

THE EU AND CHINA: PARTNERS IN EFFECTIVE MULTILATERALISM?

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Introduction

In a way, both the European Union and China can be seen as new global strategic actors in the politico-military dimension of world affairs. While both, in view of their economic and demographic weight, for some time have certainly had the potential to become global actors in the field of foreign and security policy, it is not until recently that they are actively waging policies in these fields. Because of their weight, the emergence of the EU and China as global strategic actors constitutes a new structural factor that has an enormous impact on the world order and on world events. This impact first became apparent with regard to the EU. The ongoing development of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), to which was later added the military arm of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP), has notably led to – as yet unresolved – questions regarding the nature of the transatlantic partnership between Europe and the US and the future of its most visible expression, NATO. China set foot on the stage slightly later, but this step caused even more reverberation.

This paper aims to assess whether the EU and China have just their position as debutants on the international politico-military scene in common, or whether they share strategic views to an extent that would allow them to establish a true strategic partnership, i.e. structural consultation and active cooperation on a wide range of foreign and security policy issues.

The Global Role of the EU: From Player to Power?

A Holistic Strategy

Although the CFSP dates back to the entry into force of the Maastricht Treaty in 1993, it is since the creation of ESDP in 1999 that the EU has really emerged as a global actor in foreign and security policy. This evolution is symbolized by the adoption of the ambitious European Security Strategy (ESS), *A Secure Europe in a Better World*, by the European Council on 12 December 2003.¹ For the very first time the Member States solemnly adopted a common strategic vision for the whole of EU foreign policy.

The ESS can best be characterized as a holistic, integrated or comprehensive approach.² This approach can be conceptualized through the notion of *global public goods* (GPG), which emerged in the context of the UN at the end of the 1990s. GPG have traditionally been seen in the context of development, but currently the concept is being used more and more in general political terms, e.g. by Joseph Nye.³ Starting point of this approach is the assumption that there are a number of ‘goods’ that are global or universal in the sense that it is generally felt – at least in Europe – that every individual is entitled to them.⁴ Like in the ‘human security’ approach, the individual is the point of reference. If to a certain extent the definition of the core GPG is a political and normative choice – Rotberg uses the term ‘political goods’⁵ –

many elements have been recognized as being universal beyond any doubt, notably in the field of human rights. These goods are public in the sense that their provision cannot be left to the market but should be supervised by government at the different levels of authority (local, national, regional and global).

These core GPG can be grouped under four broad headings:

- physical security or ‘freedom from fear’;
- political participation, the rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms;
- an open and inclusive economic order that provides for the wealth of everyone or ‘freedom from want’;
- social wellbeing in all of its aspects – access to health services, to education, to a clean and hazard-free environment etc.

These GPG are strongly interrelated: ultimately, one cannot be ensured or enjoyed without access to the other; the four categories are therefore equally important.

The ESS puts forward the global objective of *effective multilateralism*: ‘The development of a stronger international society, well functioning international institutions and a rule-based international order is our objective’. Effective multilateralism, or in other words effective global governance, can be translated as ensuring access to GPG; a system that fails to provide the core GPG lacks legitimacy. Global stability, and therefore the security of all States, depends on the availability of sufficient access to the core GPG. Rather than terrorism, weapons of mass destruction (WMD) or other military threats, the most important threat is the ever growing gap between haves and have-nots, a gap which can be best expressed in terms of access to the essential GPG. While this gap and the feelings of exclusion, marginalization and frustration resulting from it certainly do not justify conflict, they do help to explain it, which is a prerequisite for prevention and resolution of conflicts. The gap between haves and have-nots is foremost among the challenges of the globalized world, because it is a threat of a systemic nature, i.e. it results from the malfunctioning of, and impacts on, the global order itself. For unless mechanisms of governance are created or rendered more effective that can alleviate this situation, at a certain level of inequality, the resulting political upheaval, extremisms of all kinds, economic uncertainty and massive migration flows will become uncontrollable. Because of this interdependence GPG are non-exclusive, like true public goods: ultimately maintaining our access to GPG requires improving others’ access. Since it denies access to core GPG to a large share of the world’s population, the status quo is not an option.

Against this background, specific politico-military challenges do stand out. They include regions of chronic tension and long-standing disputes and conflicts, failed States and civil wars, proliferation of WMD and excessive militarization, and terrorism. These challenges directly threaten people, States and regions. They have to be tackled head-on, but as they are symptoms of the ‘dark side of globalization’, effective global governance, improving access to GPG, must be pursued at the same time as the key to *preventing* such threats. ‘Security is the precondition of development’, the ESS States, but this works the other way around as well. Of course, the strength of the causal relationship between, on the one hand, the gap between haves and have-nots in the broadest sense and, on the other hand, specific politico-military issues differs from case to case. Nonetheless, in the long term no durable solution of politico-military problems can be achieved unless the stability of the world system itself is assured.

The Holistic Approach in Practice

Implementing a comprehensive or holistic approach, based on the notion of GPG, has evident policy implications.

The first is *integration*. Because the core GPG are inextricably linked together, action must be undertaken to address all of them simultaneously and in a coordinated fashion, by all relevant actors, in all fields of external policy, putting to use all the instruments at their disposal, including trade, development, environmental, police, intelligence and legal cooperation, diplomacy, and security and defence. In the words of the ESS:

Spreading good governance, supporting social and political reform, dealing with corruption and abuse of power, establishing the rule of law and protecting human rights are the best means of strengthening the international order.

The same plea for a comprehensive approach can be found in the objectives of EU external action as formulated in the draft Constitutional Treaty (Article III-292), which puts additional emphasis on aspects of global governance, such as sustainable economic, social and environmental development, the eradication of poverty, the integration of all countries into the world economy, and the abolition of trade restrictions. In its recent communications on development, the Commission has explicitly mentioned the provision of ‘universal public goods’ as a basic factor.⁶

Although policies in all of these fields must be integrated under the same overall objective of increasing access to GPG, in order to avoid contradictory actions being undertaken, each policy should continue to operate according to its own rationale and dynamic. ‘Securitization’, i.e. the instrumentalization of non-military dimensions of foreign policy in function only of ‘hard’ security concerns or ‘freedom from fear’, must be avoided, for it ignores the intrinsic importance of the other GPG. An integrated approach deals with all GPG simultaneously, but does not require that all issues must be put under the label of security. On the contrary, although this may raise their importance in the eyes of States, it also blurs the distinctions between policy areas. Poverty or HIV/AIDS are of a different nature than terrorism, proliferation or conflict: they can be life-threatening but they do not imply a threat of violence and cannot be tackled by politico-military means. Accordingly, rather than including all challenges under the label of security, issues must not be dealt with as security threats unless they pose an effective threat of violence. In that sense, the ESS has perhaps not really been aptly named. It really is a foreign policy strategy rather than just a security strategy.

The second policy implication is that by thus addressing the root causes of conflict, a policy oriented on the core GPG emphasizes *structural conflict prevention*. This presents a formidable challenge: it implies dealing with more issues, related to all of the core GPG, at an earlier stage, before they become security threats. Effective prevention is much more than mere appeasement: it demands a proactive stance, aiming to change circumstances that induce instability and conflict. Mark Duffield analyses how structural prevention in effect amounts to the ‘merging of development and security’:

[Development] is no longer concerned with promoting economic growth in the hope that development will follow. Today it is better described as an attempt, preferably through

cooperative partnership arrangements, to change whole societies and the behaviour and attitudes of people within them.⁷

In this broad sense, development ‘not only leads to the reduction of poverty, more political freedom, and greater affirmation of human rights, but also lays the foundation for more durable peace and security’.⁸ In the terms of the Commission:

Development is crucial for collective and individual long-term security: they are complementary agendas and neither is subordinate to the other. There cannot be sustainable development without peace and security, and sustainable development is the best structural response to the deep-rooted causes of violent conflicts and the rise of terrorism, often linked to poverty, bad governance and the deterioration and lack of access to natural resources.⁹

In its relations with third countries, the EU seeks to bind all these dimensions together via conditionality mechanisms, e.g. in the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and in its relations with the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries (ACP) under the Cotonou Agreement. A policy oriented on GPG will thus in fact be quite intrusive, which can make it rather contentious with the target countries.¹⁰ But as it is in the very nature of GPG that pursuing them is in the mutual interest of all concerned, it is at the same time a very positive approach, contrary to other, threat-based strategies. ‘For whom’ rather than ‘against whom’ is the question that determines policy. The sincere pursuit of GPG will bring greatly enhanced legitimacy. As Nye advises the US: ‘we gain doubly from such a strategy: from the public goods themselves, and from the way they legitimize our power in the eyes of others’.¹¹

Thirdly, as effective action in all policy fields concerned requires the cooperation of a wide range of actors at many different levels, a GPG-oriented policy implies *multilateralism*: an intricate web of States, regimes, treaties and organizations, i.e. multi-level governance, implicating all levels of authority in a coordinated effort to improve people’s access to GPG. Although in the spirit of human security the individual is taken as point of reference, the State remains a primary partner, for no effective arrangements can be made with weak and failed States. In the words of the ESS: ‘The best protection for our security is a world of well-governed democratic States’. Third States must therefore be seen as partners for cooperation rather than as mere subjects of EU policies; the aim is to influence rather than to coerce, to use the carrot rather than the stick. There will be cases where the use of force is inevitable, for not all actors are amenable to preventive initiatives and security threats will arise. But in the framework of multilateralism, the use of force can only be a measure of last resort to be mandated by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), which the ESS sees as the core of the multilateral system. In those cases, the legitimacy acquired through the pursuit of GPG can be capitalized upon.

The EU is not the only actor pursuing an integrated approach. The *Outcome Document* of the UN’s Millennium+5 Summit of September 2005 puts forward the linkages between security, development and human rights, dubbed the three freedoms by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan in his preparatory report.¹² The important contribution of the EU to the debate on UN reform and its central role at the actual Summit has certainly influenced this outcome. In the development of integrated or holistic policies and institutions, the EU undoubtedly is a trend-setter.

As the ESS recognizes, ‘As a union of 25 states with over 450 million people producing a quarter of the world’s Gross National Product (GNP), and with a wide range of instruments at its disposal, the European Union is inevitably a global player’. It is not yet a fully-fledged global *power* however, as all too often still it fails to find consensus and thus the will to actively influence events, notably in the field of CFSP/ESDP. Yet the EU certainly has the potential to be a power in the politico-military dimension of the world order, and, like many others, it already is in the economic dimension as well as in the transnational dimension of post-territorial issues and norms and values. Multipolarity therefore is a fact; multilateralism is the EU’s way of dealing with it.

Implications for an EU-China Partnership: The EU Perspective

Strategic partnerships are vital to the implementation of the holistic approach, which seeks a ‘positive way’ of permanent dialogue and active cooperation in all dimensions of foreign policy, in order to prevent conflict and promote security and social, economic and political development – the four core GPG. The ESS says as much:

In particular we should look to develop strategic partnerships with Japan, China, Canada and India as well as with all those who share our goals and values, and are prepared to act in their support.

In this regard, the role of China is crucial, for not only is it a global power in its own right but it also is a permanent member of the UNSC. As for the EU the UNSC in principle is the sole arbiter that can decide on the use of force, a cooperative or at least non-obstructive China is first of all vital for the promotion of security. Without it, the legitimacy and legality of a UNSC resolution are unobtainable. China’s obstructive role towards the adoption of coercive measures against Sudan in order to halt the atrocities in Darfur, apparently motivated by Chinese interests in the Sudanese oil industry, is a case in point. Secondly, this holds true for the other GPG as well: the conditionality-based approach of the EU’s bilateral relations, which links aid and economic benefits to economic, political and social reform, can be easily undercut if another player comes along and offers partnership with total disregard of conditionality. Zimbabwe can serve as an example. While because of the human rights situation EU relations with the country have been frozen since 2002 and restrictive measures have been adopted against the government, China’s relations with the regime have grown apace with its isolation from the West. If energy interests are at stake, the only conditionality imposed seems to be adherence to the ‘One-China’ principle,¹³ which appears to be the pattern for China’s increased presence in Africa. ‘In other words, China’s oil needs are turning into a headache for the EU’s foreign policy’.¹⁴ Finally, the cooperation of China is also vital to build effective multilateral rules and institutions addressing issues that cut across borders, such as the environment or the prosecution of war crimes.

From the viewpoint of the EU’s foreign policy strategy, China is not seen as a threat, but a strategic partnership with China would be highly beneficial if it is not a *conditio sine qua non* for the achievement of the EU’s overall objective of effective multilateralism. Building on China’s increasing actorness, EU policy therefore is to engage China and ‘[to encourage] China to play a proactive and responsible role in global issues’.¹⁵ For:

Globalization means, among many other things, that a country the size of China is both part of the problem and the solution to all major issues of international and regional concern. Engagement means developing comprehensive relations which allow for

working towards a common understanding on all issues of concern, in support of multilateral problem-solving wherever this applies on international and regional issues.¹⁶

The latest Commission Communication on China (2003) puts forward that such a common understanding is indeed developing:

Faced with these developments, it is in the clear interest of the EU and China to work as strategic partners on the international scene. EU and Chinese interests converge on many issues of global governance, in particular as regards the key role of multilateral organizations and systems. Through a further reinforcement of their cooperation, the EU and China will be better able to promote these shared visions and interests, and thus to shore up their joint security and other interests in Asia and elsewhere.¹⁷

In other words, the EU wants to '[enmesh] China in the widest possible range of international institutions'.¹⁸ It expects China as a global power in a multipolar world to shoulder global responsibilities and to contribute actively and constructively to effective multilateralism.

The Global Role of China: From Unilateralism to Multilateralism?

Experimental Multilateralism

Chinese foreign and security policy in the post-World War II era combines a continuous emphasis on national defence to defend what China perceives as inalienable territorial rights with diplomatic instruments designed to allow China a level of political influence out of proportion to its economic and military capabilities. This foreign policy priority implied that once the Sino-soviet alliance began to fall apart in 1956, China developed a policy of non-alignment, with the exception of its alliance with North Korea. After the Cold War, Beijing has maintained this basic scheme of foreign and security policy with some adjustments. Chinese foreign policy focuses on limiting the possibilities of violent conflict in its neighbourhood without compromising the right to use force against entities defined by China as separatists or as aggressors threatening Chinese sovereignty. The policy is aimed at allowing Beijing to concentrate resources on internal economic development and is pursued by cooperating with states that are at least partially supportive of Chinese foreign policy goals. US military and economic superiority and the prospects of a future global order dominated by the US alliance system encourage Beijing to prioritize diplomacy while continuing to rely on military instruments for the defence of Chinese territory. Chinese threat perceptions hence remain dominated by the view that China must guard itself against foreign assaults on what China defines as its historical rights.¹⁹

The emergence of China as a major diplomatic player in regional and global multilateral fora is the principal element of renewal in Chinese post-Cold War foreign policy called China's Independent Foreign Policy of Peace.²⁰ The main principles of Chinese foreign policy are freedom from alliances, the active pursuit of common prosperity through global economic frameworks of coordination and cooperation, the preservation of the UN system as the principal forum for the management of global security issues, and the five principles of peaceful coexistence defined as mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence.

China's 2004 White Paper on National Defence states the main contents of Chinese security policy based on an assessment of the principal challenges to Chinese peace and development.²¹ The Chinese government recognizes that transnational security threats such as terrorism, infectious diseases, piracy, drug production and trafficking constitute increasingly grave security challenges and that such issues are inseparable from national security issues, encouraging a holistic security policy with integrated strategies that responds to national and transnational security threats at the same time. However, in practice the Chinese government continues to emphasize the traditional aspects of national security, both in its threat assessment and in its policies designed to counter the threats. The rise of the Taiwan independence forces is listed as the biggest immediate threat to peace and stability. In addition, the 2002 US-DPRK nuclear standoff on the Korean peninsula and Japanese defence policy are seen as major threats. Adding to the gravity of these threats is the fact that US, Japanese and Taiwanese military capabilities are steadily being reinforced and that the United States is leading in the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA). The RMA has enhanced the war fighting capabilities of these countries through information technology, thereby engendering a technological gap between themselves and states such as China that do not form part of the US alliance system. To a large extent, this technological gap has been fostered by US economic superiority, furnishing it with the means to invest substantially in military technology, nuclear arsenals and information warfare. These developments underscore Beijing's concern about the asymmetrical economic balance between the United States and China.

The risks and challenges caused by economic globalization is therefore another important item on the Chinese security agenda. Economic globalization is perceived as an opportunity to bring the nations closer together, but it has also worsened the imbalance in world economic development. Beyond this broad assessment of the advantages and drawbacks of globalization, there is, however, not much belief in the possibility of ameliorating security problems through enhanced economic interdependence. This is not surprising in view of developments such as the steadily deteriorating Sino-Japanese relations at the same time as economic integration between the two neighbouring states is progressing. Instead, the majority of people in China's political establishment sees China's successful integration into the world economy as a means to restore China's great power status, allowing for modernization of its armed forces so as to be able to defend the nation against continuous threats towards its territorial integrity, particularly in the Taiwan Strait. In addition, economic globalization gives China increased access to markets and energy resources which is considered imperative to contain domestic social and political unrest.²²

Economic globalization is hence not predominantly a contested phenomenon. Instead, it is seen as a useful means of defending and enhancing China's position in the global international system. By contrast, the prolonged existence of unipolarity vis-à-vis multipolarity is considered a phenomenon that is potentially detrimental to international peace and stability. As such, it will have a major impact on Chinese security according to the government. In the official Chinese view, hegemonism and unilateralism have gained new ground, as struggles for strategic points, resources and dominance crop up from time to time. While cooperating with and seeking support from each other, the world's major countries are checking on and competing with one another as well. The United States is not explicitly singled out as the culprit giving rise to international rivalry and strategic uncertainty. However, the Chinese government comments on the US contribution to the gravity of the Taiwan threat through increased arms sales and states its dissatisfaction with progress in the six-party talks attempting to settle the 2002 US-DPRK nuclear standoff, thereby indicating

some of the Chinese security concerns that are considered enhanced by Washington's pursuit of unilateral strategies.

In private, Chinese government officials are less discrete about pronouncing the US pursuit of a global *Pax Americana* a principal security concern, in part because the cornerstones of such an order include Japan and a *de facto* independent Taiwan, in part because US hegemony constitutes an impediment to Chinese demands for a global order. Washington is described as a likely future strategic rival whose preference for imposing its demands by military means creates incentives for China and other states to counterbalance the United States. In particular, the US decision to bypass the United Nations and wage a preventive war against Iraq despite its failure to obtain a Security Council mandate for the use of force is considered an assault against the majority of countries that supports focusing on bilateral negotiations and multilateral coordination when handling international disputes.²³ A discrepancy has arisen between the only remaining superpower relying increasingly on military capabilities and the majority of countries relying on multilateral institutions, arms control and similar means to obtain strategic stability.²⁴

Experimental Multilateralism in Practice

China goes to great lengths to present itself as a power that bases its foreign and security policy on a multilateral strategy that corresponds to China's Independent Foreign Policy of Peace. China has opted for freedom from alliances except for the 1961 Sino-North Korean alliance on the basis of the 1954 Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence which remains part of the constitution of the People's Republic of China.²⁵ According to the Chinese understanding, peaceful co-existence does not entail that international relations are to be dominated by cooperation. Instead, Beijing advocates that the pursuance of national interests should be a combination of individual foreign policy choices and extensive multilateral dialogue to prevent clashes between states over national interests that may produce violent conflict. Multilateralism is hence a means to allow states to concentrate on fulfilling their individual goals rather than an end in itself.

In the economic field, China's membership of the World Trade Organization (WTO) from 2001 is worth noting as an example of China's proactive attitude towards its integration into global economic frameworks of coordination and cooperation. Instead of trying to oppose overseas demands for reforms as is the case with Russia, Beijing embraces existing rules of world trade with the purpose of transforming the rules to better match Chinese needs. By contrast, despite Chinese membership of the World Health Organization (WHO), Beijing proved very reluctant to share information and permit assistance from this organization to contain SARS in 2003. The case indicates that China has yet to accept the consequences of membership of international institutions for the handling of threats and their tendency to intervene in governmental policies, especially when it comes to transnational threats that potentially involve external parties in the domestic policies of states.

At the regional Asian level, Beijing has established a network of partnership agreements and institutional arrangements that complements the US alliance system without compromising its principle of freedom from alliances. The principle invests Beijing with the flexibility necessary to form partnerships where Washington's alliance system is at its weakest and where the states aspire to conduct a foreign policy that is partly independent from the United States. An important element in Chinese multilateralism is to play a proactive role in regional and global institutions that are thought to help maintain international peace and stability

without subjecting states to US leadership.²⁶ The process began in Central Asia with the Chinese initiative to establish the 1994 Shanghai Five grouping that was translated into the treaty-based Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in 2001. The SCO encompasses Russia, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan as well as China and involves military and economic cooperation and joining up in the fight against terrorism. Substantial cooperation is limited, focusing on the mutual interests of the states in keeping US demands for human rights protection and democratization at bay. Beijing is also engaged in extensive economic and security cooperation with Southeast Asia, centred on the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). For example, in November 2002 an agreement was signed to create a Sino-ASEAN Free Trade Area from 2010, and in October 2003 China acceded to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation that coins the Southeast Asian principles of state conduct. In the wake of the Asian financial crisis in 1997/98, agreement was reached to establish ASEAN+3 involving the ten Southeast Asian states as well as China, Japan and South Korea in financial and economic dialogue and policy coordination. Chinese cooperation with ASEAN has also been strengthened with the purpose of devising strategies for dealing with transnational security threats such as terrorism, infectious disease, piracy, drug production and trafficking. In November 2005, China was included in the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) as a dialogue partner, which due to the paralysis of SAARC most likely constitutes a mere symbolic confirmation of Chinese support for subcontinental multilateral security institutions.

The principal institutional basis for Chinese multilateralism is Beijing's concern to preserve the UN system of the Cold War as the main mechanism underpinning the management of global and regional security issues. The UN is the principal platform for China to demonstrate its commitment to universal principles of state conduct and to show that China is a responsible power fulfilling its obligations towards the international community. This aspiration suits the foreign policy aims of China particularly well, since Beijing's vision of international order does not involve dominance. Instead, Beijing envisages the preservation of the Cold War UN system based on its fundamental principles of absolute sovereignty, effective territorial control and the authority of the UN Security Council. It is not a system designed to encourage extensive cooperation or competition. Instead, it encourages states to live and let live, allowing for heterogeneous political systems and institutional structures at the regional level aiming at conflict prevention. This version of international order is conducive to a diversity of political systems that insulates states from US demands to implement liberal concepts of human rights and democracy and to base their national security solely on the US alliance system.

Beijing hence does attach importance to having a moral basis for its foreign and security policy. China's ability to counter the consolidation of a *Pax Americana* that involves sustaining Taiwan's *de facto* independence and enhancing the military role of Japan in Asian security is strengthened by referring to an external source of political authority that is recognized by the majority of powers as legitimate. The UN has this quality because it is a left-over from the Cold War that continues to be recognized as the principal forum for the management of security issues of global importance by the majority of states. China also occupies a permanent seat in the UN Security Council, allowing it to veto US attempts at using this forum for consolidating a *Pax Americana*. The UN system is hence predominantly a defensive structure that can be used to ward off US attempts at imposing its will without a mandate from the international community and to persuade states that China has no intentions to interfere in the political authority of other states. Beijing hence takes pains to ensure that the permanent and *ad hoc* security institutions to which it subscribes explicitly acknowledge

the fundamental principles of the UN system. China's concern to embed its foreign and security policy in globally accepted principles of state conduct provides it with a platform for experimenting with multilateral cooperation with other states with a view to accommodating the global order and its institutional frameworks to Chinese demands and interests. It also allows China to present itself as the power carrying the moral high ground compared to the United States. Washington would like to install the liberal principles of democracy, human rights and the rule of law as a fundamental part of the UN system on a par with the principles of absolute sovereignty and effective territorial control. The majority of countries in the world do not support such revisions to the UN system because it can be used by the US hegemon to disregard the domestic autonomy of other governments and even among its democratic allies, criticism of the methods used by the United States to attempt to implement these revisions is wide-spread. For example, US efforts to transform Afghanistan and Iraq into liberal democracies are said to be ineffective because they rely on imposition without sufficient regard for indigenous demands and conditions. China has skilfully utilized the mounting criticism of US foreign and security policies to promote itself as a responsible power whose foreign policy conduct is embedded in global and regional multilateral structures and as such it is based on the common interests of states. Chinese multilateralism hence also serves to convince the surroundings that China's rise will be peaceful, thereby repudiating expectations of future Chinese aggression.

Multilateralism is, however, not as dominant a feature of Chinese foreign policy as it would sometimes seem from official rhetoric. Multilateralism is arguably a test run of the willingness and ability of China's surroundings to accommodate Chinese demands and interests. China has come a long way towards being accepted as a responsible power by the international community. However, fundamental problems remain, most notably over the issues of Taiwan, Sino-Japanese relations and US hegemony, which cause China to continue to rely on unilateralism in practice. Chinese unilateralism is similar to that of the United States in that it implies that Beijing cannot rely upon the goodwill of others for its safety, and therefore should be prepared to act on its own and if necessary by using force. However, Chinese unilateralism differs from that of the United States by being a passive military build-up designed to prepare for fighting a future war, since China is not sufficiently strong to encourage the use of force for foreign policy purposes at the present time. Instead, Beijing intends to build up its military capabilities to maintain a credible deterrent. China does not make a secret of its prioritization of reforms driven by the Revolution in Military Affairs, and its plans of having fewer but better troops and of stepping up its military posture across the Taiwan Strait. China uses considerable resources on transforming its armed forces from self-sufficiency in manpower to self-sufficiency in military technology to be able to adopt swift and flexible defence responses to security threats.²⁷ A major part of Beijing's military modernization program concerns the acquisition of destroyers, fighter aircraft and submarines, which will give Beijing a capability to perform military strikes against a probably US-protected Taiwan when necessary, as well as to defend the ocean frontier and even at a later date to exert control over central regional shipping lanes. As part of modernization efforts, China is building programs for these types of weapons to gradually free itself from dependency on other states. These developments may bespeak a Chinese intention to match the United States in the Asia-Pacific within the next two or three decades.²⁸

Implications for an EU-China Partnership: The Chinese Perspective

As is the case with the EU, strategic partnerships are vital to China's ability to implement its multilateral strategy, which focuses on maintaining international peace and stability,

preventing conflict, and on only allowing for the use of force as a last resort. Chinese multilateralism is aimed at creating peaceful, benevolent surroundings, thereby allowing China to build up its economic and military capabilities by cashing in on the benefits of economic globalization so as to realize its potential to position itself as a global great power. Both the EU and China oppose US hegemony and are supportive of the development of a multipolar international system. Multipolarity implies the emergence of new poles in the Third World, Western Europe, North America, Australia, Northeast Asia, South Asia and Eurasia.²⁹ The Chinese concept of multipolarity does not involve traditional power balancing through alliances, but through the looser concept of strategic partnerships. In practice, multipolarity involves partial cooperation with powers that are willing to counter US security policies, and the EU is one such power. The EU equally recognizes China's interest in supporting global multipolarity and resisting perceived US hegemony.³⁰

In October 2003, China and the EU established an all-round strategic partnership. The Joint Declaration of the Seventh China-EU Leaders' Meeting that was finalized in 2004 outlines China-EU cooperation in more than 30 fields including politics, economy, society, science and technology, culture, education, environmental protection and international affairs.³¹

Seen from Beijing's perspective, the partnership holds particularly great potential in the areas of trade and science and technology. Beijing remains a developing country with vast problems of poverty and increasing social inequality, giving rise to concerns among China's political leaders that social upheaval will bring down communist party rule and dismember the country. In contrast to the surroundings, Beijing's leadership is very much aware that China's ascendancy to the position of a great power is not a given fact. The Chinese government hence stopped speaking of China's peaceful rise in 2004 since the term implies that it might pose challenges against the interests of other states. Instead, the government now speaks of China's peaceful development.³² The term is designed to convey the image that China is a secondary power like the EU. Increased access to markets and research and development in the areas of science and technology is considered imperative to maintain high economic growth rates, which is seen as the principal means to contain domestic social and political unrest.³³ The EU member states constitute an attractive alternative to US science and technology R&D. For example, Germany's expenditure on research and development as a percentage of GDP was 2.52 per cent, allowing it a rank five among the OECD countries, ahead of the United States.³⁴ In 2003, China became the EU's second trading partner behind the United States, with EU-China bilateral trade amounting to 135 billion euro.³⁵

In addition, EU multilateral policies are seen as a role model by China. Specifically, in China's view the EU member states have succeeded in reversing the traditional flow of wealth from rural to urban areas by means of economic redistribution measures. Moreover, the EU is a model for conflict resolution and the non-use of force since in contrast to the United States the EU is a security community, meaning that the member states do not resort to war to solve their problems. The EU is a civilian power, implying that problems are solved through peaceful means such as persuasion, consultation and consensus rather than by resorting to power politics. China is aware of historical differences between itself and European countries, such as the willingness to deal thoroughly with the question of securing Germany's peaceful rise and considerable US assistance for the restoration of Europe after the Second World War. Europe also differs in its preferred methods of conflict resolution which emphasize legal and treaty-based outcomes in contrast to Asian methods that emphasize consensus-based processes. Nevertheless, Chinese engagement and integration in international institutions based on dialogue rather than the use of force is a means of maintaining peace and stability

and ensuring the peaceful emergence of China as a great power, and China aims at learning from the European process of integration to ensure that these goals are met.

Building-Blocks of a Strategic Partnership

Shared Views

China's perception of the EU as a role model can be detected in its domestic reform policies dealing with the issue of poverty in general and the flow of wealth from rural to urban areas in particular that is seen as a major threat to Chinese unity and continued communist party rule. For example, China plans to raise the farm prices as an echo of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy and to lower taxes on the peasantry. Tuition fees for primary and junior high school students in the poor provinces in Western China have been scrapped to improve the quantity and quality of education. The semi-democracy in the rural villages and control of local corruption are consolidated by allowing inhabitants to choose freely amongst candidates acceptable to China's Communist Party.³⁶

The strategic outlook of the EU and China presents many commonalities. The multilateral strategies employed by the EU and China are similar in their focus on stability and conflict prevention based on policy coordination. They also agree that the UN should be at the centre of global security management, and that persuasion and dialogue is preferable to resort to force. The potential for EU-China security cooperation seems great. As it is stated in China's EU Policy Paper:

The common ground between China and the EU far outweighs their disagreements. Both China and the EU stand for democracy in international relations and an enhanced role of the UN. Both are committed to combating international terrorism and promoting sustainable development through poverty elimination and environmental protection endeavours.³⁷

In the words of the Commission:

EU and China share views on the importance of multilateral systems and rules for global governance, which includes the further strengthening of the United Nations system, its role in regional and global conflict resolution and in the coordination of actions addressing global concerns, from weapons control, through international terrorism, to climate change.³⁸

For the EU as well as China a strategic partnership based on these shared views would contribute significantly to the realization of their foreign policy strategy. This fact is reflected in the ongoing development of their bilateral relations, which are both deepening and widening. The mechanisms for political dialogue now comprise: annual Summits at the level of Heads of State and Government; one or two Troika Ministerials per year; meetings per EU Presidency of Political Directors, of Regional Directors, of EU Heads of Mission in Beijing with the Chinese Foreign Minister, and of the Chinese Ambassador in the Presidency capital with the President of the General Affairs and External Relations Council (GAERC); and regular meetings at the level of experts and high officials. Added to that are a human rights dialogue, and economic and sectoral dialogue and agreements. Foreign and security policy form an integral part of the political dialogue and 'global governance issues now routinely

figure on the agenda of bilateral meetings, e.g. climate change, UN reform, terrorism', as stated in an April 2005 stock-taking exercise by the Commission³⁹ and as called for in the 2003 Commission Communication. One concrete result has been the *Joint Declaration of the People's Republic of China and the EU on Non-Proliferation and Arms Control* (8 December 2004), in which the two recognize each other as strategic partners in the area of disarmament and non-proliferation, and which has already been followed by a first joint workshop on non-proliferation.

Joint Initiatives

Progress has thus certainly been made, but for a true strategic partnership to be established, more actual 'joint EU-China policy initiatives' must be undertaken on the basis of the political dialogue, something which the 2003 Communication also called for. The opportunities for more active diplomatic and operational cooperation on a number of issues could be assessed.

Despite EU-China trade disputes, China continues to encourage cooperation in the areas of service trade, investments, and science and technology, in view of its concerns about domestic order.⁴⁰ China and the EU have set up dialogue and consultation mechanisms in these fields, but in Beijing's view the economic complementarity between the EU and China calls for deepened cooperation at the political and corporate levels. A prevailing barrier towards the realization of these plans is EU concern about the trade imbalance between European countries and China, which is seen to crowd out European manufacturing and labour.

In the area of arms control and non-proliferation, the EU and China agree that wide scale nuclear proliferation triggered for example by Iran would encourage an arms race that might prompt Europe and China to switch additional resources out of the civil economy into increased military expenditure and to deemphasize the role of multilateral conflict resolution as a principal means of global security management.

The context of effective multilateralism and the UN perhaps hold the greatest potential for practical cooperation because both the EU and China go to great lengths to ensure that the UN remains the dominant forum for global security management. One obvious way of assuming a share of the responsibility for global peace and security is contributing forces to UN-led (blue helmets) and UN-mandated operations. In spite of its status as permanent UNSC member however, in February 2006 China contributed just 1,052 blue helmets or 1.4% out of 73,000. The majority of these were deployed in Liberia (UNMIL: 595), the Congo (MONUC: 230) and Haiti (MINUSTAH: 127). EU Member States combined contributed 4,209 (5.7%). If forces participating in UN-mandated operations are further taken into account (EUFOR in Bosnia, KFOR in Kosovo, ISAF in Afghanistan) a total EU contribution of over 30,000 is arrived at. On the one hand, the operations in which both China and EU Member States participate with significant numbers could be the topic of dialogue, to jointly identify lessons learned and to assess the opportunities for cooperation in the field. E.g. UNMIL also comprises substantial Irish and Swedish and MINUSTAH Spanish contingents. EU Member States do not significantly contribute to MONUC, but the EU has its own police and security sector reform missions in the country, EUPOL and EUSEC. On the other hand, when new missions are launched, the EU could actively seek substantial Chinese participation in cooperation with European forces, in order to enhance China's current limited contribution and in order to overcome China's reluctance in those case where its economic interests could otherwise lead it to block or slow down intervention, as has been the case in the past. Such a

scenario is of course equally dependent on the willingness of the EU to assume part of the burden of global peace and security and contribute more forces to UN-led or UN-mandated operations in regions where its presence has hitherto been limited, notably in Sub-Saharan Africa. Such dialogue and cooperation could be the first steps towards more extensive military cooperation.

Another area in which cooperation is actually vital for success is the work of the newly established Peacebuilding Commission (PBC). China, France and the UK as permanent members of the UNSC, and the European Commission as the world's third donor are among the core members of the PBC's standing Organizational Committee. In the immediate post-conflict phase the PBC is to bring around the table all relevant actors for a given country, in all relevant areas, to create a platform for consultation and coordination. The holistic approach called for by Kofi Annan is thus evident. This approach inherently requires a certain degree of conditionality, linking support for economic reconstruction to the creation of a democratic political system, respect for human rights and the establishment of the rule of law. The question is whether all key members of the PBC will agree to such an approach, which is particularly different from China's current policies in Africa. Again, intense dialogue is called for.

Perhaps Africa-related participation in UN missions and the PBC could be part of a general EU-China consultation on Africa in the framework of the political dialogue. Both parties could set forth their interests and principles, in order to promote mutual understanding and hopefully a gradual coordination of approaches. The EU ought to convince China that an approach based on conditionality, if consistently pursued by all actors involved, in the long term need not be contradictory to economic interests. China's EU Policy Paper puts forward the arrangement of a 'strategic security consultation', repeated in the April 2005 stock-taking exercise by the Commission. In this framework all security-related topics could be discussed, including non-proliferation, terrorism, UN operations and the PBC.

Remaining Differences

The difference in their approaches to partnership in Africa highlights the fact that the EU's and China's strategic outlook are not totally complementary, notably on issues of human rights and democracy. There obviously still are serious concerns on the human rights situation in China itself, and China is of course not a democracy. Both facts are reflected in China's foreign policy, notably its disregard for conditionality and its general reluctance to mandate intervention, even in case of grave human rights violations. In spite of the promising participation of former Foreign Minister Qian Qichen in the High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, which among other things unanimously recommended the principle of 'responsibility to protect' (R2P), in the end China adopted a very conservative position on UN reform at the September 2005 UN Summit.⁴¹ It remains doubtful therefore whether China will be cooperative in the implementation of R2P, another topic which could be on the agenda of a 'strategic consultation mechanism'.

In other words, there is no consensus on the universality of all of the GPG or freedoms that the EU and the UN seek to promote. Although it recognizes the multipolar nature of the current world order, China as yet does not seem to agree with all of the rules which the EU puts forward in the context of effective multilateralism as a way of dealing with multipolarity. Effective multilateralism as a set of rules limiting the unbridled aspirations of all powers is something else than merely counterbalancing the US, as it sometimes seems to be understood

in China. The promotion of GPG in China itself, including democracy, human rights and the rule of law, remains very difficult. The EU may not agree on the means the United States tends to use to promote democracy, human rights and the rule of law, but both Brussels and Washington agree that these principles for domestic conduct should obtain the status as fundamental rules of state conduct in the UN system on a par with absolute sovereignty and effective territorial control. Chinese experiments with top-down controlled village democracy does not alter the fact that Beijing, by contrast, is firmly committed not to compromise on the precedence of the principles of absolute sovereignty and effective territorial control. For example, in Central Asia the SCO that is based on the UN Charter is used as a platform for criticizing the immorality of Western criticism of current authoritarian regimes for their domestic political conduct which encompasses gross human rights atrocities. China's interpretation of what it means to preserve the UN as the moral basis for state conduct is thus vastly different from that of the EU.

When looking beyond the rhetoric of peace, stability and prosperity through free trade that almost all states can agree to, the EU and China focus on divergent issues as the most promising areas of cooperation. China would like to see the EU remove barriers of trade, but here the limits of European openness emerge in the concern of Member States to protect the employment opportunities and welfare systems of their own citizens. In the area of arms control and non-proliferation, the EU has not lifted the arms embargo against China, in part because of US pressure, but also because the EU is equally doubtful about the intentions and consequences of China's continuous military build-up. In 2005, the EU pressured the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to bring Iran's nuclear program before the UN Security Council against the wishes of China and Russia. The two countries agreed to referral only on condition that the UNSC takes no immediate action. In March 2006, Beijing and Moscow refrained from supporting a statement proposed by the EU and the US that Iran suspends its nuclear enrichment efforts, arguably because they are opposed to the UNSC's adoption of punitive measures against Iran. Both the EU and China may be keen to avoid proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, but at the end of the day the opportunities for practical cooperation are circumscribed by the fact that they are at different sides of the fence. The majority of European countries will continue to rely on the US for mutual security guarantees in contrast to China, for whom the US alliance system is a potential threat to its security interests and goals.

All of these are key points of attention for the political dialogue and the Commission's warning of 2001 therefore remains highly relevant:

But China's opening and joining the international community has always been fraught with difficulties and is likely to be so for many years. Nothing can be taken for granted. The reform process is not on permanent auto-pilot.⁴²

Conclusion: A Strategic Partnership Still in the Making

The EU and China have established an extensive political dialogue, which includes foreign and security policy, notably in the context of the UN and what the EU refers to as effective multilateralism. The foundation of this politico-military dialogue is constituted by a commonality of views on the world order, in particular on the need for a rule-based multilateral order and the role of the UN. Yet significant differences continue to exist, most importantly with regard to human rights and democracy, which renders China's unqualified

support for the holistic approach advocated by the EU and the UN difficult. As a result, the EU and China have not yet been able to translate the dialogue into systematic cooperation and regular joint initiatives. A true strategic partnership has not yet been established because the EU and China have not been able to move beyond the stage of dialogue. If they succeed in the exercise of coordination and can build a fully-fledged strategic partnership, the effectiveness of their policies will be greatly enhanced. However, the prospects of that happening are not too encouraging.

A major limitation to the feasibility of EU-China cooperation is that Chinese multilateralism remains experimental. Although rhetorically the Chinese government is committed to multilateralism, in practice it entertains second thoughts because the basic dynamic of the international environment is seen to remain power politics. In contrast, the EU as a predominantly civilian power relies heavily on economic and diplomatic means for influence in the international system. Beijing sees a strong national defence and continued authoritarian rule as a necessity to maintain domestic stability and to protect China against future aggression from foreign powers such as the United States and Japan, should they prove unwilling to accommodate Chinese demands and interests in a future global order. The EU's multilateralism is one of its defining characteristics, which allows it to present itself as the prototype of how economic and political power can be used to claim global power status without relying on military capabilities. This idea of power may appeal to contemporary China because it helps Beijing convince the surrounding countries that China has no interest in promoting a Sino-centric order, but that China's rise will be accompanied by a continued focus on the common interest of states in peace and stability. However, in view of US efforts to strengthen its alliance system, Chinese multilateralism remains experimental and is therefore as of yet not a reliable basis for long-term EU policy planning towards China.

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¹ See <http://ue.eu.int/uedocs/cmsUpload/78367.pdf>.

² Sven Biscop, *The European Security Strategy – A Global Agenda for Positive Power*. Aldershot, Ashgate Publishing, 2005.

³ Joseph S. Nye, *The Paradox of American Power: Why the World's Only Superpower Can't Go it Alone*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002.

⁴ GPG are sometimes defined more narrowly as comprising only those public goods which cannot be provided but through international cooperation, excluding public goods of which the State is or should be the main provider, such as education or political participation. See e.g. the International Task Force on Global Public Goods, <http://www.gpgtaskforce.org>.

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⁷ Mark Duffield, *Global Governance and the New Wars*. London, Zed Books, 2002, p. 42.

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⁹ COM (2005) 311 final, *Proposal for a Joint Declaration by the Council, the European Parliament and the Commission on the European Union Development Policy. 'The European Consensus'*, p. 8.

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