

A THEORETICAL ASSESSMENT OF CHINA'S RATIONAL CHOICE DECISION MAKING IN AFRICAN PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS

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ABSTRACT

China is a major player in African peacekeeping operations (PKOs) and makes decisions based on careful government options. The motivation to participate in PKOs is not based on a fixed set of security or strategic interests but takes rational decision making into account to maximize utility. The literature points out that China is involved in PKOs to promote international prestige, become a responsible world player or to gain operational experience but these goals are generally speaking also applicable to some other international objectives, for instance joint military exercises and technological exchanges. In view of this background, the study aims to examine China's rational decision making in PKOs focusing on the expectation that the leadership considers a list of options to maximize national or security interest, a reaction to an option is proposed, and with every option one course of action is chosen. Peacekeeping intervention is analyzed in relation to the primary goal of promoting international peace and development with secondary contributions on specific goals in the peacekeeping environment. The study point out that peacekeeping is a means to exercise economic diplomacy, strengthen bilateral and multilateral relations, builds strategic partnerships and facilitates energy diplomacy.

Keywords: Peacekeeping Operations, Rational Choice Decision making, Bilateral and Multilateral Relations, Economic Diplomacy, Strategic Partnerships.

INTRODUCTION

A major set of explanations for peacekeeping decision making are oriented around the motives and actions of the nation or government as unified, national actor. China's independent foreign policy of peace stresses that fostering an international environment conducive to the peaceful development and co-existence of states is the baseline around which China's relations with other countries are shaped. This statement also stands in relation to China's engagement with African states to secure peace and stability and promote cooperation. In order to achieve this goal, the Chinese leadership has to consider different options that can increase or decrease the value-maximization of this goal, make an assessment of the consequences attached to the goal, and decide on an alternative that suits the goal's payoff function. What is important to note is that the promotion of peace and stability is viewed as the ultimate goal with peacekeeping a means to obtain this goal. Peacekeeping is therefore not a goal in itself, but one of many tools China can use to add value to its African engagement. It is also not a definite conclusion that peacekeeping is the best choice after considering the different options and their consequences, and only that peacekeeping reinforces the decision of the Chinese leadership to follow a certain course of direction. There are many intermediary or proximate goals that are not sought as ends in themselves, such as cultural and language exchanges, sport and academic interaction, and the establishment of small and private enterprises, as means to reach the goal of peaceful development and co-existence. Peacekeeping has a good effect in many of these

‘subordinate’ goals to produce desired results. This is what Allison & Zelikow (1999: 15) refer to as focusing on an objective or cluster of objectives around which an account of value-maximizing choice is constructed, with the effect to maximize the patterns of activities for each function. The application of China’s rational decision making in PKOs takes this means-ends relationship to into account.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on China’s PKOs is very extensive in nature and reflects not only on one aspect of participation, such as the desire for its troops to obtain peacekeeping or military experience in active areas of operations or to engage in security cooperation with contingents of other peacekeeping countries. Research undertaken on China’s PKOs first and foremost shows the intention to project a positive image of its political system abroad. Through peacekeeping intervention in conflict areas, for that matter not only the African peacekeeping environment, but in all politically unstable and insecure regions where peacekeeping troops have a mandate fulfill the traditional role of peacekeepers and assist in wider peacekeeping activities, China’s actions are observed by a large group of interested people. Academics, general China-watchers, governments, non-governmental organizations, lobbyists, local populations, civil groups in post-conflict societies or simply speaking, one and all, desires to see in what way China manages PKOs and if Chinese troops live up to official government policy and rhetoric of peaceful development and co-existence.

The Traditional/ Classical School

The rational actions of states are part of the classical school in decision making. This school perceives and acts on information from the situational context and makes decisions toward maximizing utility and predetermined goals. Classical theories of decision making contend that rational choices explain possible alternatives made by nation-states as basic actors within the international system to maximize utility within a complete and perceived environment that includes their national political system as well as the international system as a whole, an internal environment, as well as an external environment(Snyder, Bruck & Sapin, 2002: 58).Within this classical school, some theorists diverge from the traditional political analyses that reify or personify nation-states as basic actors. Instead of directing attention to metaphysical abstractions of the state, the government, or such broadly labeled institutions as ‘the executive,’ they narrow the subjects of their inquiry from larger collectivity to a smaller unit identifiable person responsible for making decisions, or to specific human decision makers who shape or establish government policies (Lu, 2000: 184). As a step further, emphasis is placed on the study of motivation and characteristics of decision makers, for motives of states are not truly separable from the motives of individual decision makers who speak on behalf of states and rationalize their policy actions (Snyder, et al, 2002: 58).Scholars of the rational choice school differ over the emphasis they place on the significance of different decision making determinants. Some focus on the study of the decision situation, which encompasses the total “external setting” and “internal setting” in which the choice must be made (Brecher, 1972: 4).

The external setting includes the state’s geopolitical position within the global system and the regional balance of power, as well as the state’s relationship with relevant individual powers(Sprout & Sprout, 1956: 310).As for the internal setting, two crucial important variables are the state’s military and its economic capabilities, which set limits on what the government can do(Lovett, 2006: 240).The internal setting also includes the domestic

systematic environment and the structure of the political system in which decision makers must operate. In sum, these scholars believe the objective elements constitute the critical elements (Lu, 2000: 184). In peacekeeping decision making, the influence of the PLA and the domestic economic machinery are factors that narrow or expand the decision making power of China to attain its foreign policy objectives. Other scholars assign perception a central place in foreign policy decision making. They regard the world as viewed subjectively by decision makers to be more important than objective reality. A distinction is therefore drawn between the 'psychomilieu' and the 'operational environment' (Lu, 2000: 185). 'The operational environment affects the results or outcome of decisions directly,' they argue, 'but influences the choice among policy options, that is, the decisions themselves, only as it is filtered through the image of decision makers' (Rosenau, 1993).

Whereas the traditional stress the significance of the subjective 'psychomilieu' of China's power elite in the formulation of the nation's foreign policy, the realist/rational actor school focuses its attention on the objective 'operational environment' (Whiting, 1960). Given the operational environment, the classical/rational actor school argues that China's policy behaviour is hardly different from other countries. Chinese decision making can be viewed in traditional Western patterns of balance of power, national interests, and domestic economic, military, and systemic constraints (Lu, 2000: 186). Despite differences in focus on different key variables, the theoretical frameworks established under the classical school attempt to explain state behaviour in terms of a rational actor (Bresslauer & Tetlock, 1991). The classical school assumes that decision makers strive to be consistent, to make optimal choices in narrowly constrained, neatly defined situations, and to rank and maximize values by choosing the most efficient alternative (Allison & Zelikow, 1999: 15). This is to assume that decision makers clearly discern their objectives in view of the available options as well as the likely consequences of each alternative choice before making decisions (Lovett, 2006: 240). In sum, the classical school stresses the rationality of decision making, a reflection perhaps of Western intellectual's faith in the essential rationality of human behavior inherited from the Enlightenment.

THE RATIONAL ACTOR MODEL

This model draws on 'realism,' which regards states as rational unitary actors, and as the central units in international relations. It argues that state goals and national security are what determine policy choices. State actions are determined by international politics, and therefore domestic politics are not relevant (Saikaly, 2009: 20). Drawing on the assumptions of 'rational choice,' decisions are made from carefully considered government options, with cost and benefit analysis for each option to maximize utility (Jervis, 1998). The inference in this model is that 'if the nation performed an action of this sort, it must have had a goal of this type' (Allison & Zelikow, 1999: 5). However, this model does not consider that decision-making is not always rational, or that there are actors, other than the state, in foreign policy making. The core concepts of the RAM are: (1) the state has a list of goals deemed to be in the national interest, (2) in dealing with an international issue, a list of options is proposed, (3) as a reaction to an option a consequence is proposed, (4) with every option based on rational choice, one course of action is chosen, after cost and benefit analysis, in which the national interest is maximized (Saikaly, 2009: 20). The assumptions of this model are summarized by concepts such as strategic problem, state goals, rational actor, value-maximizing, and strategic interactions, which are operationalized with the following evidence:

a) As evidence that a state wants to maximize goals, the expectation is that the operational environment provide opportunities and risks in attaining these goals and that choices to respond to these challenges create a cost-benefit assessment (Bendor & Hammond, 1992: 320-322). For China, potential examples may include failure to maintain mandates in peacekeeping areas, public criticism over the responsibility to protect (R2P), non-interventionism and respect for territorial integrity, traditional peacekeeping against wider peacekeeping, operational benefits, promoting a multilateral agenda, and protecting Chinese interests abroad.

b) As evidence of goals that the state has, observers would expect decision makers to articulate ends, such as the promotion of international image and prestige, promotion of economic interests and providing peaceful and stable environments (Simon, 1985: 298). For China, this utility maximization may include exercising influence through economic diplomacy, strengthening bilateral and multilateral relations, promoting of culture and education, and gaining access to valuable African natural resources.

c) As evidence of rationality, observers would expect the state to consider different options before making a choice, suggesting that no alternative is excluded because of evaluating the risks and opportunities (Simon, 1985: 300). What is the best option for maximizing China's objectives through peacekeeping? Examples may include displaying power status and projecting an image of a responsible power, building strategic partnerships, such as economic free trade zones and acquiring markets for weapon sales, establishing security frameworks for protecting its interests abroad, and by assisting with security sector reform and training of African military personnel.

d) As further evidence of rationality and of value maximizing, observers would expect discussions of the costs and benefits of each alternative, which ultimately determine the course of action to be taken (Allison & Zelikow, 1999: 26).

CHINA'S RATIONAL CHOICE DECISIONMAKING IN PKOS

A. Theoretical Assessment

The Chinese leadership has not currently defined a definite strategy for PKOs. The options they presently choose appear to be more of a collection of what will be effective under specific conditions, which relies on the influence they want to exert over post-conflict and other African states in economic and political arenas. While examining the overall preference of China to advance toward closer cooperation with African states, the importance they place on multilateralism, and the structural and functional role of the Forum on China-African Cooperation (FOCAC) and cooperation with other African regional bodies embody this cooperative framework, and strengthens security partnerships through military cooperation. Peacekeeping is also integrated into this African strategy and is viewed as a part of the original preference. Peacekeeping does not operate in isolation from China's African strategy, since it contributes to specifying the optimal choice of the leaders in an appropriate end-means calculation. Chinese officials repeatedly state that none of their African ventures should be seen as means to an end, or in the language of power politics as wielding influence. However, without the presence of so many of Chinese troops on the continent and the negative or positive images they portray, it is hardly unthinkable that peacekeeping is not a means to an end. Peacekeeping is instrumental for China to reach their objectives and that the post-conflict societies in which they are involved holds particular significance for implementing foreign policy, which can have successful results. Getting the proverbial "last soldier over the top of the hill to win the battle" is a reflection of the scope and intensity with

which China views peacekeeping to maximize utility to the interest of international security goals. In addition, the use of Chinese peacekeeping troops to assist in tasks beyond the scope of their assigned mission mandates indicates that the means of repairing infrastructure contributes to enhancing the objective of closer government cooperation and with the parties to the peace settlement. The certainty with which the means and ends are related and how closely the actual consequences of behavior match the consequences that are desired all depend on an understanding of the decision making process (Russett, Starr & Kinsella, 2010: 164).

Rational decision makers resolve the conflicts they face in multi-attribute, that of subjective utility, and simply trading off to find the best outcome (Gross Stein, 2008: 102). Considering the uncertainty of the environment and the perception of threat, Chinese decision makers self-consciously consider the values and goals affected by the peacekeeping environment and explain their interrelationships. Gross Stein, (2008: 102) states that after taking the anticipated consequences of actions into account, decisions are skilfully implemented and reviewed periodically to provide valuable feedback. In measuring the cost-benefit ration, the determination of China is to accept the risks the environment offers and increase its regional profile than to be outside the system and weaken its position (He, 2007).

In applying the rational choice model to China's PKOs, the assumption is that the decision making process should be logical and orderly, arriving at an expected or unintended outcome. The preferences of decision-makers should be ranked, at least intuitively, in such a way that if I prefer A to B, and B to C, then I prefer A to C (Gross Stein, 2008: 103). In practical terms it means that if China prefers peacekeeping to conflict and conflict to economic diplomacy, then China should prefer peacekeeping to economic diplomacy. Violating this requirement of 'transitive' preferences, for example, if China prefers C to A, or economic diplomacy to peacekeeping, then China is ruled out as a rational decision-maker. As part of the process of making informed choices, China should be good at collecting and evaluating information on African PKOs in a continuous and consistent manner. This will help to make choices based on responses that contain significant evidence. Media reporting on African PKOs feeds the Chinese state propaganda machine with new information on an almost daily basis. Information not previously accessed can be significant or diagnostic in that it presents evidence to the government in considering the likelihood of some of the consequences the government is considering (Gross Stein, 2008: 103). For instance, the consideration that peacekeeping could act as means toward economic ends, initially was not in the minds of the decision-makers, and subsequently is regarded as new information. It was diagnostic, insofar, African states signaled that they would be willing to establish a Forum On China-African Cooperation (FOCAC), using the good intentions of Chinese PKOs as basis for this relationship. The minimal, commonsensical requirements of rationality in foreign policy decision-making expect that policy makers can learn from history, that they can draw some propositions from the past and apply these propositions in an appropriate way to the future as they weight the likely consequences of the options that they face ((Bendor & Hammond, 1992: 325).

The Chinese leadership has a vast historical tradition of making strategic choices in warfare and security matters that they also can apply in peacekeeping decision-making. The question is if the Chinese leadership approximates common sense of a rational decision-maker by making logical, discriminating while open to new evidence, coherent and consistent choices. Are they open to arguments and evidence and think about the likely consequences of options,

such as, sending more troops to post-conflict societies to increase outcomes or sending fewer troops to post-conflict societies to decrease outcomes.

An alternative more demanding model of rational choice demands far more from decision-makers. Borrowing heavily from micro-economics, they expect decision makers to generate subjective probability estimates of the consequences of the options that they consider, to update these estimates as they consider new evidence, and to maximize their subjective expected utility (Russett et al, 2010: 164). What options are available to achieve the greatest possible outcomes and what probability estimates are taken into consideration when choosing the best options? For example, is the option based on making troops more visible for the sake of showing goodwill, harmonious intentions and co-existence with other nations or are there ulterior motives involved based on gaining economic leverage, political influence and security cooperation with African states? Chinese peacekeeping decision-making, indeed, rests upon a lot of options as the evidence points out and is not a one-track goal the leaders have in mind. Theories of rational choice in foreign policy treat both initial preferences and expectations as given and exogenous (Clarke, 1989: 30). Models of rational choice identify the strategy that leaders should choose, given their preferences and expectations and assume that people are 'instrumentally rational' in the process of choosing.

B. Combining Theory and Practice

The next section illustrates rational choice decision making in respect of China's economic, energy and strategic goals. The peacekeeping options that strengthen these goals are elaborated in the second instance. The consequences of these options toward the goals are then examined and lastly, the option is chosen that adds value to each goal. China's choice is essentially explained by demonstrating the best option to maximize the peacekeeping utility function.

a) Goals

Securing a peaceful and stable environment is viewed as the national or ultimate goal in the three mission countries. This goal is ordered to be the highest in the payoff, or the utility of preference function, which represents the desirability or utility of alternative sets of consequences (Vickers, 1995: 54). In effect goals of national propriety are rank ordered from the highest to lowest in value maximization. For example, goals that serve the direct national interest may include gaining a strategic foothold in Western Africa, countering the western sphere of influence, giving aid and assistance, promoting international prestige, becoming a responsible player in world politics, and establishing trade partnerships and opportunities for investment. These goals are all relevant in China's engagement with African states and serving the country's interests.

b) Options

The options pertain to the way in which peacekeeping strengthens the goals of China. The argument is that peacekeeping is viewed as a tool that combines the different options into securing a peaceful and stable environment as the national goal. To gain a strategic foothold in Western Africa, an increasing number of diplomats visit the selected countries to negotiate strategic and security issues, which points to the capacity of cooperating with these states. Pertaining to the objective of strengthening trade and economic relations, China can promote economic dialogue between Sino-African business actors, and encourage small and medium

sized enterprises (SMEs) to begin operating and promote two-way flow of trade. Although many of these entrepreneurs come to Africa by their own accord and do not receive any government assistance, they are still citizens of China and act as subjects of the Chinese state. What is significant from this option is that peacekeeping troops support these vendors in the sectors where they are stationed. Informal interaction between the shop owners and the soldiers constitute a positive relationship that adds value to the presence of the troops in the country and maximize the utility function of peacekeeping, when they invest in the agricultural sector to increase food production, and become involved in the mining industries for the extraction of minerals that can satisfy China's demand for these resources.

Moreover, the actions peacekeeping troops perform increase China's status in these countries and contribute to goal-seeking ambitions. Examples of such alternatives varies from, a) providing medical assistance to local populations in the sectors where the troops are stationed, b) providing transportation services between towns and villages for citizens to commute safely from one destination to another where such services did not previously exist, or was in a very bad state of affairs and c) building or repairing infrastructure, such as, roads and bridges, which increase the economic efficiency of the host country, accelerates economic development and from the Chinese side, facilitates faster access to resources and transportation to ports for shipments to China.

c) Consequences

There is an attached a set of consequences or outcomes of choice for each alternative that will ensure if that particular alternative is chosen (Allison & Zelikow, 1999: 18). Such ventures hold promising results for strengthening and maintaining economic cooperation. It is assumed that peacekeeping is in direct relationship to the achievement of economic goals, oil diplomacy and strategic partnerships. The image peacekeepers portray, the praise and recommendations they receive from the host governments and the perceptions local populations have toward them, facilitate cooperation on economic grounds. Acts such as these reinforce or weaken the decisions of the leadership to send troops. The leadership can either accept the invitation by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to contribute to mission areas, or abstain from intervention because peacekeeping does not promote the interests of China.

The actions of the peacekeepers in the mission areas provide straightforward results. In this instance, they provide services that are observable and measurable in terms of the work they are doing. Their actions are also viewed through the lenses of the Chinese media, the central leadership, and observers on the ground from other peacekeeping contingents, local populations and civic-society groups. Decision makers can now select the option whose consequences rank highest in the decision maker's payoff function (Axelrod, 1984). Considering this analytical scheme, which encompasses the goals, options, and consequences, it is a fair judgment to make that peacekeeping adds value to the goal-seeking ambitions of China in post-conflict societies. Providing for basic human needs in the lives of citizens and doing tasks beyond the necessary requirements is a consequence that is commended by one and all. In providing medical services, China displays its willingness to assist local populations and members of other peacekeeping contingents who need medical attention. This option showcases the medical capabilities of China to the outside world. Organizing transportation services involves expediting and shifting goods from one destination to another, and also portrays willingness to move its own personnel around for early peacekeeping efforts of Security Sector Reform (SSR). Without logistical support and

forms of transportation for the sectors under its command, communication with own forces and citizens might break down. China is filling a gap in services that are not provided by other peacekeeping contingents, which indicates that China is willing to shoulder more responsibilities, expand its scope of PKOs, and satisfy the strategic and business goals of the Chinese leadership. Repairing infrastructure at a very basic level is an option that has good resonance on the perspectives of local populations in the three countries toward Chinese peacekeeping troops. This kind of option, therefore, is viewed in favourable light and signals an intention of commitment by China to not only keep warring parties apart, monitor ceasefires and participate in sector patrols, but also to take part in non-traditional peacekeeping activities.

d) Choosing and Option

Rational choice is value-maximizing, which means that the rational agent has to select the option with potential consequences that rank highest in terms of reaching goals and objectives (Allison & Zelikow, 1999: 24). Considering the options and their consequences available to the Chinese leadership, the question is which option has the highest payoff function. In examining the options it is evident that economic diplomacy is an effective tool to promote its African diplomacy. The function of peacekeeping in this relationship is to give effect to economic diplomacy through trade, the signing of business partnerships, trade and investments. Peacekeepers, as actors of the Chinese state, also shape negotiations that may occur on levels of high politics. For example, peacekeeping intervention in Liberia serve the means to secure access to natural resources and gaining a strategic advantage over adversaries, which is an element of high politics. In essence, high and low politics diplomacy is essential to national power and well-being and peacekeeping intervention maximizes the value of interests. Providing medical assistance, transportation and building or repairing infrastructure are positive goal-seeking actions. These actions demarcate the boundaries between traditional peacekeeping and early peace building activities. These actions also indicate that China is not content with only playing the pacifier role that most of the other peacekeeping countries perform, but is also prepared to move on to constructive engagement and dynamic interaction. As a significant contributor to African PKOs, the leadership has to make decisions that elevate the status of China in relation to the functions the troops perform.

CRITIC ON THE RATIONAL ACTOR MODEL

The rational actor model is also subjected to criticism. The model tends to neglect a range of political variables, of which Michael Clarke includes: 'political decisions, non-political decisions, bureaucratic procedures, continuations of previous policy, and sheer accident (Clarke, 1989: 31).' There are factors in the peacekeeping decision-making process complicating the ordering of tasks, roles and policy and they are simply dismissed or ignored. For example, political factors that might play a role in the operational environment as essential to influence the objectives of the central leadership are not accounted for. These factors, then are exogenous to the choices of China and has minimal or limited impact on utility maximization. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, Chinese government officials have recognized that challenges can have detrimental or beneficial effects on China's international status and performance. As Richard Snyder observes, a crisis can lead to closer integration of the foreign policy-making group, the clarification of values, and adaptive innovation; or it can produce behavior that threatens the survival of the nation (Hermann, 1963: 62). Even though African peacekeeping per se is not viewed in terms of a crisis for China, because it does not endanger national interests on the homeland or

threaten the direct survival of the Chinese nation-state it provides opportunities for integrating decision-making procedures of all the relevant actors, and leads to conditional changes in the behavior of the central leadership.

CONCLUSION

Rational Action is most effectively viewed as an analytical tool that pragmatically explains China's peacekeeping decision making. The actions China's takes in the peacekeeping environment focus on value-maximizing the means for achieving objectives, and as this paper indicates, the principle category in which China's realizes its objectives is security and interests. Gaining access to natural resources and protecting the interests that are derived from these industries is viewed as the main objective. Rational action assumes that actors are individualistic in nature, and in this paper focused on China's behavior of China's as a single unit. The implementation of China's rational choices served the purpose of exemplifying the behavior of the decision makers. The positive effects of peacekeeping on the perceptions of post-conflict societies referred to the absolute and unconditional trust and faith in the actions of China, which are considered as taken for granted. The cooperative agreements reached between African leaders and China, which includes countries where peacekeepers are stationed, strengthened this position. Although Chinese documents state in detail that promoting a peaceful society and co-existence with other nations are the core foundations of its independent foreign policy of peace, and that participation in PKOs is a means to reach this goal, the evidence suggests that it is tacitly understood by citizens living in these conflict areas and merely rhetoric to gain access to resources, increase its bargaining power and exert other forms of influence.

In addition, the choice of whether to treat the preferences of China as given is important because it strengthens the assumption that the decision makers make empirical claims about the peacekeeping environment and what they want is constant within the context of peacekeeping actions. A consequence for China's in securing a safe environment for conducting business and protecting interests is to cooperate with other actors on a consistent basis. If this does not happen, policies with regard to peacekeeping implementation may not have the desired effect, or may understate the potential for political change. In reality, it is not clear if there is a boundary between the actions and interests of China. This could be investigated further in a separate study, especially since there has been a lack of clarity regarding whether China's peacekeeping decision making has been viewed as a result of the fixed preference assumption or as natural action to protect its interests. The core of rational action is individual choice, which crucially depends on the beliefs of the decision makers and the way in which desires and beliefs culminate in the taking of actions. Rational action further highlights the goal-seeking ambitions of China and in this paper it is a fair claim to make that peacekeeping adds a foreign policy dimension to China's total African strategy. Peacekeeping is also a political instrument in the hands of decision makers that, although indirectly, acts as a driving force to gain access to Africa's strategic marketplace through peaceful intentions and shows of goodwill. Analyzing China's actions advanced a strong hypothesis about a course of action. What is further important is that China has to make calculations about appropriate options, express them as pros and cons and choose alternatives that best advance its interests. Supplementing this logical order of events is China's readiness or reluctance to take risks in this environment.

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