

# Towards Coexistence and Cooperation: NATO and China



**NATO** ASSOCIATION OF CANADA

ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE POUR L'OTAN



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# The NATO Association of Canada

*Towards Coexistence and Cooperation: NATO and*

*China*

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# **The Ambitions of the People’s Republic of China: An Opportunity and a Threat to the Rules-Based International Order**

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## **Abstract**

In 2020, the spread of COVID-19 required international organizations to uphold and strengthen their mission to assert a rules-based international order. Doing so exposed pressure points and uncertainties in the existing system. The United Nations (UN) and its agencies, particularly the World Health Organization (WHO), stood at the forefront of the global response to COVID-19, while China became a key subject of international dialogue and scrutiny. This chapter provides an account of the multilateral agencies embedded in the UN and their relation to China during the once-in-a-generation COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. The chapter begins by drawing on the historical context of China’s relationship with the rules-based international order, including China’s recent ascent. Following, the chapter will provide an assessment of the aforementioned international organizations through a case study approach. The chapter aims to pose recommendations to empower cooperation with China, providing context for the subsequent chapter on the future of NATO-China relations and opportunities for adaptation.

## **Introduction**

NATO 2030 references China as a “geopolitical and ideological challenge” to the Alliance, posing a potential point of contention to the rules-based international order — which represents “a shared commitment by...countries to conduct...activities in accordance with agreed rules that

evolve over time.”<sup>12</sup> With its explicit mention of the “China challenge,” NATO 2030 sees Beijing’s expansive reach, stimulated by its ever-evolving influence in international organizations, as a threat to the rules-based international order.<sup>3</sup>

In 1949, Mao Zedong, leader of the Communist Party, declared the creation of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), also recognized as China by Chinese leadership, after the defeat of his Nationalist Party opponents following a bloody civil war. Prior, the PRC was the Republic of China (ROC) and represented by Taiwan. In this period, Mao favoured a policy of isolation for China, resulting in heightened global tensions and a decline in the country’s integration into the emerging rules-based international order reflected in international institutions.<sup>4</sup>



Image 1: People pay tribute to Mao Zedong in his hometown of Shaoshan. (Source: REUTERS, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/mao-hailed-as-a-hero-at-home-but-not-in-beijing-gxhkc0kgj20>)

<sup>1</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization, NATO. 2020. “NATO 2030: United for a New Era. Analysis and Recommendations of the Reflection Group Appointed by the NATO Secretary General.” p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Association of Australia, UNAA. 2015. “The United Nations and the Rules-Based International Order.” p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p. 12.

<sup>4</sup> Li, Xing and Shaw, Timothy M. 2014. “Same Bed, Different Dreams” and “Riding Tiger” Dilemmas: China’s Rise and International Relations/Political Economy.” *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 19 (1) (03): 69-93. p. 81.

China asserted its initial position in international organizations through the “Three World Theory.” Accredited by Mao, the concept was a developmental economic vision. The concept counters the Western terminology of first, second and third world countries, that was developed during the Cold War to classify countries “based on their respective economic development and standards of living.”<sup>5</sup> Mao’s concept instead emphasizes “China’s national interests and sovereignty as its logical origin, the law of the unity of opposites as its philosophical cornerstone and anti-hegemony as its main diplomatic strategy.”<sup>6</sup> It assigns superpowers as the First World and the main enemies (e.g., U.S. and Soviet Union); developed countries between the two worlds as the Second World and the “allies of the third world” (e.g., Japan and Canada); and developing countries as the Third World.<sup>7</sup> To Mao, “...All Asian countries, except Japan, and all of Africa and also Latin America belong to the Third World.”<sup>8</sup> The concept was publicly hailed by Deng Xiaoping, then Vice-Premier of the PRC State Council, at the sixth special session of the UN General Assembly in 1974, during a momentous period of global realignments, such as the Cold War, decolonization, national liberation movements and social revolutions.<sup>9</sup>

Under the leadership of Deng, China committed to international and regional organizations that targeted areas related to the four modernizations, such as economics, security, culture, environment, science, technology, and politics. Deng’s administration discerned the value of a non-confrontational approach to accomplish the “goals and objectives of a peaceful and stable environment for economic development.” Thus, the PRC prioritized acquiring economic competition through participating in international organizations. As a result, countries that aligned with a liberal democratic order, including the U.S., established more friendly relations with China and enhanced the acceptability of China as a member of the Western-dominated international society. The fast-paced induction and sheer influence of China in international affairs demonstrated the

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<sup>5</sup> Lumen Learning. n.d. “Module 5: Social Stratification and Inequality.” <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/alamo-sociology/chapter/reading-global-classification/>.

<sup>6</sup> An, Jiang. 2013. “Mao Zedong’s “Three Worlds” Theory: Political Considerations and Value for the Times.” *Social Sciences in China*. p. 43 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02529203.2013.760715>.

<sup>7</sup> Saba, Paul. 1980. “On the Counter-Revolutionary Theory of the Three Worlds.” *Red Dawn*. <https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/ncm-1a/red-dawn.htm>.

<sup>8</sup> Jian, Chen. 2019. “From Mao to Deng: China’s Changing Relations with the United States.” *Wilson Center*. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/mao-to-deng-chinas-changing-relations-the-united-states>.

<sup>9</sup> Altehenger, Jennifer. 2015. “Social Imperialism and Mao’s Three Worlds: Deng Xiaoping’s Speech at the UN General Assembly, 1974.” *Revolutionary Moments: Reading Revolutionary Texts*. p. 177. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781474252669.0028>.

country's capability of constructive and cooperative participation but began to elicit dialogue around China's intentions.

Today, Xi Jinping, President of the PRC, and subsequently President for years to follow after eliminating the two-term Presidential limit, leads China's development and ascent to great power status.<sup>10</sup> Through initiatives, such as the One Belt One Road, and multilayered engagement strategies, including the Two Centennial Goals, Xi has given outsiders an opportunity to reflect on China's current ambitions related to rules-based international order. These ambitions represent the country's desire to evolve from its perceived developing country status to an understanding that China is "prosperous, powerful, democratic, culturally advanced, and harmonious."<sup>11</sup> However, the process of integrating China as a developed country produces grave concerns for rules-based international order, raising questions about its motives in international organizations and the influence of its authoritarian power. Will China demand hegemonic status? How does China's rise impact international organizations?

## **The UN**

China has come to the forefront of international organizations. One consequence of this has been the demonization of China by democratic states and media outlets, who often depict the country as a hegemonic power with nefarious intentions, acting out of self-interest and ignoring moral obligation. Whether these depictions encompass the country's human rights violations towards the Uyghur minority, the anti-Chinese rhetoric espoused by former U.S. President, Donald Trump, or the polarizing debate of the origins of COVID-19, all have positioned China as a controversial actor. Today's tensions are driven by China's ever-growing oppositional power, which has demonstrated the lingering effects of an ideological disconnect that has been present since the Cold War era. China's representation in the Western world, coupled with its evolving influence, has resulted in the deterioration of the existing international order. This deterioration fuels

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<sup>10</sup> McDonell, Stephen. 2018. "China's Xi allowed to remain 'president for life' as term limits removed." *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-43361276>.

<sup>11</sup> Dollar, David et al. 2020. "China 2049: Economic Challenges of a Rising Global Power." *Brookings Institution*. [https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/FP\\_20200106\\_china\\_2049\\_dollar\\_huang\\_yao.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/FP_20200106_china_2049_dollar_huang_yao.pdf).

the argument that China presents a threat to the rules-based international order and multilateral organizations, including the UN.

### *Historical Context*

China has remained a member of the UN since the inception of the organization in 1945. However, its turbulent politics have resulted in uncertainty, delaying the country's official recognition. The UN first acknowledged the ROC, represented by Taiwan, as the "China seat," and excluded the PRC and mainland China from international recognition. In 1949, China finalized its position as a communist regime and the PRC, under the leadership of Mao, adopted a "self-reliant and self-sufficient path of development."<sup>12</sup>

Twenty years later, the nation began experiencing a gradual transition from a post-revolutionary communist regime to a post-Mao era of liberalization and proto capitalism, subsequently eliciting China's formal reintegration into the international community.<sup>13</sup> In October 1971, the UN General Assembly voted on resolution 2578, officially recognizing the PRC.<sup>14</sup> Countries, like the U.S., opposed the recognition through the initiation of motions that "made changing China's representation in the UN an 'important question,' thus requiring a two-thirds margin to pass."<sup>15</sup> Still, countries, including the Soviet Union and, more notably, Great Britain, regarded the PRC as the legitimate Chinese government.<sup>16</sup> The recognition allocated to the PRC made the mainland Chinese government the only "legitimate representatives of China to the UN" and saw the expulsion of "the representatives of the ROC, also known as Taiwan."<sup>17</sup> While Taiwan remains a point of dispute, Chinese recognition in the UN has allowed mainland China to reintegrate into the rules-based international order.

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<sup>12</sup> Li, Xing and Timothy M. Shaw. 2014. "'Same Bed, Different Dreams' and 'Riding Tiger' Dilemmas: China's Rise and International Relations/Political Economy." *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 19 (1) (03): 69-93. p. 81.

<sup>13</sup> Kent, Ann. 2002. "China's International Socialization: The Role of International Organizations." *Global Governance* 8 (3) (Jul): 343-364. p. 344.

<sup>14</sup> Carter, James. 2020. "When the PRC Won the 'China' Seat at the UN." *SupChina*. <https://supchina.com/2020/10/21/when-the-prc-won-the-china-seat-at-the-un/>.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

### *China as a Peacekeeping Success*

China has played a significant but contentious role in several international organizations. For example, the formal recognition of the PRC by the UN General Assembly generated concerns about Taiwan's recognition. Taiwan's lack of international support and omission as a sovereign nation illustrated the adverse effects that China's reintegration to rule-based international order produced. Similarly, China's evolving economy has helped the country exert its influence in international organizations, leading to claims that China presents an ever-growing threat. This perception is reinforced by China's seat on the UN Security Council (UNSC), which gives it the power to veto resolutions. Despite the country's perceived negative attributes, China has shown a willingness to participate in the rules-based international order by engaging in multilateral initiatives, such as the UN Peacekeeping Operations (UNPKO).



Image 2: Chinese peacekeepers marching in a Beijing parade marking the People's Republic of China's 70th anniversary. (Source: Wang Zhuangfei/chinadaily.com.cn, <https://www.china-daily.com.cn/a/202009/17/WS5f62fd5da31024ad0ba7a2a9.html>)

In decades since the recognition of the PRC in 1971, the nation began establishing a role in UNPKO while remaining a critic of UN interventions. As a result, an ideological disconnect began to emerge. This disconnect was evident in the country's overall disapproval of UNPKO and its reluctance to participate in UN-affiliated agencies, including the World Bank, IMF and Conference on Disarmament.<sup>18</sup> The "peaceful settlement" initially nurtured by China looked dubious through its hesitancy to align with the UNPKO. The disagreement with the UN derives from China's perception of national sovereignty. China maintains a perceived "traditional stance on sovereignty" based on the memory of the "Century of Humiliation and the country's loss of sovereignty at the hands of Western imperialism."<sup>19</sup> Despite its original reluctance, China began to regard UNPKOs through a "functional and less ideological lens."<sup>20</sup> China has since favoured UNPKOs that encourage "traditional peacekeeping tasks" and have become a leading contributor to the institution, suggesting a national priority to not only continue to operate within the rules-based international order, but become an active member at the expense of older policies.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, China's influence and involvement have evolved, especially in relation to sending military personnel and civilian policy officials to several disparate UN missions, such as in the Middle East, Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Caribbean.<sup>22</sup> The country's participation in UNPKO has increased its soft-power while mitigating the perception of a "looming 'China threat.'"<sup>23</sup>

More recently, China has demonstrated a shift from a wary ally to an eager member bestowing financial and military contributions to the UNPKO. In 2016, China was the second largest contributor to the budget for UNPKOs, "providing 10.29 percent of the institution's budget."<sup>24</sup> Its contribution extends beyond finances, with Xi Jinping, General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and President of China, promising to complete the registration of 8000

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<sup>18</sup> Kent, Ann. 2002. "China's International Socialization: The Role of International Organizations." *Global Governance* 8 (3) (07): 343-364. p. 344.

<sup>19</sup> Kuo, Steven C.Y. 2020. "Chinese Peace in Africa: Peacemaking, Peacebuilding and Peacekeeping." p. 40.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid p. 40.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid p. 46.

<sup>22</sup> Lanteigne, Marc. 2019. "China's UN Peacekeeping in Mali and Comprehensive Diplomacy." *The China Quarterly* 239 (09): 635-655. p. 637

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. p. 639.

<sup>24</sup> Cho, Sunghye. 2019. "China's Participation in UN Peacekeeping Operations since the 2000s." *Journal of Contemporary China* 28 (117) (05): 482-498. p. 482.

standby troops at the UN.<sup>25</sup> Today, China reigns as the second largest contributor to the UN peacekeeping budget, behind the U.S. The changing attitude of multilateralism in the context of the rules-based international order illustrates the “long socialization process that China has embraced.”<sup>26</sup>

China’s rapid growth, alongside its expanding influence in international organizations, has alarmed democratic states that perceive China as an authoritarian power who intends to utilize corrosive strategies to influence rules-based international order.<sup>27</sup> Yet China’s attitude towards multilateralism and increased participation in UNPKO outwardly demonstrate that China has a desire to actively engage in the order. China has been diligent in its involvement with UNPKOs, having primarily aided UN missions in Cyprus and Western Sahara. Both countries represent small and militarily low-risk enterprises.<sup>28</sup> In other similar countries, China has exerted attempts to leverage financial contribution to the UNPKO budget to diminish the number of human rights officials attached to UN missions, building a case for China’s self-interest concerning its economic contributions.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, criticisms against China’s self-interested posture are prevalent in its humanitarian work, which could arguably be a mechanism to divert attention from the humanitarian abuses within China itself. These abuses include subjecting citizens to censorship, surveillance, and ethnic cleansing. In recent months, ethnic cleansing of the Uyghur Muslim minority in Xinjiang has caused debate in the international community, with thirty-nine UN member states condemning the PRC.<sup>30</sup> The hypocrisy of participating in UNPKOs and other humanitarian ventures while human rights abuses continue to occur within Chinese borders is one of the many factors driving the anti-China sentiment in the Western media and academia. While it is

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<sup>25</sup> Cho, Sunghee. 2019. "China's Participation in UN Peacekeeping Operations since the 2000s." *Journal of Contemporary China* 28 (117) (05): 482-498. p. 483.

<sup>26</sup> Kim, Youcheer. 2020. "Is China Spoiling the Rules-Based Liberal International Order? Examining China's Rising Institutional Power in a Multiplex World through Competing Theories." *Issues and Studies* 56 (1) (03): 1-28. p. 3.

<sup>27</sup> Li, Xing and Shaw, Timothy M. 2014. "'Same Bed, Different Dreams' and 'Riding Tiger' Dilemmas: China's Rise and International Relations/Political Economy." *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 19 (1) (03): 69-93. p. 72.

<sup>28</sup> Gowan, Richard. 2020. "China's Pragmatic Approach to UN Peacekeeping." *Brookings*. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/chinas-pragmatic-approach-to-un-peacekeeping/>.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Besheer, Margaret. 2020. "At UN: 39 Countries Condemn China's Abuses of Uighurs." *Voice of America*. <https://www.voanews.com/east-asia-pacific/voa-news-china/un-39-countries-condemn-chinas-abuses-uighurs>.

certain that China's intentions may not be purely charitable, the country's actions do continue to contribute a net positive impact to the security of nations within the international order.<sup>31</sup>

### *A Permanent Decision-Maker on International Security*

China's membership in the UN Security Council (UNSC) sheds light on the nation's evolving influence. The UNSC has provided a place that reveals China's voting patterns, which converge and diverge with other actors in the rules-based international order. At the UNSC, decisions "on procedural matters, shall be made by an affirmative vote of nine votes while decisions on all other matters, shall be made by an affirmative vote of nine members including the concurring votes of permanent members."<sup>32</sup> As one of the five permanent seats on the UNSC, China holds veto power, and, as a result, can influence decision-making processes that extend to a broad range of international security concerns. Recent years have demonstrated that China's voting patterns in the UNSC have, at times, aligned with that of other powers, including the U.S, thereby aiding the facilitation of passing resolutions. By contrast, other situations have illustrated China's oppositional power, leading to impasses and disagreements that have contributed to the slow deterioration of relations between China and other actors, presenting a case for diplomatic failure. Because UNSC resolutions necessitate the support of nine of the fifteen members, a negative vote from any permanent member is enough to dissuade an approval. China's negative votes, particularly during the 2000s, have posed a point of contention for the UNSC.<sup>33</sup> Chinese voting patterns suggest a lingering diplomatic disconnect between Beijing and Washington. These recent years have demonstrated that China is not only self-interested in decision-making processes in the UNSC but has also used its voting power to "protect abusive regimes", which was evident in the cases of Libya, North Korea, and Iran.<sup>34</sup> This behaviour has advanced ideological clashes between China and the U.S., resulting in deadlocks and compromises on resolutions that impact global security. For instance, between 2006 and 2010, China actively worked to weaken resolu-

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<sup>31</sup> Cho, Sunghee. 2019. "China's Participation in UN Peacekeeping Operations since the 2000s." *Journal of Contemporary China* 28 (117) (05): 482-498. p. 498.

<sup>32</sup> United Nations Security Council, UNSC. "Provisional Rules of Procedure." <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/content/repertoire/provisional-rules-procedure>.

<sup>33</sup> Wuthnow, Joel. 2011. "Beyond the Veto: Chinese Diplomacy in the United Nations Security Council." *Columbia University*. p. 13.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid* p. 22.

tions targeting North Korea's missile and nuclear tests and successfully diluted sanctions targeted at Iran's nuclear program.<sup>35</sup> In 2007, the PRC vetoed a non-binding statement about political repression in Burma driven by U.S President George W. Bush.<sup>36</sup> In 2011, China abstained from a UNSC vote over a resolution that sought to create a "no-fly zone" over Libyan airspace and "permitted the UN to protect civilians from the attack was intended to prevent the killing of civilians, following an uprising against the rule of Muammar el-Qaddafi based in Benghazi."<sup>37</sup> Since then, China has "vetoed nine resolutions, including eight on Syria and one on Venezuela."<sup>38</sup> The actions of China present a case for diplomatic failure, as the country has repeatedly used its veto power to nullify key actions supported by other UNSC members.



Image 3: Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi listens during a UN Security Council session chaired by Donald Trump. (Source: Carlos Barria / Reuters, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/09/trump-security-council/571351/>)

<sup>35</sup> Wuthnow, Joel. 2011. "Beyond the Veto: Chinese Diplomacy in the United Nations Security Council." *Columbia University*. p. 13.p. 21.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid* p. 21.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid* p. 1.

<sup>38</sup> Vina, Morgan Lorraine. 2021. "Don't Let China Hijack the UN Security Council." *The National Interest*. <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/don%E2%80%99t-let-china-hijack-un-security-council-184537>.

Likewise, China has demonstrated its willingness to act in support of those who oppose the U.S. and other Western powers, particularly evident in the Israel-Palestine conflict. Since the establishment of Israel in 1948, fighting between Palestine and Israel has occupied numerous UNSC resolutions. In May 2021, violence was spurred with rising tensions between Israel and Hamas, the ruling militant group in Gaza.<sup>39</sup> China has communicated support for Palestine, with recent statements criticizing the U.S. for blocking the UNSC from reaching an agreement on the conflict.<sup>40</sup> In appearing to mediate conflict through permanent power held under the UNSC, it is argued China may be using the conflict for self-interest. The country's participation in the conflict enables China to showcase its ambition to become a global power, one that counters the U.S. and appears "more responsible."<sup>41</sup> The U.S. is a unilateral supporter of Israel, and like China's relationship with Syria, has constantly vetoed UN resolution proposals on Palestinian affairs. The U.S. has twice blocked a joint statement calling for an immediate ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, whereas China condemned the conflict and represented the lone dissenting voice on the issue.<sup>42</sup> China's ideological divergence tends to be the source of impasse through its self-interest over moral responsibility in the case of the Palestine and Israel conflict. The opposing interests of China and the U.S. on this issue highlight how the differing priorities of UNSC members can undermine opportunities for compromise and peace. As China becomes increasingly confident on the world stage, this split is likely to widen.

## **The WHO**

The COVID-19 pandemic has emphasized that the presence of widespread disease and the permeability of national borders requires international cooperation to ensure global prevention and control. Historically, the cholera epidemic inspired the first development of cooperation at this scale. In the nineteenth century, cholera – "an acute, diarrheal illness caused by infection of the

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<sup>39</sup> 2021. "Hamas: The Palestinian militant group that rules Gaza." *BBC*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-13331522>.

<sup>40</sup> Sheng, Yang. 2021. "When China mediates Palestine-Israel conflict via UN platform, US 'stands opposite to international justice.'" *Global Times*. <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202105/1223623.shtml>.

<sup>41</sup> Zhou, Viola. "Why China Is So Eager to Play Mediator Between Palestine and Israel." *Vice News*. <https://www.vice.com/en/article/k78bq3/china-palestine-israel-peace-maker>.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

intestine” – took the lives of tens of thousands in Europe, prompting the creation of the International Sanitary Convention, whose purpose was to prevent and control epidemics.<sup>43</sup> This example demonstrates an international collaborative effort to address a global health concern. Yet, this example does not acknowledge the political interests that can shape international concerns, hence the need to investigate modern phenomenon as they relate to the existing rules-based international order. Such can be accomplished through assessing the relationship posed between the UN agency, the WHO, and China.

### *Historical Context*

In 1945, the UN Conference on International Organizations voted to establish an international health organization. Three years later, the WHO was formed as the “directing and coordinating authority in international public health” under the framework of the UN. The organization acts through three levels – global, regional, and national – to achieve “the highest possible level of health” for all people. All three levels have been actively engaged in the world in recent months as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, emphasizing the importance of the WHO in addressing a global threat to humanity. Today, the WHO staffs 7,000 individuals across 150 countries, including scientists, medical doctors, public health officials, and cross-sectoral experts. One country that holds an essential role in the organization is China. Despite being a founding member of the agency in 1948, the seat of China, under the PRC, was not formally recognized until 1971. The WHO also did not have a representative office in Beijing until 1981. However, the past four decades have demonstrated China’s transformation in becoming proactive in WHO decision-making processes. Following the death of Mao in 1976, “rapid institutional innovation and developing capacity for greater global engagement, including in health” was prioritized by the PRC. China has since become a significant contributor to the WHO, leading some to question whether the country exercises soft-power influence on the agency.

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<sup>43</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, CDC. 2020. “General Information: Cholera - *Vibrio Cholerae* Infection.” <https://www.cdc.gov/cholera/general/index.html#one>; McCarthy, Michael. 2002. “A Brief History of the World Health Organization.” *The Lancet*. Vol 360. [https://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lancet/PIIS0140-6736\(02\)11244-X.pdf](https://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lancet/PIIS0140-6736(02)11244-X.pdf).

## *Taiwan as the Self-Reliant Outlier*

The Taiwan government continues to advocate for its own participation in the WHO as a sovereign nation. China opposes Taiwan’s participation in international organizations based on the One-China policy, which claims that the island is “a province of China” that is “not qualified” and “has no right to participate”<sup>44</sup> as a sovereign state. The policy emphasizes that the PRC was and is the only China, with no allowance for Taiwan as a separate sovereign entity.<sup>45</sup> Nonetheless, past and present international health crises continue to reveal Taiwan’s ability to be self-reliant in overcoming global health threats, while providing a visible point of opportunity for contact among Taiwan, the WHO, and peripheral organizations.



Image 4: Soldiers participate in drill organized by the New Taipei City government to prevent the spread of COVID-19. (Source: Sam Yeh—AFP/Getty Images, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/35483578@N03/18504935993>)

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44 Green, Michael J. 2021. “What Is the U.S. ‘One China’ Policy, and Why Does It Matter?” Center for Strategic & International Studies. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/what-us-one-china-policy-and-why-does-it-matter>.

45 Ibid

In 2003, Taiwan, alongside China and Hong Kong, had the highest infection rates of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) – a viral respiratory disease caused by a SARS-associated coronavirus.<sup>46</sup> While China and Hong Kong received initial support from the WHO during the epidemic, Taiwan’s calls for aid were ignored. After Chinese consent, the WHO sent several observers to the island, leading to support from the U.S. and Japan for Taiwan to receive observer status at the World Health Assembly (WHA) – a privilege granted by the WHO to non-members to give them an ability to participate in the organization's activities. Simultaneously, the European Union (EU) and Canada called for Taiwan’s participation in the WHO’s activities.<sup>47</sup> At the time, Taiwan was relying on itself to overcome global threats, including natural disasters and epidemics. This ability to curb threats in a national context prepared Taiwan for effective organization and mobilization of relevant mechanisms, including governmental reorganization, medical care system preparedness, and public engagement.<sup>48</sup> For example, the SARS outbreak called attention to Taiwan’s faults, highlighting a need for a unified primary point of command when central and municipal governments failed to coordinate anti-pandemic measures, leaving Taiwanese citizens vulnerable to SARS. Therefore, post-SARS, the Taiwan government created the National Health Command Center (NHCC), placed under the Taiwan Centers for Disease Control (CDC). The NHCC focuses on widespread outbreak response and acts as the “operational [point of command] for communications among central, regional, and local authorities.”<sup>49</sup> The NHCC has been hailed a success, most notably during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, where the Center created a sub-center titled, the Central Epidemic Command Center (CECC).

In January 2020, the CECC was constructed as headlines in mainstream media began to note the appearance of a “new and unknown respiratory disease emerging in China”.<sup>50</sup> The organization values intersectoral collaboration, where ministries – e.g., ministries of transportation, economics, labor, and education and the Environmental Protection Administration, etc. – work jointly to

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<sup>46</sup> World Health Organization, WHO. “Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS)” [https://www.who.int/health-topics/severe-acute-respiratory-syndrome#tab=tab\\_1](https://www.who.int/health-topics/severe-acute-respiratory-syndrome#tab=tab_1).

<sup>47</sup> Winkler, Sigrid. 2012. “Taiwan's UN Dilemma: To Be or Not to Be.” *Brookings*. <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/taiwans-un-dilemma-to-be-or-not-to-be/>.

<sup>48</sup> Lee, Wui-Chiang. 2020. “Taiwan’s experience in pandemic control: Drawing the right lessons from SARS outbreak.” *Journal of the Chinese Medical Association*: p. 622. doi: 10.1097/JCMA.0000000000000350

<sup>49</sup> Wang, C Jason et. al. 2020. “Response to COVID-19 in Taiwan: Big Data Analytics, New Technology, and Proactive Testing.” *JAMA*. p. 1341. doi:10.1001/jama.2020.3151

<sup>50</sup> Lee, Wui-Chiang. 2020. “Taiwan's experience in pandemic control: Drawing the right lessons from SARS outbreak.” *Journal of the Chinese Medical Association*. p. 622. doi:10.1097/JCMA.0000000000000350

manage the public health crisis. In approaching the COVID-19 pandemic through a cross-sectoral lens, CECC has been successful in implementing measures to block transmission and stunt the spread of COVID-19, while representing Taiwanese culture and its population.<sup>51</sup>

The case of Taiwan and the WHO shows how small nations can develop effective mechanisms for self-reliance, even when they are marginalized from international institutions. However, this example also raises the following question: With China growing in influence and power, are smaller countries like Taiwan, that currently participate in international organizations, at risk of being dominated by China's growing soft power? The question is especially relevant to Canadians, given recent tensions between Ottawa and Beijing.

### *The Turbulent Partnership of Canada and China*

Canada has long played a key role in the WHO. Brock Chisholm, a Canadian doctor and first Director-General of the WHO, proposed the name of the organization recommending the “World – or Universal – Health Organization.”<sup>52</sup> With the goal of a “peaceful community” which would benefit all nations, Canada's induction to the WHO was holistic and inclusive, one that mimics the global “mosaic” identity – welcoming differences of ethnicity, culture, racial identity, and language – held by the country.<sup>53</sup> With over 1.8 million Canadian residents of Chinese origin, and hundreds of thousands of Chinese students attending Canadian educational institutions, China empowers Canada's mosaic, forming the basis for stronger diplomatic ties and bilateral opportunities. Unlike Sino-American relations that are influenced by “competition for global technological dominance, and incompatibility of political ideologies,” Canada follows a sectoral and issue-by-issue stance that aims to account for Canada's national interest in the rules-based international order.<sup>54</sup> However, the unfolding of the COVID-19 pandemic has accentuated cross-

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<sup>51</sup> Lee, Wui-Chiang. 2020. “Taiwan's experience in pandemic control: Drawing the right lessons from SARS outbreak.” *Journal of the Chinese Medical Association*. p. 622. doi:10.1097/JCMA.0000000000000350

<sup>52</sup> Gunn, SW. 1968. “The Canadian contribution to the World Health Organization.” *Canadian Medical Association Journal*. 99(22):1080–1088. p. 1081.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. See also: Schneider, Howard. 1998. “Canada: A Mosaic, not a Melting Pot.” *The Washington Post*. WP Company. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1998/07/05/canada-a-mosaic-not-a-melting-pot/8a4998ed-b04b-491e-b72e-1ef4d8e96d84/>.

<sup>54</sup> Ong, Lynette H. 2020. “Navigating Canada-China Relations in a Turbulent Era.” *Public Policy Forum*. <https://ppforum.ca/publications/navigating-canada-china-relations/>.

sectoral tensions between Canada and China, laying bare how Canada's economic reliance on China hinders the national autonomy of the former.

In 2018, Meng Wanzhou, an executive for Huawei – a Chinese multinational technology company – was arrested on a layover in Vancouver, British Columbia, due to a U.S. Department of Justice warrant. Wanzhou was detained on the count of fraud and conspiracy in connection with allegations she lied to a financial executive in Hong Kong about her organization's control of a subsidiary named Skycom, which was accused of violating U.S. economic sanctions against Iran.<sup>55</sup> The situation arguably positioned Canada as the middleman enabling the U.S. to exert control over China. In what appears to be a clear act of retaliation, China arrested Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor, two Canadians with professional ties to China, for alleged espionage. Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau claimed that the Chinese government is “not following the... rules and principles that the large majority of democracies follow in regard to rules-based order...”<sup>56</sup> China's behaviour has altered Canadians' perception of the country, diminishing confidence and underscoring a weakening rules-based system that exposes Canada's vulnerabilities.<sup>57</sup> Fast forward to the COVID-19 pandemic, where China continues similar policies of retaliation, begging the question: How has the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic affected relations between Canada and China within the larger context of the rules-based international order?

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<sup>55</sup> Proctor, Jason. 2021. “Meng Wanzhou's Lawyers Claim U.S. Theory of Extradition Case 'Unprecedented in Canadian Law'.” *CBC News*. CBC/Radio Canada. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/meng-wanzhou-committal-arguments-fraud-1.6014968>.

<sup>56</sup> Reuters, Thomson. 2019. “China Formally Arrests Spavor and Kovrig, Accuses Them of Spying.” *CBC*. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/canadians-arrested-china-state-secret-1.5138103>.

<sup>57</sup> Robertson, Colin. 2020. “What to Do About China: A Menu of Options.” *Canadian Global Affairs Institute*. [https://www.cgai.ca/what\\_to\\_do\\_about\\_china\\_a\\_menu\\_of\\_options](https://www.cgai.ca/what_to_do_about_china_a_menu_of_options)



Image 5: A technician works at a CanSino Biologics manufacturing facility. (Source: REUTERS, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2020/07/02/asia-pacific/science-health-asia-pacific/china-cansino-coronavirus-vaccine/>)

In May 2020, the partnership between Chinese vaccine maker, CanSino Biologics, and the National Research Council of Canada (NRC) was announced.<sup>58</sup> The partnership intended to promote transnational collaboration with CanSino receiving a license by the NRC to use a “Canadian biological product” in their COVID-19 vaccine.<sup>59</sup> The partnership was not new. In 2013, the NRC developed and designed HEK293 cell lines – a technical term for a biological product – to create an Ebola vaccine.<sup>60</sup> The same cell lines were used again in the 2020 partnership, meaning Canadian intellectual property was utilized.<sup>61</sup> The intention was that the Canadian Centre for Vaccinology at Dalhousie University in Nova Scotia was to perform the Canadian clinical trials

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<sup>58</sup> Cooke, Alex. 2020. “Canadian COVID-19 clinical trial scrapped after China wouldn’t ship potential vaccine.” *CBC*. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/canada-china-covid-19-vaccine-trial-plug-pulled-1.5701101>.

<sup>59</sup> Wells, Nick. 2021. “Chinese government interference derailed Canadian vaccine partnership: researcher.” *CTV*. <https://www.ctvnews.ca/health/coronavirus/chinese-government-interference-derailed-canadian-vaccine-partnership-researcher-1.5344258>.

<sup>60</sup> Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada. n.d. “Canada and China Collaborating on COVID-19 Vaccine” <https://www.asiapacific.ca/asia-watch/canada-and-china-collaborating-covid-19-vaccine>.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

for the vaccine.<sup>62</sup> These trials were the basis of a small Phase One COVID-19 vaccine trial in China, known as Ad5-nCoV, sponsored by CanSino that authorized a larger combination of a Phase One and Two trial in Canada.<sup>63</sup> The Canadian trial involved a lack of public access to the template consent forms, generating concern among trial participants since it was difficult “to assess whether patients [would have been] informed of [the vaccine] risks, or what risk mitigation measures, if any, were built into the design of the larger trial.”<sup>64</sup> Two months after the partnership was approved, the Canadian Press reported that China withheld vaccine shipments due to introducing “process changes regarding shipping vaccines to other countries.”<sup>65</sup> This argument did not align with the shipment delivery of the vaccine to Argentina, Chile, Mexico, Pakistan, and the Russian Federation.<sup>66</sup> By August 2020, China demonstrated no intent of distributing the vaccine to Canada, leaving Canadian officials “disappointed and frustrated.”<sup>67</sup> Today, only four Chinese vaccines have been listed by the country’s drug agency, including the one produced by CanSino, which includes the Canadian biological product. The WHO, which has yet to address the matter, has approved a vaccine made by Chinese state-owned firm Sinopharm, with another under review.<sup>68</sup> Should the WHO choose to approve the CanSino vaccine, the organization would violate their International Health Regulations (IHR) purpose “to support countries in strengthening and maintaining their capacities for ensuring rapid...response to public health risks,” since the WHO would be disregarding Canada’s loss in the failed vaccine partnership and appear to be favouring China.<sup>69</sup>

The future of China and Canada relations with respect to the WHO remains uncertain. Recent headlines note that a joint WHO-led international mission with Chinese scientists in March 2021

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<sup>62</sup> Wells, Nick. 2021. “Chinese government interference derailed Canadian vaccine partnership: researcher.” *CTV*. <https://www.ctvnews.ca/health/coronavirus/chinese-government-interference-derailed-canadian-vaccine-partnership-researcher-1.5344258>.

<sup>63</sup> Edmonds, Sterling et. al. 2020. “Transparency too little, too late? Why and how Health Canada should make clinical data and regulatory decision-making open to scrutiny in the face of COVID-19.” *The Lancet*. <https://academic.oup.com/jlb/article/7/1/1saa083/5991911>.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Cooke, Alex. 2020. “Canadian COVID-19 clinical trial scrapped after China wouldn’t ship potential vaccine.” *CBC*. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/canada-china-covid-19-vaccine-trial-plug-pulled-1.5701101>.

<sup>66</sup> McGill COVID19 Vaccine Tracker. n.d. “CanSino: Ad5-nCoV.” <https://covid19.trackvaccines.org/vaccines/2/>.

<sup>67</sup> McKinley, Steve. 2020. “Canada’s hunt for a vaccine set back months after China refuses to ship samples for clinical trials.” *Toronto Star*. <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2020/08/27/chinas-refusal-to-approve-shipping-of-test-samples-sets-canadas-hunt-for-a-covid-19-vaccine-back-months.html>.

<sup>68</sup> Mallapaty, Smriti. 2021. “China’s COVID vaccines are going global — but questions remain.” *Nature*. <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-021-01146-0>.

<sup>69</sup> World Health Organization, WHO. “International Health Regulations.” [https://www.who.int/health-topics/international-health-regulations#tab=tab\\_3](https://www.who.int/health-topics/international-health-regulations#tab=tab_3).

investigated the origins of COVID-19 and concluded that the theory publicized by President Trump – that the virus was due to lab leak in Wuhan, China – “was extremely unlikely.”<sup>70</sup> However, fourteen countries, including the U.S. and Canada, released a statement noting that the study was “significantly delayed and lacked access to complete, original data and samples”. In the statement, these countries argued for “further studies...[and] a renewed commitment by the WHO and all Member States to access, transparency, and timeliness.”<sup>71</sup> The statement has helped revive a once fringe theory regarding the origins of the virus. Although no new evidence has emerged to lend validity to the lab-leak idea, it is difficult to firmly rule out the theory without full access to the relevant data and the lack of evidence fuels speculation. As a result of these various controversies, the COVID-19 pandemic has stressed China’s participation and dominant posture in international organizations and the rules-based international order alike.

## Recommendations

In the words of Chinese military strategist, Sun Tzu, the foremost skill of a leader is to know his enemy’s mind and strategically subdue him without fighting. Tzu’s words represent a desire for successful deterrence, requiring converging actors to accept that aggression prompts retaliation, that would in turn exceed any possible gains.<sup>72</sup> This idea is mimicked in the modern concept of “strategic empathy” – the skill of understanding an enemy in the spirit of knowing the enemy and yourself.<sup>73</sup> To achieve it, one must actively cultivate knowledge about different cultures, accounting for diverse “beliefs, values, languages, and practices of a group.”<sup>74</sup> In framing China as a country embedded in an economic developmental vision, this chapter proposes three recommendations to implement strategic empathy in the rules-based international order. This concept counters that of strategic narcissism, which refers to the tendency to define the world only one

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<sup>70</sup> World Health Organization, WHO. 2021. “WHO-convened global study of origins of SARS-CoV-2: China Part.” <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/who-convened-global-study-of-origins-of-sars-cov-2-china-part>.

<sup>71</sup> U.S. Department of State. 2021. “Joint Statement on the WHO-Convened COVID-19 Origins Study.” <https://www.state.gov/joint-statement-on-the-who-convened-covid-19-origins-study/>.

<sup>72</sup> Oswald, Julian. 2008. “Conventional deterrence and military diplomacy.” *The RUSI Journal*. p. 29. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03071849308445694>.

<sup>73</sup> Ward, Howard. 2017. “Ward on Shore, 'A Sense of the Enemy: The High Stakes History of Reading Your Rival's Mind.'” *H-War*. <https://networks.h-net.org/node/12840/reviews/172891/ward-shore-sense-enemy-high-stakes-history-reading-your-rivals-mind>.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

way with the assumption that decisions by different actors reflect a singular framework of desires and outcomes.<sup>75</sup>

### *Recommendation 1: Defining the Role of the PRC in Likeminded Policy*

Canada and likeminded countries should ask what the leadership of the PRC can gain from cooperating in the rules-based international order, rather than asking what China can gain. The PRC is not China and vice versa, meaning there should be a separation of defining the government and citizens as one. Instead, the focus should be on the PRC, its leaders, and their three core political interests: maintaining the national system; national sovereignty and territorial integrity; and stable economic and societal development.<sup>76</sup> Because of the nature of China's one-party system, government leaders, including Xi Jinping, represent political interests as opposed to the political consensus of the Chinese people, suggesting that the PRC government can be seen as a self-interested apex decision-maker in China. Understanding the priorities and goals of the PRC leadership requires deliberately defining the PRC as the subject under consideration.<sup>77</sup> Doing so, empowers a narrow focus on the PRC government and excludes Chinese citizens from the scope of analyzing the PRC as a threat.

### *Recommendation 2: Elevating Democratic Leadership in International Organizations*

Countries active in the rules-based international order should push international organizations to hire member nationals in leadership positions. Doing so can offset the Chinese majority leadership that appears in four of the fifteen U.N. specialized agencies — the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization

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<sup>75</sup> Manea, Octavian. 2020. "The Need to Compete on Multiple Battlefields: An Interview with Lt. Gen. H.R. McMaster." *Small Wars Journal*. <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/need-compete-multiple-battlefields-interview-lt-gen-hr-mcmaster>.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Moss, Walter. 2021. "Russia vs. Ukraine Redux? Mapping the Way Forward from the Recent Past." *Columbian College of Arts and Sciences*. <http://historynewsnetwork.org/article/180005>.

(UNIDO). All shape international norms standards for air travel, telecommunications, and agriculture. Ultimately, such a strategy will encourage member states to strategically compete with China and its individualistic efforts to exert power and influence.

### *Recommendation 3: Replicating China's Strengths*

Countries should counterbalance China by applying the country's strengths to its own context. For instance, China leverages national advantages, including the government pursuing innovation through "targeted, relaxed regulations; widespread wireless internet services; and significant investments in basic research" with the aim of being a global leader in technology.<sup>78</sup> Under strategic narcissism, countries may condemn China for self-interested intentions. With strategic empathy, countries can learn from China, applying support for national collaboration in science and technology and the pursuit of adequate investment in respective contexts, leading to a decreased reliance on China. Sun Tzu states, "appear where you are not expected." Perhaps China will not expect other nations to follow their example in the realms of innovation and technology.<sup>79</sup>

## **Conclusion**

While the world reels under the "strategic shock" of the COVID-19 pandemic, many international organizations are rushing to uphold and strengthen the rules-based international order.<sup>80</sup> The shock of the pandemic has consisted of "immediate, damaging effects" that have resulted in a "disruption to global order."<sup>81</sup> Not to mention, the pandemic emerged at a time when China, a rising influential actor, has used its newfound strength to participate in the rules-based international order. Through its involvement in the UN and its agencies, China has emphasized its ever-modernizing and dominant position in the rules-based order, leaving its future ambitions open for interpretation. While some examples, such as its participation in the UNPKO, highlight China's

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<sup>78</sup> Schoff, James and Ito, Asei. 2019. "Competing with China on Technology and Innovation." *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/10/10/competing-with-china-on-technology-and-innovation-pub-80010>.

<sup>79</sup> Giles, Lionel. 1994. "Sun Tzu on the Art of War: The Oldest Military Treatise in the World." <https://fas.org/man/artofwar.htm>.

<sup>80</sup> Cimmino, Jeffrey, Kroenig, Matthew, and Pavel, Barry. 2020. "Taking stock: Where are geopolitics headed in the COVID-19 era?" *Atlantic Council*. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/issue-brief/taking-stock-where-are-geopolitics-headed-in-the-covid-19-era/>.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

successful integration in the rules-based order, the country also presents self-interested tendencies that promote its domestic vision and reject the visions of its international counterparts. Thus, this chapter proposes three recommendations to aid cooperation with China by countries that participate in the rules-based international order: (1) define the role of the PRC; (2) elevate democratic leadership in international organizations; (3) replicate China's strengths. These recommendations can be implemented alongside the opportunities for adaptation that are accounted for in the following chapter that details the future of China and NATO.