

HUMAN SECURITY AND CHINA'S EVOLVING FOREIGN POLICY

Gabriele Andolina

During his September 2015 visit to the United States, Chinese president Xi Jinping announced China's decision to contribute more money and troops to support United Nations peacekeeping operations. China intends to create a permanent peacekeeping force of 8,000 troops, provide USD 100 million to the African Union and USD 1 billion to the United Nations for a peace and development fund.

China's contribution can be better understood if seen through the lens of Great Power Management/Responsibility (GPM/GPR). The concept of GPM/GPR has come to play an important role in international relations, building on the idea that great powers have the responsibility to preserve international order. China, now the second economic power in the world, as well as one of the key players on the international political stage, has long been under pressure to take on a more active role in tackling and solving international issues, especially those related to human security. It is encouraging to note that in recent years China appears to

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Dr. Cui Shunji discusses China's human security-oriented foreign policy at the 2nd Italian Lecture Corner, Zhejiang University, Hangzhou, China



have risen to this challenge, as demonstrated by Beijing's efforts in contributing to the fight against the Ebola crisis.

This particular instance has been analysed in depth by **Dr. Cui Shunji**, who led the discussion at the **2nd Italian Lecture Corner, held in Hangzhou and organized by Zhejiang University's Center for Italian Studies, a partner of the TOChina System**. While studies on China's foreign policy have traditionally focussed on issues such as Beijing's stance in the South and East China Seas, China's military build-up, and tensions in its relations with the U.S, growing Chinese engagement in international efforts to tackle human security threats is often overlooked. With regard to the Ebola crisis, in particular, China provided help in terms of financial aid, distribution of equipment and dispatching of personnel. By December 2014, China had offered aid to 13 countries in Africa amounting to USD 123 million, coupled with relief goods such as personal protective equipment, food, medicines and a mobile biosafety lab in Sierra Leone. Alongside material support, hundreds of Chinese medical personnel were dispatched to Africa, in an effort to provide medical aid and training to the populations of the Ebola-stricken countries. China has cooperated with the United States, United Kingdom, France, Japan and South-Korea in the joint battle against Ebola.

In analysing this particular aspect of Beijing's foreign policy, China-watchers can find a wealth of elements deserving closer attention. Sceptics might argue that China's involvement in human security issues is actually a cover for furthering its economic interests, since Africa has long represented a major business opportunity for Chinese companies and entrepreneurs. It is certainly difficult to define where the line lies between genuine engagement for humanitarian and ethical reasons and opportunistic involvement for ulterior motives. Nonetheless, China's increasing participation in human security operations has the potential to allow it to gain credit and recognition as a responsible power, while facilitating hitherto problematic relations

with non-state actors, such as international NGOs. This, in turn, might positively affect China's own civil society, whose space for collective action is severely constrained at home.

Crucially, in keeping with Beijing's fundamental foreign policy posture, China's growing engagement in human security issues globally does not – and cannot – entail involvement in other nations' internal affairs to the point where the Chinese presence can be mistaken as interference in domestic politics. China's more responsible approach in terms of GPR, therefore, must still be balanced by – and understood within – its traditional foreign policy parameters. In an international system where there is no supreme entity that is able to define what "responsibility" really means, Beijing faces the dual challenge of shaping the discourse on "responsibility" while earning the necessary credibility to do so by striking an effective balance between engagement on the

ground and adherence to its long-standing Westphalian approach to state sovereignty.

Humanitarian concerns are a relatively recent trait of China's foreign policy. Research in the field is growing, as the government appears to be open

to increasing Chinese engagement at the international level. The road ahead, however, is long and treacherous, as Beijing develops its capacity to properly assess human security needs abroad and devise adequate protocols to address them. The next decade will tell us how China's human security-oriented foreign policy will evolve, and to what extent China itself will be transformed by this quest to consolidate its profile as a responsible global power.

Gabriele Andolina is the Acting Director of Zhejiang University's Center for Italian Studies (Hangzhou), a partner of the TOChina System.

 cn.linkedin.com/in/gabrieleandolina



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