

ASSESSMENT OF PRESIDENT XI JING PING'S PEACE PLAN FOR UKRAINE AND PALESTINE

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Abstract

This study is an assessment of President Xi Jing Ping's peace plan for Ukraine and Palestine. The plan was conceived based on the doctrine that Xi Jing Ping called the global security initiative (GSI). The study evaluated China's mediation efforts and why these efforts are yet to bring about long-term solution to any of the conflicts. The specific objectives of the research are to examine the interests and principles that drive China's peace efforts in the conflicts, to evaluate why China's efforts has not brought about solution to the conflicts, to interrogate the impartiality of China as a mediator and to offer recommendation on how to resolve the conflicts. The study is qualitative research, and the researcher employed the historical research method to trace the events that culminated in China's peace plan. The study also adopted the realist-power theory as a framework in the analysis of the work. After assessing available evidence, the findings reveals that what drives China's peace plan in the conflicts is the pursuit of its strategic interests. The result of the findings also indicate that China's effort has not yielded any result because of China's partial role in the conflicts. The study recommends that China should reformulate its peace plan to suit the desires of all the parties in the conflicts and conduct its mediation impartially to earn the confidence of the parties involved in the conflicts.

Keywords: peace-plan; Ukraine; Xi Jinping; special military operation; Donbas;

Introduction

In recent time, China has taken a leading role in the search for peace in crisis regions of the world such as in Ukraine and Palestine. In Ukraine, it set out a peace plan entitled, China's position on the political settlement of the Ukraine Crisis. It was drawn up by the CCP leadership, and set out twelve points (China Foreign Affairs, 2023). The plan was conceived on the basis of the doctrine that Xi Jinping called the global security initiative (GSI), which was published in full for the first time on 21 February 2023 in a document of the Chinese Ministry of foreign Affairs and which expresses a will to impose a common, global, cooperative and sustainable security, The Global Security Initiative (2023). Under Xi's leadership, China has expanded its mediation efforts from three conflicts in 2012 to nine in 2017, It extended multiple offers to mediate the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The first such offer was made during a visit of Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas to China in July 2017 and was followed by a peace symposium in Beijing in December of that year (Gao, 2017). China's offers to mediate have been repeated several times since, and with a greater sense of urgency during the latest round of violence between Israel and Hamas in May of 2021 (Burton, 2018). Adopting a more active role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would constitute a major escalation of Chinese involvement in Middle Eastern politics, raising serious questions regarding China's interests and intentions.

Beijing's involvement in the conflict may alter the diplomatic calculus, incentives, and strategic orientations of all sides involved, with wide-ranging implications for Israel, the Middle East, and the US. Pundits have posited that Beijing's increased involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict comes as part of China's attempts to assume a more active role as a conflict mediator globally, following 50 years of a strongly inward-focused People's Republic of China (Legard, 2018). *China's Position on the Political Settlement of the Ukraine Crisis*, as defined in its original version, includes twelve points that emphasize the importance of respecting Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty, seeking a peaceful political solution, building trust between the parties involved, and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms in the management of the conflict. The problem however is that despite these mediation efforts, China has yet to bring about long-term solutions to any of the conflicts in which it has become involved. It has been suggested that China only seeks to involve itself as a mediator in conflicts where it has significant interests.

The main objective of this study therefore is to investigate Chinese mediation dynamics and strategic priorities. The specific objectives, however, are:

- (i) To examine the interests and principles that drive China's peace efforts in the conflicts
- (ii) To evaluate why China's efforts has not brought about solution to the conflicts
- (iii) To interrogate the impartiality of China as a mediator
- (iv) To offer recommendation on how to resolve conflicts
- (v)

This study is based on the following propositions:

- (a) China's mediating role is in pursuit of its strategic interests
- (b) China's efforts have not yielded any result because of its selfish and partial role in the conflicts.
- (c)

The justification for this study is to empower policymakers to better understand the ensuing challenges and opportunities by generating actionable knowledge that contextualizes Beijing's proposal to mediate within its global strategy and to enhance the knowledge of students of international relations and contribute to existing literature on foreign policy. This qualitative research is based on content analysis of literatures examining the mediating role of China in the Ukraine-Russian and the Israel-Palestine conflicts. The study serves to illuminate the interests and principles that drive Chinese peace efforts.

An Overview of China-Israeli Relations

Israel was the first country in the Middle East region to recognize the People's Republic of China (PRC) in January 1950. Yet, the bilateral diplomatic relations could only be formed in January 1992, when Beijing finally recognized Israel. The Cold War superpower competition, the outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950, and China's pro-Arab stance acted as obstacles for the establishment of diplomatic relations (Elgur, 2022). Indeed, at the Bandung Conference in April 1955, China adversely changed its position toward Israel by prioritizing the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Palestinian issue (Shichor, 1994: 190). During the Suez War in 1956, China supported Egypt and broke off all of its contacts with Israel. This resulted in a frozen period in bilateral relations until the late 1970s (Goldstein, 2004: 239).

Israel, facing Arab states' hostility, emphasized maintaining its strong relations with the U.S.-led bloc in order to ensure its survival and security. Whereas, until 1978, China's foremost goal was, by supporting the Palestinian liberation quest vis-à-vis the Israeli occupation, to increase its influence in the Middle East region and form an anti-imperialist Third World block under its leadership as an alternative to the U.S. and Soviet blocs. In January 1965, China was the first non-Arab country recognizing the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), and in March of that year it invited the PLO to open up a semi-diplomatic mission in Beijing. In addition to its diplomatic support, China also provided military training and weapons to various Palestinian factions, adversely affecting the Chinese-Israeli relations (Shichor, 1994: 191-192).

China's voting patterns in international institutions generally oppose Israel's interests. The reason seems to stem from a combination of realpolitik and an organizational tradition. In terms of its realistic considerations, China stands with the large regional nations wielding political and economic weight and with which it already has relations, especially Muslim states, the Arab world, and Africa, as well as Russia – as opposed to the United States (Assaf, 2019). China's support for the Palestinians dates back at least to the beginning of the resurgent Palestinian national movement in the 1960s, when it was rooted in revolutionary and anti-colonial solidarity. In 1965, China became one of the first states to extend diplomatic recognition to the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) by hosting an office in Beijing. It was even one of the first suppliers of arms to Fatah, albeit clandestinely (Arafat, 1984).

Since President Xi Jinping took office, China has become more involved in the Palestine-Israel issue. On May 5-10, 2013, Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas and Israeli leader Benjamin Netanyahu was invited to visit China. The leaders of the two rivals rarely visited the same country at the same time, thus placing China, the host country, to be the focus of the world. This also showed that China attaches great importance to the Palestine-Israel conflict and is willing to promote the Middle East peace process with a more positive attitude. In his talks with President Abbas, President Xi Jinping proposed four points on promoting the settlement of the Palestinian issue (Xian, 2018). The four-point proposals stressed the importance of global recognition of Palestinian statehood, maintaining negotiations between Palestine and Israel, and affirming the international community's role in providing guarantees of Palestinian sovereignty (Tobias, 2024).

In July 2017, Chinese President Xi Jinping presented a new four-point proposal on promoting the Palestinian issue during his talks with President Abbas. First, we must firmly advance the political settlement based on the “two-state solution.” China firmly supports the “two-state solution” and the establishment of a fully sovereign, independent State of Palestine based on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital. It will, as always, play a constructive role in resolving the Palestinian issue. Second, adhere to a common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security concept. China calls for the effective implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 2334, ceases all settlement activities in the occupied territories immediately, and takes measures to prevent violence against civilians immediately. Resume peace talks as soon as possible, speed up the political settlement of the Palestinian issue, and fundamentally achieve common and lasting security. Third, further coordinate the efforts of the international community to strengthen and promote synergy. The international community should enhance coordination and launch joint participation initiatives as soon as possible. China is willing to join and support all efforts that are conducive to the political settlement of the Palestinian issue. It is planned to hold a Palestine-Israel peace symposium so as to provide new ideas for solving the Palestinian issue. Fourth, adopt a

comprehensive policy to promote peace through development (Xian, 2018). Following the October 7, 2023 crisis between Hamas and Israel, China has responded by supporting multilateral efforts to bring an immediate end to the violence in Gaza. It has done this through engagement at the United Nations Security Council, where it is a permanent member, and in other international fora.

China's Peace Plan in the Russia-Ukraine Conflict

As a permanent member of the Security Council UN, China has supported the peaceful resolution of conflicts and advocated multilateralism and international cooperation. Furthermore, China pursues a foreign policy based on non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries, respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states, and the promotion of international peace and cooperation. These principles are reflected in China's *plan* to resolve the conflict in Ukraine. In addition, the PRC has friendly diplomatic relations with Ukraine, as the *Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation between China and Ukraine* was concluded in 2013. China has economic interests mainly in the energy sector, as it has invested significant funds in the construction of energy infrastructure in Ukraine, such as coal-fired thermal power plants and gas pipelines (Chang-Liao, 2023). Consequently, China has a strategic interest in resolving the conflict in Ukraine, and the region is an important hub between Europe and Asia (Chang-Liao 2023). In the context of the war between Ukraine and Russia, China has chosen not to supply weapons to the warring parties, maintaining a role of international mediation and pacification. This choice reflects China's interest in development and stability, rather than world domination, and its desire not to influence or be influenced by other nations, such as the US.

China's Position on the Political Settlement of the Ukraine Crisis was Drawn up by the CCP Leadership, and sets out Twelve Points:

1. Respect of UN principles, including the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of all countries must be upheld.
2. The security of a country should not be pursued at the expense of others and the security of a region should not be achieved by strengthening or expanding military blocs. All parties should work towards a balanced and sustainable European security architecture in which the legitimate security interests and concerns of all countries should be taken seriously and addressed.
3. All parties should cease hostilities, exercise restraint and resume dialogue to deescalate the situation and ultimately reach a comprehensive ceasefire.
4. Dialogue and negotiation are the only viable solution to the conflict and all efforts conducive to any peaceful settlement must be encouraged and supported. China will continue to play a constructive role in this regard.
5. All measures for easing the unfolding humanitarian crisis must be encouraged and supported. The safety of civilians must be effectively protected, and humanitarian corridors should be set up for the evacuation of civilians from conflict zones.
6. Parties to the conflict should abide by international humanitarian law, avoid attacking civilians and civilian facilities, protect the victims of conflict and respect the basic rights of prisoners of war.
7. The safety and security of peaceful nuclear facilities must be ensured.
8. Strategic risk should be reduced, and the threat or use of nuclear weapons should be opposed.

9. All parties need to implement the Black Sea Grain Initiative to facilitate grain exports and ease pressures on global food security.
10. Unilateral sanctions must cease.
11. All parties should maintain the global economic system and oppose using it as a tool or weapon for political purposes.
12. Post conflict reconstruction should be supported, and China stands ready to provide assistance (China Peace Plan, 2023).

It should however be noted that the peace plan did not mention the withdrawal of Russian forces from Ukraine or the return of Ukrainian territory considered to have been illegally annexed by Russia and this has generated mixed reactions from critics of the plan. Critics of the plan have called the proposals “vague”, lacking in specific binding commitments and “clearly too abstract to be a road map to end the war” (CNN, 2023). They argue that China’s motivation, as with its previous peace plan for Israel/Palestine in 2021, is based on its diplomatic rivalry with the United States and its desire to “bolster its image as a responsible world power in the eyes of developing countries”. China’s neutrality has also been questioned as the peace plan does not acknowledge Russia’s invasion and violation of Ukrainian sovereignty, and echoes many of the arguments put forward by the Russian Government that the West is ultimately responsible for the conflict. China’s efforts to present itself as a mediator in the conflict, while at the same time providing diplomatic and economic support to Russia, has also been questioned by critics.

Theoretical framework

The history of modern political thought is the story of contest between different schools of thought that differ fundamentally in their conceptions of the nature of man, society and politics, Morgenthau (1978). A theory according to Kirlinger (1973) is “a set of interrelated constructs and propositions that present a systematic view of phenomena”. Although there are many theories in international relations, this study evaluates two theories namely, political idealism and realist power politics. Political idealism or liberalism is the philosophy that believes in the essential goodness of human nature. The idealist assumes that human nature is generally good but requires a well-structured institution to regulate their conduct. They assert that that crisis in the international system can be solved or ameliorated by settlement through international law or the mediation of international organizations. The leading proponent of this theory is Woodrow Wilson. The theories of realism revolve around four central propositions:

- (i) That states are the central actors in international politics rather than individuals or internal organizations.
- (ii) That the international political system is anarchic as there are no supranational authority that can enforce rules over the states.
- (iii) That the actors in the international political system are rational as their actions maximize their own self-interest.
- (iv) That all states desire power so that they can ensure their own self-preservation (Gooding, 2010).

This paper adopts the realist power politics theory for the analysis of this study. This is because of its relevance and suitability in analyzing Russian-Ukraine and Israel-Palestinian conflicts and the effectiveness of China’s peace plan in resolving the conflicts. The concept of power is hugely

influenced by the work of realist scholars such as Machiavelli (1961), Clausewitz (1968) and Carr (1956) but was given its most classic elaboration by Hans Morgenthau (1978). It is generally accepted that realists are cautious of injecting morality into foreign policy. They are driven by a pragmatic, often ruthless search for power. Foreign policy is driven by national interest only; therefore, morality and interest are kept separately (Kong, 2008). Realists are highly dismissive of international law and institutions, pessimistic of their ability to achieve stability (Kong, 2008). For realists, international politics and power politics are synonymous. Power is the main tool of international politics. One of the most visible features of contemporary global politics is the intense competition between or among nations, with each striving to outsmart the other to gain advantage for the purpose of ensuring its security and enhancing its overall development (Liman, 2007). The realists believe that interest is the perennial standard by which political action must be judged and directed (Morgenthau, 1978).

Interests and principles Driving China's Global Mediation

The most important determinants of where China chooses to involve itself in a mediation process is the impact of a foreign conflict on China's economic interests. Since Paramount Leader Deng Xiaoping introduced opening up and reform in 1978, China has catapulted to the ranks of second-largest economy in the world. Under Hu Jintao and later Xi Jinping governments, Beijing developed massive infrastructure projects and diplomatic relations along vital sea lanes, from the Asia Pacific to the Indian Ocean, through the Middle East, and across Africa (Hirono et al. (2019)). Both Hu and Xi sought to ensure the flow of much needed energy and trade necessary to fuel China's development while at the same time cultivating new economic opportunities for the People's Republic of China.

Chinese foreign policy is based on a number of fundamental principles, including the defense of sovereignty and territorial integrity, the promotion of good unneighboring relations, a peaceful approach to conflict resolution and mutual respect. China's recent history is replete with examples of how the Chinese state has capitalized on this political practice in terms of considerable diplomatic achievements (Griffin 2014; Branch 2004; Hartig 2013). Communist China has experimented with the use of *soft power* for a long time. A country's *soft power* is firmly based on three fundamental assets: firstly, its culture, exercised in places where it is attractive to others; its political values - when these are respected at home and abroad; and its foreign policies, when they are considered legitimate and endowed with moral authority (Nye 2008: 96).

Findings

In the course of this research study, the researcher set out to assess President Xi Jing Ping's peace plan for Ukraine and Palestine. The specific objectives of the study are:

- (i) To examine the interest and principles that drive China's peace efforts in the conflicts.
- (ii) To evaluate why China's efforts has not brought about solution to the conflicts.
- (iii) To interrogate the impartiality of China as a mediator and
- (iv) To offer recommendations on how to resolve conflicts.

propositions:

- (a) That China's mediating role is in pursuit of its strategic interests.
- (b) That China's effort has not yielded any result because of its partial role in the conflicts.

In the course of analyzing the first objective, the findings indicate that what drives China's peace efforts in the conflicts is the pursuit of its strategic interests. China has remained a foremost supporter of the Palestinian struggle and have provided military and weapons to various Palestinian factions, adversely affecting the Chinese-Israeli relations. This study also discovered how China's voting patterns in the United Nations and other international institutions generally oppose Israeli interests. The study also found out that the major reason behind this support stem from a combination of realpolitik and other economic considerations. Since China introduced its reforms which opened up its economy, China has catapulted to the rank as the second largest economy in the world and much of the oil that fuels its industrial development comes from the Arab and Muslim world. China's continued support for Palestine is a way of ensuring the continued flow of oil from the Arab-Muslim states.

In the case of its peace plan in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the study found out that China did not include the withdrawal of Russian forces from Ukraine or demand the return of Ukrainian territories that have been illegally annexed by Russia in its twelve-points peace plan in order not to offend Russia who it sees as a strategic partner. These findings conformed with the researchers first proposition which states that China's mediating role is in pursuit of its strategic interests. This also validated the researcher's adoption of the realist-power theory as the most suitable theory for the analysis of this study.

The evaluation of the second objective also indicate that China's efforts has not yielded any result because of its partial role in the conflict. It should be noted that the most essential element of mediation is to maintain impartiality towards all participants and not to take sides of either party. China's demand and support for a two states solution even when Israel has not agreed to this proposal is a negation of the principle of impartiality. Whilst China's foreign policy is based on non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries, and respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states, a policy it continues to promote in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, its failure to demand for Russian withdrawal from Ukrainian territory is hypocritical and a clear demonstration of partiality. This also validated the researcher's second proposition which states that China's peace efforts have not yielded any result because of its partial role in the conflicts.

Conclusion

China's proposed plan to resolve the Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Palestine conflicts represents a position very much in opposition to Russia and Israel's goals and offers an alternative vision of how to manage international tensions and conflicts. Among the most interesting aspects of the *plan* is the commitment to respect sovereignty, the independence and the territorial integrity of states. It has been argued that the main motivation for Russian invasion of Ukraine was the attempt by Ukraine to join NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization), a military alliance of western European Countries and America which Russian see as a threat to its national security.

China's peace plan proposal on the Israel-Palestinian conflict based on two-state solution, the establishment of a full sovereign, independent State of Palestine based on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital, the effective implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 2334, and the freezing of all settlement activities in the occupied territories is also problematic. This is because Israel has consistently rejected these proposals which it perceives as a threat to its national security and survival. Even though Xi Jian Ping's peace proposal is rooted in the idealist philosophy which believes that crisis in the international system can be solved or ameliorated by settlement or mediation, it is clear that his position is in contrast with the positions of both Russia and Israel who believe that in the pursuit of a nation's foreign policy that no nation would sacrifice

its national interest for the collective interest of all. This is exemplified by the decisions of both Russia and Israel to jettison the resolutions of the United Nations which objected to the use of force in resolving the conflicts.

Recommendations

This study recommends the following:

- (i) States should utilize the conflict resolution mechanism at the United Nations instead of lending themselves to a third-party mediation by a country whose main motivation is to protect its strategic interests.
- (ii) China should reformulate its peace proposal to suit the desires of all the parties to the conflict as against the current situation where it is only concerned with the pursuit of its own selfish interests.
- (iii) China should treat all parties in the conflicts fairly and conduct its mediation impartially to earn the confidence of all parties to the conflicts.

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