

# International System

HOW WILL CHINA'S RISE IMPACT GLOBAL NORMS & INSTITUTIONS?

## CHINA BALANCE SHEET

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### Background

- China has had to adapt to an international system dominated and developed by the major Western powers. China is generally comfortable with the major global institutions and less comfortable with other aspects of the current international system.
- China has traditionally been suspicious of multilateral structures that could potentially constrain Beijing's sovereignty and independent action. However, since the mid-to-late 1990s, China has recognized the utility of multilateralism and internationalism:
  - To reassure others about the benign nature of China's rise and commitment to serve as a responsible international actor;
  - To equalize the process, if not conduct, of international relations;
  - To constrain the ability of major powers to impose themselves on others (including itself); and
  - To safeguard its interests by way of its veto power in the UN Security Council.
- China has warmed to multilateralism as it has
  - Become reassured of its own ability to safeguard its sovereign interests in multilateral environments;
  - Come to appreciate the international system's benefits in addressing transnational challenges that affect its interests, such as piracy, drug trafficking, and terrorism;
  - Recognized the value of being at the table to shape the rules rather than having the rules imposed upon it.

### Current Situation

- In affirming the international system, Beijing has affirmed the preeminent authority of international treaties and the United Nations as ultimate arbiters of international law and legitimacy for international actions.
- Beijing has largely embraced the global trade system, realizing the benefits of access to global markets and the protections that World Trade Organization rules provide.
- China proclaims strict adherence to the principles of "state sovereignty" and "noninterference" and is reluctant to support humanitarian intervention and preemptive action.
  - China's main concern is setting a precedent for intervention in support of Taiwan or Tibet or to attack China's human rights record;
  - China also uses commitment to these principles to defend its engagement with pariah nations—such as Zimbabwe, Sudan, Iran, and Burma—that are sources of markets and critical natural resources for China.
- Nonetheless, China has demonstrated great reluctance to be exposed as the primary obstacle to a generally accepted international action.
  - In the UN Security Council when Beijing recognizes it alone opposes a resolution, it often abstains rather than vetoes, although China has become increasingly assertive in partnering with Russia and threatening vetoes individually on issues that touch on human rights or that it believes interfere in the sovereign affairs of other states for fear of setting a precedent that may be turned on itself.
- In recent years, there has been debate inside China about flexible adherence to the principles of sovereignty and noninterference, particularly through the United Nations, to demonstrate China's adherence to international norms and uphold China's reputation as a responsible international actor.

## Current Situation

(continued)

- o For instance, China endorsed UN Security Council resolutions in 2006 and 2007 concerning Iran's and North Korea's nuclear programs and a resolution in the fall of 2007 condemning Burma's violent crackdown on peaceful demonstrators, and it urged Sudan to accept an UN-mandated peacekeeping force.
- o Nonetheless, China has remained hesitant to alter its opposition to binding UN Security Council-mandated international actions to punish nations for their internal conduct. For instance, China vetoed a sanctions resolution targeting Burma's military government following the 2007 violence and in 2008 blocked a resolution that would have imposed sanctions on Zimbabwe's dictatorship.
- China has increasingly embraced global norms such as nonproliferation, counterterrorism, etc., while failing – often consciously and explicitly -- to adhere to others favored by the West. China's international aid policies, for instance, explicitly adhere to a “non-interference” principle that at best ignores, and at worst undermines, good governance and environmental and labor standards overseas. China's increasing international engagement under these conditions, therefore, has led to a potential competition of norms within the international system.
- The on-set of the global economic and financial crisis that began in 2008 has accelerated an emerging debate on the appropriate outlines of the international system, including whether changes are required in global institutions, in the participants within these institutions, and the norms and rules under which the system will be governed. Given the nature of the crisis, China will almost certainly play a central role in this discussion, although it is less certain whether China will seek to cement its “non-interference” principle as an international norm or moderate its adherence to the principle over time—in practice if not explicitly—should evolving international sensibilities and crisis conditions warrant.

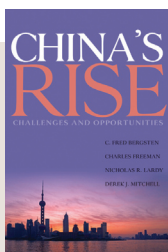
- China has in certain notable cases alarmed the United States and others by ignoring international laws or practice, however—for instance, when it tested an antisatellite weapon in 2007 without providing public notice and when later that year it denied two U.S. minesweepers permission to make port in Hong Kong to refuel as a storm approached.

## Implications

- Overall, China supports the international system and appears to have little intention to alter the international rules of the game.
- Nonetheless, the international community will need to seek ways to involve China as a decisionmaker in international fora to encourage China's commitment to a nonrevisionist approach to the international system.
- The United States can increase the chance that China will peacefully integrate into the international system by recommitting itself to and strengthening global norms and institutions.

### FACTS

- China is a member of more than 130 intergovernmental international organizations.
- China is a signatory to more than 250 multilateral treaties.
- Number of times China has vetoed a resolution at the UN Security Council—6 times (1971–2008)
- China has deployed more than 7,500 personnel to UN peacekeeping missions since it began contributing in 1990. Chinese peacekeepers are currently deployed to 11 UN missions.
- China is the second-largest provider, behind France, of peacekeeping forces among the Permanent Five members of the UN Security Council.
- Percentage of UN peacekeeping costs covered by China—2.6 percent



FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:  
SEE CHAPTER 10: “CHINA AND THE WORLD” IN *CHINA'S RISE: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES* BY C. FRED BERGSTEN, CHARLES FREEMAN, NICHOLAS LARDY, DEREK J. MITCHELL & CHAPTER 5: “CHINA'S FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY: PARTNER OR RIVAL?” IN *CHINA: THE BALANCE SHEET: WHAT THE WORLD NEEDS TO KNOW NOW ABOUT THE EMERGING SUPERPOWER* BY C. FRED BERGSTEN, BATES GILL, NICHOLAS LARDY, DEREK J. MITCHELL