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THE NEW BALANCING OF POWER IN INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS: CHINA IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Abstract. *While closely examining the behaviour of China in the United Nations, more specifically its new-found commitment to UN peacekeeping, the article discusses the conduct of emerging powers in key international organisations. It concludes that China as an ascending power shows no tendency to completely break away from the current international system. Instead, China seeks opportunities within the system, which it uses to support its economic and political interests. This approach brings multiplicative effects for other aspects of China's performance in international institutions, e.g. compensating for the normative criticism it has attracted.*

Keywords: *international organisations, United Nations, balance of power, China, peacekeeping*

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Introduction

The article addresses the role of the great powers in today's globalised world where the trend towards greater institutionalisation intertwines with the tendency to hold on to sovereignty and the existing balance of power. Through the nexus between the realist and internationalist perspectiveson international organisations, the article aims to understand the impact the changing balance of power has exerted on certain international organisations since the end of the Cold War.

Thirty years after the Cold War concluded, we are witnesses to massive changes in the international system. Nowadays, we must be careful when referring to "the American World Order" (Acharya, 2018) because the country is no longer in a position to create the rules and assert primacy in international institutions, at least not like in most of the post-World War II era. Many authors have analysed the decline of American power and turned to those states that seek to claim their slice of the 'American pie' (Ikenberry, 2003; Wallerstein, 2003; Nye, 2004; Layne, 2012; Brooks and Wohlforth, 2016). Yet, fewer ask the question of how exactly this change is to be reflected in the

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governance structures of the modern world generally, especially in international organisations as an essential (plat)form for the cooperation of actors in the international community (Chan et al., 2011; Weaver, 2015; Beeson and Li, 2016).

Indeed, international organisations have become part of our lives; it is impossible to imagine the contemporary world without them. But the world we live in is still a world made up of sovereign states. Hence, it seems reasonable to expect any future competition for world domination will have some impact on international organisations. In other words, one can anticipate that emerging new powers will try to strengthen their relative position within international organisations. China, in particular, is playing a more assertive role in the reshaping of global governance, enabled by its already established important role in international organisations, for instance, its permanent seat on the Security Council. However, one should also expect the 'incumbent' power (meaning the USA as the 'winner' of the Cold War) to be unwilling to give up its domination and its relative power as embedded in the founding documents of (key) international organisations. Sparring among the superpowers over influence in international organisations would seem a logical part of reshaping the world order after the fall of the Berlin Wall. After all, we see a precedent for such a scenario in the interwar period when the world powers of the time had either withdrawn from the League of Nations (LN) or not joined at all, depending on how well most international organisation then suited them (Northedge, 1988). Yet, almost three decades following the end of the Soviet Union and the bipolar world order, and the ensuing competition for world domination, international organisations have survived without much harm being done. We have seen no steps by current or new major powers to attempt to alter the 'balance of power' in the main international organisations; no withdrawals and no other radical measures in an effort to change the status quo have occurred thus far in stark contrast with the past. Our basic research question is thus: how are the emerging powers (such as China) ensuring their status is reflected in (key) international institutions?

In the following paragraphs, the paper first addresses the connection between the concepts of the balance of power and international organisations, while further exploring why a great power would in fact favour the status quo over making any radical changes in the way the global institutional setup functions, given that it is set in its favour. While several countries are competing (India) or again competing (Russian Federation) for 'world power' status, this article focuses on investigating China – by all accounts, the biggest competitor of the United States of America (USA) for world domination. As China pursues several channels to carve out a way to bring about more China-fit international organisations, this article will

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further confine itself to a certain field that appears to be critical while studying Chinese behaviour of the past and future: peacekeeping. Peacekeeping has emerged as China's newfound interest and should thus be further explored, due to being at odds with the country's long-standing principle of non-interference in another state's internal affairs that already in 1965 China called an American tool "to suppress and stamp out the revolutionary struggles of the world's people" (People's Daily Editorial, 1965: 10). After addressing the theoretical implications of the research question, the article analyses the empirical data found in UN databases concerning peacekeeping operations. We use this data to capture China's engagement in peacekeeping operations. This allows us a better overview of the country's troops and their strategic distribution across the various peacekeeping missions which, in turn sheds light on the transformation of China's strategic interests in peacekeeping, chiefly in Africa. The main criteria for choosing the mentioned databases is their reliability. Further use and analysis of primary sources to the extent available to us (such as speeches and resolutions) is used to complement the research.

Balancing of power and international organisation(s)

What do international organisations have in common with the balancing of power? Inis Claude (1989) noted that terrible wars are repeatedly generating resistance to the egoism of countries that blindly pursue their interests, including at the cost of human lives. At the end of these wars, humanity repeatedly declares "never again" and, to this end, it has created institutions designed to play a complementary role, alongside states, in the conduct of international relations. This is how the League of Nations and the UN came into being and, together with them, the concepts of collective security and world government. But, as Claude says, political leaders soon realised that, at least for the time being, there is not much room for idealism. In his words, "post-war mentality ... moves back toward the norm, with its emphasis upon national independence and institutional recognition of and adaptation to the rich diversity of the peoples of the world. This brings the balance of power back into the realm of respectability" (Claude, 1989: 84).

Claude's argument (1989) is not convincing overall. It is not only states that take part in policy- and decision-making processes around the world. Other actors include international *governmental* organisations – hence, ones formed by *governments*. The determination of the mandate, inter-member relations, and operational rules of an international organisation are established, signed and ratified. The question of what this has to do with the balance of power may be answered by posing yet another question: why do states, including the great powers, join international organisations

in the first place? The short answer is that because, by using them "states are able to achieve goals that they cannot accomplish on a decentralized basis" (Abbott and Snidal, 1998: 29). In other words, states need to be in a position to achieve those goals. To achieve such goals, crude power might not always be enough: they need to challenge institutional power as well. Consequently, the (re)balancing of power by definition affects international organisations whose members may need to recognise the changes occurring on the 'map' of world powers and respond accordingly. Without adaptation, without awareness of the need for adaptation, tensions among member states can arise. In the absence of adaptation, one or a combination of three things may occur. First, the emerging power which believes its status has not been sufficiently recognised can 'regulate' the international organisation's 'usefulness' by enforcing and/or implementing new cooperation practices, in breach of the international organisation's constitution, advocate new norms and values, and the like. Second, it can withdraw from the organisation. Third, it can establish a competitor – an organisation with a similar mandate.

Contemporary scholarship concerned with international organisations has already focused on studying what happens if such steps actually occur. For example, in the interwar period, the League of Nations was the target for states to 'verify' their status as a great power. In the late 1920s and 1930s, Germany had wanted to make the LN fit with its core national interests such as respect for German minorities (Schwarz, 1931). Japan wished to adapt the LN to suit its campaign in Manchuria. Since the end of the Cold War, after which a gradual shift in the balance of power to the East started, the United Nations (UN) also felt the 'verification' process. The best known and most publicised case in point is the discussion on reform of the UN Security Council (UNSC). Since the Cold War came to a halt, states have sought, in vain, to make the UNSC better reflect the actual power and influence existing among states; clearly, it does not make much sense for India not to be a permanent UNSC member. There are other examples as well, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The organisation was heavily criticised in Southeast Asia when it offered assistance to emerging economies in the region that found themselves in difficulty during the 1997 financial crisis. The IMF was accused of being ignorant of the specific environment in which it wanted to introduce reforms based on conditionality. In reaction to the IMF's intransigence and lack of enthusiasm to 'adapt' its approach to help deal with the crisis, Japan proposed a new institution with a similar mandate as the IMF, called the Asian Monetary Fund (AMF). The project ultimately did not materialise, largely due to pressure from the USA. Washington feared the AMF, had it been established, would have undermined America's influence over financial institutions it controlled in the strategically important

region of Southeast Asia (Bull and Bøås, 2003: 249). Yet, the story did not end there. Namely, the Japanese proposals paved the way for what would later become known as the New Development Bank (created by the BRICS bloc – Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) and the Chiang Mai Initiative Multilateralisation by ASEAN that performs functions similar to those of the IMF, but with more attention to the regional circumstances and in coordination with the ASEAN "Plus Three" partners China, Japan and South Korea (Liow, 2017).

The ongoing debate about the growing power of Asian countries like China, India, Japan and the ASEAN countries, but also about the restoration of powers such as in the case of Russia, could encourage a more comprehensive debate about what these trends mean for international organisations generally and key organisations in particular. However, even if these emerging powers share a similar orientation, they show important differences in terms of the extent to which they wish to influence the current world order and their will and capability to do so. China has above all developed expansionist regional ambitions, as well as global ones through different global initiatives but, more importantly, it has the material prerequisites to support its endeavours in the international community by holding its new status of the world's second largest economy. While China supports the functioning of international organisations, it still seeks a different role for itself within them – one that reflects its growing economic clout – which empowers it in being more successful in its pursuit of a more active role in world affairs than the rest.

China and the UN

As we will see later on, studying China in its new position as a growing power in terms of its role and impact on international organisations may consider various examples that raise concern about China's military and political (pre)dominance (Brzezinski, 2009). To begin such a study by regarding the UN as the global centre for discussing war and peace might seem odd. Namely, China holds the right to veto all substantive decisions in the UN. The institutional status quo that guarantees China a say in high politics is unlikely to change in the near future. Nevertheless, it seems that China sees making decisions in the Security Council as just a chapter in a much bigger story, a story about activities for which the UN is particularly well known: peacekeeping. In the UN, the great powers are often kept out of directly contributing troops to the institutions designed to maintain international peace and security, since they are less likely to be seen as neutral in policies addressing the conflicts. Yet, the rapid rise of China's investment in peace and security initiatives around the world has attracted the

interest (and concern) of several scholars (Mearsheimer, 2014; Glaser, 2015; Krepinevich, 2015; Brown, 2017). They contend China has been challenging the strategic status quo, not only in terms of China's growing security interests in its own region but through multilateral security initiatives as well. To analyse these concerns, we shall look at China's newly acquired 'peacekeeper' identity and its positioning – whether to support or to withdraw its support – with respect to the UN's peacekeeping actions.

Transformation without notification: China's changing views on UN peacekeeping
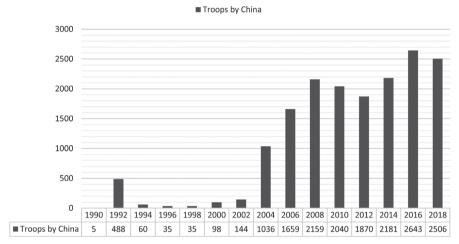
China used to be highly sceptical of the concept of UN peacekeeping throughout much of the Cold War. This scepticism finds its origins in the Korean War (1950–1953). From Beijing's perspective, the war was an aggressive military intervention under the UN flag and under US command (Neethling, 2015). China became a vocal supporter of the principle of non-interference and was against any cases of foreign intervention (ibid.).

With the end of the Cold War and China's rise as an economic and political power, all that has changed. In the mid-2000s, greater acceptance of participation in peacekeeping missions became a major component of Beijing's evolving "military operations other than war" policies (Lanteigne, 2018: 2). Whereas China had never participated in UN peacekeeping activity until 1989, when it joined the UN Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG) in Namibia, it had evolved to become the biggest contributor of troops – armed forces – to UN peacekeeping operations among the permanent members of the UNSC (Neethling, 2015: 8). Zhong and Wang (2006: 79–80) describe China's approach to UN peacekeeping before the 1990s as the "principle of three no's" – no voting, no financial contribution and no deployment. Since the 1990s, China has in total deployed 36,600 personnel on UN missions. As of September 2018, China contributes nearly 3% of the 89,986 UN peacekeepers deployed around the world (UN Peacekeeping, 2018).

In a recent speech (Xi, 2017), Chinese President Xi Jinping left no doubt about China's changing approach to UN peacekeeping. He announced China would create a standby UN contingent with 8,000 personnel, with the possibility of some forces being seconded by way of a rapid-response force (ibid.). In the same year, China also joined the UN's Peacekeeping Capability Readiness System and pledged a USD 1 billion UN Peace and Development Trust Fund for joint China-UN peace initiatives (Xinhua, 2017). What had seemed impossible not so long before had become a reality.

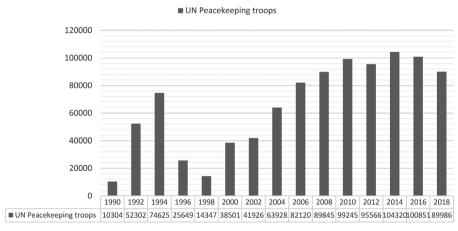*Table 1: UN PEACEKEEPING TROOPS CONTRIBUTED BY CHINA FROM 1990 ONWARDS*

Troops contributed by China 1990-2018

■ Troops by China

	1990	1992	1994	1996	1998	2000	2002	2004	2006	2008	2010	2012	2014	2016	2018
■ Troops by China	5	488	60	35	35	98	144	1036	1659	2159	2040	1870	2181	2643	2506

Source: UN Peacekeeping 2018.

Table 2: UN PEACEKEEPING TROOPS CONTRIBUTED OVERALL FROM 1990 ONWARDS

UN Peacekeeping troops overall contributions 1990-2018

■ UN Peacekeeping troops

	1990	1992	1994	1996	1998	2000	2002	2004	2006	2008	2010	2012	2014	2016	2018
■ UN Peacekeeping troops	10304	52302	74625	25649	14347	38501	41926	63928	82120	89845	99245	95566	104320	100851	89986

Source: UN Peacekeeping 2018.

On one hand, the USA, once a fervent supporter of UN peacekeeping, was calling for a drastic cut in its UN peacekeeping budget.

On the other hand, China lifted its annual contribution for UN peacekeeping operations from 3.9% in 2012 to 10.3% between 2016 and 2018, making China the second biggest financial contributor to the budget after the USA (Lanteigne, 2018: 2). The isolationist-driven retreat of Washington from financing UN peacekeeping operations opens the door in China's efforts to create a new image for itself as a leader in UN peacekeeping, a "teacher of peace, civilization, and might" (Pauley, 2018).

Table 3: TOP FIVE PROVIDERS OF ASSESSED CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE UN
PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS FOR SEPTEMBER 2018

United States	28.47%
China	10.25%
Japan	9.68%
France	6.39%
United Kingdom	6.28%

Source: UN Peacekeeping 2018.

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What then led to such a radical change in China's view on peacekeeping, one of the most recognisable (at times infamous) activities of the UN? Lanteigne (2018: 4) notes that China's commitment to peacekeeping activities in regions beyond its own periphery better prepares it to respond to non-traditional or hybrid security concerns such as terrorism, insurgency and weak or failed states. However, the Chinese interest and engagement in peacekeeping operations appear to entail a more nuanced, strategic interest within the existing system of UN peacekeeping operations. While China's interest in UN peace operations may well have something to do with a great power exercising its responsibility to maintain international peace and security, its primary interest was and still is to secure regional stability in one area that has become of special importance for Beijing – Africa.

Africa, UN peacekeeping and China

An important aspect of China's role in the region going beyond economic and development issues (Grimm, 2014; Heilmann et al., 2014; Eisenman and Heginbotham, 2018) is its engagement through the UN (Taylor, 2009; Hirono and Lanteigne, 2011; Alden, 2014). The most recent data show that in 2018 Chinese UN peacekeepers were deployed in eight different missions and operations in North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East. Most of its personnel in Africa were deployed on missions in South Sudan, Mali, Darfur and the Democratic Republic of Congo (UN Peacekeeping, 2018).

Table 4: CHINESE CONTRIBUTION TO UN PEACEKEEPING TROOPS BY LOCATION, MISSION AND NUMBER OF TROOPS IN SEPTEMBER 2018

	Location	Mission	No. of troops
Africa			
	Western Sahara	MINURSO	11
	Mali	MINUSMA	403
	Democratic Republic of Congo	MONUSCO	232
	Darfur	UNAMID	374
	South Sudan	UNMISS	1,057
Total			2,077
Other regions			
	Cyprus	UNFICYP	6
	Lebanon	UNIFIL	418
	Middle East (Jerusalem)	UNTSO	5
Total			429

Source: UN Peacekeeping 2018.

At least two factors help explain the connection between China's increasing interest in peacekeeping operations and its involvement in Africa. The first factor may be called ideological. China consistently distances itself from the West's record of colonial rule and exploitation. It often repeats statements underscoring its foreign policy of non-interference in the affairs of African states. The second factor is trade. China has joined the USA and the European Union (EU) in competing to establish trade partnerships with African countries. It is by no means clear which of these three players "is winning the competition" (Schneidman and Wiegert, 2018) although, unlike the EU and the USA, China relies much more on playing its UN card, especially its UN peacekeeping card. This sharply contradicts certain other aspects of the China's involvement in Africa. Consider arms trade, which features importantly in Chinese considerations of involvement in Africa. During the Cold War, China promoted Maoism with its limited arms sales, whereas the arms trade was dominated by the USA, the UK, France and Russia. Not anymore. According to Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) (2018), China's arms exports to Africa soared by 55% from 2013 to 2017 relative to the previous 5-year period from 2008 to 2012. Although Africa reduced its total arms imports by 22% during the same period, China's share in African supplies rose from 8.4% to 17% and, with this, China overtook the USA to become the world's second largest arms exporter to African countries.

However, arms sales do not necessarily go hand in hand with creating the stable and secure environment China needs for its economic initiatives

(Neethling, 2015; Lanteigne, 2018). As Allison (2015) puts it, "peace and security in Africa are suddenly in China's interests too". Herein comes the UN. The UN cannot do much if China does not adhere to the UN's arms embargos and sanctions against African states or their diplomatic isolation (as is often the case). But the UN (Charter) does not exclude China (nor any other state for that matter) from participating in international peacekeeping operations, irrespective of whether it agrees with an arms embargo against states in that particular conflict or not. Moreover, China can use its peacekeeping efforts as an important arm of its public diplomacy aimed at enhancing the country's legitimacy as a responsible stakeholder (Huang, 2013).

In its engagements in Africa, China does not rely solely on the UN and its peacekeeping operations. In order to establish and maintain international peace and security, China works actively with African regional and subregional organisations. China has consistently supported the positions taken by the African Union (AU) in the UN Security Council and other UN institutions. In 2003, China announced through its FOCAC (Forum on China-Africa Cooperation) action plan that "/w/e are resolved to step up cooperation and work together to support an even greater role of the UN, the AU and other sub-regional organisations in Africa [It promised to] provide, within the limits of its capabilities, financial and material assistance as well as relevant training to the Peace and Security Council of the African Union" (Conteh-Morgan and Weeks, 2016: 93). In 2010, China's Ambassador to the UN Zhang Yesui started a debate on cooperation between the UN and the regional and subregional organisations in maintaining international peace and security (Permanent Mission of the People's Republic of China to the UN, 2010) with the address stating that:

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> The African Union and sub-regional organizations in Africa have been committed to resolving hotspot issues in Africa through good offices and peacekeeping operations, but their efforts are constrained due to deficiencies in funding and capacity building. We support the establishment and deepening of the strategic partnership between the United Nations and the African Union in maintaining peace and security in Africa.

During its presidency of the UNSC in July 2017, China organised a further debate focused on enhancing the AU's capabilities in the areas of peace and security and is "one of the strong advocates for strategic, systematized and institutionalized partnership between the UNSC and AU Peace and Security Council" (Gebrehiwot and Demissie, 2018). Looking at the AU Peace Fund that was created in 1993 to enhance the institutions' ability to resolve African conflict, in 2014 China pledged it would provide USD 100 million in assistance to the AU over the next 5 years to help support putting

the African Peace and Security Architecture into operation so as to increase its capacity to respond to crises (Huang, 2017).

China, therefore, puts considerable emphasis on regional security arrangements that reduce pressure to create a peacekeeping mission under the UN mandate. Pursuant to the UN Charter, the UNSC's primary responsibility is to maintain international peace and security but, when it comes to the regional level, the AU is an important partner. The involvement of regional arrangements is not only allowed by the UN Charter (Chapter VIII), it is encouraged by the UN itself. In fact, from the UN's perspective, whether China instrumentalises regional arrangements for its own gains or not seems not so important so long as the goals of achieving peace and security in Africa are accomplished.

China and other international organisations

China's interest in obtaining a bigger role in the decision-making of international organisations regarded by China as being of vital importance does not end with the UN. Unlike the unsuccessful AMF project, the Asian Investment and Infrastructure Bank (AIIB), which began operating in 2015, has quickly become an important player in international affairs. Not only due to its 'official' role in financing the vital Chinese development strategy (Belt and Road Initiative), the AIIB may also be seen as a consequence of the World Bank's (WB) inability to adapt to changes occurring in world economics since 1989, although the WB did make some concessions. Nevertheless, these small reforms were not enough and, unlike the AMF which had been proposed by the American ally Japan, the AIIB project was initiated by China. The WB and the AIIB have important similarities. They are both development banks. Just like the USA is the main contributor and holds a right of veto in the WB due to its almost hegemonic power in the post-world-war period, China, an indisputable superpower today, is the biggest contributor and holds veto power in the AIIB.

The discussion concerning the impact the AIIB may bring for international politics has already begun. It seems that experts look at the AIIB in a much more positive way than American politicians. Stiglitz, for example, attributes this to their fear of "America's insecurity about its global influence". He warns that antagonising the AIIB could negatively impact the USA since it would become seen as a country that undermines "an important opportunity to strengthen Asia's developing economies" (Stiglitz, 2015). Moreover, he argues, the AIIB "replicates American policy in the period following World War II, when the WB was founded to multilaterize development funds that were overwhelmingly coming from the US" (ibid.)

The balancing of power may even impact the membership logic (if not the rules) in international organisations, especially where the context and rationale for their existence change dramatically. The geopolitical dynamics in the Arctic is a good illustration of the point. We know that global warming is causing the northern polar ice to melt, creating new opportunities such as introducing new shipping routes, fishing, and exploiting deposits of oil, gas and minerals (Eliasson, et al., 2017). Countries that shape arctic policies are gathered in the Arctic Council. They are Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden and the USA. This 'exclusive club' is by no means unified as several territorial disputes still need to be resolved (Byers, 2010). Meanwhile, China has focused on the Arctic as an area of particular strategic interest, forcing member states of the Arctic Council to respond. After some lobbying, China was able to garner the support of certain members (like Denmark and Sweden; the USA was the least enthusiastic about the idea) and was eventually given the status of observer in 2013 (Charron, 2014: 1). It is unlikely that China will ever become a member of the Arctic Council, but this does not prevent it exercising an indirect influence on the region by investing in it; the new 'proximity' to the Arctic Council arguably increases its legitimacy as a player there. One has yet to see whether China will become tempted to leverage its investments against (smaller) members of the Arctic Council and whether this could lead to the 'unexpected' behaviour of these countries in the organisation's decision-making processes (Rosenthal, 2012). In any case, the tale of the Arctic Council sends a clear message. As a superpower, China does not need to be an Arctic state to exercise and realise its interests in Arctic resources.

The ascendancy of new powers might also affect the normative foundations of international organisations. China's attitude to human rights is a case in point. China is a party to all relevant human rights conventions and treaties. This has had little effect on its human rights record, which has always been considered poor. Yet, as China's power grows, this record appears to be less and less important. Moreover, the Chinese pattern of investment, in particular in the developing world, which it is not made conditional on adherence to 'universal' norms and values such as respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, undermines those very norms at both the regional and global level. "In the past, the Western world lectured China extensively about its poor human rights record, for detaining dissenters and silencing free speech... [Now], China's foreign position on human rights outweighs the world's concern for China's domestic human rights" (Bass, 2011: 81). This is evidently bad news for any effort of any international organisation (with or without China as a member) to establish human rights as a universal norm.

Be that as it may, any reluctance to give China (and indeed other emerging powers) an appropriate voice in international organisations is counter-productive.

From the start of the twenty-first century, China has demonstrated growing confidence in its interactions with the global community. This has resulted in the increased use of international institutions as a means of developing and enhancing Chinese power in the international system. Therefore, to understand the dynamics of China as a great power, and as a future global power in the areas of politics, economics, and military capability one must begin with the variable of China's cooperation with international institutions (Lanteigne, 2005: 143) (O'Neill, 2015).

Conclusion

The end of the Cold War marked yet another change in the balance of power. Since 1989, China has been rapidly catching up with the developed countries, eventually acquiring the status of a great power second only to the USA – thereby attracting interest and attention on all levels, from different perspectives. In contrast to previous centuries, however, in the modern globalised world international organisations have begun to play an important role and the changing balance of power has in turn affected them as well. As the practice of the League of Nations suggests, the then great powers required international organisations to immediately adapt to the altered political circumstances. Failure to do so resulted in the withdrawal of membership. But this was not the case after the end of the Cold War, which was the first serious challenge to the existing international order since being established in 1945. Instead, the emerging new powers have either (tried to) set up competing institutions, more resolutely defended their interests within existing organisations, or 'tailored' their mandates to suit particular national interests. In other words, for the emerging powers, withdrawal from international organisations does not seem an option. Other ways and means have proven valuable for pursuing one's interests within the existing international institutional infrastructure.

This certainly applies to China. Just because its role in the WB's decision-making process does not reflect its actual economic power, China has not left the organisation. On the contrary, it is still a member and has even gained some more influence with the WB and IMF while also establishing the competing AIIB. This move upset US politicians who became worried by China's growing influence in the Asian region. However, as Stiglitz notes, China's AIIB in fact contributes to world stability by offering more opportunities for countries across the region to develop. The same can be said about China's role in Africa. In contrast to the strategically important Arctic, where

as an observer China cannot co-decide on the Arctic Council on issues (in) directly relating to exploitation of the natural resources and the use of transport routes, and therefore can only participate in research and investment in individual member states of the Council (hoping that it will thereby gain support from some of them for Chinese interests in the Arctic), China does not come to Africa merely as an investor. It is strengthening its presence through other means as well, such as the UN.

The USA has since the 1980s pushed the UN to adapt, mostly in the direction of administrative reform and financial cuts; it has shown little interest in investing in UN peacekeeping. As a newly emerging power, however, China is behaving differently. Of course, the changes since the Cold War have not altered its relative position towards the UN. After all, like the USA, China retains its veto power with which it controls every initiative to bring any big change to the organisation. Yet, unlike the UN-sceptic USA, China is looking for opportunities in the UN. It has found one with peacekeeping operations. It has increased the number of troops it provides for UN peacekeeping, making steady rises from 2004 on. China has pledged more money to the UN Peace and Development Trust Fund. It has doubled its annual contributions for UN peacekeeping operations. However, these contributions are driven by a particular motivation from Beijing. Namely, China places considerable importance on peacekeeping in Africa where it tries to distance itself from the West by emphasising its 'stick-free' approach to dealing with African countries based on the principle of non-interference in internal affairs. Yet, similarly to the West, it is maintaining its trade gains in the region. China also shows strong support for working through regional and sub-regional institutions in Africa, assisting the African Union in particular. This reveals that China is using the UN's instruments (such as the regional arrangements of Chapter VIII): it is not working against the international peacekeeping system but, through it, adapting it to suit its own goals.

By referring to China's role in UN peacekeeping operations in Africa and in cooperation with African regional organisations, we may conclude that China is successfully connecting its economic and political interests with the UN's most important aim under its Charter: to maintain international peace and security. This approach brings multiplicative effects. In addition to economic and political benefits, China's active presence in UN peacekeeping allows it to 'compensate' for the normative criticism made at its expense, especially concerning violations of human rights. The latter is also an issue in Africa, yet what African states need most at this point is political stability and investment in their economies. In this respect, China makes a perfect partner since its focus in Africa is primarily on the accomplishment of peace and security in African states, followed by engaging in investments and development projects.

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The focus of this article has been on China as the most important rising power since the Cold War. The responses to the post-Cold war environment of other new powers, but also the existing ones, would also warrant a special research effort. For example, the USA, the 'incumbent' super power, has for decades shown its dissatisfaction with the institutional design that its own planners helped create in the 1940s. It all began during the 1980s when the USA started to push for UN reform (Kilgore, 1986), and when the United Kingdom and the USA left UNESCO (Gwertzman, 1983). Not much has changed since the conclusion of the Cold War. The USA returned to UNESCO in 2002 but left again in 2017. It recently withdrew from the Human Rights Council and has declared its intention to withdraw from the Universal Postal Union (UN News, 2018). The strategy of an 'incumbent' power withdrawing from global institutions juxtaposed against the strategy of an ascending power to adapt to them may well be a topic worth exploring in the future.

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