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Received:

October 23, 2024

Approved:

December 12, 2025

Corrected:

September 21, 2026

DOI: 10.1590/1981-

3821202600020006

Data replication:

<https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/YJREI4>

Financing:

Coordenação de
Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal
de Nível Superior - National
Postdoctoral Program
(PNPD); Universidade do
Estado do Rio de Janeiro -
Programa de Incentivo à
Produção Científica, Técnica e
Artística - PROCIÊNCIA.

Note 1:

This article was presented at
the 14th Meeting of the
Brazilian Political Science
Association (ABCP) and
received the award for best
paper in the 'International
Politics' subfield.

Note 2:

This article has an erratum.

DOI: [10.1590/1981-](https://doi.org/10.1590/1981-3821202600020009)

[3821202600020009](https://doi.org/10.1590/1981-3821202600020009)

Associate editors:

Carlos Milani

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Responsibility and Resources: The Political Economy of Chinese Deployment to UN Peacekeeping Operations

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Abstract: The People's Republic of China (PRC) military footprint is expanding globally, and one of the most notable examples of its contribution to international security is its involvement in United Nations (UN) peacekeeping operations. By examining Chinese deployments to these missions, this article seeks to contribute to understanding the political economy of China's expanding global military presence. Is China a responsible power or a self-interested, resource-seeking actor in the peacekeeping regime? Relying on an original dataset, the article presents an empirical strategy based on statistical analysis to evaluate both hypotheses, covering more than 30 years of Chinese involvement in UN peacekeeping operations. Economic indicators such as GDP and trade flows are used as independent variables. Although bivariate analysis shows that China's GDP is strongly associated with personnel deployments, multivariate regression models show that the economic growth of host countries and commodity exports to China are also significant explanatory factors. On the other hand, total exports from host countries are not statistically significant and exhibit a negative, counter-intuitive relationship across all models. In addition to presenting these and other findings, the article offers a brief discussion of their implications.

Keywords: China; United Nations; Peacekeeping; Africa.



Introduction

Is China a self-interested, resource-seeking actor or a responsible power in the peacekeeping regime? Or perhaps both? The military footprint of the People's Republic of China (PRC) is expanding globally, though not yet in proportion to the country's economic prominence and diplomatic engagement worldwide. Nevertheless, it is not surprising that the principal emerging power of the post-Cold War era has undertaken a sustained process of military modernization. China's power-projection capabilities are well developed, including cyber warfare, its space program, and intercontinental ballistic missiles; moreover, the country possesses nuclear weapons.

Even so, although military activity and the construction of military installations in China's immediate neighborhood have expanded recently, this trend has not been mirrored in the deployment or stationing of armed forces beyond the Asia-Pacific region (SCOBELL, 2023). Notable exceptions include anti-piracy escort missions and patrols, joint exercises with foreign navies and armed forces, disaster relief operations, and United Nations (UN) peacekeeping operations (PKOs). In fact, China's global security presence beyond Asia is steadily expanding primarily through multilateral initiatives and activities associated with 'non-traditional security'.

In a nutshell, Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW) constitute a key driver of China's expanding global security presence. In this regard, as Shambaugh observes, "perhaps the most noteworthy example of China's contributions to international security comes via its contributions to UNPKOs" (SHAMBAUGH, 2013, p. 216). By examining China's involvement in these operations in greater detail, this study seeks to advance understanding of the political economy underpinning China's expanding global military presence.

Analysts have identified numerous factors that help explain China's decision to contribute to specific missions, such as safeguarding trade flows and investments, protecting Chinese citizens in conflict zones, enhancing the armed forces' operational capabilities, identity-related considerations, compliance with multilateral norms, among others. (HELLSTRÖM, 2009). Overall, this article further examines two hypotheses derived from the literature: 01. China's engagement in UN peace operations serves primarily to protect its overseas interests, particularly the flow of energy resources and raw materials; 02. China deploys troops because, as a major power that has attained high levels of development and expanded material capabilities, it seeks to fulfill and honor its responsibilities.

This first line of argument is particularly prevalent in Western think tanks and media outlets. A Brookings Institution report, for instance, asserts that diplomats and analysts worry that China (...) use[s] blue helmet mission to prop up pro-Beijing leaders in Africa" and, that "Chinese officials have linked their deployments to the need

to protect the country's citizens and investments" on the continent, which is home to the majority of Chinese peacekeepers (GOWAN, 2020, pp. 03 and 07).

When China announced that it would deploy an infantry battalion to South Sudan, both The Guardian and The Wall Street Journal published pieces linking the decision to oil-related interests (BARIYO, 2014; SMITH, 2014).

The second hypothesis relates to how China seeks to portray itself as a responsible power. This narrative forms part of an official foreign policy discourse aimed at mitigating perceptions of a 'Chinese threat' and reinforcing the rhetoric of peaceful development (RICHARDSON, 2011). An editorial from the 'South China Morning Post', for example, notes that "widening participation will reassure others that China is a responsible power, while furthering international understanding and respect" (SCMP, 2014). Consistent with this interpretation, China deployed combat troops to Mali in 2013, even though the country is not among its major trading partners in Africa. This case suggests Beijing's willingness to move beyond what has been described as 'resource diplomacy' (LANTEIGNE, 2019).

Despite growing scholarly interest in the subject, "the literature is still missing a theoretically informed and rigorously tested analysis to address what combination of factors explain China's deployment, with most studies favoring a historical narrative approach" (FUNG, 2016, p. 02). This article seeks to address this gap by assessing the two aforementioned hypotheses through an empirical approach. To this end, economic indicators are employed, as discussed below. Both hypotheses point to a close relationship between economic factors and peacekeeping, whether by linking (under)development and security to China's identity as a 'peacebuilder' or simply because maintaining peace and security in conflict-affected areas is important given China's economic assets and citizens present in these contexts (LANTEIGNE, 2018; ZHENG, 2017).

In addition to refining the conceptual framework by proposing new ways of operationalizing both the dependent and independent variables, this study draws on the largest dataset assembled on the topic to date. Through this effort, the statistical analysis conducted here seeks to provide an answer to the research question guiding this investigation. Preliminary findings indicate that China's economic growth, a domestic-level variable, emerges as a significant predictor of its participation in UN peace operations. Furthermore, the economic performance of host countries and their exports of primary commodities also appear as statistically significant explanatory factors.

In this regard, patterns of economic development and trade flows appear to play a central role in shaping China's engagement in peacekeeping operations. However, these findings should not be interpreted as definitive conclusions. Accordingly, this article seeks to explore complementary dimensions of the political economy

underlying China's expanding global military footprint, such as the strategic use of PKOs as instruments of influence and the central role of the African continent in this broader process.

In addition to this introduction, the article is organized into five sections. First, I present descriptive data on Chinese deployments to PKOs, along a brief review of the recent literature. Next, I assess the (few) existing quantitative studies on the subject, focusing on the empirical strategies adopted by these authors and the limitations of their findings. Subsequently, I outline the research design, particularly the procedures for variable selection, measurement strategies, the methods employed, and the hypotheses tested. The following section presents and discusses the empirical findings. Finally, the article concludes with remarks and suggestions for future research.

China in the peacekeeping regime: facts and theories

The journey of the PRC as a peacekeeping state officially began in April 1990, when five military observers were dispatched to the Middle East. Two years later, the country deployed its first formed military unit: An engineer contingent of 400 troops to the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC). Over the course of the 21st century, China became the largest contributor of personnel among the five permanent members (P5) of the Security Council and the second-largest financial contributor to the peacekeeping budget.

Following two small deployments of combat troops in 2012 and 2013, China deployed its first full infantry battalion to a UN mission (in South Sudan) in 2015, signaling a new, proactive, and more conflict-engaged profile in the peacekeeping regime. That same year, China dispatched its highest number of peacekeepers on record: 3,045 troops. As of 2024, this level has never been reached again, with 2,644 peacekeepers in 2017 marking the subsequent peak.

This growing engagement has been accompanied by a profound institutional transformation in China's peacekeeping apparatus. The establishment of a standing peacekeeping force of 8,000 troops, equipped with specialized units and supported by advanced training centers, reflects Beijing's effort to professionalize its participation and to align operational standards with UN expectations. This development also signals China's aspiration to play a more prominent normative and agenda-setting role within the UN peacekeeping architecture (ZÜRCHER, 2019).

The total number of troops in UN peacekeeping operations has increased considerably since the 2000s, but this growth in contributions has not been uniform across participating countries. African and Asian states, in particular, have been primarily responsible for driving this upward trend. Indeed, countries from Africa, Asia, and Latin America provide over 90% of the military and police personnel deployed in

UN peace operations, yet account for only about 15% of the peacekeeping budget – an amount notably inflated by China’s financial contribution (WEISS and KUELE, 2019). Among the P5, China was the only country to have increased its troop deployments over this period. Moreover, Chinese deployments exhibit a distinctive pattern when compared with those of other countries.

Between 1990 and 2024, according to the dataset employed in this study (described in detail below), the African continent received approximately 80% of all Chinese personnel deployed to PKOs, whereas the average share of troop contributions to Africa by all UN member states (including China) was 68.6% over the same period. Japan’s contributions, for example, have been primarily directed toward operations in Asia, with Africa accounting for less than half of its deployment. In this regard, “the fact that China has been widely active in Africa is not a simple result of the high demand for peacekeeping forces in that continent, therefore, but results from a deliberate intention in that direction on the part of the supply side” (MATSUDA, 2016, p. 62).

Graph 01 presents China’s largest contributions to PKOs¹. On average, the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) is the operation that received the largest share of Chinese personnel over the past three decades, with a mean deployment of 861.93 troops, corresponding to 6.46% of the mission’s average total contingent (13,073.71 personnel). Chinese troop contributions to South Sudan began in 2011, the same year the country gained independence. Since the deployment of the infantry battalion, UNMISS has accounted, on average, for 37.5% of all Chinese personnel assigned to these operations. In 2019, China deployed 1080 troops to UNMISS, the highest annual deployment to a single mission recorded in the period analyzed.

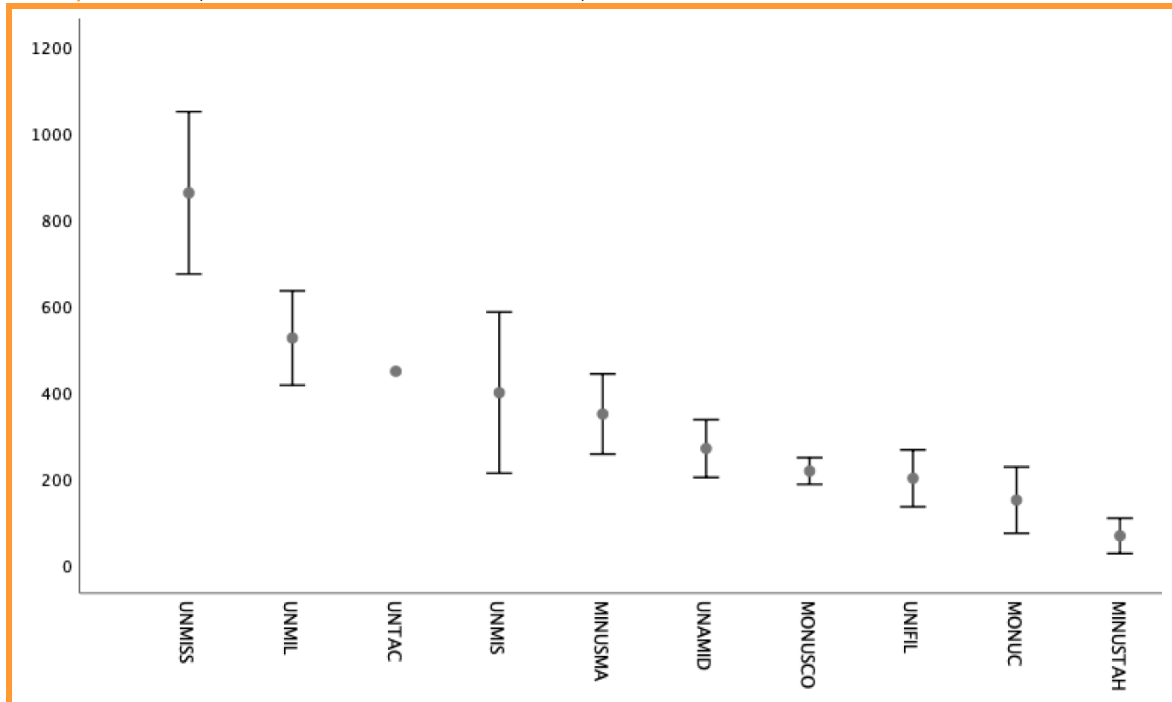
Following UNMISS, the missions in Liberia (UNMIL), Sudan (UNMIS), and Mali (MINUSMA) have received the largest number of Chinese troops. Although Cambodia received the third-largest contribution, this case constitutes a clear outlier, as the mission lasted just over one year (March/1992 – September/1993), during which China deployed 448 troops. In the case of Sudan, the mission in the Darfur region (UNAMID) also deserves mention. Overall, seven countries emerge as the primary destinations for Chinese personnel deployed to PKOs. In addition to the five countries mentioned above, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO and MONUC) and Lebanon (UNIFIL) complete this ranking. By contrast, the number of Chinese personnel involved in Haiti (MINUSTAH) is considerably lower compared to the other cases: the maximum annual deployment was 143 peacekeepers in 2008, with an overall mean of 66.23 troops – equivalent to an average of 0.76% of the mission’s total contingent.

Having briefly observed some data, the next step is to discuss the determinants of deployment. Beyond the case of China, the specialized literature identifies a wide range of explanations for why states contribute to PKOs, spanning from normative

¹Approximated figures based on data for December of each year.

commitments to strategic calculations. At least five main motivations for troop deployments can be identified: political, economic, security, institutional, and normative factors (BELLAMY and WILLIAMS, 2013).

Graph 01. Top 10 destinations of Chinese personnel in UNPKOs (1990-2024)



Source: Elaborated by the author based on data from Peacekeeping (2025).

Some studies point to instrumental motivations for peacekeeping contributions, such as geopolitical interests, access to resources, trade routes, alliance maintenance, and regional influence. Regional dynamics, for example, have shaped African deployments since 2013 and South American involvement in Haiti (WEISS and KUELE, 2019), while states facing rivalries or coup threats may use peacekeeping deployments as a means of managing security risks (KATHMAN and MELIN, 2017). Economic and institutional incentives also matter: contributors to UN missions often respond to financial incentives and may display free-riding behavior, whereas participation in non-UN missions is more strongly associated with motivations related to the provision of public goods (GAIBULLOEV et al., 2015).

Although general support for the UN shapes predispositions, actual troop contributions depend on specific policy choices and contextual factors, meaning that even skeptical states may participate under certain conditions (BELLAMY and WILLIAMS, 2012). National interests strongly influence both the design and politics of UN missions, which may vary considerably despite operating within shared institutional frameworks. As deployments become more hazardous, political contestation tends to intensify. Against this backdrop, China emerges as a particularly illustrative case of how both symbolic narratives and strategic calculations inform peacekeeping behavior.

According to the official discourse, four main reasons are advanced to explain why the PRC's armed forces participate in PKOs. The claim that the pursuit of peace is embedded in the genes of the Chinese nation; the assertion that the Chinese people are committed to the well-being of humanity; the principle that serving the people constitutes the fundamental purpose of the people's armed forces; and the view that China honors its responsibilities as a major power (PRC, 2020). In contrast, the academic literature emphasizes four distinct explanatory categories: the protection of China's overseas interests; the acquisition of operational experience; the securing of reputational benefits; and addressing identity-related concerns (FUNG, 2016). In short, both identity-related and material factors matter.

In this context, China's evolving posture in peacekeeping embodies an emerging ideational shift. Rather than adhering to the liberal peacebuilding model dominant in Western practice, Beijing promotes a vision of 'developmental peace' that prioritizes stability through economic growth, state capacity, and gradual reform. This alternative approach, sometimes framed as 'peace-through-development', underscores China's preference for sovereignty and non-interference while offering a counterpoint to liberal peace narratives – although this framing remains more of a rhetorical trope than a fully articulated and coherent model (ZÜRCHER, 2019).

China's participation in UN peacekeeping can also be interpreted through a pragmatic lens. In this regard, states may deploy troops to manage the externalities of conflicts affecting neighboring countries or strategic partners, such as instability, arms flows, and risks to trade or investments. Accordingly, China's engagement in African missions reflects an effort to protect its economic interests in politically fragile environments, as seen in the emphasis placed on safeguarding infrastructure and resource extraction sites (UZONYI, 2020). This behavior corresponds to a broader pattern among the P5, for whom peacekeeping may serve as an instrument to advance distinct strategic and economic agendas (DUARTE, SILVA and CARVALHO, 2022).

Contemporary scholarship has evolved considerably, encompassing analyses of China's behavior in the Security Council, its idiosyncrasies on issues such as liberal peacebuilding, human protection, and regime change, as well as the implications of its increasingly combat-oriented profile (ALDEN and LARGE, 2015; FOOT, 2020; FUNG, 2019; HIRONO, JIANG and LANTEIGNE, 2019; WUTHNOW, 2013). Numerous case studies have also been conducted, including analyses of Chinese engagement in Cambodia, Liberia, Mali, Sudan, and South Sudan, to cite a few (CABESTAN, 2018; HIRONO, 2011; LARGE, 2018; MOUMOUNI, 2018).

On the other hand, the literature contains comparatively few empirical studies based on statistical models. In short, a robust and rigorously conducted quantitative analysis remains lacking. In particular, the limited number of quantitative studies conducted to date has produced mixed findings. Furthermore, these studies do not cover the more

recent period marked by a substantial increase in the deployment of Chinese personnel. The next section devotes attention to these issues

Assessment of existing quantitative studies

To date, three empirical studies have applied multivariate statistical models to evaluate the explanatory impact of selected variables on Chinese deployments to PKOs (LAWSON, 2011; LIN-GREENBERG, 2009; ZHOU, 2013). All three identify several obstacles to drawing robust inferences from the available data, including endogeneity and insufficient sample size. Accordingly, the regression results reported in these studies should be interpreted with caution. Before proceeding, however, it is necessary to examine the measurement strategies adopted by these authors and their limitations.

All three studies operationalized the dependent variable (DV) in more than one way. A dichotomous measure (01 or 0) was the only specification employed by all authors. The three studies also operationalized the DV as a percentage, measuring Chinese deployments either in relation to the duration of the mission (LIN-GREENBERG, 2009) or relative to other countries' personnel contributions to the same operation (LAWSON, 2011; ZHOU (2013). Finally, one author (ZHOU, 2013) also measured Chinese contributions in absolute terms (a discrete variable), selecting the peak month, given that the number of Chinese peacekeepers in a UNPKO varies from month to month within a given year. Table 01 summarizes these measurement strategies.

Table 01. Operationalizations of the dependent variable in previous statistical analyses of Chinese deployment to PKOs

	Lin-Greenberg (2009)	Lawson (2011)	Zhou (2013)
Binary (participation or no participation)	X	X	X
% of Chinese personnel in a PKO (divided by the total UN peacekeepers from all countries)		X	X
% of Chinese personnel in a PKO (divided by the length of the mission, defined as the total number of months the mission was active)	X		
Absolute number of Chinese personnel in a PKO (peak month of the year)			X

Source: Elaborated by the author.

At least two problems merit attention here. First, the dichotomous measure does not capture important variations over time nor the magnitude of the Chinese presence across different missions. Second, in the specific case of Lawson (2011), the UN Department of PKOs had not yet made publicly available online reports detailing each

country's annual contributions prior to 2000 at the time the study was conducted. Therefore, the author relied on estimates based on average annual UN contributions. This limitation no longer applies, since the relevant data are available. These studies employed correlations, logistic regression models, and Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression. We will briefly review their findings after describing the explanatory factors.

Across the three studies, seven independent variables were employed, with bilateral trade being the only variable common to all (see Table 02). Strategic commodities were included by two authors, measured either through proven reserves of oil and gas (LIN-GREENBERG, 2009) or through Chinese imports of raw materials and energy resources (LAWSON, 2011). The remaining five variables were: geographic distance; overseas Chinese population; responsible power; the new security doctrine; and type of the conflict (territorial issues or otherwise). The last two variables are dichotomous.

President Hu Jintao introduced the new doctrine of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in late 2004, signaling a commitment to uphold world peace and a deliberate mission to safeguard China's expanding national interests. Accordingly, all missions that had not ended by the close of 2004 or that were initiated after December 31, 2004 were coded as 01, and '0' otherwise. In turn, the 'responsible power' variable was operationalized using the aggregate number of battle-related deaths recorded one year prior to the start of the operation or to the onset of China's participation. In fact, all authors employed lagged measures for the independent variables (one, three, or five years).

Table 02. Explanatory variables used in previous statistical analyses of Chinese deployments to PKOs

	Lin-Greenberg (2009)	Lawson 2011)	Zhou (2013)
Bilateral trade	X	X	X
Strategic commodities (proven reserves of oil and gas)	X		
Strategic commodities (Imports of raw materials and energy resources)		X	
Geographic distance	X		
Overseas Chinese population	X		
Responsible Power			X
New Security Doctrine			X
Type of conflict			X

Source: Elaborated by the author.

The results reported by Lin-Greenberg (2009) and Lawson (2011) indicate that the trade variable was the only one with substantive coefficients in almost all the models. Nevertheless, two of Lawson's models (2011) showed a negative and counter-intuitive relationship between trade and Chinese involvement in PKOs. In the same study, as

shown, strategic commodities were operationalized as exports of raw materials and energy resources, yielding a moderate and statistically significant relationship only for the former. Lin-Greenberg (2009), in turn, measured these commodities through oil and gas reserves and found a negative coefficient, representing another theoretically contradictory result.

In turn, Zhou (2013) found a statistically significant relationship for the trade variable in only one out of four regressions, while three models indicated a negative relationship with China's participation in peacekeeping missions. The same study also found no statistically significant effect for the 'responsible power' variable. Zhou's (2013) main finding concerns the relevance of the new PLA security doctrine as an explanatory factor. This shift in the contemporary profile of Chinese contributions was also highlighted by Lin-Greenberg (2009) through a medium-n comparative analysis.

In sum, all three authors claim that their evidence corroborates the resource-seeking hypothesis. A brief look at their abstracts is revealing. Lin-Greenberg's thesis "finds that China's participation in peace operations after 2000 is guided by a realist motivation that seeks to maximize access to commercial and diplomatic interests, with higher levels of participation in states with high strategic values" (LIN-GREENBERG, 2009, p. 03). Lawson's results "suggest that China, on average, is more likely to participate in UNPKOs hosted by nations with which it already maintains a strong trading relationship" (LAWSON, 2011, p. iv). Finally, Zhou's "statistical results show that (...) China appears primarily to be a self-interested actor as to peacekeeping" (ZHOU, 2013, p. 31).

Nevertheless, the findings produced by these multivariate statistical analyses, despite revealing some interesting general associations between variables, suggest that it remains very difficult to infer a broader underlying logic in China's decision-making process. Several model specifications yielded counterintuitive results. Thus, flexibility seems to guide this dimension of the country's international projection. However, as China's contribution to peace operations has increased significantly since the most recent empirical study was published, an updated dataset may reveal new trends. An appropriate empirical strategy should therefore explore this extended time period and incorporate additional explanatory variables.

Data, hypotheses, and methods

To test whether China behaves as a responsible actor, a self-interested resource-seeking actor, or both when deploying personnel to PKOs, this study adopts an empirical strategy combining descriptive statistics and regression models. The period analyzed spans from 1990 to 2024.

Following the strategy adopted by Montenegro (2021), the dependent variable (personnel contribution) is operationalized in four different ways: 01. contribution per

mission, including missions in which China did not participate; 02. total annual contribution; 03. contribution relative to the total mission contingent; and 04. contribution to a given mission relative to the total personnel deployed by China across all missions in a given year. Table 03 presents these measures, along with the corresponding variable labels. All data were collected from the United Nations Department of Peace Operations (DPO) website. To ensure variance, binary values were not used.

Table 03. Different measures of the dependent variable

Variable	Measurement
CTB_num	Personnel contribution per mission-year
TOT_CHN	$\sum$ CTB_num per year
CTB_perc_mission	% of Chinese contribution in a given mission-year relative to the total contingent of the mission
CTB_perc_CHN	% of Chinese contribution in a given mission-year relative to TOT_CHN

Source: MONTENEGRO, 2021, p. 409.

As for the independent variables, all are unprecedented in empirical studies. These variables were grouped in two clusters comprising potential indicators for evaluating both the ‘resource-seeking’ and the ‘responsibility’ hypotheses.

The ‘responsible power’ cluster includes two explanatory variables. One of these is China’s GDP. The relationship between economic growth and the provision of global public goods is evident in the PRC’s official rhetoric. Put simply, as China’s GDP increases, its personnel contributions to UNPKOs are also expected to increase (JIANG, 2000). In this regard, a White Paper on Peaceful Development claims that “China should develop itself through upholding world peace and contribute to world peace through its own development” (PRC, 2011, p. 06).

A potential mechanism linking China’s growing GDP to its increasing involvement in PKOs is described in the same document: “(...) as its comprehensive strength increases, China will shoulder corresponding international responsibilities and obligations” (PRC, 2011, p. 20). Four years later, the White Paper on China’s Military Strategy reinforced this narrative by recognizing that growing national strength entails greater responsibilities (PRC, 2015). Accordingly, it appears plausible to incorporate China’s GDP into our empirical strategy. As this variable varies across years rather than across missions, it is tested against total annual personnel contributions. Thus, H1 posits that China’s economic growth is associated with an increase in its personnel contributions to peace operations.

The other explanatory variable in the ‘responsible power’ cluster is the host country’s GDP relative to China’s GDP. I chose this measure to provide a reference parameter for comparing GDP levels while also incorporating China’s economic growth into the

models. This is the only independent variable for which a negative relationship with the DV is expected. In other words, the lower the host country's GDP relative to China's, the greater the expectation that China will act as a responsible power by deploying personnel to the mission. Therefore, H2 posits that China will deploy fewer personnel in countries with higher growth rates as a percentage of China's own GDP.

Data for the variables included in this cluster were collected from the World Bank, and reported in current USD (billions).

By contrast, the 'resource-seeking' cluster includes three variables. First, rather than using bilateral trade, I recorded only exports from the host country to China. It is important to note that, with the exception of India, none of the main host countries of peacekeeping missions are among China's principal trading partners, and China's leading export products – primarily broadcasting equipment, computers, integrated circuits, and telephones – are not predominantly destined for these countries.

Nevertheless, China is a major importer of commodities, and some of the host countries are relevant suppliers of crude petroleum, gold, iron ore, and manganese ore, among other resources. Moreover, all previous quantitative studies have used two-way bilateral trade as an independent variable. Replicating this approach here would likely produce similar results while overlooking a fundamental problem: why would China deploy troops to protect its own exports if the primary markets for Chinese products are the European Union, the United States, and Asian neighbors? Thus, H3 posits that higher levels of exports to China from a peace operation host state are associated with higher levels of Chinese personnel contributions to that same state.

Second, I follow the measurement of strategic commodities proposed by Zhou (2013) – namely, natural resources classified under Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding System (HS) categories 26 (Ores, slag, and ash) and 27 (Mineral fuels, oils & product of their distillation; etc) – with one modification. Instead of calculating the variable based on the gross value of host country exports of these products, I examine the share (salience) of these commodities relative to total exports. After all, the resource-seeking hypothesis makes more sense when most of a country's exports to China consists of strategic commodities, here labelled as 'raw materials' and 'energy resources'. The three variables mentioned – total exports, raw material exports, and energy resources exports – were measured in current USD (millions)².

Data for the variables included in this cluster were collected from UN Comtrade³. The theoretically expected relationship between all these variables and the DV (regardless

²Raw material and energy resource exports were recorded in current USD (millions), whereas the 'salience' variables for both are expressed as a percentage of total exports.

³Still within the 'resource-seeking' cluster, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) could constitute a relevant variable, given China's expanding investments in countries hosting peacekeeping missions. However, FDI was excluded from the analysis due to significant transparency and measurement issues. Official data are often

of measurement) is positive. Accordingly, H4 posits the same relationship as H3, but focusing on the share of raw material and energy resource exports as a percentage of total exports

Information on the five independent variables is summarized in the table below.

Table 04. Summary of independent variables, sources, and hypotheses

Cluster	Variable	Measurement	Source	Hypothesis
Responsible Power	GDP_CHN	China's GDP	World Bank	+
	GDP_perc	$(\text{GDP}_{\text{Host Country}} / \text{GDP}_{\text{China}}) \times 100$	World Bank	-
Resource-Seeking	EXPtoCHN	Host Country exports to China	UN Comtrade	+
	Salience_26	$(\text{Exports}_{\text{Raw Materials}} / \text{Exports}_{\text{Total}}) \times 100$	UN Comtrade	+
	Salience_27	$(\text{Exports}_{\text{Energy Resources}} / \text{Exports}_{\text{Total}}) \times 100$	UN Comtrade	+

Source: Elaborated by the author.

As for the empirical strategy, this research adopts a two-step approach. First, descriptive statistics provide an overview of all variables. Next, I run Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression models to assess which explanatory factors are statistically significant, as well as the magnitude and direction of their effects⁴.

With the exception of H1, for which the DV is TOT_CHN, all models testing hypotheses H2, H3, and H4 use CTB_NUM, CTB_perc_mission, and CTB_perc_CHN as dependent variables.

In sum, the empirical approach proposed here allows us to assess: 01. whether China's economic growth has any association with its contribution to PKOs; 02. whether the development level of a host country affects China's decision to deploy troops; and 03. whether China's participation in PKOs is primarily motivated by the protection of trade flows, particularly those involving strategic commodities.

Findings and discussion

Descriptive statistics

The dataset contains 629 observations for the dependent variable measures. This number substantially exceeds the 'N' used in previous quantitative studies (Zhou's

concentrated in tax havens, and Chinese government disclosures offer limited insight. In addition, major datasets, such as China Global Investment Tracker, China AidData, and SAIS-CARI, contain missing values for many countries and do not provide consistent data for the period prior to the 2000s.

⁴OLS was chosen because the database exhibits limited time variation across missions, both those with and those without Chinese personnel. Although the panel is unbalanced, the structure of the data makes it difficult or impossible to employ models such as pooled OLS, fixed effects, or random effects.

work (2013), with 281 observations, has the largest ‘N’ among them), and the same applies to the independent variables. Overall, China’s average annual personnel contribution to PKOs was 1,444 in the analyzed period, representing approximately 1.4% of total peacekeeping personnel across all missions. Descriptive data also indicate that Chinese deployments are relatively evenly distributed across the missions in which the country participated between 1990 and 2024: on average, each PKO received 5.56% of the Chinese personnel deployed in a given year. It is true, however, that some missions have recently gained greater prominence, especially UNMISS. Descriptive statistics for all nine variables used in this study are reported in Table 05.

With regard to the independent variables, it is noteworthy that the minimum and maximum values for GDP_perc were recorded in host countries to which China has never deployed personnel: Yemen, Guinea-Bissau, and the Central African Republic on the one hand, and India/Pakistan on the other. As for GDP_CHN, the pattern is nothing new: annual values have consistently increased (with the exception of a slight decline of USD 50 billion between 2022 and 2023), reaching a maximum of USD 18.74 trillion in 2024. China’s average GDP over the period analyzed was USD 7.4 trillion.

Table 05. Descriptive statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
CTB_num	629	0	1080	72.4	184.36
TOT_CHN	629	5	3045	1444.63	1025.56
CTB_perc_mission	629	0.00	33.33	1.4	2.75
CTB_perc_CHN	629	0.00	100	5.56	12.18
GDP_CHN	629	361.56	18743.80	7409.51	6460.54
GDP_perc	555	0.01	50.06	2.08	5.65
EXPTOCHN	524	62	104071	1782.66	6369.06
Saliency_26	524	0.00	100	9.68	22.58
Saliency_27	524	0.00	100	20.23	38.94

Source: Elaborated by the author based on data from Peacekeeping (2025), UN COMTRADE DATABASE (2025), and WORLD BANK GROUP (2025).

With regard to EXPTOCHN, Timor-Leste represents the two lowest observations, followed by Sierra Leone. At the upper end of the distribution, India/Pakistan leads, followed by Iraq. Among the top ten in this ranking, the Democratic Republic of the Congo also appears among the countries that hosted PKOs during the period analyzed.

Still regarding trade flows, the highest salience of raw materials (Saliency_26) was recorded in Burundi – which exports various types of ores (tungsten, niobium,

tantalum, vanadium and zirconium) – in 2004, 2005, and 2007. Nevertheless, trade flows between Burundi and China are minimal, as is the contribution of Chinese personnel to this country, which consisted of three officials deployed in 2004 and 2005. Additionally, several annual observations close to 100% for this variable were recorded in Liberia and DR Congo. Their main exports to China include, respectively, rubber and titanium ore, and refined copper, copper ore, and cobalt.

As for energy resources, the ten highest observations were recorded in South Sudan⁵. Almost all South Sudanese exports to China consisted of oil. Still, countries such as Angola, Libya and Iraq – also major oil exporters – registered similarly high salience levels for energy resources (above 99%) but received very few Chinese personnel⁶.

Regressions

The article now tests the four hypotheses outlined above. For H1, the bivariate analysis showed a strong positive relationship between China's economic growth and its personnel deployments in peacekeeping operations. The correlation coefficient (r) between China's GDP and its annual personnel contribution to PKOs between 1990 and 2024 was 0.79 ($p < 0.001$). For the regression analysis, I also applied a logarithmic transformation to these variables. The fit of both linear and logarithmic models further demonstrates the robustness of this relationship ($r^2 = 0.62$ and 0.34 , respectively). Both models are significant ($p < 0.001$), as well as the estimated parameters (β): 0.12 (lin-lin) and 0.24 (log-log). Constant values were 517.38 and -0.41 respectively – but only the former was statistically significant.

The first hypothesis concerning China's responsibility was thus supported: on average, an annual increase of one billion dollars (current USD) in China's GDP is associated with an increase of 0.12 in personnel contributions. In other words, an increase of USD 08 billion in China's GDP is associated, on average, with the deployment of one additional Chinese peacekeeper. Since the coefficient in a log-log model estimates this relationship in percentage terms, it can also be stated that a growth of 1% in China's GDP increases personnel contributions to UN peacekeeping missions by 0.24%. These results provide empirical support for China's official rhetoric. A recent White Paper on China's Military Strategy states that, "with the growth of national strength, China's armed forces will gradually intensify their participation" in PKOs and "do their utmost to (...) provide more public security goods, and contribute more to world peace" (PRC, 2015, last paragraph).

⁵For missions involving two countries (e.g., MINURCAT, UNIKOM, UNMEE), I reported data for only one country for which information was available. As a result, five observations in *Salience_27* and one in *Salience_26* exceeded 100. These values were used to calculate the mean and standard deviation reported in Table 05 but were excluded from the maximum values.

⁶China never sent personnel to a mission conducted exclusively in Iraq, but did contribute to UNIKOM, which operated in both Iraq and Kuwait and was established to monitor the demilitarized zone along the border following the forced withdrawal of Iraqi forces.

The remaining hypotheses (H2, H3, H4) were tested using models estimated for three different measures of the dependent variable. The results are presented in Table 06.

Table 06. Results for regression models

	CTB_num			CTB_perc_mission			CTB_perc_CHN		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
GDP_perc	-5.16*** (1.36)	-3.97** (1.36)	-5.21*** (1.33)	-0.04* (0.02)	-0.03 (0.02)	-0.05* (0.02)	-0.21* (0.09)	-0.11 (0.09)	-0.24** (0.09)
EXPtoCHN	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)		-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)		-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)	
Salience_26	1.48*** (0.30)		1.48*** (0.30)	0.01 (0.00)		0.01 (0.00)	0.12*** (0.02)		0.12*** (0.02)
Salience_27	0.25 (0.18)		0.24 (0.18)	-0.00 (0.00)		-0.01* (0.00)	0.02 (0.01)		0.01 (0.01)
Continent	-31.06*** (7.20)	-41.67*** (6.99)	-31.09*** (7.20)	-0.78*** (0.12)	-0.81*** (0.11)	-0.79*** (0.12)	-2.00*** (0.49)	-2.89*** (0.48)	-2.01*** (0.50)
Constant	85.39*** (10.92)	111.10*** (9.14)	85.33*** (10.90)	2.06*** (0.18)	2.06*** (0.15)	2.05*** (0.18)	5.67*** (0.75)	7.82*** (0.63)	5.64*** (0.75)
R ²	0.13	0.08	0.13	0.12	0.11	0.12	0.14	0.07	0.13
Adjusted R ²	0.12	0.08	0.12	0.11	0.10	0.11	0.13	0.07	0.13
p-value	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Note: * p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01; *** p < 0.001.

For each DV, three models were run, yielding a total of nine models: one including all explanatory variables; one excluding salience (26 and 27); and one excluding exports from the host country to China. Continental dummies were included as controls, with Africa as the reference category (coded 0). All nine models were statistically significant.

The results presented in Table 06 indicate that GDP_perc was the only variable that was statistically significant in all but one model, providing support for H2. On the other hand, H3 can be fully rejected, as EXPtoCHN was not significant and showed counterintuitive, negative effects across all models. In turn, H4 is partially confirmed: Salience_26 was statistically significant in all models except those using CTB_perc_mission as the dependent variable, whereas Salience_27 was only significant in model (06), but with a negative coefficient. This result is counterintuitive relative to theoretical expectations, that is, a positive association between peacekeeper deployment and trade flows of energy resources.

As for H2, the results corroborate the negative relationship between the host country's level of economic development (measured relative to Chinese growth, %) and China's participation in the operation. Models (01) and (03) show that, on average,

a 1% increase in the host country's GDP relative to China's GDP is associated with a reduction of five personnel. Likewise, models (04) and (06) indicate that this same 1% increase is associated with a 4% or 5% decrease in Chinese personnel deployment relative to the total mission contingent. In fact, China contributed very little to operations conducted in countries with above-average values in this variable (> 2.07%), such as India/Pakistan (19.86%), Croatia (2.42%), and Colombia (2.13%).

The findings related to EXPtoCHN reinforce previous studies that reported similarly contradictory results for bilateral trade. In addition, all estimated parameters for EXPtoCHN were extremely close to zero, indicating that, indeed, there is no meaningful relationship between trade and participation in peacekeeping operations, at least in China's case. This result can be explained in part by Beijing's historical absence from operations conducted in countries with substantial trade flows with China, such as Iraq, and most notably, India/Pakistan.

In the same vein, the findings related to H4 also reinforce the conclusions of previous research. With regard to raw materials (Saliency_26), models (01) and (03) indicate that a 1% increase in the share of these products in total exports leads to an increase of approximately one Chinese peacekeeper. When the same relationship is examined for energy resources (Saliency_27), the increase in personnel contribution is approximately 0.2 – although this relationship is not statistically significant. Despite the high salience observed in Sudan (61.27%) and South Sudan (99.99%), this lower effect can be attributed to countries such as Angola, Iraq, and Libya (all 99%), which have never hosted Chinese personnel. Furthermore, these results should be interpreted with caution given the large number of countries that do not export such products to China.

Finally, the estimates for the Continent variable were particularly interesting, indicating a strong negative relationship between peacekeeping operations conducted outside Africa and China's participation. In other words, China is expected to deploy fewer personnel to missions conducted in the Americas, Europe, or Asia, as shown by models (01) and (03). Models (04) to (09) also indicate that missions outside Africa are associated with a lower percentage of Chinese troops relative to the total mission contingent and to the total Chinese personnel deployed in a given year.

Brief discussion

The results allow us to infer, albeit only partially, that a domestic variable (China's GDP) is a relevant predictor of Chinese participation in peacekeeping operations; however, it should be noted that this specific partial finding is based on absolute annual deployment numbers. When we disaggregate the data to account for mission-level variation, the regressions show that both the economic growth of host countries and their commodity exports – but not total exports – are statistically significant explanatory factors.

Evidently, this responsibility/resources framework cannot account for the full range of idiosyncrasies of empirical reality. Like any statistical model, it constitutes a simplification and is not intended to provide definitive answers. Nevertheless, the results obtained from nine different models – not forgetting the bivariate analysis comprising correlation, linear and logarithmic regressions – based on more than six hundred observations certainly tell us something. By way of a brief discussion, three points merit further elaboration.

First of all, it is important to emphasize that the findings presented in this article should be interpreted within the broader context of China's expanding global security presence. This process, at least from a rhetorical standpoint, began to take clearer shape in the late 1990s, when Chinese leaders started to use the term "new security concept" (NSC), which "made room for non-traditional security in Chinese foreign policy by pointing out that national security is not only military in nature" (GHISELLI, 2018, p. 614).

The 2004 defense White Paper marked an evolution of this concept by introducing the idea of 'comprehensive national security' (CNS). This concept is linked to the PLA's 'new historic missions', introduced by president Hu Jintao in late 2004. Known as the 'three provides, and one role', these missions are defined as follows:

- (1) providing an important guarantee of strength for the party to consolidate its ruling position, (2) providing a strong security guarantee for safeguarding the period of important strategic opportunity for national development, (3) providing a powerful strategic support for safeguarding national interests, and (4) playing an important role in safeguarding world peace and promoting common development (MULVENON, 2009, p. 02).

Ten years later, China's stance took a step beyond the NSC and CNS when president Xi Jinping put forward the vision of 'holistic national security' (HNS). According to the White Paper on China's Military Strategy (PRC, 2015), "this new concept aims at balancing internal and external, traditional and non-traditional security, and protecting both China's existence and development interests" (GHISELLI, 2018, p. 616). Thus, the deployment of armed forces abroad and the protection of national interests overseas have definitely become a permanent and relevant issue in Chinese foreign policy debates.

Second, as a natural corollary, China's recent deep engagement in PKOs can be understood both as a legitimate means of protecting its national interests abroad while seeking to avoid being perceived as a threat, and as a mechanism for exercising influence within the global community. Nevertheless, assessing whether these interests are effectively defended and whether China is perceived as a 'responsible power' falls beyond the scope of this article. For present purposes, we can note that, unlike other major powers such as the United States and European countries, which

have significantly scaled back their involvement in multilateral peacekeeping missions, China has expanded its presence.

This divergence is telling. Whereas Western powers have shifted toward unilateral or ad hoc coalitions, China's continued engagement within the UN framework has allowed it to project legitimacy, align with principles of sovereignty and non-interference, and differentiate its global posture from that of its peers. Peacekeeping, in this context, serves as not only an instrument of soft power, but also as a low-cost, high-visibility platform for projecting global influence.

This engagement has enabled China to build bilateral relationships, protect economic investments, and shape local security environments without engaging in direct military intervention. Moreover, as other major powers retreat from PKOs, China's relative visibility increases, allowing it to fill both symbolic and operational gaps in global governance. Therefore, peacekeeping offers a window into China's global ambitions not as an aspiring hegemon in the traditional sense, but as a power that seeks to expand its international presence by engaging selectively and pragmatically in institutions and arenas where Western withdrawal creates strategic openings.

Third, any primary empirical analysis of China's involvement in the peacekeeping regime reveals the centrality of the African continent in this regard. While it is true that the 'Taiwan factor' once played a central role in China's participation in PKOs – such as in the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) in 2003 – more recently, other determinants have come to explain the country's engagement in defense and security matters in Africa. As noted in the White Paper on China's Military Strategy (PRC, 2015), "(...) the security of overseas interests concerning energy and resources, strategic sea lines of communication (SLOCs), as well as institutions, personnel and assets abroad, has become an imminent issue" (PCR, 2015, p. 08).

Therefore, it is not surprising that China's first overseas military base was established in Africa – in Djibouti, in 2017 – and that its objective is precisely to support the blue helmets operating on the continent, as well as the Navy in its anti-piracy missions in the waters surrounding the Gulf of Aden. Indeed, China has steadily expanded its military footprint across the African continent through a broad range of cooperative initiatives. Since 2000, the PLA has conducted 19 military exercises, 44 naval port calls, and nearly 300 high-level defense exchanges in Africa (ARDUINO, 2024). These activities, often framed as military diplomacy or humanitarian engagement, reflect an evolving strategy of engagement with African security sectors. Early initiatives such as the 2009 'Peace Angel' exercise in Gabon focused on medical evacuation and civil-military coordination, signaling China's initial preference for a light-touch approach oriented toward soft power projection, rather than direct combat readiness (NANTULYA, 2024).

More recently, China's engagement with African defense sectors has taken on a more structured and ambitious form, particularly through multilateral platforms such as the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). Among the “key measures to support Africa by the Chinese side”, the Beijing Action Plan (2025–2027) outlines a significant expansion of military cooperation, including a RMB 1 billion grant to support African armed forces, the training of 6,000 military personnel, and joint exercises involving 500 young African officers. Additionally, the initiative provides for the training of 1,000 police officers and the strengthening of security coordination along the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) corridors (PRC, 2025). These developments reflect a shift toward more institutionalized and capability-oriented partnerships, aligned with Beijing's broader objective of consolidating its image as a ‘responsible power’ while contributing to African-led peace and security initiatives beyond the scope of UN peacekeeping.

China has also supported African-led peace operations conducted by Regional Economic Communities (RECs), further reinforcing its approach to security governance on the continent. For instance, Chinese assistance has extended to the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Mission in Mozambique, where regional forces have been engaged in counterinsurgency operations in Cabo Delgado (AMANI AFRICA, 2024). This pattern of engagement is further illustrated by agreements signed between the African Union (AU) and the Chinese government for the provision of military equipment to support the African Standby Force (ASF), the G5 Sahel Joint Force (comprising Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, and Chad), and the armed forces of Mozambique, South Sudan, and Tanzania (AU, 2020).

By actively engaging in PKOs under the UN's auspices and cooperating within other regional frameworks in Africa, China has sought to consolidate its image as a power that prioritizes cooperation and multilateralism while avoiding direct confrontation, in line with its policy of non-intervention and respect for national sovereignty, even as this stance has faced criticism (HODZI, 2019). Accordingly, this involvement in PKOs reflects an important facet of China's global ambitions, signaling an effort to shape the international order in ways that are more favorable to its interests while building strategic alliances in the Global South.

Concluding remarks

This article demonstrated that China's involvement in UNPKOs cannot be explained by an interest in safeguarding the flow of exports from host countries. Previous studies have reported similar findings for bilateral trade as a whole. By contrast, the regression models indicated a statistically significant relationship between the flow of strategic commodities and the deployment of personnel. Although this finding may suggest a resource-seeking rationale, it should be interpreted with caution.

As a matter of fact, our data reveal that host states whose exports consist primarily of natural resources – such as Angola, Georgia and Iraq – have never received Chinese

troops. Still, the statistical significance of raw material exports in our models warrants attention, especially given that this finding is based on a substantially larger number of observations than in previous quantitative studies.

The bivariate analysis also showed that China's economic growth is strongly associated with its personnel contribution to PKOs. Similarly, lower levels of GDP in host countries increase the probability of Chinese personnel deployments. Responsibility, therefore, also appears to be an influential factor guiding Chinese engagement in the peacekeeping regime.

Based on the findings presented here, this notion of responsibility may be understood in two ways. First, by linking China's own economic development to the expansion of its global responsibility, as development enhances military capabilities and thereby increases the need to provide global public goods such as peace and stability. Second, by understanding that the responsibility to contribute to regional and global security also stems from the need to adopt a more assertive stance towards less developed and conflict-immersed countries. Simply put: economic growth brings responsibility, and active engagement in multilateral peacekeeping operations in economically fragile countries serves as a means of demonstrating that China is, indeed, a responsible power.

It is noteworthy that China's contemporary deployment profile shows particular attention to regions surrounding the Belt and Road Initiative, especially its maritime component. Personnel contributions to South Sudan, Sudan, DR Congo, and Lebanon – as well as China's clear involvement in peace efforts in the first two countries – may not be directly linked to the BRI, but the security of these regions is undoubtedly a matter of concern. A closer examination of the BRI map, alongside the geographic distribution of Chinese peacekeepers and Chinese government-financed projects, offers a useful perspective in this regard.

While this study prioritizes variables such as GDP and strategic resources as key determinants of China's engagement in UNPKOs, it is important to acknowledge the central role of African countries in Chinese deployments and the broader scope of China's military and security cooperation on the continent. Initiatives such as support for the African Standby Force (ASF) and commitments outlined in the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) Action Plan 2025–2027 point to a more comprehensive and strategic security presence by Beijing. These efforts, often conducted through Africa's Regional Economic Communities (RECs), indicate that China's security footprint extends well beyond the UN framework. Future research could benefit from systematically incorporating these alternative forms of engagement to better understand China's evolving role as a responsible power and provider of regional stability on the African continent.

It is also worth noting that, in this study, peacekeeping missions of different types – such as special political missions, traditional peacekeeping operations, and observation or good offices missions – were analyzed collectively. This approach follows established quantitative research practices, which often aggregate different mission types to identify general patterns in state contributions and strategic behavior. While these missions differ conceptually and operationally, treating them as a single category allows for a macro-level examination of the factors influencing state participation across the full spectrum of UN peace operations. Disaggregating by mission type, although valuable, may fragment the dataset and reduce the ability to detect broad trends, especially particularly when analyzing global contributors such as China. Future studies could build on this foundation by employing qualitative or mixed-methods analyses that explore how specific mission characteristics shape state decisions in greater detail.

Still regarding the future research agenda, case studies focusing on negative outcomes of the dependent variable (i.e., cases in which China did not send personnel contributions) also represent a fruitful avenue of inquiry⁷. As noted above, there are commodity-exporting countries that host (or have hosted) peace missions in which China was not involved, or was only marginally involved.

Comparative studies based on small or intermediate number of observations are equally welcome. For instance, the configurational logic of Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) models, unlike a correlational approach, may reveal which combinations of factors explain Chinese deployment to PKOs. Of course, multivariate models with more potential explanatory variables – and even new ways of measuring the dependent variable – are also needed, as the literature still lacks studies of this kind. In short, considerable work remains to be done.

Revised by Paulo Scarpa

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⁷For example, Uziel and Marcondes (2021) conducted a study examining a negative case in which Brazil chose not to contribute to the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA).

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Acknowledgments

The author is grateful to Alessandro Eugênio Pereira for his insightful comments on an earlier version of this paper, presented at the 14th Meeting of the Brazilian Political Science Association, and to Thales Leonardo de Carvalho for his support and valuable feedback on the empirical analysis. Any remaining errors or inaccuracies are the author's responsibility.

Appendix

Readme: Dataset on the Political Economy of China's Contributions to UN Peacekeeping Operations (1990–2024)

Overview

The dataset used in this article is an update version that includes refined and corrected data, extended coverage, and addresses data gaps identified in the previous version (MONTENEGRO, 2022)⁸, enhancing robustness for analyses of China's evolving role in United Nations (UN) peace missions.

It provides detailed data on China's personnel contributions to UN Peacekeeping Operations (PKOs) from 1990 to 2024, integrating updated Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and trade flows indicators to analyze the determinants of Chinese peacekeeping engagement.

The dataset supports research on the dual hypothesis that China's increasing participation in UN peacekeeping missions reflects its strategy to position itself as a responsible global power while protecting its resource interests through engagement in critical regions.

Data Sources

- UN Peacekeeping Troop Contributions: [UN Peacekeeping official database](#)
- GDP Data: [World Bank GDP data](#)⁹
 - This indicator is expressed in current prices, meaning no adjustment has been made to account for price changes over time. This indicator is expressed in United States dollars.
- Trade Data: [UN Comtrade database](#) (see platform input settings below)
 - What are you looking for?
 - Type of Product: Goods
 - Frequency: Annual
 - Classifications: HS
 - Refine your search
 - HS (as reported) Commodity Codes: TOTAL; 26 (Ores, slag and ash); 27 (Mineral fuels, mineral oils and products of their distillation; bituminous substances; mineral waxes)
 - Reporter: China
 - Partner: Host country (2nd Partner: World)

⁸Available at <<https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataset.xhtml?persistentId=doi:10.7910/DVN/2LW0JZ>>.

⁹Last Updated Date: 01/07/2025.

- Trade Flows: Import
- Modes of Transport: TOTAL modes of transport
- Customs Codes: TOTAL customs procedure codes
- Set your query options¹⁰
 - Breakdown Mode: Plus
 - Aggregate By: None

Figure A1. Screenshot – UN Comtrade data search: China–Cyprus trade flows

The screenshot shows the UN Comtrade Database search interface. The top navigation bar includes links for Data, Data Availability, Metadata, Data Tools, Help Center, My Comtrade Free, and Logout. The main heading is 'Trade Data'. Below this, there is a message about data updates and a search form. The search form is divided into several sections: 'What are you looking for?' with tabs for Type of Product (Goods, Services), Frequency (Annual, Monthly), and Classifications (HS, SITC, BEC, As Reported). The 'Refine your search' section includes dropdowns for HS (as reported) Commodity Codes (TOTAL), Reporters (China), Partners (Cyprus), 2nd Partner (World), Trade Flows (Import), Modes of Transport (TOTAL modes of transport), and Customs Codes (TOTAL customs procedure codes). The 'Set your query options' section includes dropdowns for Breakdown Mode (Plus) and Aggregate By (None).

Updates from Version 1

- Trade and GDP data were re-collected, respectively, on July 2 and 3, 2025. Note that import values are not comma-separated in totals or in HS26/HS27 data.
- Expanded coverage and imputation for missing data in specific countries (detailed below).
- Clarifications on variable definitions.
- Overall data harmonization for robustness and consistency with latest sources.

¹⁰Last update in UNdata: 2025/07/10.

Variables Description

Chart A1. Dependent Variables (DV)

Variable	Description
CTB_num	Number of Chinese personnel contributed to a mission in a given year (mission-year level)
TOT_CHN	Total number of Chinese personnel contributed across all missions in a given year
CTB_perc_mission	Percentage share of Chinese personnel in the total troop contingent of a mission-year
CTB_perc_CHN	Percentage of a mission-year's Chinese contribution relative to total Chinese personnel deployed that year

Chart A2. Independent Variables (IV) — Clusters and Hypotheses

Cluster	Variable	Description	Source	Expected Relationship
Responsible Power	GDP_CHN	China's GDP (constant USD)	World Bank	Positive (+)
	GDP_perc	(GDP of host country / GDP of China) × 100	World Bank	Negative (-)
Resource-Seeking	EXPtoCHN	Value of exports from host country to China (total)	UN Comtrade	Positive (+)
	Salience_26	% of host country's exports that are raw materials (HS 26)	UN Comtrade	Positive (+)
	Salience_27	% of host country's exports that are energy resources (HS 27)	UN Comtrade	Positive (+)

Chart A3. Other Variables

Variable	Description
TOT_mission	Total troop contingent in a given mission-year (December snapshot)
Continent_COD	Numeric code for host country continent: 0 = Africa, 1 = Asia, 2 = Europe, 3 = America
GDP_HostCountry	Host country GDP (raw data used to calculate GDP_perc)
EXP_26	Host country exports of raw materials (HS code 26) (raw data used to calculate Salience_26)
EXP_27	Host country exports of energy resources (HS code 27) (raw data used to calculate Salience_27)

Notes on Data Processing and Missing Data

- Regression coefficients and descriptive statistics are reported with two decimal places. Values were rounded up whenever the following digit was 6 or higher. For example, 1.86 was reported as 1.90, 1.438 as 1.44, and 1.916 as 2.00.
 - As log-log models are highly sensitive to missing values, it is worth noting that the bivariate analysis yields considerably different results for the 1992–2024 interval compared to 1990–2024 — unlike the linear-linear models (both bivariate and multivariate), which are less affected by this variation.
- For a more intelligible interpretation of the descriptive and regression analyses, particularly regarding the independent variables, the GDP data were divided by one billion and the trade data by one million.
- Peacekeeping mission troop totals and Chinese personnel contributions were captured as of December each year.
- The complete output files (.spv) – six in total – are available on Harvard Dataverse. They include: a graph showing the top 10 destinations of Chinese personnel in UNPKOs; bivariate analyses (correlations and both linear-linear and log-log regressions); descriptive statistics; and nine regression models — three per dependent variable (Models 1, 4, and 7 include all independent variables; Models 2, 5, and 8 exclude Salience_26 and Salience_27; and Models 3, 6, and 9 exclude EXPtoCHN).
- For missions involving two countries, variable values were averaged; when data were available for only one of the countries, those values were used. This resulted in one observation above 100% for Salience_26 (UNMEE in 2002) and five observations for Salience_27 (MINURCAT in 2007–08 and 2009–10; and UNIKOM in 1996).
- Because they are regions or continents rather than specific country pairs, trade and GDP data were not tabulated for the Middle East (UNTSO), West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), and Central America (ONUCA).
- Missing trade data were identified for several countries and years: Angola has no data for 1990–1991; Bosnia and Herzegovina lacks data for 1996 and 1997; Cambodia has data available only from 1992; Central African Republic has no data for 1999; for Central African Republic/Chad, HS 27 salience data are available only for Chad; Cyprus is missing data for 1990 and 1992; El Salvador has no data for 1991; Eritrea lacks data for 2000; Georgia is missing data for 1996; Haiti lacks data for 1998 and 1999; India and Pakistan have no data for 1991–1992; for HS 27 salience, only India has data in 2000–2001, and Pakistan is missing data for 2021; Iran and Iraq have no data for 1990; Iraq and Kuwait lack data for 1991, and HS 26 data are available only for Kuwait; Kosovo has no trade data available for any year; Lebanon lacks data for 1990–1991; Liberia has no data for 1996; North Macedonia has data available only for 1997–1998; Rwanda lacks data for 1994; South Sudan has no data for 2011, the year of its

independence; Syria lacks data for 1990 and 1991; Timor-Leste has no data for 1999–2002; Yugoslavia has no data for 1996 and 1997.

- It is worth noting that UN Comtrade does not provide trade data for the years 1990 and 1991, leading to 19 observations in our dataset that lack trade values for this time frame.
- Missing HS 26 and 27 data, when total exports were reported, were tabulated as zero, assuming no recorded trade flows for these commodities.
- Missing GDP data were also noted: Kosovo has data only from 2008 onward; South Sudan has no data available after 2016; Yemen has no GDP data available.
- For Western Sahara, Morocco's data were used as a proxy (no trade data for 1990 and 1991).

Usage Notes

- Data are provided at mission-year and country-year levels; ensure appropriate aggregation or filtering for analyses.
- Consider imputation or robustness checks to address missing data.
- The variables "Country_Region" and "Continent" were tabulated in Portuguese.