

CHINA BALANCE SHEET

INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

The direction that China and U.S.-China relations take will define the world's future. For the United States, a rising China increasingly affects American prosperity and security, calling for some clear-eyed thinking and tough economic, political, and security choices. As the twenty-first century unfurls, the stakes have never been higher for getting U.S. policy toward China right. By untangling the complex, sometimes contradictory, strands of this vast and dynamic country, *China: The Balance Sheet* lays the foundation for informed and effective U.S. policy toward China, the world's emerging superpower.

BACKGROUND

- **China has traditionally been suspicious of multilateral structures that could potentially constrain Beijing's sovereignty and independent action.**
- **However, since the late 1990s, China has recognized the political utility of multilateralism and internationalism:**
 - As a means to reassure others about the benign nature of China's rise and commitment to serving as a responsible international actor;
 - As China has become reassured of its ability to safeguard its sovereign interests in multilateral environments;
 - As China has come to appreciate the international system's benefits in addressing transnational challenges such as piracy, drug trafficking, terrorism, and infectious disease;
 - As China has recognized the value of being at the table to shape the rules rather than having the rules imposed upon it.
- **Beijing has affirmed the preeminent authority of international treaties and the United Nations as ultimate arbiters of international law and legitimacy for international actions:**
 - To equalize the process, if not conduct, of international relations;
 - To constrain the ability of major powers to impose themselves on others (including itself);
 - To safeguard its interests within the UN system, given China's veto power in the UN Security Council.

For further information, see Chapter 5:
"China's Foreign & Security Policy: Partner or Rival?"

China: The Balance Sheet: What the World Needs to Know Now about the Emerging Superpower

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CURRENT SITUATION

- **China proclaims its strict adherence to the principles of “state sovereignty” and “non-interference,”** and reluctance to support humanitarian intervention and preemptive action.
 - China’s main concerns are setting a precedent that could be used to intervene—for instance, to support Taiwan or to attack China’s human rights record;
 - China also uses commitment to these principles to defend its unconditional political and economic engagement with pariah nations, such as Zimbabwe, Sudan, and Burma, which are sources of natural resources for China.
- **Nonetheless, China has demonstrated great reluctance to be exposed or isolated as the primary obstacle to a generally accepted international action.**
 - In the UN Security Council when Beijing recognizes it stands alone in opposition to a resolution, it often abstains rather than vetoes in order to safeguard its good relations with the offending state, thereby staying on the correct side of the international community by allowing the resolution to pass.
- In recent years, there has been debate inside China about flexible adherence to the principles of sovereignty and non-interference, particularly through the United Nations, to demonstrate China’s adherence to international norms and uphold China’s reputation as a responsible international actor.
 - China for instance endorsed UN Security Council resolutions in 2006 and 2007 concerning Iran’s and North Korea’s nuclear programs, and has urged Sudan to accept an UN-mandated peacekeeping force.
 - Nonetheless, China has not altered its official position on these principles and remains highly resistant to pressures to compromise in the conduct of its foreign policy.

China increasingly will face hard decisions whether to accede to international demands for action against offending nations, thereby safeguarding international values and norms, or cling to policies that safeguard its immediate self-interest.

Facts

- *China is a member of more than 130 inter-governmental international organizations.*
- *China is a signatory to more than 250 international multilateral treaties.*
- *Number of times China has vetoed a resolution at the UN Security Council: 4 times (1971–2004).*
- *China abstained on the 1991 vote to authorize the first Iraq War and on the 2004 vote to condemn atrocities in the Darfur region of Sudan.*
- *China has deployed more than 4,000 military personnel on 14 UN peacekeeping missions since 1990.*
- *China is the leading provider of peacekeeping forces among the Permanent Five members of the UN Security Council.*
- *Percentage of UN peacekeeping costs covered by China: 2 percent.*

IMPLICATIONS

- China supports the international system and appears to have little intention to alter the international system’s rules of the game.
- Nonetheless, **the international community will need to monitor whether the actions of a rising China result in weakening the system,** regardless of Chinese intent.