

From Mao Zedong to Xi Jinping: China's Commitment to Peace and Global Stability

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Abstract

This article explores China's commitment to peace and global stability, tracing its foreign policy from Mao Zedong to Xi Jinping. It highlights China's consistent emphasis on peaceful coexistence, diplomacy, and non-interference. From Mao's revolutionary ideals to Deng Xiaoping's economic focus, and through the leadership of Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao, and Xi Jinping, China has prioritized peaceful diplomacy over military aggression. Key initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative and Xi's "Community with a Shared Future for Mankind" reflect China's ongoing commitment to global cooperation, stability, and multilateralism.

Keywords: Global Peace, Chinese Foreign Policy, Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, Global Cooperation, Global Stability

Introduction

China's foreign policy has consistently emphasised building friendships and resolving disputes through mutual respect, equality, and peaceful coexistence. This approach prioritises collaboration and non-interference, promoting harmony in international relations. Over the decades, Chinese leaders have persistently emphasized their country's commitment to peace, stability, and harmonious relations on the global stage. From Mao Zedong to Xi Jinping, Chinese leaders have continually reiterated that China seeks a peaceful rise, dismissing the notion that its growing influence is a threat. The speeches of Chinese top leaders reveal a consistent theme of peaceful development and global cooperation, portraying China as a responsible power that aims to foster stability rather than conflict.

Historical Context of Foreign Exploitation in China

China has faced centuries of foreign domination and exploitation, beginning with the Mongol invasion in the 13th century. Under Genghis Khan's rule, the Mongols decimated cities, killed millions, and imposed harsh governance through the Yuan Dynasty [2]. This early period of foreign conquest laid the foundation for centuries of external interference. The 19th and early 20th centuries marked a particularly painful chapter, as Western colonial powers and Japan began exploiting China through a series of unequal treaties, especially after the Opium Wars (1839-1842, 1856-1860) [5]. The Treaty of Nanjing (1842), signed after the First Opium War, was the first of these humiliating agreements. It resulted in the cession of Hong Kong to Britain, the opening of five ports to foreign trade, and the granting of extraterritorial rights to foreign nationals, undermining China's sovereignty [3]. The aftermath of the Opium Wars saw further foreign encroachment, with treaties such as the Treaty of Tianjin (1858) and the Treaty of Peking (1860), which opened even more Chinese ports and ceded additional territory. Notably, the Kowloon Peninsula was handed over to Britain, and other foreign powers were granted similar privileges in various parts of China [7]. Following the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895), China was again forced into submission, signing the Treaty of Shimonoseki. This treaty resulted in the cession of Taiwan to Japan and imposed heavy indemnities on China, further weakening its position on the global stage [6]. The situation worsened with the Boxer Uprising (1899-1901), a nationalist uprising against foreign influence. The subsequent Boxer Protocol (1901) demanded even harsher terms from China. In addition to large indemnities, it led to the foreign occupation of Beijing, the stationing of foreign troops in key areas, and further privileges granted to foreign powers [4]. These unequal treaties, often signed under duress after military defeats, deeply undermined China's sovereignty and significantly altered its relations with the outside world. This period, spanning much of the 19th and early 20th centuries, is known as the Century of Humiliation [8].

In contrast to these foreign atrocities, Chinese leaders and people have consistently advocated for peace and the principle of harmonious living. Despite enduring extreme foreign exploitation,

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China's message has always been one of resilience, peaceful coexistence, and a desire to live in harmony with the world [1].

China's Leadership Upholding a Legacy of Peace and Diplomacy

Despite facing foreign aggressions, China's leadership has consistently prioritized world peace, steering clear of initiating conflicts. Chinese leaders have emphasized diplomacy and peaceful resolutions, avoiding unnecessary wars or invasions. For instance, Zhou Enlai, at the 1955 Bandung Conference, advocated for peaceful coexistence and the principle of non-interference between nations. Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms opened China to global markets, focusing on stability and international cooperation rather than military aggression. Similarly, Hu Jintao promoted China's "peaceful rise," ensuring the nation's development without compromising global security or engaging in conflict. This legacy of peace and diplomacy has continued under Xi Jinping, who has furthered the tradition with his vision of a "Community with a Shared Future for Mankind," emphasizing global cooperation, mutual benefits, and shared prosperity.

Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai: Foundations of China's Peaceful Foreign Policy

Mao Zedong, the founding father of the People's Republic of China, established the groundwork for China's peaceful foreign policy. In his speeches, Mao advocated for peaceful coexistence and non-alignment, especially during the Cold War. Despite the revolutionary nature of the Chinese Communist Party, Mao prioritized peace as a fundamental principle in China's relations with other nations.

In December 1953, Premier Zhou Enlai introduced the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence [9].

The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence are Mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, No mutual aggression, No mutual interference in internal affairs, Equitable and mutual benefit, and Peaceful coexistence [11]. These principles aimed to promote harmony and stability in international relations, particularly among nations with different social and political systems. The first principle emphasizes mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, ensuring that no nation seeks to undermine another's independence. The second principle advocates for non-aggression, rejecting the use of force between states. Third, non-interference in internal affairs ensures that countries do not meddle in each other's domestic issues. The fourth principle promotes equitable and mutually beneficial cooperation, aiming for fair partnerships that benefit all parties involved. Lastly, the fifth principle calls for peaceful coexistence, where nations with different ideologies and systems can live side by side without conflict.

The following year, these principles were formally established as norms of international relations when Zhou Enlai signed both the Sino-Indian and Sino-Burmese Joint Statements. On April 24, 1954, Premier Zhou led a delegation to the Geneva Conference, where China advocated for ending hostilities in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. After two months of negotiations, a final declaration was reached, ending the war in Indo-China and affirming the national rights of the three countries.

In April 1955, at the Bandung Conference in Indonesia, Zhou Enlai emphasized the importance of unity and collaboration among newly independent Asian and African nations. He articulated that the Chinese delegation's mission was to foster unity rather than engage in disputes, focusing on shared goals instead of differences. Zhou highlighted that despite varying political systems, all these nations had emerged from colonial rule and should strive for mutual respect, understanding, and solidarity. He further advocated for the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence as the foundation for building relationships based on friendship, cooperation, and good neighbourliness', thereby promoting a peaceful and equitable global order [10].

In April 1955, at the Bandung Conference in Indonesia, Zhou Enlai addressed relations with the U.S.,

Stating:

"The Chinese and American people are friendly. The Chinese people don't want war with the U.S. The Chinese government seeks dialogue with the American government to ease tensions in the Far East, especially in Taiwan."[9]

In 1957, Mao stated: *"The people of the world want peace, but so long as imperialism exists, wars of aggression will be inevitable."* Mao meant that although people desire peace, imperialism forces nations into conflict because powerful countries exploit and dominate weaker ones for their

gain. As long as imperialism exists, wars driven by these powers will continue. In 1957, during a speech in Moscow, Mao said: *"We stand for peace. We do not want war. But wars of aggression must be opposed, and wars of national liberation and people's revolutions must be supported."*

Mao emphasized that while China seeks peace and opposes war, it is necessary to resist aggressive wars by imperialist powers and support revolutionary movements fighting for national liberation and self-determination [12].

Deng Xiaoping: "Peace and Development" as Global Priorities

Following the death of Mao, Deng Xiaoping emerged as the paramount leader of China and the architect of its reform and opening-up policy. Under Deng, China shifted its focus from revolutionary ideals to modernization and development, with a firm commitment to peace as a means to achieve prosperity.

In 1974, while addressing the UN General Assembly, Deng Xiaoping explained that global relations can be viewed through the lens of three distinct worlds. He classified the United States and the Soviet Union as the first world, developing nations in Asia, Africa, and Latin America as the third world, and the countries between them as the second world. Deng emphasized that the two superpowers, the U.S. and the Soviet Union, were vying for global dominance, seeking to control developing nations while also pressuring less powerful developed countries. These superpowers are the leading exploiters and oppressors, with their vast nuclear arsenals, military bases, and global interference. Economically, they exploited other nations by seizing resources and wealth. Deng was particularly critical of the superpower that claimed to be socialist, stating it acted in even worse ways. China, as a socialist and developing nation, was part of the third world and would never become a superpower. According to Deng, a superpower is an imperialist force that invades and controls others. He warned that if China were ever to transform into such a superpower, it should be opposed and overthrown by the global community alongside the Chinese people. [14]

Deng's strategy was encapsulated in his well-known dictum, *"Hide your strength, bide your time, and never seek leadership."* [15]. This policy was intended to position China as a peaceful partner in global affairs, avoiding the pursuit of hegemony and focusing on economic development. Through his speeches, Deng reinforced China's peaceful stance, insisting that China's modernization would not threaten global stability.

Deng's emphasis on economic cooperation as a form of peaceful diplomacy shaped China's role in the international system and reassured the world that China's development was not a threat to global security but an opportunity for shared growth.

Jiang Zemin: Strengthening Multilateral Cooperation

Jiang Zemin, who led China throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, upheld the policies of peaceful development and strengthened China's involvement in the global community through multilateral cooperation. In his speeches, Jiang emphasized China's responsibility as a global leader dedicated to peace and development.

While addressing the inaugural APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting in 1993, President Jiang Zemin emphasized the importance of reflecting on the future as the world approaches the 21st century. He stressed that achieving genuine peace and prosperity through joint efforts would benefit humanity. Jiang warned that global chaos, insecurity, and economic troubles at the century's turn would be unacceptable. He also advocated for regional economic cooperation based on mutual respect, equality, mutual interest, openness, and shared prosperity [16].

During his speech at the 1 October rally in Tiananmen Square, Beijing, marking the 50th anniversary of the People's Republic of China, President Jiang Zemin proclaimed, "We will remain committed to an independent foreign policy of peace and continue to foster friendly relations and cooperation with all nations, grounded in the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence." [17].

Under Jiang, China actively participated in international organizations and reinforced its stance that global peace and cooperation were necessary for mutual development. His leadership marked a significant increase in China's participation in international institutions, further cementing its image as a proponent of peace.

Hu Jintao: Peaceful Development and "Harmonious World"

Hu Jintao, who succeeded Jiang Zemin in 2002, introduced the concept of a "harmonious world," which built upon his predecessors' ideals of peace and development. Hu's speeches consistently

emphasized the notion that China's rise would be peaceful, benefiting the world rather than threatening it.

At the United Nations in 2005, Hu Jintao articulated his vision of a harmonious world:

"We advocate the building of a harmonious world of lasting peace and common prosperity, and China is committed to peaceful development. We will not engage in arms races, nor will we challenge any country's development. China will develop itself in the context of promoting world peace." [18].

This speech underscored China's vision for a multipolar world where nations cooperate to solve global challenges. Hu emphasized that peace is not only the responsibility of great powers but of all countries, large or small.

Xi Jinping: "Community with a Shared Future for Mankind"

Xi Jinping, China's current president, has continued the tradition of promoting peaceful development while enhancing China's global role. His key foreign policy concept, "Community with a Shared Future for Mankind," expands on the peaceful rise narrative by emphasizing mutual benefits, global cooperation, and shared prosperity.

In his 2015 speech at the UN General Assembly, he emphasized China's commitment to promoting peace, development, cooperation, and fostering a community with a shared future for all of humanity. China remains dedicated to contributing to global peace and fostering peaceful development. Regardless of changes in the international landscape or its growing strength, China will never pursue hegemony, expansion, or dominance over any sphere of influence. He stated, *"The world is experiencing profound changes, but peace, development, cooperation, and win-win outcomes remain the trend of the times. China will continue to uphold the principles of peace, development, fairness, justice, democracy, and freedom. We are committed to building a community with a shared future for mankind, based on mutual respect and cooperation"* [19]. While delivering a speech at the UN Peacekeeping Summit, Xi stated that as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, China has actively participated in peacekeeping operations for 25 years, contributing both troops and funds. China plans to establish an 8,000-strong peacekeeping force, train 2,000 peacekeepers, provide \$100 million in military aid to the African Union, and deploy its first helicopter squad for UN missions in Africa. Additionally, a portion of the China-UN Peace and Development Fund will be allocated to support UN peacekeeping efforts [20].

Xi Jinping's speeches emphasize China's commitment to addressing global challenges such as climate change, poverty, and security, portraying China as a responsible global leader dedicated to peace. In his address at the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation on May 14, 2017, President Xi highlighted the historical importance of peace and cooperation along the ancient Silk Road. He referenced Zhang Qian's journey in 140 B.C. and the thriving trade during the Tang, Song, and Yuan Dynasties. Figures like Du Huan, Marco Polo, and Zheng He traversed these routes, fostering peaceful exchanges and building lasting bridges of cooperation between the East and West [20]. At the opening ceremony of the BRICS Business Forum held virtually in 2022, Xi Jinping remarked: "History teaches us that peace, the common aspiration of humanity, must be actively pursued and safeguarded by everyone. Only by cherishing and upholding peace, while never forgetting the painful lessons of war, can we sustain the hope for lasting peace. In the face of a volatile and unstable world, we must remain committed to the principles of the UN Charter and fulfill our mission to maintain peace." His saying emphasizes the universal and shared responsibility of humanity to actively pursue and safeguard peace as a fundamental aspiration. It highlights the importance of learning from history, particularly the devastating consequences of war, to ensure such painful lessons are not forgotten. Peace, as a fragile and invaluable state, requires proactive and collective efforts to preserve it, especially in a world marked by volatility and instability. By reaffirming commitment to the principles of the UN Charter, such as sovereignty, non-aggression, and international cooperation, the statement underscores the necessity of a rules-based global order to maintain harmony. Ultimately, it calls for unity and collective action in addressing shared challenges, asserting that hope for a peaceful future depends on humanity's ability to work together with a sense of moral responsibility and historical awareness [21]. Xi emphasized that China will uphold the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, working with all nations to build a shared future for humanity while contributing to global peace and development. China's commitment to peaceful development remains steadfast, avoiding colonial or hegemonic paths. With a strong record in peace and security,

China is actively involved in resolving global hotspot issues like Ukraine, Palestine-Israel, and the Korean Peninsula. Every advancement in China's strength enhances prospects for world peace [22].

Conclusion

This research underscores the unwavering commitment of China to peace and global stability, tracing its foreign policy evolution from Mao Zedong to Xi Jinping. Despite enduring centuries of foreign exploitation and humiliation, China's leaders have continuously championed the principles of peaceful coexistence, diplomacy, and non-interference. Through initiatives such as the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, the Belt and Road Initiative, and Xi Jinping's vision of a "Community with a Shared Future for Mankind," China has consistently sought to foster cooperation, mutual respect, and stability in international relations.

From Mao's revolutionary stance to Deng Xiaoping's economic focus, and through the leadership of Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao, and Xi Jinping, the underlying message remains clear: China's rise will be peaceful, focused on development rather than aggression. The historical context of China's foreign exploitation has shaped its policy approach, positioning it as a promoter of global peace, solidarity, and prosperity. China's foreign policy today, characterized by multilateral cooperation and active participation in international peacekeeping, further reinforces its role as a responsible global actor.

As China continues to assert its influence on the world stage, it reaffirms its commitment to a rules-based global order, where cooperation and peaceful development are prioritized. The nation's long-standing diplomatic efforts and its determination to uphold peace and stability suggest that China will remain a key player in shaping a harmonious, prosperous global future for all nations.

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