the run-up to the withdrawal of coalition forces from Afghanistan. China has already subtly changed course in reaction to the political turmoil in Pakistan and the uncertainty surrounding the presidential election in Afghanistan: a month before Xi Jinping cancelled his first

state visit to Pakistan, China also announced it would postpone the “Heart of Asia” conference, scheduled to take place by the end of August, to an unknown date. China's reaction could be seen as a very subtle interference in the political affairs of the two countries.

## 5. How China sees the crisis in Ukraine

Abigaël Vasselier

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In November 2013, the Ukrainian government reneged on signing an Association Agreement with the European Union. The following month, Ukraine’s President Viktor Yanukovich announced the signing of an agreement on economic co-operation with Russia. The explosion of pro-Europe protests and the violence that followed led to the removal of the Ukrainian president in February 2014. Moscow accused the EU and the United States of supporting revolution and took control of Crimea. A referendum was held, in which the population of Crimea voted to join Russia. The EU and the US contested the referendum and a United Nations resolution declared the referendum’s results invalid.

Since then, diplomatic tensions have increased between Moscow on one side and Brussels and Washington on the other, especially after Europe and the US imposed sanctions on Russia. Meanwhile, pro-Russian separatist activity continues to de-stabilise Ukraine, even after the country signed the first part of an Association Agreement with the EU on 21 March 2014. Along with the rest of the international community, Beijing is struggling to respond to this crisis, which challenges its relationship with Moscow and threatens to disrupt the regional balance in Asia.

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<sup>47</sup> Hua Lu is *Caijing*’s correspondent in Ukraine.

<sup>48</sup> Peng Nian is an observer and commentator on political and diplomatic issues in Asia.

<sup>49</sup> Zhao Chu is the deputy director of the Shanghai Institute of Defence Strategies. Generally critical of political and military issues, he is known for his opposition to the implementation of the Chinese Air Defence Identification Zone.

<sup>50</sup> Zheng Yongnian is director of the East Asian Institute at Singapore National University.

## Reasons for the crisis

Han Liqun says that the Ukraine crisis shares common features with the other protests around the world over the last three years. The author identifies five categories of “social conflict” (社会矛盾, *shehui maodun*), which, he says, explain the dissatisfaction of the Ukrainian people: conflicts between new and old elites; conflicts over the distribution of wealth; ethnic and religious conflicts; conflicts caused by separatist tendencies; and conflicts linked to reform. In Ukraine, Han says, these conflicts have been exacerbated by inadequate and uneven economic development, by the slow process of democratisation, and by the emergence of serious conflicts of interest in national politics.

Zhao Chu describes what he calls the “Putin doctrine” (普京主义, *pujing zhuyi*), which explains the importance of Ukraine to Moscow and how the country’s national troubles turned into an international crisis. When Vladimir Putin returned to the Kremlin in 2012 as president of Russia, he set out two priorities. In domestic policy, he called for the implementation of robust measures to strengthen society and the state system. In foreign policy, he said that Russian diplomacy should be built around two principles: Russian involvement in world affairs and a special role in former Soviet territories such as Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan. Based on this doctrine, Putin has justified Russian intervention in Ukraine as a matter of national interest. The crisis calls into question the very essence of the Putin doctrine. Zhao Chu explains that the doctrine is in conflict with the post-Cold War global order, in which the boundaries of the post-Soviet space are being redefined by the US through NATO and the eastward expansion of the EU. The Ukraine crisis has brought the Putin doctrine into direct conflict with the EU and the US.

## The international order and the principle of sovereignty

The Ukraine crisis is shaking up the international order and challenging the principle of sovereignty. The changes that are taking place naturally resonate in Chinese foreign policy.

Zheng Yongnian says that although “sovereignty” (主权, *zhuquan*) is a concept that has existed for a long time, it is not applied to everyone in the same way. For example, Russia and the US promote sovereignty in their speeches, but they show little respect for it in their actions. The sovereignty of other countries is therefore subject to the goodwill of these powerful nations, themselves founded on the “principle of the cannon” (“大炮”原则, “*dapao*” *yuanze*). This contradiction is at the heart of what Zheng calls “the Ukrainian tragedy” (乌克兰悲剧, *Wukelan beiju*).

The case of Ukraine offers a good example of a smaller country’s sovereignty being subordinated to larger, more powerful countries. Russia has intervened in the country based on the principle of its own national interest.

Zhao Chu says that, with tensions growing between Washington and Moscow, a weakened Russia could choose to use force to maintain its interests, especially in Ukraine, in spite of the agreement made between Moscow and Kyiv guaranteeing Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.<sup>51</sup> Zheng Yongnian agrees that Russia would readily break this agreement if it were to enter into a confrontation with the West.

Zheng believes that the international order is defined by the emergence of alliances that either ensure the survival or trigger the decline of empires and sovereign states. American hegemony has shaped the global order since the end of the Cold War, but it now seems to be disintegrating. Zheng points out that Washington has not adjusted the alliance strategy that it maintained during the Cold War, but instead has continued to strengthen its existing alliances. There are two problems with this strategy: the absence of a "new enemy" (新的敌人, *xin de diren*) and the "expansion of Western influence"

(扩张西方势力, *kuozhang xifang shili*) against Moscow. Peng Nian, on the other hand, believes that the Ukraine crisis has in fact placed China in a difficult situation.

However, the main sign of change in the international order is probably the re-emergence of a bipolar order in international relations – a trend that all the authors discuss. Zheng Yongnian says that the Ukraine crisis should be understood in the context of "great power politics" (大国政治, *daguo zhengzhi*). Trapped between the West and Russia, Ukraine does not have enough space to survive independently of these two powers while preserving its own interests. Hua Lu says the EU and Russia are racing to see which one will "save Ukraine" from its growing economic crisis. Hua compares the benefits that Ukraine could receive from the Russians and those that it would get from the Europeans. Hua concludes that Russia can offer non-conditional economic support to Kyiv more quickly. In spite of the advantages that European aid could bring in the long term, the EU's capacity to provide emergency support remains limited.

Beijing needs to think about its place in the international order that seems likely to emerge after the Ukraine crisis. China abstained in the vote on the Crimea referendum at the United Nations Security Council, showing that Beijing would prefer to align itself neither with Russia nor with the West. Peng Nian says that the change in the international order has "put China in an awkward position" (颇为尴尬, *poweì ganga*). Zheng Yongnian explains that, during the Cold War, China was seen as an "imaginary enemy" (假想敌, *jiaxiang di*), and other powers made use of this image to strengthen alliances. Could this situation happen again?

<sup>51</sup> The 1994 Budapest memorandum is an agreement under which Ukraine commits itself to the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons in exchange for guarantees of security and territorial integrity from Russia, the United States, the United Kingdom, China, and France.

Zheng says that Beijing has so far refused to participate in the alliance game and has instead promoted multilateralism. However, Washington is now on the hunt for Asian allies. Zheng Yongnian warns that if China takes sides, it will be the first step towards confrontation.

### Will China benefit from the crisis?

The Ukraine crisis has revealed the re-emergence of a bipolar order in international relations, with Russia on one side and the US-EU alliance on the other. If foreign policy is essentially "great power politics", as Zheng Yongnian says, then what is the role of China in this order?

Some analysts have suggested that the rivalry between the US and Russia in Ukraine will benefit China by weakening the US's "pivot to Asia". China could also benefit economically from US and European sanctions on Russia. And the crisis enables China to gain a better understanding of US and European security structures. In this way, Beijing could emerge as a winner in this crisis.

Peng Nian, on the other hand, believes that the Ukraine crisis has in fact placed China in a difficult situation. It is questionable whether the Ukraine crisis has really challenged the US's pivot to Asia. Peng points out that the original aim of the pivot was to contain China, and that the strategy has evolved in proportion to China's increasing resources. Rivalry in Eastern Europe could have led to the US reallocating resources to Europe. However, Peng Nian says that Washington's commitment to Ukraine will not reduce its commitment in Asia. EU involvement alongside the US in the Ukraine crisis has allowed the US to limit the resources and energy it is expending on the crisis.

Some analysts believe that China's economy will benefit from the implementation of European and US sanctions against Russia. Moscow's growing economic dependence on Beijing, they say, will help China to benefit from the sanctions. But Peng points out that Russia is already dependent on Chinese products, particularly for basic necessities. Even so, Russia's economic dependence on China could continue to grow if the Russian economy does not diversify its suppliers.

The Ukraine crisis has shown the inability of the US and the EU to guarantee Ukraine's security and territorial integrity. Some analysts believe that China could use this weakness to cast doubt on US and European security guarantees in the Asia-Pacific region. However, Peng Nian says that if Beijing were to use this argument, it would tarnish its image, because it would make itself look like an aggressor in the region. In any case, the Kyiv-Washington relationship cannot really be compared with American alliances in the Asia-Pacific region.

The authors say that the Ukraine crisis has disrupted the balance struck by the world's key powers after the end of

the Cold War. Plunged into an “awkward” situation, Beijing has decided to refuse to join the game of alliances that could lead to confrontation in Asia. With the situation in Ukraine still deteriorating, it is difficult to reach a full assessment yet of the impact of the crisis for Beijing. However, the crisis will more than likely mark a turning point in Chinese-Russian history, as well as in Chinese foreign policy.

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