

Document 20.12: “Playing its Due Role” by Chen Xulong in *Beijing Review*, October 19, 2006

China has been a member of the United Nations (UN) for 35 years. During this period, the world situation has changed greatly, and the domestic situation in China has also taken on a new look with the deepening of reform and opening up since 1978. The changes in China have been reflected in its multilateral diplomatic policy and its important and unique role in the UN arena. With the increasing role and status of the UN in the international order, China has become a stronger follower and defender of the international organization.

The past 35 years have seen China develop from a closed society to an open and modern one that is increasingly involved in the international community. China’s national strength is increasing and its influence and status in the world are rising. Today, China’s participation and cooperation is very important in handling some global problems.

With more maturity and confidence, China has extended its multilateral diplomacy to every field, and is participating in the work of wide-ranging sectors of the UN. With the changes in the domestic and international situation, China has generally experienced four phases in terms of its activities in the UN.

The first was during the 1970s, when China had just returned to the organization. The focus at that time was on disclosing the expansionist policies of the two superpowers—the former Soviet Union and the United States—to support third world countries in their fight for their legitimate rights and interests, and to give the UN leeway in dealing with regional conflicts.

Affected by the leftist trend of thought in the nation, the Chinese delegation to the UN often highlighted revolution and conflict in its speeches, which was seldom echoed at UN meetings. On other occasions, China appeared very conservative. The members of the Chinese delegation to the UN were too cautious in participating in some foreign affairs

activities. They also did not like to attend some UN meetings or to grant interviews to the media for fear of making careless mistakes. To Chinese delegates at that time, no event was the best. This situation lasted until 1979. During this period, China basically held a negative attitude toward UN peacekeeping actions, and almost vetoed all UN votes in this area.

The second phase lasted from the early 1980s to the early 1990s. With the deepening of reform and opening up, economic construction became the priority on China's agenda. The country made a major adjustment of its foreign policy in 1982, and from then on the focus of China's diplomacy changed from stressing war and revolution to promoting peace and development.

Guided by this change, China became involved in international affairs with a more active, open, flexible and pragmatic attitude. China's sense of international cooperation and responsibility was enhanced and its constructive role in the UN was manifested.

China also changed its attitude toward UN peacekeeping operations. From 1981, the country adopted a flexible stance. In 1988, it joined the UN's special committee on peacekeeping operations, and in 1989 China, for the first time, sent its troops to take part in UN peacekeeping activities.

The third phase extended from the early 1990s to the beginning of the 21st century. With the end of the Cold War, the international structure changed tremendously, and the world entered a post-Cold War era. As the theme of peace and development was strengthened, the contradiction between unilateralism and multipolarization became more and more prominent. China became a more active participant in international affairs.

China has attached great importance to multilateral diplomacy and has strengthened its interaction with the international system. In response to some Western countries' promotion of Western ideology and values in the economic, social and human rights

fields, China advocates building a multipolar world and establishing democratic international relations. China holds that all countries should respect the diversity of human civilization and social development models, and should attach importance to the role of the UN and safeguard its authority.

It has also carried out close cooperation with developing countries, effectively resisting the power politics and expansionism of some Western countries. In dealing with the regional conflict, China has played its role as a permanent member of the UN Security Council. On the issue of peacekeeping, China has become more and more active and has increased its manpower, material and financial input. In January 2000, China for the first time sent a civilian police force to participate in UN peacekeeping operations, dispatching 15 civilian policemen to East Timor. China has played an increasingly important role in the UN in the areas of development, the environment and social economy.

The fourth phase began with the September 11 terrorist attacks in the United States. The counterterrorism battle is affecting and changing the world structure. With the rise of nontraditional security threats and the development of unilateralism, the world has entered into a post-post-Cold War period. Advocating peace, development and cooperation, China actively supports multilateralism, firmly defends the status and role of the UN and supports the necessary and reasonable reform of the world body.

Chinese President Hu Jintao, attending the summit to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the establishment of the UN, delivered a speech that called on all countries to build a harmonious world of lasting peace and common prosperity through joint efforts, which has set a new direction for China's multilateral diplomacy.

Important role

China is one of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, which means that it should shoulder more responsibility than most of the other UN members in maintaining world peace. To achieve world peace and stability, China must pay attention

to the coordination among major countries and push forward overall international cooperation. At the same time, as a representative of developing countries, China must consider and maintain the interests of developing countries in dealing with international problems, especially on the issues of development, environmental protection, human rights and humanitarian intervention.

In this sense, it must be engaged in promoting North-South cooperation. Furthermore, in line with its growing national strength, China has increasingly become a regional major country with world influence. The important and unique role of China in the UN has been mainly manifested in the following areas:

First, as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, China actively advocates dealing with regional conflicts within the framework of the UN and pays more attention to maintaining the collective security system with the UN at its core. China once contributed to the ceasefire between Iran and Iraq. It also played an indispensable role in handling the Cambodian issue. With regard to the Middle East, China encourages all parties to resume peace talks and restart the peace process based on the relevant UN resolutions and on the principle of “land for peace.”

Regarding the situation in Iraq, China has always proposed a political solution within the UN framework that respects the will of the Iraqi people. In terms of Africa, China stresses that the world community should pay attention to conflicts on the continent in consideration of global peace and development and to help Africa end turbulence, realize stability and peace and move onto the road toward prosperity.

China has constantly expanded its involvement in UN peacekeeping operations. Since 1989, China has dispatched over 3,000 peacekeepers, including military personnel, police and civilian officials, on 14 UN peacekeeping missions. China has also joined the UN system of stand-by arrangements for peacekeeping. Entering the 21st century, China actively supports the leadership and coordination role of the UN in the counterterrorism

and anti-proliferation fields and suggests the UN strengthen its capability in dealing with new threats and challenges.

Second, China maintains that promoting cooperation and development in the social, economic and cultural arenas should be the major target and task of the UN, and it actively supports the legitimate propositions and claims in establishing a new international economic order. China suggests that developing countries, which account for the majority of UN members, play a bigger role to facilitate a fair and just handling of world affairs, making important contributions to North-South dialogue and South-South cooperation.

On the issue of development, China calls for an open, cooperative and mutually beneficial approach, making efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. It proposes that the UN increase its input in the development field, boost international development and shift its focus from “security first.”

Third, on the issue of the UN reform, China has held active consultations with all parties to seek understanding and agreement. On the reform of the UN Security Council, China holds that the representation of developing countries should be strengthened and small nations should also have the opportunity to participate in the work of the UN Security Council. It understands the will of African countries to join the UN Security Council and opposes the alignment of Japan, Germany, Brazil and India in their drive to become permanent members of the council.

All in all, in 35 years of multilateral diplomatic activities with the UN as the core, China has been able to properly handle the relationship between national interests and the interests of mankind, as well as the relationship between rights and obligations in the world arena, and has gradually formed a peaceful, development-oriented, cooperative and harmonious diplomatic view.

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Source: Chen Xulong, “Playing its Due Role.” *Beijing Review*, 19 Oct. 2006.