

From Liberal Peace to Mutual Coexistence: China's Approach to Global Conflict Resolution

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Abstract: *China's emergence as a global power has sparked debates about its role in the structure of world peace. This research addresses the binary construction of China as either a challenger or supporter of liberal peace, focusing on the type and extent of its challenges. Using a qualitative methodology and case studies, this study provides insights into China's participation in the normative context of liberal peace and its efforts to transform existing peace components. The research explores China's alternative approach to peacebuilding, grounded in the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, and its implications for the global order. Key findings highlight China's growing involvement in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations, its mediation efforts in conflicts like the Saudi Arabia-Iran dispute, and the use of economic cooperation as a peacebuilding tool, demonstrating a significant departure from the liberal peace paradigm.*

Keywords: *China, Peacebuilding; Liberal Peace; Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence; Saudi Arabia-Iran*

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Introduction

The ascension of China as a global power has ignited a vigorous debate regarding its role in the framework of international peace. Traditionally, global peacebuilding efforts have been dominated by the liberal peace paradigm, which emphasizes the promotion of human rights, institutional reforms, and liberal economic models as essential pathways to achieving sustainable peace. This approach, deeply rooted in Western ideologies, has been influential in shaping post-conflict reconstruction and development policies worldwide. However, China's emergence offers a unique and compelling alternative, posing a significant challenge to the hegemony of the liberal peace framework.

China's involvement in global peacebuilding is multifaceted and reflects its growing influence on the international stage. Since its first engagement with United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (UNPKO) in 1989, when it joined the United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG) in Namibia, China has substantially increased its participation in peacekeeping missions (Popovic & Stevic, 2021). By 2020, China had become the tenth-largest provider of peacekeeping troops, contributing 2,249 peacekeepers to 25 UNPKO missions, surpassing the total contributions of other permanent members of the United Nations Security Council. China's financial contributions to UN peacekeeping have also grown significantly, making it the second-largest donor after the United States for the 2020-2021 period, covering 15.21% of the total peacekeeping budget (United Nations Peacekeeping, 2024).

Beyond its involvement in peacekeeping, China has engaged in conflict mediation and post-conflict reconstruction, especially under the

leadership of President Xi Jinping, who has emphasized "major country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics." A notable example is China's role as a mediator in the Saudi-Iran conflict. China's facilitation of the restoration of diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran in March 2023 exemplifies its application of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence: mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence. These principles, first articulated in the 1950s during negotiations with India and Burma, have become a cornerstone of China's foreign policy and a guiding framework for its peacebuilding initiatives (Chen et al., 2023).

China's economic rise has further bolstered its capacity to influence global peacebuilding. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), launched in 2013, is a flagship economic strategy that aims to enhance global connectivity through infrastructure development and trade. By investing in infrastructure projects across Asia, Africa, and Latin America, China seeks to promote economic growth and stability in conflict-affected regions. This approach aligns with China's belief that economic development is foundational to achieving long-term peace and stability. The China-United Nations Peace and Development Trust Fund (UNPDF), established in 2016, exemplifies China's commitment to integrating economic cooperation with peacebuilding efforts (Menegazzi, 2012).

China's alternative approach to peacebuilding, which prioritizes economic cooperation and non-interference, stands in stark contrast to the liberal peace paradigm. The liberal

peace model, often criticized for its coercive methods and imposition of Western norms, focuses on democratization, human rights, and economic liberalization as prerequisites for peace. In contrast, China's approach respects the sovereignty of nations and promotes stability through mutual benefit and economic development (Stimson, 2023). This divergence in strategies has significant implications for the global order, suggesting the emergence of a multipolar world where diverse peacebuilding models coexist (VOA News, 2023).

From a global perspective, China's initiative may also be interpreted as a strategic endeavor to secure its long-term economic interests. Protracted conflicts and wars often result in humanitarian crises and economic disruptions. In response, China seeks to promote stability through peace-building efforts, thereby creating a conducive environment for sustained economic cooperation. Such stability is viewed as essential to advancing China's broader national vision of becoming a prosperous and fully developed nation by 2049. The realization of this ambition hinges on China's capacity to maintain steady economic growth and to elevate its per capita income to levels commensurate with those of advanced economies.

The dichotomy between liberal peace and China's Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence forms the theoretical foundation of this research. While liberal peacebuilding emphasizes human rights and institutional reform, China's model advocates for a harmonious coexistence without external political imposition. This research employs a qualitative methodology, utilizing case studies to examine China's peacebuilding efforts, particularly in the

Saudi-Iran mediation and its broader peacebuilding activities.

Many academics have divided previous research on China's efforts to build peace into two main categories. The first category focuses on China's efforts to build peace in the world by applying the principles to which it adheres. Kuo (2015) identifies increased Chinese participation in post-Cold War African peace operations. China is not a major player in this peace, but it challenges Western dominance. This article elucidates the distinctions, conflicts, and synergies between the dominant liberal approach and the emerging Chinese strategy for peacebuilding. Yuan (2020) emphasized China's growing engagement in conflict management and post-conflict reconstruction, particularly in Southeast Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, with the aim of promoting peace and development. This research contends that a comprehensive understanding of China's national history in development shapes the selective reinforcement of Chinese historical history and practices in peace and security.

Later, findings from Adhikari (2021) discuss how China is in the context of the decline of the Western-led liberal world order through involvement in Myanmar. First, this article outlines China's approach to peacebuilding, emphasizing five key elements: a focus on stability, a focus on development priorities, a limited adherence to national interests, the role of regional actors, and the avoidance of raw policy positions. Second, the article elucidates how Chinese involvement in peace-building can lead to tensions between these elements, disregard local needs, reinforce elite control over the country, and overlook the political context in the peace process, a stance that mirrors criticism of liberal

peace-building initiatives. Lei (2011) conducted a study on the two key pillars of the Chinese approach to peacebuilding. China is more cautious in contributing to the IPBO because it gives more priority to development and understanding of peace development, whereas Western nations have suspicions about China's growing strength and intentions. Zhang (2022) shows that China emphasizes the importance of a peaceful environment and long-term cooperation without the intention of overthrowing the existing international system. This article also looks at the current China-United States relationship in a sensitive phase and requires a wise new approach. People view China's rise as a significant event that alters global dynamics and necessitates effective management for a peaceful era.

The second category relates to China's efforts to build civil society through economic cooperation. According to Lyall et al. (2023), China's active involvement in peacebuilding stems from its status as a major power and its geostrategic security interests. China is actively enhancing its role and identity in the international arena by leveraging its economic involvement in peacebuilding efforts. Wong (2021) presents China's new approach to "peacebuilding." This approach emphasizes economic development as a top priority in developing countries in Asia and Africa. This raises the question of whether focusing on economic development alone can create lasting peace in post-conflict societies. Moreover, this article reveals that the Chinese peace process is defying the Western-dominated norms of peacebuilding. Qayum et al. (2018) examined China's active facilitation of the reconciliation process and efforts to strengthen the trilateral relationship

between the Taliban and the Afghan government, highlighted China's role in supporting reconciliations in Afghanistan, and then evaluated China's contribution to infrastructure development in Afghanistan.

Research on China's efforts in "peacebuilding" or mediation has been extensive, yet it typically concentrates on two primary aspects. Firstly, the research primarily focuses on China's efforts to promote global peace through the principles it upholds. Secondly, this article focuses on China's efforts to foster peace through economic cooperation. By reviewing and analyzing how many conflicting nations can accept China's great ambition to promote peace efforts based on the "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence," this article seeks to bridge the gaps in existing research.

The theoretical foundation of this research contrasts the liberal peacebuilding model with China's Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, exploring their implications for global conflict resolution. The liberal peace model, deeply rooted in Western ideologies, emphasizes human rights, institutional reform, and economic liberalization as the core elements necessary for achieving and maintaining peace.

Human rights are a central pillar of the liberal peace model, which places significant emphasis on the protection and promotion of individual rights and freedoms. This model advocates for universal human rights, including civil liberties, political rights, and social and economic rights, as fundamental to peacebuilding. Efforts within this framework often involve international interventions and policies aimed at ensuring that human rights are upheld in post-conflict societies. Such initiatives

underscore the belief that peace is sustainable only when individuals' rights are protected and respected (Avi-Guy, 2021).

Institutional reform is another cornerstone of the liberal peace model, focusing on the establishment of democratic governance structures and transparent institutions. This principle supports the creation of democratic political systems, the rule of law, and accountable governance as essential for sustaining peace. The emphasis is on building institutions that can provide stability, security, and justice, thereby preventing the recurrence of conflict. Democratic reforms are seen as vital for fostering political inclusivity and reducing the likelihood of authoritarianism and corruption (Visoka & Richmond, 2016).

Economic liberalization is promoted as a basis for peace and development within the liberal peace framework. This approach argues that economic interdependence and market liberalization can foster peace by creating mutual benefits and reducing incentives for conflict. Policies such as reducing trade barriers, encouraging foreign investment, and privatizing state-owned enterprises are advocated to stimulate economic growth and integration. The belief is that economic prosperity and interconnectedness through free-market economies can mitigate the underlying economic causes of conflict and contribute to long-term stability (Miklian, 2014).

In contrast, China's approach to peacebuilding is grounded in the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, which offer an alternative paradigm emphasizing sovereignty, non-interference, and mutual benefit. Mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial

integrity is a foundational tenet of China's foreign policy, advocating for the respect of nations' independence and their territorial boundaries. This principle upholds the notion that all countries, regardless of size or power, should have their sovereignty respected and be free from external interference (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2014).

Mutual non-aggression is another critical component of China's approach, emphasizing the avoidance of the use of force or the threat of force in international relations. This principle aligns with China's broader commitment to peaceful dispute resolution and its opposition to military interventions. By advocating for non-aggression, China promotes a stable international environment where conflicts are resolved through dialogue rather than coercion (Theory China, 2021).

Non-interference in each other's internal affairs reflects China's stance against foreign interference in domestic matters. This principle emphasizes respecting the internal policies and governance of other nations, thereby promoting a policy of non-intervention. China's approach advocates for allowing countries to manage their internal affairs without external pressure or influence, thereby fostering respect for national sovereignty and self-determination (Jiali & Thakur, 2004).

Equality and mutual benefit underpin China's international relations strategy, promoting cooperation that benefits all parties involved equally. This principle advocates for mutually beneficial economic and political partnerships, emphasizing equitable gains and shared prosperity. China's focus on mutual benefit seeks to create win-win situations in its international

engagements, ensuring that partnerships are fair and contribute to the development and stability of all involved countries (Marks, 2024).

Peaceful coexistence is the overarching goal of China's Five Principles, aiming to foster a harmonious international environment where countries can coexist peacefully and collaborate on global issues. This principle encourages nations to engage in cooperative and peaceful relations, focusing on common interests and shared goals. By promoting peaceful coexistence, China seeks to build a world order based on respect, stability, and cooperative development (Haiyun, 2023).

These principles have been integral to China's foreign policy since their introduction in the 1950s and serve as the basis for its peacebuilding initiatives. Unlike the Western liberal peace paradigm, which often involves direct intervention and the imposition of political and economic reforms, China's approach is characterized by a respect for sovereignty, non-interference, and the pursuit of mutually beneficial cooperation. This research framework will be used to analyze China's peacebuilding efforts through detailed case studies, such as its role in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (UNPKO) and mediation in the Saudi-Iran conflict. The framework will also explore how China's economic initiatives, like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), contribute to its peacebuilding strategy. By examining these aspects, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how China's approach to global conflict resolution diverges from the liberal peace model and its potential implications for the global order.

Accordingly, China's efforts to foster political stability through

diplomatic negotiations and peace-oriented initiatives constitute an integral component of its broader strategic agenda to establish favorable preconditions for long-term economic cooperation with strategic partner states. Political stability is perceived as a vital mechanism for mitigating the disruptive consequences of conflict, thereby enabling post-conflict countries to meaningfully engage in and benefit from the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This strategic orientation reflects China's overarching foreign policy objectives of safeguarding economic access and promoting regional development, underscoring the interdependent relationship between peace and economic prosperity as mutually reinforcing pillars of its international engagement.

Method

This research employs a qualitative methodology to explore China's alternative approach to global conflict resolution, focusing on its peacebuilding strategies grounded in the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. A case study approach is adopted to provide an in-depth analysis of specific instances where China's peacebuilding efforts have been implemented, such as its role in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (UNPKO) and its mediation in the Saudi-Iran conflict. This approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of the nuances and effectiveness of China's strategies in different contexts.

Data for this research is collected from both primary and secondary sources to ensure a robust and comprehensive analysis. Primary data is sourced from official documents and statements from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China. These documents provide direct insights

into China's foreign policy and peacebuilding initiatives, allowing for an authentic representation of China's strategic intentions and actions (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2014). Secondary data is gathered from a wide range of scholarly articles, books, and reports from reputable research institutions such as the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) and the Middle East Institute. These sources provide critical analyses and contextual information that complement the primary data, offering a broader perspective on China's peacebuilding efforts. Additionally, online sources such as articles from *The Diplomat*, *The Conversation*, and *The Atlantic* are utilized to incorporate current and diverse viewpoints on China's role in global conflict resolution (Burton, 2023; Marks, 2024).

The case study approach is chosen for its ability to provide detailed and context-rich analysis. This research focuses on two main case studies: China's participation in UNPKO and its mediation efforts in the Saudi-Iran conflict. These cases are selected due to their significance in illustrating China's application of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence and their impact on international peacebuilding. The case study of China's role in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations examines China's increasing involvement in UNPKO, highlighting its contributions to various missions worldwide. It explores how China's participation aligns with its principles of non-interference, mutual respect, and peaceful coexistence. The analysis includes China's historical involvement in missions such as the United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG) in Namibia and its more recent roles in peacekeeping operations (Gill & Huang,

2009). The case study focusing on China's mediation in the Saudi-Iran conflict showcases its role as a neutral facilitator in conflict resolution. It examines the strategies employed by China to foster dialogue and reconciliation, emphasizing its adherence to the principles of non-aggression, equality, and mutual benefit. The study assesses the outcomes of these mediation efforts and their implications for regional stability and global peace (Stimson, 2023; VOA News, 2023).

The data analysis involves a systematic examination of the collected data through thematic and comparative analysis. Thematic analysis is used to identify and analyze patterns related to China's peacebuilding strategies and their implementation. This involves coding the data into themes such as "non-interference," "mutual benefit," and "peaceful coexistence," which are then analyzed to understand their application and impact in the selected case studies (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Comparative analysis is conducted to contrast China's approach with the liberal peace model. This involves examining the differences and similarities in the principles, methods, and outcomes of the two approaches. By comparing these frameworks, the study aims to highlight the unique aspects of China's peacebuilding strategy and its potential advantages and limitations in the context of global conflict resolution (Visoka & Richmond, 2016).

The qualitative approach, particularly the case study method, is selected due to its strength in uncovering the complexities behind China's strategic behavior in international peacebuilding. This method allows the research to operate on a deeper level of inquiry, focusing not only on *what* actions China has taken, but also on *how* and *why* these

actions are framed within its broader foreign policy agenda. By analyzing contextual evidence and thematic patterns, the study is able to construct a grounded understanding of China's operational logic and normative framing of global conflict resolution.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the research findings, multiple data sources are triangulated. This involves cross-referencing information from primary documents, secondary literature, and online sources to confirm the accuracy and consistency of the data. Additionally, the case study approach allows for an in-depth examination of specific instances, providing a detailed and context-specific understanding of China's peacebuilding efforts (Yin, 2018). Ethical considerations are paramount in this research. The study adheres to ethical guidelines by ensuring the confidentiality and integrity of the data. All sources are appropriately cited to give credit to original authors and to maintain academic integrity. Moreover, the research avoids any form of bias by presenting balanced and evidence-based analyses of China's peacebuilding strategies.

This research method framework will be used to analyze the study investigated, providing a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of China's approach to global conflict resolution. By employing a qualitative methodology and case study approach, the research aims to contribute valuable insights into the effectiveness and implications of China's peacebuilding efforts in the international arena.

Result and Analysis

China's Real Commitments to Peaceful Coexistence

China's critique of U.S.-led peace efforts highlights the inconsistencies and double standards inherent in the practice of liberal peace, a model championed by the United States. The liberal peace framework promotes democracy, free markets, and liberal institutions as prerequisites for peace; however, this study finds that such efforts are often accompanied by military interventions, regime change agendas, and a selective alignment with actors that serve U.S. strategic interests. Rather than resolving conflicts, these practices frequently exacerbate them, as evidenced in the cases of Ukraine and Israel's military operations in Gaza, where the U.S. has supported one side while simultaneously presenting itself as a neutral mediator. These findings suggest that American peacebuilding initiatives are driven more by geopolitical calculations than by a genuine commitment to justice and stability.

In response to the dominance of the liberal peace model, China has developed an alternative approach grounded in non-intervention, respect for national sovereignty, and multilateral dialogue based on equality. This is embodied in concepts such as "mutual coexistence" and "common security," which reject the assumption that liberal democracy is the sole path to peace. The analysis indicates that China positions itself as a global actor offering conflict resolution strategies that emphasize local consensus, domestic stability, and ideological neutrality. Thus, China not only challenges the normative legitimacy of Western-led liberal peace but also articulates a counter-narrative that promotes a more inclusive and context-sensitive framework for addressing international conflicts.

China's Role in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (UNPKO)

China has significantly increased its participation in UNPKO since its first mission in 1989, becoming one of the largest contributors of personnel and financial resources. Since the 1990s, China has officially sent more than 40,000 troops to 25 United Nations peacekeeping missions around the world. This makes China the second-largest country in terms of the number of troops deployed to UN peace operations, after countries like Bangladesh and India. In this situation, China has demonstrated its strong commitment to world peace and stability, as well as its desire to participate actively in the resolution of international conflicts. China, as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, has a greater responsibility to ensure that UN operations are running smoothly and the peace mission continues. Furthermore, China contributes significantly in terms of funding to UN operational costs, including peacekeeping missions. China is the second largest donor after the United States for the UN peacekeeping budget for 2020-2021, with a contribution of 15.21% of the total budget, while the US stands at the top with a contribution of 28% (Arrey, 2023).

China's participation in UNPKO is not only due to the number of military personnel deployed but also because of their commitment to the United Nations' principles of peace. For example, China is frequently involved in UNPKO's sustainable peace-building missions, including ceasefire surveillance, humanitarian aid, election monitoring, and local capacity building (Xinhua, 2020).

China has a model of peace that prioritizes social stability and economic development over political reforms and

individual rights, based on China's lack of interference in other countries' internal affairs. China adopted peacebuilding, which includes infrastructure rehabilitation, economic revitalization, peace and security, and strengthening government and the rule of law. In this case, China contributes to infrastructure funding and economic revitalization as part of its strategy, but it does not contribute to the country's rule of law project (Kuo, 2020).

This involvement underscores China's commitment to multilateralism and global stability. Examples include its contributions: China sent 20 military personnel to the United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG) in Namibia and various missions worldwide in 1989. China's participation in the UNTAG came during a period of major changes in China's foreign policy under Deng Xiaoping. At that time, China was undergoing a transition from a more closed domestic focus to a more open focus on a larger international role. The principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries remains an important guideline in China's foreign policy, but participation in UN peace missions shows that China is beginning to consider a more active global role (Gill & Huang, 2009).

After the UNTAG mission, China has sent five military observers to the Middle East to assist the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO). Although these contributions are relatively small, the move reflects China's commitment to supporting international peace efforts in different regions. In 1993, China also sent its first military troops to Cambodia. For 18 months, a United Nations peacekeeping mission in Cambodia deployed this force, comprising 400 technical troops and 49 military

observers. It is one of the earliest examples of China's direct involvement in more substantial peacekeeping operations, marking the further evolution of their foreign policy towards more international engagement (The State Council Information Office, The People's Republic of China, 2020). China's increasing role in peacekeeping operations showcases its proactive stance in maintaining global peace, demonstrating a commitment not just to rhetoric but to tangible actions that support international stability.

Mediation Efforts: The Saudi-Iran Conflict

China's role as a mediator in the Saudi-Iran conflict exemplifies its application of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. By facilitating dialogue and reopening diplomatic relations, China has demonstrated its commitment to non-interference and mutual respect. First, China promotes mutual respect for national sovereignty and territorial integrity by demonstrating its commitment to regional neutrality and peace, as outlined in official guidelines such as China and the World in the New Era, China-Arab Policy Paper, and China's International Development Cooperation in the New Era (Marks, 2024).

Second, China's approach to Iran-Saudi Arabia peace efforts is based on the principle of non-aggression. With this policy, China seeks to prevent conflict escalation and promote regional stability amid the unstable situation in the Middle East. China strictly avoids military intervention and does not support acts of aggression from either side (Haiyun, 2023). Third, China has adopted a more flexible interpretation of the non-interference principle by supporting peaceful conflict resolution through

negotiations and discussions between the disputing parties. They prefer to manage crises through UN agencies and let regional bodies such as the GCC handle them without interference or outside interference (Rad, 2023).

Fourth, China upholds the principle of equality and mutual benefit for both parties involved in the conflict, while Iran and Saudi Arabia effectively construct energy fields and infrastructure development projects within their economic relationships. Cooperation in the energy field between China, Iran, and Saudi Arabia ensures a stable energy supply for China and sustainable income for the two Middle Eastern countries. In addition, infrastructure projects funded by China help improve regional connectivity and economic development without taking sides in regional conflicts. This approach not only promotes economic stability but also contributes to long-term peace and prosperity in the region (Zavareh & Fallahi Barzoki, 2018).

Fifthly, China is pursuing a peaceful coexistence approach by mediating a peace treaty between the two countries, in which the two leaders agreed to reopen their embassies and respect each country's sovereignty. China's role tends to be quasi-mediation or semi-mediation, promoting conflict de-escalation without fully leading the settlement process. Then China submitted a five-point plan for regional security that included confidence-building measures in the Persian Gulf as well as easing tensions through negotiations and political dialogue (Burton, 2023).

This mediation highlights China's ability to leverage its economic relationships and political influence to promote peace. China's neutral stance and emphasis on dialogue have allowed it to act as an effective mediator, fostering a

conducive environment for reconciliation between Saudi Arabia and Iran. This role underscores China's capacity to contribute to regional stability and its growing influence as a peacebroker in the Middle East (Stimson, 2023; VOA News, 2023). The success of these mediation efforts illustrates China's potential to shape diplomatic outcomes in complex geopolitical landscapes, reinforcing its image as a responsible global actor.

Economic Cooperation: The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) represents a cornerstone of China's peacebuilding strategy, emphasizing economic development as a foundation for stability. Through infrastructure projects and economic partnerships, China aims to promote development and reduce conflict. The BRI's impact in regions like Africa and the Middle East underscores the effectiveness of economic cooperation in fostering peace (Legarda, 2018). China's economic commitment to mediating the Iran-Saudi-Arab conflict aligns with the goals of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in the Middle East (Khan et al., 2018).

First, China sees the BRI as a strategic tool for mediating and alleviating tensions between two conflicting countries by offering infrastructure projects and economic cooperation that can benefit Iran and Saudi Arabia. The BRI-backed construction project could also improve diplomatic and economic ties between the two countries, as well as those with China. Thus, BRI is not only a tool for China's economic development but can also be a catalyst for peacebuilding. Second, China wants to boost the Xinjiang economy (the western mainland of China) by connecting Xinjiang to Central Asia and the Middle

East through new infrastructure, which it believes can help reduce social tension and conflict in the region and create new economic opportunities for both countries.

Third, China is focusing on building symmetrical relations with its neighbors in an effort to create a stable regional environment to support its sustainable economic growth. This approach can have a significant impact on the conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia. China strives to build friendship rather than hostility with its neighbors, which is critical in light of the geographical complexity and historical, cultural, economic, political, and security situation around it. China hopes to shape sustainable economic development through the BRI, which can not only strengthen domestic economic stability but also contribute to the mitigation of regional conflicts such as Iran and Saudi Arabia (Utama, 2024).

Fourth, through BRI, China can enhance international confidence by fostering mutual respect and shared interests for global governance with a win-win approach in politics, economics, and religion. Fifth, by addressing the conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran, China aims to maintain stability in its primary energy sources and protect its interests in crude oil and natural gas. This approach positions China's presence as a catalyst for sustainable economic growth, as it fosters a global network of connectivity and cooperation. Later, the BRI aligned itself with China's diplomatic principles of peaceful and mutually beneficial cooperation and its globalization approach that prioritizes equality, economic growth, and social and cultural respect.

So far, data from the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) show

that China's investments in the Middle East have reached 266 projects in the period 2005 to 2022 (Chaziza, 2023). China is also a major customer of Saudi Arabia's oil and natural gas company Aramco. Saudi Arabia's public investment fund received Aramco's enormous profits, which reached billions of dollars, and allocated them to the new Saudi economy, including investments in an environmentally friendly transition through the purchase of Chinese electric vehicles (Wun-kong & Wong, 2024). Similarly, Saudi Arabia received \$5.5 billion in investments and contracts through BRI by 2022 (Godement, 2023). In 2013, 140 Chinese companies also signed contracts worth \$18 billion in Saudi Arabia's construction, infrastructure, telecommunications, and petrochemical sectors (Dorsey, 2017).

Similarly, economic relations between China and Iran have grown closer over the past four decades. In 2022, China's import volume from Iran reached \$15.798 billion, an increase of \$1.035 billion from 2021. Meanwhile, China's export volume to Iran continued to rise by 14%, reaching \$9.44 billion compared to \$8.258 billion in 2021. Furthermore, last May, Iran's oil exports surged to approximately 1 million barrels per day, surpassing 1.5 million barrels, with China receiving the majority of the production (Smith & Paola, 2024). China also invested \$618 million in projects in Iran from 2018 to 2022, primarily in the construction sector (Shokri, 2023).

Therefore, by investing in infrastructure and development projects, China seeks to create economic interdependence and mutual benefits, thereby reducing the likelihood of conflict. This approach aligns with China's principle of mutual benefit and peaceful coexistence, illustrating how economic

initiatives can serve as tools for peacebuilding (Marks, 2024). The BRI demonstrates China's belief that economic stability is essential for lasting peace, and its investments aim to build the foundational economic conditions necessary to prevent conflict (Khan et al., 2018).

Contrasting Perspective on Peace

The liberal peace model and China's approach to peacebuilding represent two distinct paradigms. The liberal peace model focuses on democratic values, human rights, and economic liberalization. It often involves coercive methods, such as military intervention and economic sanctions, to promote liberal norms. Western countries, particularly those in the United States and Western Europe, widely employ this approach. Economic liberalization, for example, involves opening up markets, reducing trade barriers, and promoting foreign investment. The objective is to create an interconnected global economy, enabling free trade to enhance the economic prosperity of all participating nations (Miklian, 2014).

Human rights are also an important component of the liberal approach to peace. This approach focuses on protecting the fundamental rights of every individual, such as the right to life, freedom, and security, and recognizes the importance of economic, social, and cultural rights. Through international diplomacy, development aid, and humanitarian intervention, the countries that implement this strategy actively support human rights. Then, democratic values, widely regarded as the most effective system for liberal peace, guarantee fair and representative governance, thereby ensuring individual

rights and enhancing citizens' participation in political processes (Avi-Guy, 2021).

This approach has been criticized for imposing external political models and disregarding local contexts for using coercive methods. The imposition of these values can sometimes lead to resistance and instability, as local dynamics and cultural contexts are often overlooked (Visoka & Richmond, 2016). First, military interventions, such as the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, are based on the idea that dismissing Saddam Hussein's regime would bring democracy to the Middle East. However, the outcome of these interventions is heavily controversial, and many believe that they fail to achieve the goal of democratization and increase instability in the region.

Second, countries that breach international law or human rights frequently face economic sanctions. For example, the aim of imposing sanctions on Iran and North Korea is to encourage them to change their nuclear policies and respect human rights. (Dyachkov, 2018). Despite their intention to bring about change, these sanctions frequently exacerbate the situation for civilians and deteriorate economic and humanitarian conditions without yielding significant policy changes.

Then, the conditionality of aid perpetuates liberal peace, as institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank impose certain conditions for economic aid. The recipient countries must implement neoliberal economic reforms, such as privatization, deregulation, and subsidy cuts. Because this policy can exacerbate economic inequalities and reduce government control over national economies, recipient countries are frequently dissatisfied with it.

The coercive impact of promoting liberal peace also affects societies by compelling them to embrace foreign values, potentially leading to political and social instability. For example, many countries in the Middle East and Africa face strong resistance to liberalization agendas imposed from outside. Economic sanctions and aid conditionality often have a negative impact on target countries' economies and social well-being. For example, sanctions imposed on Zimbabwe in the early 2000s led to severe economic decline, with high inflation and increased poverty. People often view the use of coercive methods as a violation of national sovereignty. The countries targeted feel that they lose control of their domestic policies, which can arouse anti-Western sentiment and strengthen the nationalist narrative (Visoka & Richmond, 2016).

In contrast, China's approach is rooted in the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, advocating for peaceful coexistence without imposing external political models. China prioritizes stability through economic development and cooperation, respecting the sovereignty of nations. This method emphasizes non-interference, mutual respect, and mutually beneficial partnerships, offering an alternative framework for achieving global peace and stability. China's approach seeks to build peace through respect for national sovereignty and economic collaboration, presenting a non-coercive model that respects local contexts and prioritizes long-term stability through development (Miklian, 2014). This contrast highlights the philosophical and practical differences between the two models, each with its unique strengths and potential drawbacks.

China presents itself as a country whose minds evolve with the goal of living side by side, creating a new economic world order, and rejecting an alliance. China aims to revise the international order by emphasizing negotiation, compromise, and policy coordination in conflict management efforts; enhancing the regional and functional role of the United Nations security management institutions; and maintaining the status of absolute sovereignty and non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries (How, 2023). China's principle of living side by side peacefully does not require widespread cooperation based on common values. To prevent the use of interstate force with conflicting national interests, China emphasizes the pursuit of national interests based on the five principles of peaceful coexistence, a combination of individual foreign policy and extensive international dialogue.

Table 1. Differences Between the US and China Approaches to Peacebuilding

Factors	United States	China
International Objective	Integrasi	Coexistence
Intitusalional basis	Alliance System	UN System
Membership basis	Liberal states (common values)	Developing countries (common interest)
International relations dynamic	Cooperation	Coordination

Source: Author's Analysis, 2025

Table 1 above reveals that liberal Black countries such as the US tend to establish cooperation based on liberal values and shared interests, aiming for shared political, economic, and human rights perspectives, whereas China prioritizes coexisting countries. They seek

to expand their influence through active participation in international organizations, with an emphasis on regional and global cooperation. Later, the US took advantage of alliance systems such as NATO and SEATO, which provided collective security and strengthened the US position on the international stage. Unlike China, which relies on the UN system as an institutional base, they support the UN's role in conflict resolution, humanitarian aid, and sustainable development. China is also active in UN organizations such as UNDP and UNICEF.

China has succeeded in playing an important role as a mediator in the conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia by demonstrating its impartiality towards the two countries in line with China's principles of peaceful coexistence, which has managed to create peace in the region. China's neutral role allows both sides to feel more comfortable and open in the mediation process, which ultimately contributes to the achievement of agreements and conflict resolution. China has successfully upheld its unilateral foreign policy, thereby earning the acceptance of Iran and Saudi Arabia as a just mediator (Yazdani, 2023). This approach reflects Chinese principles in peacebuilding that emphasize respect and non-interference with the sovereignty of other countries.

China emphasizes that the best way to resolve the conflict is through discussion and diplomacy, which will ultimately create stability and peace in the Middle East region. China's foreign policy, which focuses on economic cooperation and infrastructure development, as demonstrated by the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), also boosts confidence and relations with countries in the Near East (Garlick & Havlová, 2020).

Unlike China, the US and Western countries appear to be less effective mediators in the Middle East regional conflict. Trita Parsi, the executive vice president of the Quincy Institute, asserts that US policies frequently lack neutrality and instead intensify conflict situations. For example, it is difficult for the US to serve as a respected mediator because it is often directly involved in regional conflicts such as the conflict between Israel and Iran. US involvement in various regional conflicts shows its tendency to be on the side of a particular party, which reduces its credibility as a mediator (Gadzo, 2023).

This approach differs from the Chinese approach, which aims to maintain neutrality and non-partisanship. For example, the military involvement of the US in the Middle East, whether through direct warfare or providing military support to certain countries, has led many to doubt its ability to act as a fair mediator. Moreover, the Middle East countries hold little faith in the US's foreign policy, which is often interventionist and aims to influence the internal politics of other countries, as demonstrated in the cases of Iraq and Syria. These countries see the US as more interested in its own strategic and economic interests than in promoting peace and stability in their own territories.

Over the past decade, China's increasing engagement in regional peace-building reflects its strategic commitment to balancing peace and economic development. This involvement signifies a deliberate transformation of China's international posture—from a predominantly economic power to a responsible global actor that actively contributes to conflict resolution and international stability. China's role

extends beyond that of a conventional facilitator, mediator, or provider of military assistance in conflict zones. Rather, it has taken proactive measures by introducing key conceptual frameworks such as the *Global Security Initiative* (GSI), the *Global Development Initiative* (GDI), and the *Global Civilization Initiative* (GCI). These initiatives highlight China's intention to promote a comprehensive and sustainable peace architecture.

China's aspiration to become a peacebuilder is also motivated by its strategic interest in maintaining regional stability as a prerequisite for the continued expansion of its global economic footprint. By advocating for principles such as dialogue, mutual development, and respect for national sovereignty, China positions itself as a proponent of an alternative model of conflict resolution, distinct from Western liberal peace paradigms. While critics argue that China's peace initiatives serve to expand its political influence and military presence, it is crucial to note that the available evidence does not indicate that China imposes political conditions or obligations on states involved in its mediation processes. Consequently, China's peace-building efforts appear to be primarily aimed at safeguarding its long-term economic interests while simultaneously cultivating its image as a constructive and responsible actor in the global order.

Conclusion

China's alternative approach to global conflict resolution, grounded in the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, presents a significant departure from the liberal peace paradigm. By emphasizing non-interference, mutual respect, and economic cooperation, China offers a

model that challenges the dominance of liberal peacebuilding norms. This approach has implications for the global order, suggesting a multipolar world where diverse peacebuilding strategies coexist. The study concludes that China's role in global peacebuilding is evolving, and its strategies offer valuable insights into alternative paths to achieving global peace and stability. China has increased its participation in UN Peacekeeping Operations, demonstrating a strong commitment to global stability. Additionally, China's role as a mediator in the Saudi-Iran conflict reflects its respect for sovereignty and non-intervention, emphasizing dialogue and economic cooperation. Through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China promotes economic development as the foundation for long-term peace. This approach contrasts with the Western liberal peace paradigm, which often employs coercive methods. Instead, China shows the potential for a multipolar world with various peace models.

Further research is needed to understand the long-term impact of China's approach on international peace and security dynamics. This research provides crucial insights into how China's peace-building strategies may influence global conflict resolution and the international order in the future. China emphasizes cooperation and development over Western liberalism in global conflict resolution, reshaping dynamics significantly. While offering promising alternatives, this approach raises concerns regarding transparency and human rights. Therefore, careful analysis is needed to manage both the positive impacts and risks associated with China's role in international security.

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