10 “A community of shared future for mankind” and implications for conflict prevention

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Introduction

The concept of “a community of shared future for mankind” is not only the top-level design for China’s diplomacy in the new era, but also the Chinese proposal to address global challenges. The new concept inherits the fundamental principles and spirit of the Charter of the United Nations, on the one hand, and provides a new approach to tackle new threats in the globalized world, on the other. The cooperation between China and the United Nations to jointly build a community of shared future for mankind is significant for the prevention of conflict. While to achieve the goal of universal peace and common development through a new type of international relations is the fundamental way to prevent conflict, the co-construction of “One Belt and One Road” will bring strong momentum for developmental peace.

Background

In October 2017, the political report of the Nineteenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) mentioned the idea of “a community of shared future for mankind” six times, pointing out that “the Chinese people are willing to work with the people from the rest of the world to promote the construction of a community of shared future for mankind and create a better future for mankind” (Xi “Secure a Decisive Victory”). The Nineteenth National Congress of CPC also confirmed that a community of shared future for mankind is an important component of President Xi Jinping’s thoughts on socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era and the main goal of the major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics. The concept was also included in the new Constitution amended in March 2018.

The concept of “a community of shared future” has guided China’s diplomacy in recent years in several ways. First, China has made great efforts to promote the regionalization of “a community of shared future” by building up “a community of shared future” with ASEAN, Africa, Latin America, Arab countries, etc. Second, China has provided even stronger support for UN-centered multilateralism. Besides being the second largest contributor to both the UN’s regular and its peace-keeping operations budget, China also established the 1 billion USD China–UN Peace and Development Fund and the 3 billion USD South–South Cooperation Fund, and donated to several UN agencies to support UN peacekeeping operations and the development agenda. Third, China has made use of the opportunities of hosting summits (to include the G20, BRICS, and APEC, among others) to integrate the concept into the norms and agenda of these international organizations.

The case of the South China Sea indicates how China tries to prevent conflict by building a community of shared future. A community of shared future in the South China Sea is a part of such a community between China and ASEAN, or more broadly in Asia. China calls for a South China Sea of “peace, friendship and cooperation” through the enforcement of the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea. China also proposed a principle of “shelving the differences and seeking joint development” and a dual-track approach to solve the dispute by political and diplomatic means. To China, the best and the only way to prevent conflict in the South China Sea is to construct a community of shared future based on the existing regional and subregional cooperation mechanism including the China–ASEAN Summit (10+1) and the China–ASEAN Free Trade Area.

However, some major powers and neighboring countries still have doubts about how China would build a community of shared future, given the fact that China has strategic competition with the United States, political stalemate with Japan, and an ongoing territorial dispute with India. In addition, questions remain on how this very Chinese concept can be accepted by international society and transformed into an internationally recognized norm and value.

A community of shared future for mankind is the inheritance and progression of the Charter of the United Nations

The Charter of the United Nations is the cornerstone of a community of shared future for mankind and the basis and starting point for the prevention and resolution of conflicts. In accordance with the Charter, the United Nations has four purposes, along with seven principles. To build

a community of shared future for mankind, China advocates the idea of global governance featuring extensive consultation, joint contribution, and shared benefits; the idea of a new type of international relations with mutual respect, fairness and justice, and win-win cooperation, as well as the idea of neighborhood diplomacy including amity, sincerity, mutual benefit, and inclusiveness. These ideas are both the inheritance of and the development of the purposes and principles of the Charter, and are also of great significance for the prevention of conflicts.

When the United Nations was founded, the main problems facing the international community were colonial dominance and the conflict and wars among countries. Since then, the Cold War between the East and the West, the North-South gap, hegemonism, and power politics have become sources of major challenges and conflicts. Accordingly, the Charter sets out the basic principles governing international relations, such as sovereign equality, peaceful settlement of international disputes, and non-interference in internal affairs of other countries. Today, the international community is facing new crises such as finance, environment, refugees; new threats including terrorism, climate change, infectious diseases, cyber security; and new challenges of populism, social fragmentation, and religious antagonism. The idea of a community of shared future for mankind provides China's wisdom and solutions for the international community to deal with these new crises, threats, and challenges.

For example, in the global governance approach advocated by China, extensive consultation means mutual respect, brainstorming, considering the interests and concerns of all parties, thus embodying the wisdom and creativity of all parties; joint contribution means giving play to different advantages and capacities of each other so that all countries can build cooperation platforms and address global challenges together; shared benefits means bringing more cooperation fruits in a fairer way to all peoples and helping to build a community of shared interest, a community of shared destiny, and a community of shared responsibilities.

Another example is the new type of international relations featuring cooperation and win-win situations as not only suitable for the economic field, but also widely suitable for political, security, cultural, and human rights fields. Cooperation is utilized to achieve win-win results to replace the approach of "the winner takes all", aiming to resolve disputes through dialogue and resolve divergence with consultation. Realizing cooperation and win-win results through consultations, contribution, and shared benefits is beneficial in significantly avoiding the occurrence, escalation, or spread of conflicts.

A community of shared future for mankind is highly compatible with the cause of the United Nations

A community of shared future for mankind consists of a community of shared security, a community of shared development, and a community of shared human rights, which are at the core of the cause of the United Nations. As can be seen from the Charter, the United Nations and a community of shared future for mankind share common ideas and thoughts, principles and norms, spirit and values. The maintenance of peace, the promotion of development, and the protection of human rights are the goals of the cause of the United Nations and also the pillars of a community of shared future for mankind. Since its founding, the United Nations has taken measures like preventive diplomacy, mediation, conciliation, political negotiations, and the international rule of law to avoid the occurrence and escalation of conflicts. The Security Council was established to strive towards a community of shared security across the globe.

The promotion of development has increasingly become the focus of the work of the United Nations, and the development system is a part of the United Nations system with widest functions and most institutions. The United Nations, by implementing the four ten-year international development strategies, promoting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and formulating the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, has made major achievements in eradicating poverty, combating climate change, and promoting sustainable development. Safeguarding human rights is also one of the main objectives of the United Nations. By formulating international legal documents for human rights, establishing specialized institutions for human rights affairs and promoting human rights, the United Nations promotes and safeguards human rights, staying committed to building a community of shared human rights across the globe.

Universal security and common development proposed by a community of shared future for mankind is a fundamental way to prevent conflict

Universal security and common development is the basic path for building a community of shared future for mankind and the fundamental way to prevent conflicts. The United Nations is committed to the goal of sustainable peace through conflict prevention, peacekeeping, peacebuilding, and other peace operations. Peace operations are not only the primary means of conflict management by the United Nations, but also the major manifestation of global security governance, and

thus remain a public security product for the international community. In today's world, security issues are characterized by inter-connectivity, trans-nationality, and diversity. Only by adhering to cooperation and co-building can lasting security be realized. China advocates a view of global security featuring commonality, comprehensiveness, cooperation, and sustainability, and builds a sense of cooperation to deal with security challenges. To jointly construct a community of shared future for mankind featuring universal security is a Chinese solution for global security governance and an effective way to achieve sustainable peace. Universal security means not only the security of the rich, the strong, and the majority, but also the security of the poor, the weak, and the few.

Common development is an effective way to realize sustainable development. In September 2015, the United Nations Development Summit adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as a guiding document for global development governance and international development cooperation. In recent years, China has actively advocated the idea of common development by hosting the G20 summit, the BRICS summit, and the APEC leaders' informal meetings. In promoting the construction of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), the implementation of neighborhood diplomacy and foreign aids, China takes common development as the guideline for its actions. To build a community of shared future for mankind featuring common development is a Chinese solution for global development governance and an effective way to achieve sustainable development.

However, we need to analyze the nature of development and the way to achieve development goals. Only inclusive and sustainable development is the key to conflict prevention. In some countries, exploitation of resources and degradation of the environment as the result of development leads to a lot of turmoil. In other countries, the wide disparity between rich and poor, and the injustice of wealth distribution in the process of development arouse much social disorder. In some cases, slow and gradual development is more appreciated, and too quick and too much development brings social instability. So, it is the development model, not development itself that has much to do with conflict or peace.

Statistics may indicate that richer countries are more stable and have less conflict than those poor countries, but it is hard to conclude that poverty itself will lead to more conflicts. In Southeast Asia for example, GDP per capita in Laos and Cambodia is much lower than that in Indonesia, Philippines, and Thailand, but it is clear that there are more conflicts in the latter three countries. The same phenomena exist in South Asia between Bhutan and Sri Lanka. In those countries with

more conflicts, social problems such as minority separatism, ethnic independence, and religious divergence may have more links with conflicts. So, it is the root of poverty and the social problem behind poverty, not poverty itself, that brings more conflicts.

China will make great contributions to preventing conflict by working with the United Nations to promote the new type of international relations

The cooperation between China and the United Nations is a new way to promote the new type of international relations, jointly implement BRI, and build a community of shared future for mankind. If a community of shared future for mankind is the goal, then the new type of international relations is the mode, and the implementation of BRI is the pathway. The new type of international relations is a new concept and new thinking offered by China for dealing with new changes in the international layout, new challenges in the international community, and the new reforms in the international order.

The new type of international relations is to persist in win-win cooperation and oppose zero-sum games. The new type of international relations is “to replace confrontation with cooperation and replace monopoly by win-win” (Wang). Common interests are the foundation and condition for achieving win-win cooperation, and the United Nations is the main platform and mechanism for member states to realize the common interests for mankind, such as peace, development, and human rights.

The new type of international relations is to adhere to multilateralism and oppose unilateralism. The United Nations is the product and embodiment of multilateralism. Today, the United Nations is at its time of greatest need to strengthen multilateralism to address global challenges like terrorism, climate change, and the threat of nuclear proliferation. China is a natural partner of the UN-led multilateralism. Cooperation between China and the United Nations can provide a powerful impetus for multilateralism.

The new type of international relations is to insist on the political settlement of international conflicts and oppose the use or threat of use of force. Political means should be the main option for resolving international conflicts. The case of Iraq and Iran proves from both positive and negative aspects that seeking common ground and convergence of interests of all parties based on multilateral negotiations and consultations and considering the security concerns of the parties concerned is conducive to the settlement of the disputes. In contrast,

unilateralism and military means, even if they achieve temporary results, cannot resolve the root of security problems. China persists in resolving major international issues through peaceful negotiations and cooperation within the framework of the United Nations, opposes any unilateral military action that circumvents the United Nations, and discourages member states from easily adopting coercive measures such as sanctions and embargoes.

The new type of international relations is to adhere to the democratization and rule of law in international relations and the opposition of power politics and hegemony. The United Nations advocates the ideas of just security and fair development, promotes the legal settlement of international disputes, standardizes state behavior, restricts state power, and balances national interests by the rule of law, to promote the rule of law in international relations. Power politics and hegemonism are the main factors hindering democratization and the rule of law in international relations, as well as an important source of inequality and irrationality in the international order. As the largest developing country, China is the beneficiary and promoter of the democratization of international relations. In the process of upholding win-win cooperation, multilateralism, political settlement of international disputes, and democratization and rule of law in international relations, China and the United Nations have tremendous room for cooperation to jointly construct and lead the new type of international relations.

China will cooperate with the United Nations to implement the Belt and Road Initiative, which will provide a powerful momentum for developmental peace

President Xi Jinping elaborated on the idea of such a community on many international occasions, including key speeches at the United Nations. The first speech was in September 2015 when President Xi attended the general debate of the 70th session of the General Assembly at United Nations Headquarters in New York to deliver an important speech entitled "Working Together to Forge a New Partnership of Win-Win Cooperation and Create a Community of Shared Future for Mankind" (Xi "Working Together"). The second speech was in January 2017 when President Xi delivered an important speech at the United Nations Office at Geneva entitled "Work Together to Build a Community of Shared Future for Mankind" (Xi "Work Together"), thereby fully explaining to the international community the concept of a community of shared future for mankind. After the vision of a community of shared future for mankind was put forward, it has been enshrined

in the relevant resolutions of the UN General Assembly, the Security Council and the Human Rights Council several times (A/RES/72/27; S/RES/2344(2017); A/HRC/RES/34/4; E/CN.5/2017/2). In 2016 and 2017, the UN Security Council and the UN General Assembly respectively adopted resolutions calling for strengthening regional cooperation to provide a safe and secure environment for the implementation of BRI (S/RES/2274(2016); A/71/9).

The cooperation between China and the United Nations to jointly implement BRI is conducive to the overall advancement of the Initiative, upgrading it into an international development agenda. The cooperation between China and the United Nations in implementing BRI can be first reflected in its connecting with the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The implementation of BRI should be guided by the new development agenda, so that BRI can be a new model of international development cooperation and global development governance. In particular, with the guidance and assistance of the United Nations development system, the projects and measures of the BRI should be linked up with the development plans of the regional, national, and local governments along the route to germinate and grow.

Second, BRI implementation should not be limited to economic, trade, and investment projects, but also includes many cultural, educational, scientific, and health and other exchange activities, which requires cooperation with United Nations subsidiaries and specialized agencies, so that projects and actions with universal value and global significance can be carried out professionally and locally.

Third, the South–South Cooperation advocated by the United Nations and BRI advocated by China can be complementary and mutually supportive. On one hand, BRI provides the impetus for new South–South Cooperation; on the other hand, the South–South Cooperation will provide a multilateral framework for BRI. The implementation of BRI will effectively strengthen, deepen, enrich, and bring innovation to South–South Cooperation, while South–South Cooperation can also provide experience for BRI to transform itself from a Chinese initiative to a new mode for South–South Cooperation.

Conclusion

As the main goal and top-level design of Chinese major power diplomacy in the new era, the idea of “a community of shared future for mankind” proposed by President Xi will undoubtedly have implications for world peace and security. Yet, the so-called Chinese idea/solution needs to be integrated with existing international principles and norms,

and/or transformed into the new ones. China has greatly contributed to UN peacekeeping operations in the last 30 years. However, China's contributions in terms of peacekeepers and finance are yet to be translated into China's higher status and more influence in decision-making and management of UN peace operations. Compared to peacekeeping operations, China invests less and remains low profile in conflict prevention and peacebuilding. "A community of shared future for mankind" provides a future direction for the prevention of conflicts from a Chinese perspective. But, more importantly, how to transform the idea of this community into international norms and values serving for conflict prevention is a common challenge for both China and the rest of the world.

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