

Principles of China's Foreign Policy

China portrays itself as a Third World country that pursues "an independent foreign policy of peace." Third World means that China is a poor, developing country and not part of any power bloc such as that around the United States or the socialist bloc formerly associated with the Soviet Union. "Independence" means that China does not align itself with any other major power. Chinese spokesmen say that their country seeks peace so that it can concentrate on development.

China says its decisions on foreign policy questions derive from 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. The Chinese leadership originally enumerated these principles in 1954 when China, with a communist government, was trying to reach out to the non-communist countries of Asia.

Today, the Five Principles still serve a useful purpose. They offer an alternative to the American conception of a new kind of world order — one in which international regimes and institutions, often reflecting U.S. interests and values, limit the rights of sovereign states to develop and sell weapons of mass destruction, repress opposition and violate human rights, pursue mercantilist economic policies that interfere with free trade, and damage the environment. China's alternative design for the world stresses the equal, unfringeable sovereignty of all states large and small, Western and non-Western, rich and poor, democratic and authoritarian, each to run its own system as it sees fit, whether its methods suit Western standards or not. Another Chinese term for such a system is "multipolarity." The Five Principles explain why America should not be able to impose its values on weaker nations. Thus the core idea behind the Five Principles as interpreted by China today is sovereignty — that one state has no right to interfere in the internal affairs of another state.

China says it "never seeks hegemony." In the 1960s hegemony was a code word for Soviet expansionism. Today Chinese officials use the term to refer to what they see as a one-sided American effort to enforce America's will on other countries in such matters as trade practices, weapons proliferation, and human rights. By saying it will not seek hegemony, China tells its smaller neighbors that China's economic development and growing military might, will not turn the country into a regional bully.

Chinese officials' position on most disputes around the world is that they should be solved by peaceful negotiations. This has been their view on the war between Iran and Iraq, the struggle between Israel and the Arabs, the rivalry between North and South Korea, and the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia. At the U.N., China often abstains or refrains from voting on resolutions that mandate sanctions or interventions to reverse invasions, end civil wars, or stop terrorism. As a permanent Security Council member China's negative vote would constitute a veto, angering countries who favor intervention. By not voting or casting an abstention, China has allowed several interventions to go ahead without reversing its commitment to non-intervention.

Of course, these articulated moral principles do not mean that Chinese foreign policy is not realistic or strategic. In many cases, the announced principles actually fit the needs of Chinese strategy. Especially in places relatively far from China, such as the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America, a few simple principles actually reflect Chinese interests most of the time. To

oppose great-power intervention and defend sovereignty and equality among states is not only high-minded but represents China's national interest in regions where China cannot intervene itself. The farther one gets from China's borders, the easier it is for China to match rhetoric with interests. Even when there are inconsistencies and tradeoffs in Chinese policy, the rhetoric is flexible enough to accommodate them.

Exercise:

- How does China's position on the issue relate to the principles on which China claims its foreign policy decisions will be based?
- What are the implications of China's position for China itself?

BBC article

China defends building projects on disputed islands

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China has defended its construction of infrastructure on disputed islands in the South China Sea.

It said it did not intend to militarise the area and accused the US of provocations by sending a navy ship through the area last month.

The comments by a Chinese vice foreign minister came on the sidelines of the annual Asean summit in Kuala Lumpur.

China claims most of the South China Sea as its territory, but four South-East Asian states also claim parts.

On Wednesday, US President Barack Obama called on China to stop land reclamation in the disputed waters.

China has repeatedly said its dredging work is legal.

The land reclamation, which began in late 2013, has turned submerged reefs into islands.

Responsible global leader?

"Building and maintaining necessary military facilities, this is what is required for China's national defence and for the protection of those islands and reefs," said Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Liu Zhenmin.

China planned to "expand and upgrade" civilian facilities on the islands, he said, "to better serve commercial ships, fishermen, to help distressed vessels and provide more public services", Mr Liu added.

This year has seen increasingly vocal opposition by Vietnam and the Philippines, backed now by Japan and the US, to China's construction of buildings, jetties and airstrips on the islands, the BBC's Jonathan Head in Kuala Lumpur says.

"The world is watching," to see if Beijing will behave like a "responsible global leader", Philippines President Benigno Aquino told leaders at the summit hours earlier.

In response, China's Prime Minister, Li Keqiang, warned countries outside the region not to inflame tension.

He also called for direct negotiations to resolve the dispute.

But Vietnam and the Philippines want the issue to be dealt with at a regional or international level, says our correspondent.