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China and the increasing role in UN missions

Since the early 90s China has actually started to play an increasingly important role in the UN Peacekeeping missions. Exceeded the initial scepticism with regard to peacekeeping operations, viewed only as an interference with the sovereignty of the host countries, China has shown a growing contribution to the programmes beside a more considerable role within the Security Council. From the first participation in 1989 UNTAG mission (Namibia) to the deployment of the protection company inside the MINUSMA mission (Mali) in 2013, there is an assumption of a progressively more extensive and differentiated role in UN missions in parallel with rising interests and significant investments in the African continent. This greater role has been realized through the increment of five percentage points of the total budget of UN Peacekeeping Operations and the deployment of more than 3.000 personnel in mid-2015, including troops, police officers and military experts. And now China is one of the first financial contributors and the major troop-contributing country (actually at the ninth ranking within the UN).

The key point is precisely that Chinese “Blue Helmets” are mostly involved in Peacekeeping Operations in Africa: this is the field where China is playing its strategy to reach a position of even greater leverage and greater responsibility. Two missions are emblematic in this process, i.e. MINUSMA (Mali) and UNMISS

(South Sudan). Through the peacekeeping interventions China is strengthening its military presence in the continent, in fact the actual number of Chinese contingent troop in Mali is estimated at more or less 400 elements and at the beginning of 2015 it has sent 700 soldiers in South Sudan, in addition to the 363 units already present in 2014; furthermore it has just signed a ten-year lease agreement for the construction of a logistic centre in Obock (Djibouti). But collaterally China is working on the expansion and safeguard of its economic interests. Despite the decrease of Chinese direct investments in the first semester of 2015, which have not surpassed the value of \$ 1,200 billion, Africa remains strategically important for China, being its first commercial partner.

Beyond the consolidation of its role in UN peacekeeping missions and the reinforcement of military presence, due to the fact that China's growth and prosperity is unavoidably linked with the stability and security in the African continent, the trend that the international community has to look at carefully is related to the protection of its local interests (in particular the exploitation of natural resources, namely the oilfields to the advantage of national oil companies), which is the mean for the affirmation of its economic and political influence.