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Diplomatic Opportunities and Rising Threats: The Expanding Role of Non-Traditional Security in Chinese Foreign and Security Policy

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ABSTRACT

Through the lens of securitization theory, this article looks at the significant impact that non-traditional security has had over Chinese foreign policy. Over time, non-traditional security has changed from being understood as an opportunity to boost China's international standing, to being seen as an important category within security threats. China's security and diplomatic behavior has changed accordingly. In particular, China has become more confident in using and authorizing force. This article pinpoints this process started in the 1990s by looking at the debate within the government and the legal, institutional and military response against those new threats. It also prompts important considerations about the drivers and the direction of Chinese foreign policy, and the general approach of studying the same subject.

Introduction

The role of non-traditional security in Chinese security policy is often underestimated and/or understood in a superficial way. The few publications that specifically revolve around the Chinese understanding of non-traditional security mainly focus on its domestic aspects and overlook the foreign policy ones.¹ There are two main reasons for this.

First, deeply rooted in the work of the Copenhagen School's theory of securitization,² the definition of non-traditional security and its relationship with the security of the state is problematic at a conceptual level. Although the idea that everything can become a threat allowed for the inclusion of non-military threats in the field of security studies, the scholarship on non-traditional security tends to divide, rather than integrate, traditional and non-traditional security. This is extremely evident when one looks at Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde's approach to military security, which basically includes only war and military diplomacy.³ While the referent object in military/traditional security seems to only be the state, non-traditional security focuses on the people.

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¹Susan L. Craig, *Chinese Perception of Traditional and Non-traditional Security Threats* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2007); Andrew Scobell and Gregory Stevenson, 'The PLA (re-)discovers nontraditional security', in Lyle J. Goldstein, ed., *Not Congruent but Quite Complementary* (Newport, RI: United States Navy War College, 2012), pp. 41–50; Patricia Thornton, 'China's non-traditional security', in Lowell Dittmer and Yu Maochun, eds, *Routledge Handbook of Chinese Security* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), pp. 64–77.

²Mely Caballero-Anthony, 'Understanding non-traditional security', in Mely Caballero-Anthony, ed., *An Introduction to Non-traditional Security Studies: A Transnational Approach* (London: Sage, 2016), pp. 3–19.

³Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (London and Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998), pp. 49–52.

Today, one of the few commonly agreed upon features of non-traditional threats is that they are non-military. Therefore, although interstate conflicts may break out because of them, they do not require a military response in the first place.⁴ This point of view implicitly underscores the assumption that there is/should be some kind of proportional relationship between a threat and the instrument used to neutralize it. Therefore, the external use of military force by the state should only be used against similar threats—such as another state—and not against lesser ones.

Hence, the role of the state *vis-à-vis* non-traditional threats has been reduced by ideally limiting the tools that can be used against them. Both scholars and practitioners of state violence have expressed strong dissatisfaction towards such understanding of traditional and non-traditional security and the role of the state.⁵ However, the idea that non-traditional security has little influence in a country's foreign and security policy compared to traditional interstate competition is still dominant, especially when the country taken into consideration is China.

Second, China is a non-Western rising power, and it is probably the only state with the potential to challenge US world leadership. Although experts both in China and the US acknowledge that a power transition is unlikely, especially due to American military primacy,⁶ a strong narrative about classic great power rivalry has emerged among scholars and policymakers.⁷

It is difficult to deny the fact that policy needs strongly influence the academic community of Chinese security studies. Currently, the mainstream debate about Chinese security and foreign policy has been dominated by traditional security issues. In line with this approach, the general interpretation of non-traditional security-related Chinese military activities is that they are 'battle laboratories' used to improve war fighting capabilities.⁸ While this is not wrong in general, such an interpretation does not capture the full picture.

Since these issues have prevented scholars from fully appreciating the scope of a crucial change in Chinese foreign and security policies, this article aims to shed light on the role of non-traditional security in Chinese foreign policy. The argument is that since the late 1990s non-traditional security has become an increasingly important driver of Chinese foreign policy, thereby affecting the development of the country's behavior, its military and its diplomatic establishment. This is due to the fact that non-traditional security offered China the opportunity to build stronger relations with other countries. Later, although such diplomatic values never disappeared, non-traditional security issues became a synonym for threats to the security of Chinese citizens. Similar to other countries, this is a key source of legitimacy for the government, along with the nation's territorial integrity.⁹ Indeed, while traditional security is mainly about the protection of the country's territorial integrity, non-traditional security is about the safety of its citizens. As China's economic presence grew abroad, especially in unstable areas, so did the salience of addressing non-traditional threats abroad.

Like other studies about non-traditional security, this article relies on securitization theory. Yet, differently from them, it does so fully taking into consideration the possible use of the military against non-traditional threats. In particular, it refers to the work of Thierry Balzacq, a prominent supporter of the recent 'social' turn of securitization theory.¹⁰ The main idea is that security threats are not given, but require active construction by the relevant actors within a certain political system and society. The boundaries of 'security' are malleable; what is considered a normal issue one day can be seen as

⁴Caballero-Anthony, 'Understanding non-traditional security', pp. 6–7 and 13–15.

⁵Brilliant examples of this sentiment are: Christopher Coker, 'Post-modern war', *The RUSI Journal* 143(3), (1998), pp. 7–14; Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007); Cui Shunji and Barry Buzan, 'Great power management in international society', *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 9(2), (2016), pp. 181–201.

⁶David Shambaugh, *China Goes Global: The Partial Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 269–306; Lyle J. Goldstein, 'Does China think America is in decline?', *The National Interests*, (28 January 2016), available at: <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/does-china-think-america-decline-15042> (accessed 4 January 2017).

⁷Alastair Iain Johnston, 'How new and assertive is China's new assertiveness?', *International Security* 37(4), (2013), pp. 7–48.

⁸Michael McDewitt, 'PLA naval exercise with international partners', in Roy Kamphausen David and Lai Travis Tanner, eds, *Learning by Doing. The PLA Trains at Home and Abroad* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: United States Army War College Press, 2012), p. 81.

⁹George Klosko, *Political Obligations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 27.

¹⁰Thierry Balzacq, *Securitization Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011).

an existential threat another day. Hence, there is no rigid definition of what a non-traditional security threat is, but rather, in this case, it is the Chinese government that expands the meaning of these words over time.

For that to happen, it is necessary that the context in which securitization takes place is favorable. For example, if leaders and policymakers view an issue as threatening, its securitization happens more easily. The happening of certain events can further help catalyze those fears into action. For example, the development of a new weapon in a neighboring country against whom wars have been fought in the past can contribute to creating a sense of threat among the elites and, eventually, contribute to the decision to carry out a preemptive attack.

In order to verify that something has become a security issue, it is necessary to prove the *perlocutionary* effects of securitization: that new concrete measures (new policies, institutional changes, military deployments and so on) were taken to neutralize the new threat.

Consistently, two hypotheses must be verified. First, the connection among non-traditional security, national security and foreign policy should grow stronger over time in the context of the relevant Chinese official discourse, thereby signaling the rise of non-traditional security in the agenda. During this process, the role of the citizens as the referent object of the securitization should become prominent. Second, it must be clear that the rhetoric is matched by action through the adoption of institutional and legal measures that allow for the use and/or the development of the necessary capabilities. In particular, the more the armed forces play a central role, the more evident is the degree of securitization.

In order to test the first hypothesis, this study looks at how the Chinese government has framed non-traditional security in the context of national security and foreign policy since the 1990s. This is done through the review of reports delivered by Chinese leaders and the biannual defense white papers. This information is complemented by the studies of some prominent Chinese scholars. China's recent diplomatic history is divided into three periods—the late 1990s, the first decade of the new century and the first half of the second decade—to test the second hypothesis. This is necessary to demonstrate that the growing attention on non-traditional security has been translated into new policies. The final part of the article discusses the key findings and their significance for our understanding of Chinese foreign policy.

The Chinese Government, Non-Traditional Security and Foreign Policy

According to Professor Wang Yizhou, a rudimentary idea of non-traditional security appeared in the Chinese intellectual and political debate in relation to the term 'political security' after the events of Tiananmen in 1989.¹¹ However, as a review of the official documents on security and foreign policy made by Professor Liu Yuejin shows, until the late 1990s non-traditional security issues were not included in the concept of national security.¹² For example, in the October 1992 report to the 14th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) delivered by Jiang Zemin, all the references to national security are related to the modernization of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in order to guarantee the general protection of China's reform and economic reform.¹³ This same concept was repeated during the plenary sessions of the 8th National People's Congress between 1993 and 1998.

However, in late 1996, signs of change started to become visible during the opening speech delivered by Qian Qichen at the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), where security appeared as the result of regional stability achieved through cooperation and mutual trust. Hence, the Chinese leaders started to use the

¹¹Yizhou Wang, 'Lun zhongguo wajiao zhuanxing' ['Debating the transformation of Chinese diplomacy'], *Xuexi yu tansu [Study & Exploration]* 5, (2008), pp. 57–67.

¹²Yuejin Liu, 'Zhonggong zhongyang he zhangyang zhengfu guanyu feichuantong wenti de lunshu' ['Expression of non-traditional security concepts by the Chinese government'], in Yu Xiaofeng and Wei Zhijiang, eds, *Feichuantong anquan lanpishu [Bluebook of Non-traditional Security]* (Beijing: Shehuikexue wenxian chubanshe, 2014), pp. 14–17.

¹³Jiang zemin zai zhongguo gongchandang de shisi ci quanguo daibiao dahui shang de baogao' ['Jiang Zemin's Report to the 14th National Congress of the CCP'], *People's Daily*, (12 October 1992), available at: <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64162/64168/64567/65446/4526313.html> (accessed 4 January 2017).

term 'new security concept' (NSC) during their meetings with foreign leaders and in defense-related documents. In 2002, China and ASEAN signed a memorandum of understanding aimed at establishing cooperation on non-traditional security issues.

While the 1998 defense white paper only hinted at it, the 2000 white paper clearly stated that China's defense policy should have been based on 'mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality and cooperation', and that 'only by developing a new security concept and establishing a fair and reasonable new international order can world peace and security be fundamentally guaranteed'.¹⁴ The NSC made room for non-traditional security in Chinese foreign policy by pointing out that national security is not only military in nature. However, it says very little about the role of the PLA apart from the fact that it should have offered a more proactive approach to Chinese diplomacy outside its traditional role.

Non-traditional security mostly appears to be securitized to make a case for cooperation with other countries, especially the neighboring ones, and more in general, to offer an arguably different vision of international security from that of the West's 'Cold War mentality'.¹⁵ Moreover, non-traditional security is very much a state issue that has little to do with the normal citizens. Indeed, even when the 2002 white paper mentions the 9/11 attack, during which two Chinese citizens tragically died, it does so only to explain that the relations between great powers have improved because the US needed support for its fight against international terrorism.¹⁶

The complex relationship between non-traditional security and China's national security and foreign policy is reflected in Jiang Zeming's words during the 16th National Congress of the CCP in 2002. He stressed that traditional and non-traditional security threats, especially terrorism, are interwoven and are having disruptive effects over the stable international environment that China needs for its own development.¹⁷ Consequently, the solution was to make the NSC operational through multilateral dialogues, such as the UN and other international organizations. According to Major General Du Nongyi, this is the reason behind the sudden increase in Chinese contributions to peacekeeping in the early-mid 2000s.¹⁸ In summary, non-traditional security issues were not seen as threats to China's existence, but to the external environment it needed to develop. Consistently, the response advocated by the Chinese leaders is diplomatic in nature even if it has a limited military component. These were the very early stages of the securitization process.

Hu Jintao's arrival to power was a pivotal moment. His emphasis on 'governing for the people' prompted a deep change in the understanding of security in China, from one centered on the survival of the state to another more people-focused one. According to Chinese scholars, and as shown below, such change proved to be determinant for the evolution of Chinese foreign and security policy, especially in relation to the country's overseas interests.¹⁹

The defense white paper published in 2004 presented an evolution of the NSC by introducing the idea of 'comprehensive national security' (CNS). According to the white paper,

¹⁴*China's National Defense* (Beijing: Information Office of the State Council, PRC, 2000), available at: <http://www.china.org.cn/e-white/2000/20-2.htm> (accessed 4 January 2017).

¹⁵*China's Position Paper on the New Security Concept* (Beijing: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, PRC, 2002), available at: http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjw_663304/zjzjg_663340/gjs_665170/gjzyhyh_665174/2612_665212/2614_665216/t15319.shtml (accessed 4 January 2017).

¹⁶*China's National Defense* (Beijing: Information Office of the State Council, PRC, 2002), available at: <http://china.org.cn/e-white/20021209/l.htm> (accessed 6 June 2017).

¹⁷Zai zhongguo gongchandang de shiliu ci quanguo daibiao dahui shang de baogao' ['Report to the 16th National Congress of the CCP'], *People's Daily*, (8 November 2002), available at: <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64162/64168/64569/65444/4429125.html> (accessed 4 January 2017).

¹⁸Nongyi Du, *Xin zhongguo junshi wajiao yu guoji weihe yanjiu* [*Military Diplomacy of New China and International Peacekeeping*] (Beijing: Guofang daxue chubanshe, 2015), p. 149.

¹⁹For example: Lantao Zhang, 'Guanyu "heping jueqi" yu xin anquan guan de lilun sikao' ['Thoughts about "peaceful rise" and the new security concept'], *Guoji guanxi xueyuan xuebao* [*Journal of the University of International Relations*] 5, (2004), pp. 6–9; Honghua Men, 'Yao jiaqiang dui zhongguo haiwai liyi de yanjiu' ['It is necessary to boost the research on China's overseas interests'], *Xuexi shibao* [*Study Times*], (15 June 2009), available at: <http://theory.people.com.cn/GB/136457/9472800.html> (accessed 4 January 2017).

China sticks to keeping its development in pace with its security and makes great efforts to enhance its national strategic capabilities by using multiple security means to cope with both traditional and non-traditional security threats so as to seek a comprehensive national security in the political, economic, military, and social areas.²⁰

The PLA was bestowed a new set of 'historic missions' that included protecting the rule of the Party, protecting China's national security, sovereignty, territorial integrity and development interests—a term largely associated with China's economic expansion abroad. Reportedly, Hu Jintao stated that these new missions are the foreign and security policy translation of the concept of 'scientific development' in order to provide a security backup to the country's development and interests, and promote world peace in the period of strategic opportunities.²¹

Against this background, the idea that the military had to play a more active role *vis-à-vis* non-traditional security issues in foreign policy gained traction. For example, in 2006 the Central Committee pointed out the necessity to fight traditional and non-traditional security threats by eliminating hostile forces inside and outside China.²² In his report during the 17th National Party Congress in 2007, Hu Jintao called for the PLA to further improve its capabilities to respond to diverse kinds of threats.²³

Non-traditional security dominated the defense white paper issued in January 2009. Exceptionally, instead of opening with the traditional assessment of the international situation, it emphasized the fact that China had to overcome 'a devastating earthquake' in Sichuan in the past year.²⁴ The white paper also officially enshrined the concept of Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW) in Chinese defense policy. At the same time, celebrating 60 years of Chinese diplomacy with an article in *Seeking Truth*, Yang Jiechi insisted that the role of the people as the fulcrum of China's foreign policy had to be preserved and that the protection of the Chinese people and the nation's overseas interests had to maintain high priority among the tasks of the government.²⁵

During an interview about the decisions taken during the Fifth Plenum of the 17th CCP Central Committee, Dai Bingguo stated that, in support of its development strategy, China planned to use its growing hard power through a more active engagement in cooperation on non-traditional security issues, from natural disasters and energy security to international peacekeeping.²⁶ He stressed this idea many times over the years. Finally, by outlining the meaning of security for China during times of peace, the Chinese leadership argued that 'China faces multiple traditional and non-traditional security challenges, including the threat of separatists and terrorism. It is, therefore, necessary and justified to modernize China's defense capabilities in order to uphold China's security and to protect its peaceful development.'²⁷

In late 2012, the rhetorical link between non-traditional security and the role of the PLA abroad grew stronger. Since China was facing 'existential problems' and 'development problems' caused by traditional and non-traditional security issues, the Party required the PLA and the whole national defense system to achieve 'a great development during their modernization'. The PLA was then expressly required to play

²⁰*China's National Defense in 2004* (Beijing: Information Office of the State Council, PRC, 2004), available at: <http://www.china.org.cn/e-white/20041227/1.htm> (accessed 4 January 2017).

²¹Yong Jia, Xuanliang Li and Zhi Cao, 'Qiang jun zhi lu' ['The path of a strong army'], *People's Daily*, (22 December 2008), available at: http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrbwhb/html/2008-12/22/content_161881.htm (accessed 4 January 2017).

²²Zhonggong zhongyang guanyan shehui zhuyi hexie shehui nuogan zhongda wenti de jue ding' ['The CCP's Central Committee decision on important issues concerning the building of a socialist harmonious society'], *People's Daily*, (19 October 2006), available at: <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64162/64168/64569/72347/6347991.html> (accessed 4 January 2017).

²³Hu jintaozai dang de shiqi da shang de baogao' ['Hu Jintao's report to the 17th National Congress of the CCP'], *China Daily*, (25 October 2007), available at: http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/hqzg/2007-10/25/content_6205616_9.htm (accessed 4 January 2017).

²⁴*China's National Defense in 2008* (Beijing: Information Office of the State Council, PRC, 2009), available at: http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-01/20/content_10688124.htm (accessed 4 January 2017).

²⁵Jiechi Yang, 'Wei hu shijie heping cujin gongtong fazhan' ['Protecting world peace, promoting common development'], *Qiushi [Truth Seeking]* 19, (2009), pp. 22–24.

²⁶Dai bingguo: suowei zhongguo de zhanlve yi tu bu xiang you xie ren xiang de name fuza' ['Dai Bingguo: the so-called China's strategy is not as complex as some people think'], *People's Daily*, (7 December 2010), available at: <http://politics.people.com.cn/GB/1026/13417139.html> (accessed 4 January 2017).

²⁷*China's Peaceful Development* (Beijing: Information Office of the State Council, PRC, 2011), available at: http://english1.english.gov.cn/official/2011-09/06/content_1941354.htm (accessed 4 January 2017).

a more active role in peacetime foreign policy while continuing to improve the level of war readiness.²⁸ The defense white paper issued in 2013 fully reflected Hu's point of view and called for an even greater PLA engagement in foreign policy during times of peace.²⁹

Indeed, while pointing a finger at Japan for 'making troubles over the issue of the Diaoyu Islands', the relevance of non-traditional security issues was highlighted by the encouragement of making 'active planning for the use of armed forces in peacetime, dealing effectively with various security threats and accomplishing diversified military tasks'. The white paper also called for the strengthening of 'overseas operational capabilities such as emergency response and rescue, merchant vessel protection at sea and evacuation of Chinese nationals, and provide reliable security support for China's interests overseas'.

Later, the protection of Chinese citizens and legal persons overseas started to appear regularly in government reports delivered by the Premier Li Keqiang. Such growing emphasis on the protection of overseas interests was conceptually grounded in 'going hand in hand with the idea of diplomacy for the people and the China Dream', since the 18th Party Congress.³⁰ According to Yang Jiechi, the great efforts to implement 'diplomacy for the people' manifested themselves during the evacuation from Libya in 2011.³¹ Hence, while the top leadership called for the strengthening of the regulations related to the protection of Chinese citizens and legal persons abroad, greater coordination between the consular protection system and the armed forces became necessary.³²

Finally, after the NSC and the CNS, President Xi Jinping put forward the vision of 'holistic national security' (HNS) during the first meeting of the Central National Security Commission.³³ According to the defense white paper published in May 2015, this new concept aims at balancing internal and external, traditional and non-traditional security, and protecting both China's existence and development interests.³⁴

Chinese interests and national security are considered

vulnerable to international and regional turmoil, terrorism, piracy, serious natural disasters and epidemics, and the security of overseas interests concerning energy and resources, strategic sea lines of communication (SLOCs), as well as institutions, personnel, and assets abroad has become an imminent issue.

Therefore,

a holistic approach will be taken to balance war preparation and war prevention, rights protection and stability maintenance, deterrence and warfighting, and operations in wartime and employment of military forces in peacetime.³⁵

A number of Chinese scholars in recent years argued that the gradual but steady expansion of Chinese interests abroad propelled non-traditional security to the top of the Chinese foreign and security policy agenda after the Chinese leadership adopted a more expansive approach to security in the early 2000s.³⁶ Traditional and non-traditional security have become equally important.

²⁸Shiba da baogao' ['Report to the 18th National Congress of the CCP'], *Xinhua*, (8 November 2012), available at: http://www.xj.xinhuanet.com/2012-11/19/c_113722546.htm (accessed 4 January 2017).

²⁹*The Diversified Employment of China's Armed Forces* (Beijing: Information Office of the State, PRC, 2013), available at: http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2013-04/16/c_132312681.htm (accessed 4 January 2017).

³⁰Liping Xia, 'Shiba da yilai "wajiao wei min" linian yu shijian de xin fazhan' ['Practice and development of "diplomacy for the people" since the 18th Party Congress'], *People's Daily*, (6 February 2015), available at: <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n/2015/0206/c187710-26521276.html> (accessed 4 January 2017).

³¹Jiechi Yang, 'Wajiao gongzuo de kexue fazhan zhi lu' ['The path of scientific development for diplomatic work'], *People's Daily*, (10 October 2012), available at: <http://politics.people.com.cn/n/2012/1010/c1001-19209677.html> (accessed 4 January 2017).

³²Haipi Li, 'Zhongguo lingshi baohu chixu fazhan tanxi' ['An analysis of the sustainable development of China's consular protection'], *Xiandai guoji guanxi* [Contemporary International Relations] 6, (2016), pp. 9–14.

³³'Xi Jinping: jianchi zongti guojia anquan guan zou zhongguo tese guojia anquan daolu' ['Xi Jinping: upholding a holistic national security concept taking the path of security with Chinese characteristics'], *Xinhua*, (15 April 2014), available at: http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2014-04/15/c_1110253910.htm (accessed 4 January 2017).

³⁴*China's Military Strategy* (Beijing: Information Office of the State Council, PRC, 2015), available at: http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2015-05/26/c_134271001_3.htm (accessed 4 January 2017).

³⁵*Ibid.*

³⁶For example: Yizhou Wang, *Creative Involvement: The Evolution of China's Global Role* (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2013).

Similarly, Liu Yuejin argued that in the HNS the distinctions between external and internal, traditional and non-traditional and so on, are almost non-existent.³⁷ An analysis written by Gao Zugui, Deputy Director of the Central Party School's Institute of International Strategic Studies, emphasized that the HNS aims at providing guidance in dealing with three issues: cyber and information security; maritime security; and terrorism at home and abroad—from North Africa to China's neighborhood. The HNS, Gao wrote, brings all these issues into the domain of military security and, among the other guidelines, requires the armed forces to improve the protection of the nation's overseas interests.³⁸

In summary, three key interrelated changes regarding the referent object and the kind of response towards perceived new threats in the past 30 years confirm that non-traditional security has been significantly securitized in the context of Chinese foreign policy.

First, the importance of non-traditional security in concepts of national security put forward by Chinese leaders has grown steadily over time, and today they are not just equally important, but the distinction between them is fading away. The fact that this process happened in such a consistent way over time, regardless of the personality and approach to security matters of each of the three Chinese top leaders, probably is evidence of the great perceived urgency of the problem. While the argument here naturally is not that traditional security is now less important than non-traditional security, it is nonetheless quite telling that this happened despite the worsening of the Asian security environment and the tensions with the US.

Secondly, as expected, the rise of non-traditional security in the security and foreign policy agenda happened along with a change in what is considered the main referent object of the understanding of national security by the Chinese government. Initially, the key referent object was the state; this is why non-traditional security happened to be mentioned in the context of China's relations with other countries. However, especially under Hu Jintao, a less state-centric approach to security gained traction, and today Chinese citizens are the prominent referent object. This can clearly be seen in how the Chinese government discussed the 9/11 attack, an event that made the US more accommodating towards other great powers and thus ultimately beneficial for China's security as it was understood back then, and the Libyan crisis, which deeply affected the Chinese official debate on security and foreign policy. Such change is even of greater significance if one considers that the concept of non-traditional security was originally introduced in the Chinese debate to describe the threats coming from certain citizens against the state under the form of mass demonstrations like that of 1989.

The third important change is that there was, as anticipated, a positive correlation between the growing centrality of the security of the citizens and the level of engagement envisioned by the government for the PLA. From limited contribution to peacekeeping missions to defend China's international reputation to making concrete preparations to protect China's overseas interests, the PLA has been asked to do more. Naturally, however, this does not mean that the diplomatic value of cooperation on non-traditional security disappeared.

Since the first hypothesis is verified, the next part of this empirical analysis focuses on the *perlocutionary* effects of securitization.

Seizing the Opportunity, Neutralizing the Threat: Chinese Diplomacy and Military Adapt to the Evolving Situation

This section of the article tests the second hypothesis by dividing China's recent diplomatic history into three periods and looking at a series of key events and the Chinese response towards them, both in terms of measures taken to address a certain threat and those aimed at improving the capabilities necessary to meet future challenges.

³⁷Yuejin Liu, 'Feichuantong de zongti guojia anquan guan' ['Non-traditional concept of overall national security'], *Guojianquanyanjiu [Journal of International Security Studies]* 6, (2014), pp. 3–25.

³⁸ZuguiGao, 'Bawo zongti guojia anquan guan de kexue neihan' ['Mastering the scientific content of national holistic security'], *PLA Daily*, (29 February 2016), available at: http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2016-02/29/content_2682.htm (accessed 13 June 2017).

China's Charm Offensive in the 1990s

Chinese diplomacy in the 1990s was characterized by efforts to boost the country's international standing after the fall of the Soviet Union and the events of Tiananmen seriously undermined China's relations with other countries, especially the West. China's most immediate diplomatic goal after the end of the Cold War was thus to reinvigorate the country's international standing, especially in its neighborhood, in order to guarantee a friendly and stable external environment and allow the policymakers to focus on domestic economic development.

As pointed out by a number of scholars, the introduction of non-traditional security among the topics of discussion in bilateral and multilateral talks, like the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), was instrumental in laying out the basis for stronger relations with China's neighbors.³⁹ In both cases, it was China which was to bring non-traditional security to the table and to invest significant diplomatic and economic resources.

The importance of non-traditional security as an opportunity to boost China's international standing can also be seen in the Chinese engagement in peacekeeping during those years, roughly between 1989 and 2002. It was characterized by a focus on Asia, and greater attention was paid to the political meaning behind the participation in those missions. In the past, China always contributed military observers and police officers, and the only exception was the participation of some 400 military engineering troops in the UN Transitional Authority of Cambodia (UNTAC) mission between 1992 and 1993. Although Chinese military observers were also present outside Asia in places like Kuwait and Palestine, UNTAC and the UN Transitional Administration of East Timor (UNTAET) were the two missions that best represented China's attitude towards peacekeeping during this first phase.⁴⁰

First of all, these were the only two missions where China sent a contingent of peacekeepers instead of observers. After UNTAC, China sent a large number of troops ten years later to Liberia (UNOMIL). In UNTAET, China sent a contingent of officers from the People's Armed Police (PAP). Reportedly, the PLA was also meant to join the mission, but that did not happen because of poor bureaucratic coordination.⁴¹

Second, they were both seen within the rhetorical framework of the 'South-South Cooperation', which aimed for two main goals. The first was to promote a version of peacekeeping more focused on sovereignty and based on the Chinese vision of development.⁴² The second was to use peacekeeping as a tool to contrast Taiwanese influence in the region.⁴³ Indeed, while China's peacekeeping 'charm offensive' was successful in Cambodia,⁴⁴ Chinese efforts were also rewarded by the then East Timorese President Xanana Gusmao who pledged to not recognize Taiwan as an independent state.⁴⁵

Not all that Glitters is Gold—New Threats in the New Century

Three events in the first decade of the new century played a key role in shaping the Chinese approach to non-traditional security in foreign policy in two main ways. They were a series of attacks against Chinese citizens abroad in 2004, the Darfur crisis in 2007, and the rise of piracy in the Gulf of Aden culminating with the launch of an international mission to patrol those waters in late 2008. On the

³⁹Bates Gill, *Rising Star* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2007); Jing-dong Yuan, 'Regional institutions and cooperative security: Chinese approaches and policies', *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 13(1), (Autumn 2001), pp. 263–294; Ian Storey, 'China's bilateral defense diplomacy in Southeast Asia', *Asian Security* 8(3), (2012), pp. 287–310; David Shambaugh, 'China engages Asia', *International Security* 29(3), (2006), pp. 64–99.

⁴⁰Marc Laintegne, 'A change in perspective: China's engagement in the East Timor UN Peacekeeping Operation', *International Peacekeeping* 18(3), (2011), pp. 313–327.

⁴¹Gill, *Rising Star*, p. 124.

⁴²Shogo Suzuki, 'Why does China participate in intrusive peacekeeping? Understanding paternalistic Chinese discourses on development and intervention', *International Peacekeeping* 18(3), (2011), pp. 271–285.

⁴³Chin-Hao Huang, 'Principles and praxis of China's peacekeeping', *International Peacekeeping* 18(3), (2011), pp. 257–270.

⁴⁴Miwa Hirono, 'China's charm offensive and peacekeeping: the lessons of Cambodia—what now for Sudan?', *International Peacekeeping* 18(3), (2011), pp. 328–343.

⁴⁵Ian Storey, 'China and East Timor: good, but not best friends', *China Brief* 6(14), (2007), available at: <https://jamestown.org/program/china-and-east-timor-good-but-not-best-friends-3/> (accessed 17 November 2017).

one hand, non-traditional issues became threats to Chinese citizens and companies abroad, thereby requiring the Chinese government to react and adapt to the emerging situation. On the other hand, diplomatic investment in non-traditional security started to present increasing costs because of the growing expectations of the international community for China's role in world affairs.

In 2004, Chinese workers in Sudan, Pakistan and Afghanistan were kidnapped and killed, which put Hu Jintao's 'governing for the people' to the test shortly after being formulated.⁴⁶ The presence of Chinese companies and workers in dangerous areas was not only securitized at the rhetorical level but also immediately produced concrete effects in terms of policy and institutional evolution.

First, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) established the Department of External Security to complement the work of the Department of Consular Affairs, which was already tasked to provide assistance to Chinese citizens abroad. The MFA spokesperson stated that the decision to establish the new department was born out of the acknowledgement that non-traditional security issues were becoming prominent in international affairs.⁴⁷ A few months later, the State Council created the ministerial-level Small Group for Coordination on External Emergencies led by the Minister of Foreign Affairs Li Zhaoxing, and was tasked to play a coordinating role in protecting China's overseas interests.⁴⁸

Second, with the support of the MFA, the Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM) and the State-Owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission (SASAC) issued new regulations calling for companies operating abroad to improve their risk-assessment capabilities.⁴⁹ According to Wan Xia, a professor at China Foreign Affairs University, these reforms should be seen as the most evident manifestation of the new direction for Chinese diplomacy set by the Hu Jintao leadership.⁵⁰

In the next two 2008 cases, although the role of overseas interests was important, the Chinese actions mainly resulted from the potential diplomatic costs that were rising from growing international reputation and influence. Simply put, besides the fact that China is a permanent member of the UN Security Council (UNSC), 2008 was also the year of the Olympic Games. The Chinese government naturally did not want to see such a symbolic event being ruined by international criticism.

Since the first UNSC resolution on the Darfur crisis, China had tried to water down the criticism against the Sudanese government.⁵¹ However, as the crisis continued to worsen and the year of the Olympic Games drew closer, a harsh media campaign was mounted against Beijing by linking the killing in Darfur with the Games. The publication of a 2007 report by Amnesty International on the failure of the arms embargo against the Sudanese government further added pressure on Beijing, one of the main suppliers to the African government.⁵²

In 2005, China, through the missions of the Chinese government's special envoy Liu Guijun, started to press the Sudanese government in order to allow the deployment of peacekeepers. Hu Jintao also reportedly talked about the issue with al-Bashir.⁵³ Later, under China's presidency, the UNSC passed

⁴⁶'Chinese kidnapped in Sudan back home finally', *China Daily*, (1 April 2004), available at: http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2004-04/01/content_319711.htm (accessed 4 January 2017); Guan Xiaofeng and Jiang Zhuqing, 'Leaders condole Chinese hostage's death', *China Daily*, (15 October 2004), available at: http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2004-10/15/content_382691.htm (accessed 4 January 2017); 'Eleven Chinese workers killed in Afghan attack', *China Daily*, (10 June 2004), available at: http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2004-06/10/content_338324.htm (accessed 4 January 2017).

⁴⁷'Waijiaobu xin zeng shewai anquan shiwusi' ['The MFA establishes the new Department of External Security Affairs'], *China.com*, (6 July 2004), available at: <http://www.china.com.cn/chinese/kuaixun/603744.htm> (accessed 4 January 2017).

⁴⁸Lili Zhang, *Waijiao juece [Diplomatic Decisions]* (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 2007), p. 258.

⁴⁹*Guanyu jiaqiang jingwai zhongzi jigou yu ren yuan anquan baohu gongzuo de yijian [On the Strengthening of the Protection of Chinese Investment Institutions and People Abroad]* (Beijing: MFA, MOFCOM, SASAC, 2005), available at: http://www.gov.cn/zwggk/2005-10/19/content_79807.htm (accessed 4 January 2017).

⁵⁰Xia Wan, 'Haiwai gongmin baohu de kunjing yu chulu—lingshibaohu zai guoji fa lingyu de xin dongxiang' ['Protection of overseas citizens: predicament and solutions—new trends in consular protection in international law'], *Shijie jingji yu zhengci [World Economics and Politics]* 5, (2007), pp. 37–42.

⁵¹Jonathan Holslag, 'China's diplomatic victory in Darfur', *BICCS Asia Paper* 2(4), (2007), pp. 1–12.

⁵²'Sudan arms continuing to fuel serious human rights violations in Darfur', *Amnesty International*, (8 May 2007), available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr54/019/2007/en/> (accessed 4 January 2017); Helene Cooper, 'Darfur collides with Olympics, and China yields', *The New York Times*, (13 April 2007), available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/13/washington/13dipl.html> (accessed 4 January 2017).

⁵³'Hu puts forward principle on Darfur issue', *Xinhua*, (5 February 2007), available at: http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2007-02/05/content_801393.htm (accessed 4 January 2017).

Resolution 1769 providing for the African Union/United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID). China contributed more than 300 medical and engineering troops.

China was not only defending its own growing international reputation and learning how to act like a 'great power', but also the presence of Chinese workers and companies was an important factor. Chinese companies were heavily investing in the Sudanese oil industry. For example, between 1996 and 2007, Chinese investments in the upstream sector totaled US\$4.3 billion, totaling 43% of the total foreign direct investments in that part of the Sudanese economy.⁵⁴ Between 2001 and 2007, an average of 6% of Chinese crude oil imports came from Sudan.⁵⁵ Moreover, between 2003 and 2007, the number of Chinese contract workers, a term used by Chinese statistics to refer to state-owned companies' employees, grew from 3,618 to 16,904.⁵⁶

Characterized by a mix of innovation and continuity, China's diplomatic intervention and participation in the peacekeeping mission well represents the evolution of the Chinese approach to non-traditional security. On the one hand, China acted in an unprecedented proactive way by engaging and mediating between the different actors involved. On the other hand, concrete military participation was consistent with the general trends in Chinese peacekeeping in those years. Since 2004, China had increased its contribution of troops in a significant way, but like in past missions, the Chinese peacekeepers in UNAMID were from engineering and medical units. This is indicative of the fact that the Chinese approach to non-traditional security in foreign policy was still primarily seen in relation to the country's diplomatic influence and status, albeit the presence of economic interests abroad was becoming an important factor.

While the diplomatic side of the Chinese actions in Darfur appears more interesting than the military one, it is important to point out that in 2008, the PLA started to lay the foundations for a greater role in the future. First, as stated during the opening ceremony, the Shijiazhuang Mechanized Infantry Academy established the first MOOTW Teaching and Research Office within the PLA in order to prepare the Chinese soldiers to better respond to non-traditional threats.⁵⁷ Second, the Central Military Commission (CMC) issued the first comprehensive 'Plan for the Development of MOOTW Capabilities' which describes the training, equipment and capabilities necessary to carry out antiterrorism, protection of rights and interests, international peacekeeping, surveillance, and international and domestic disaster relief operations. Third, the PLA opened the Huairou Peacekeeping Center in June 2009.

Finally, China's participation in the international anti-piracy mission off the coasts of Somalia since late 2008 is also indicative of the growing prominence of non-traditional security in the foreign policy agenda. Like in the Sudanese case, the decision to join the international mission was mainly determined by the government's necessity to show China's commitment to neutralize a threat rather than actually eliminate it. There is indeed a strong consensus among scholars that the Chinese warships were there to send a strong message to both domestic and international observers.⁵⁸ If China had not participated, it would have been the only UNSC member and one of the few countries to not do so, thereby becoming an easy target for international criticism.

Moreover, the Chinese task forces followed rather conservative rules of engagement, more so than their Western counterparts, aimed at scaring the pirates rather than capturing them.⁵⁹ The Chinese government was under great pressure to act against another non-traditional threat. Indeed, China

⁵⁴Kabbashi M. Suliman and Ahmed A. A. Badawi, 'An assessment of the impact of China's investments in Sudan', *Africa Portal*, (2010), available at: <http://dspace.africaportal.org/jspui/bitstream/123456789/32436/1/Sudan-China-FDI-relations.pdf?1> (accessed 15 December 2017).

⁵⁵Elaboration of data from ITC Trade Map, available at: <http://www.trademap.org/Index.aspx> (accessed 15 December 2017).

⁵⁶Department of Trade and External Economic Relations Statistics, National Bureau of Statistics, *Zhongguo maoyi waijing tongji nianjian* [China Trade and External Economics Statistical Yearbook] (Beijing: Zhongguo tongji chubanshe, 2015), pp. 612–614.

⁵⁷Jian "feizhazheng junshi xingdong jiaoyanwu" zai zhongguo junxiao yinfa zhenglun' ['The creation of the "MOOTW Teaching and Research Office" in a Chinese military school sparks debate'], *Global Times* (31 October 2008), available at: <http://mil.huanqiu.com/china/2008-10/269035.html> (accessed 4 January 2017).

⁵⁸For example: Andrew S. Erickson and Austin M. Strange, *Six Years At Sea ... And Counting* (Washington, DC: Jamestown Foundation, June 2015), pp. 23–44.

⁵⁹Erik Lin-Greenberg, 'Dragon boats: assessing China's anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden', *Defense & Security Analysis* 26(2), (2010), pp. 213–230.

took away its most modern ships from their traditional defense duties and sent them to faraway waters despite the first signs of growing tensions in Asia.

Between late 2008 and 2012, the PLA Navy (PLAN) sent ten task forces to the Gulf of Aden, each composed of a supply ship and two surface combatants, mostly frigates and destroyers. The three supply ships and ten modern surface combatants deployed in those years were the only ones of those kinds that China had. In that period, they thus were on continuous rotation. The reason behind this is that between 2005 and 2010 the PLAN had less than six Type 54 frigates and four Type 52 destroyers available.⁶⁰ The number of rotations per ship significantly declined only after the departure of the eleventh task force. Until 2015, almost all the surface combatants deployed had participated only in one expedition. Therefore, it seems that the PLAN had to take away some of its most modern ships from traditional defense duties in order to support the leadership's decision to join the international anti-piracy efforts in the Middle East. It is likely that such a decision was taken in order to avoid embarrassing problems of the past like an engine failing in the middle of the sea and not being able to repair it without foreign assistance.⁶¹

Besides, the PLAN could not rely on a solid logistic support. On the one hand, the PLAN had to use the American GPS system for navigation because the Chinese Beidou was not ready.⁶² On the other hand, because China lacked facilities in foreign countries, it was necessary to find alternative solutions. Through port calls in the region, the PLAN managed to find a partially sustainable arrangement. Since the arrival of the fourth task force between 2009 and 2010, the duration of every deployment has been extended from four to six months. By looking at the list of the records broken by the first task force, it is quite clear that operating in the Gulf of Aden was much more about overcoming the challenges of being there for the PLAN, and not actually fighting the pirates.⁶³

Again, there are signs of continuity and discontinuity with the past. On the one hand, China was able to make the best out of a bad situation by taking the chance to start a robust naval diplomacy through port calls and joint exercises with other navies. On the other hand, the decision to send its best warships far away from home was extremely indicative of the importance that the Chinese government has attached to effectively responding to a non-traditional threat, or making a show of doing so, especially for diplomatic reasons.

To conclude, it is possible to see how the securitization process started to influence Chinese foreign policy towards greater activism and engagement in international security issues. Growing awareness that non-traditional issues were threatening China's reputation and overseas interests prompted an institutional reaction. The PLA and the civilian ministries started to develop the capabilities necessary to support the leadership's decision to neutralize those threats.

The 2010s were still transitional years. For example, the PLA's capability to operate abroad was clearly limited, and the decision to intervene in the Darfur crisis was already a significant departure from the diplomacy of the past. However, as emphasized in the publications of many Chinese scholars today, the lack of expertise and knowledge of the dynamics of faraway regions probably prevented Chinese foreign and security policymakers from fully understanding the risks growing out of a global economic presence.⁶⁴

⁶⁰Ronald O'Rourke, 'China naval modernization: implications for U.S. navy capabilities', *Congressional Research Service*, (17 June 2016), available at: <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL33153.pdf> (accessed 4 January 2017).

⁶¹Michael C. Grubb, 'A comprehensive survey of China's dynamic shipbuilding industry', *China Maritime Studies* 1, (2008), pp. 32–33.

⁶²Zhuanjia: beidou yidai reng you da liang qedian bu neng yong yu junshi' ['Expert: first generation of beidou still has many shortcomings, cannot be used by the military'], *Beijing Youth Daily*, (25 March 2009), available at: http://military.china.com/zh_cn/important/64/20090325/15394974.html (accessed 4 January 2017).

⁶³Yanxin Sun and Hongliang Zhu, 'Zhongguo haijun shou pi huhangbiandui kaichuang renmin haijun lishi duo ge "di yi"' ['Naval vessel escort first: Chinese navy escort formation achieves multiple "firsts" in history of People's navy'], *Xinhua*, (28 April 2009), available at: http://news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2009-04/28/content_11275556.htm (accessed 4 January 2017).

⁶⁴For example: Degang Sun, 'Zhongguo canyu zhongdong diqu chongtu zhengli de lilun yu shijian' ['Theory and practice of China's participation in the Middle East conflict governance'], *Xiya feizhou* 4, (2015), pp. 79–98.

Libya, Mali and Syria: Security and Development in China's Changing Foreign Policy

This last part of this section focuses on the tragic events in Libya in 2011 and Mali and Syria in 2015. It is clear from these events that Chinese actions reflect a real intent to neutralize the rise of non-traditional threats. Although the diplomatic value of engaging in cooperation remained significant, it became of secondary importance.

The evacuation from Libya of some 36,000 Chinese nationals was an exceptional event both because the number of people rescued was six times more than during all the previous ten years, and because of the difficult conditions under which the evacuation took place.⁶⁵ A number of Weibo users, some of whom were trapped in Libya, complained about the inefficiency of the emergency hotline set up by the MFA.⁶⁶ Moreover, although scholars and government officials tried to prevent the spreading of alarmist comments about the damages to Chinese companies,⁶⁷ the MOFCOM in April 2011 stated that Chinese companies in Libya had signed contracts totaling US\$18.8 billion.⁶⁸ As another scholar has already pointed out, and as the review in the first part of this article shows, the Libyan crisis transformed the protection of citizens abroad into a new imperative of Chinese diplomacy.⁶⁹ It is important then to understand how such an imperative translated into concrete actions.

Since the evacuation showed the limits of the support that the PLA could offer, the first step was to invest more intellectual resources to prepare the PLA from a doctrinal and operational point of view. In late 2011, the PLA Academy of Military Science (AMS) established the MOOTW Research Center, composed of 28 experts from state institutions, the CMC, the PLA, the PAP and public security institutions. The Center specializes in antiterrorism and social unrest, domestic and international disaster relief, interest and rights protection, surveillance, international peacekeeping and international exercises.⁷⁰ New regulations for peacekeeping were released shortly afterwards.⁷¹ The PLA Logistic Department also issued new measures regarding the financial and logistic organization of MOOTW.⁷² Finally, in November 2013, the National Security Commission led by Xi Jinping was created.

Chinese experts from top think tanks and government and military institutions agree in general that the Commission will play an important role in formulating a comprehensive national security strategy that includes both civilian and military actions.⁷³ In particular, according to Gong Fangbin, a senior scholar with the PLA National Defense University, the Commission was established in order to better

⁶⁵ According to the Chinese MFA, before 2011 the total of Chinese nationals evacuated from other countries was around 6,000. 'Zuguo jie ni huijia' ['The motherland takes you home'], *China Consular Protection Service*, (April 2015), available at: <http://cs.mfa.gov.cn/gyls/lsgz/ztzl/zgjinhl/> (accessed 4 January 2017).

⁶⁶ Josh Chin, 'China's other problem with protests abroad', *The Wall Street Journal*, (23 February 2011), available at: <http://blogs.wsj.com/chinarealtime/2011/02/23/chinas-other-problem-with-protests-abroad/> (accessed 4 January 2017).

⁶⁷ Weidong Zhu, 'Zhongguo zai libiya sunshi you duo da' ['How big are Chinese losses in Libya?'], *Global Times*, (22 April 2011), available at: <http://opinion.huanqiu.com/pk/2011-04/1647493.html> (accessed 4 January 2017); Mei Xinyu, 'Zhongguo zai libiya de sunshi mei you name da' ['Chinese losses in Libya are not so big'], *Global Times*, (9 June 2011), available at: <http://finance.huanqiu.com/roll/2011-06/1745727.html> (accessed 4 January 2017).

⁶⁸ 'Zhongguo qiye zai libiya zichan da 188 yi meiyuan sunshi nan guliang' ['Chinese companies had contracts worth USD18.8 billion in Libya. It is difficult to calculate the losses'], *Global Times*, (24 March 2011), available at: <http://finance.huanqiu.com/roll/2011-03/1584398.html> (accessed 4 January 2017).

⁶⁹ Shaio H. Zerba, 'China's Libya evacuation operation: a new diplomatic imperative—overseas citizens protection', *Journal of Contemporary China* 23(90), (2014), pp. 1092–1112.

⁷⁰ Yiwei Tian, 'Junshi kexue yuan feizhanzheng junshi xingdong yanjiu zhongxin cengli' ['The AMS opens the MOOTW Research Center'], *Xinhua*, (13 December 2011), available at: http://news.xinhuanet.com/mil/2011-12/13/c_122413199.htm?anchor=1 (accessed 4 January 2017).

⁷¹ 'Hu jintao jianshu mingling fabu shixing "zhongguo renmin jiefangjun canjia guoji lianheguo weichi heping xingdong tiaoli" (shixing)' ['Hu Jintao signs the order to issue the "Regulations for the PLA to Participate in UN Peacekeeping Missions" (Draft)'], *Xinhua*, (22 March 2012), available at: http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2012-03/22/c_111691498.htm (accessed 4 January 2017).

⁷² 'Zonghouqinbu yinfa "jundui feizhanzheng junshi xingdong caiwu baozhang banfa" he "jundui zhanshi caiwu baozhang banfa"' ['The PLA Logistic Department issues the "Measures for Financial Security of MOOTW" and "Measures for Financial Security in Time of War"'], *Xinhua*, (21 March 2012), available at: http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2012-03/21/c_122861227.htm (accessed 4 January 2017).

⁷³ Kun Liu, 'Zhuanjia: guojia anquan weiyuanhui fuzeren yingshi zuigao lingdaoren' ['Experts: the persons in charge of the National Security Commission should be the top leaders'], *Global Times*, (12 November 2013), available at: <http://mil.huanqiu.com/china/2013-11/4558366.html> (accessed 4 January 2017).

coordinate responses to non-traditional security issues.⁷⁴ After all, he argues, the CMC is already more than capable in dealing with traditional threats. Zhi Binyou, the Director of the Emergency Response Training Center of the Chinese Academy of Governance, stated that it is extremely probable that the Commission will play a key role in coordinating civilian and military activities during peacetime *vis-à-vis* non-traditional security issues.⁷⁵

In terms of capabilities, it is very likely that this crisis also put an end to the important debate about the eventual establishment of overseas military bases. Tellingly, in 2013, the CMC Member and leader of the PLA General Logistic Department Zhao Keshi wrote an article on this topic for the AMS's flagship journal *China Military Science* expressing strong support for the establishment of overseas bases to better perform MOOTW, among other reasons.⁷⁶

At the same time, China's engagement in peacekeeping grew both in quantitative and qualitative terms. A first sign of change in this regard happened in 2012 when a platoon of armed troops was deployed in South Sudan to protect Chinese peacekeepers there. They had no other role in the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS). Nonetheless, they set an important precedent for the following deployments of combat troops. After them, both in UNMISS and the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), the PLA kept on deploying similar troops to execute the mandate of the missions. They significantly differ from the standard PLA infantrymen. While the average equipment issued to the PLA troops is still outdated,⁷⁷ the combat troops deployed in Mali and South Sudan boast full body armor, new weapons, drones and modern armored carriers.⁷⁸ Even their training, which includes real-combat drills, is similar to that of the PLA special operations forces.⁷⁹

Moreover, it is important to point out that China, through the support of the Resolution 2,100 for the deployment of MINUSMA, also tasked the peacekeepers to take 'all necessary means, within the limits of its capacities and areas of deployment' to 'stabilize' population centers in northern Mali and to 'deter threats and to take active steps to prevent the return of armed elements in those areas'.⁸⁰ This is a rather large mandate compared to the previous missions and to what China had been at ease with authorizing in the past. The same year MINUSMA was launched, China supported the creation of an 'intervention brigade' with offensive tasks as part of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). Even more telling is the evidence of the sudden ease in using and authorizing force in foreign policy, a trend further strengthened in the aftermath of the tragic killing of three senior managers in Mali and that of another Chinese national kidnapped by the so-called Islamic State in Syria in late November.

After Xi Jinping called to boost the international efforts against terrorism after a Chinese hostage was killed in Syria, the Chinese Ambassador to the UN mentioned this tragic event among the motivations behind China's vote in favor of allowing the use of force against the terrorists in Syria and Iraq.⁸¹

⁷⁴Fangbin Gong, 'Guojia anquan weiyuanhui sheli hou de anquan guanli' ['The management of security after the establishment of the National Security Commission'], *Qiushi* [Truth Seeking], (13 January 2014), available at: http://www.qsttheory.cn/tbzt/tbzt_2013/sbjsz/fxjd/201401/t20140113_312164.htm (accessed 4 January 2017).

⁷⁵Binyou Zhi: Guojia anquan weiyuanhui sheli hou de yingji guanli' ['Zhi Binyou: emergency response after the establishment of the National Security Commission'], *Qiushi*, (18 December 2013), available at: <http://theory.people.com.cn/n/2013/1218/c40531-23872415.html> (accessed 4 January 2017).

⁷⁶Keshi Zhao, 'Xin xingshi xia jiakuai wojun houqin xiandaihua de zhanlve sikao' ['Strategic thoughts on accelerating modernization of PLA logistics in the new situation'], *China Military Science* 4, (2013), pp. 1–10.

⁷⁷Qian Zhang, 'How much does PLA soldier's individual equipment cost?', *People's Daily*, (6 December 2014), available at: <http://en.people.cn/n/2014/1206/c90000-8819167.html> (accessed 4 January 2017).

⁷⁸Tao Zhang, 'China's peacekeeping equipment questioned', *PRC MOD*, (4 January 2015), available at: http://eng.mod.gov.cn/DefenseNews/2015-01/04/content_4561933.htm (accessed 4 January 2017).

⁷⁹Minnie Chan, 'Chinese troops in two-day drill to prepare for peacekeeping missions', *South China Morning Post*, (20 November 2017), available at: <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2120754/chinese-troops-two-day-drill-prepare-peacekeeping> (accessed 20 November 2017).

⁸⁰*Resolution 2011 (2013)*, UNSC, (25 April 2013), available at: http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/minusma/documents/mali%20_2100_E_.pdf (accessed 4 January 2017).

⁸¹Security Council "unequivocally" condemns ISIL terrorist attacks, unanimously adopting text that determines extremist group poses "unprecedented" threat, *UN Meeting Coverage*, (20 November 2015), available at: <http://www.un.org/press/en/2015/sc12132.doc.htm> (accessed 7 January 2017).

Considering that China had opposed the use of force in Syria since 2011 for fear of a second Libyan crisis, this fact is quite indicative of the change going on in China's understanding of terrorism and the protection of its overseas interests.⁸²

From a legal standpoint, after the approval of the National Security Law in July 2015, a new Antiterrorism Law was passed in December of the same year. They both officially made room for more flexible use of the PLA against non-traditional threats abroad to protect Chinese interests. Although that law was also strongly influenced by the terrorist attacks that happened within China's borders,⁸³ the officer in charge of the CMC's Legal Affairs Bureau greatly emphasized that for the first time the Chinese law clearly allows the PLA and the PAP to go abroad for 'peacekeeping operations, international disaster relief, maritime escorts, and military operations to protect China's overseas interests'.⁸⁴

Furthermore, the CMC established an Overseas Operation Office between late 2015 and early 2016. The Unit, operating under the War Operations Department of the CMC, brings together officers from different PLA departments. According to the former Deputy Director of the MOD's Peacekeeping Office, the establishment of the Office was a necessary step to push forward the 'normalization of military operations abroad'.⁸⁵ As the negotiations for the establishment of the first military outpost in Djibouti concluded in November 2015, he also emphasized the importance of both negotiating agreements with other countries and strengthening regulatory work in China to achieve such goals.

To conclude, there is a significant correlation between the words of the Chinese leaders presented in the first section of the article and their actions taken into consideration in this latter section. The fact that the PLA became the main protagonist of this process after an initial civilian response, from showing the flag in support of China's international standing, to more concrete actions to defend the country's interests and citizens abroad, shows how powerful the process of securitization has been. Ultimately, this process not only led to growing military activities abroad and the creation of the relevant institutional-legal framework, but it also caused a broader reconsideration about the use of force in foreign policy. This and other issues are discussed below in the final part of the article.

Conclusion and Further Considerations

This article looked at the evolving relationship between non-traditional security and Chinese foreign policy through the lens of securitization. It showed that non-traditional security became an extremely important driver of China's foreign and security policy.

It is easy to see the correlation between the securitization of non-traditional security in the documents and statements of the Chinese government and its leaders, and the legal and institutional developments in the Chinese civilian ministries first, and in the military then, aimed at least at mitigating the new threats. Non-traditional security stopped being an abstract term for diplomatic dialogues and issues like terrorism, pirates and instability abroad emerged as important contents of the Chinese understanding of those words. As the threat became clearer, the Chinese military operations were deeply affected: their geographical scope grew, and the quality and quantity of the troops deployed also increased. This happened because events overseas resonated well with the official discourse about national security in China, thereby propelling non-traditional security to the top of the diplomatic and military agenda.

⁸² Andrea Ghiselli, 'Growing overlap between counter-terrorism and overseas interest protection acts as new driver of Chinese strategy', *China Brief* 16(9), (2016), pp. 15–18.

⁸³ 'Lawmakers weigh China's draft anti-terrorism law', *China Daily*, (25 February 2015), available at: http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-02/25/content_19653472.htm (accessed 4 January 2017).

⁸⁴ Jun Mao, 'Yi falvxing weihu guojia anquan de shiming renwu' ['Performing the mission of protecting the country according to the law'], *PLA Daily*, (15 July 2015), available at: http://www.81.cn/jfbmap/content/2015-07/15/content_117221.htm (accessed 4 January 2017).

⁸⁵ Yuandan Guo, 'Jiemijie fangjun "haiwai xingdong chu" qiang huajing waikuai fan zhineng' ['The PLA "Overseas Operation Unit" to strengthen overseas rapid reaction capabilities'], *Global Times*, (25 March 2016), available at: <http://mil.huanqiu.com/china/2016-03/8768818.html> (accessed 4 January 2017).

Important considerations can be made now on three important issues, namely the changing relationship between the Chinese state and its citizens and how it affects foreign policy; the meaning of the securitization of non-traditional security issues in Chinese foreign policy for other countries; and the general approach on studying Chinese foreign and security policy. Each of these issues is worthy of being further explored in the future.

To begin with, traditional national defense, including the reunification with Taiwan, remains the priority of the Chinese government and of the PLA. Yet, considering the serious threats against the security of its citizens, one of the two pillars any government rests on, it is not surprising to see non-traditional security concerns shaping China's behavior in a significant way. As noted above, this change is extremely significant for it is the fruit of a deep evolution of the relationship between the state and the citizen since 1989, from the adversarial nature implicit in the term 'political security' to the declared urgency to protect the citizens abroad. The Chinese government is not only extremely sensitive about this issue, but it is also fueling expectations among citizens through the direct sponsorship and indirect support of popular movies like *Wolf Warrior 2*, *Operation Mekong* and *Operation Red Sea*. Such a dynamic is likely to give birth to a bottom-up force potentially as strong as that of the much-studied Chinese nationalism.

Secondly, the securitization of non-traditional security issues in the context of foreign policy brought about an apparently subtle, but in reality crucial change in China's approach to political instability and terrorism abroad. Indeed, China's approach to these issues directly grows out of its own, more or less successful experience of promoting economic development in its western provinces in order to create social harmony.⁸⁶ Although this remains the main approach, the use of military force or authorizing third parties to do so is now part of the 'policy menu' in the hands of the Chinese leaders.

There are of course risks associated with this turn, and the Chinese foreign policy community is well aware of the risk of spreading the country's resources too thin, as a result of an excessively proactive security strategy.⁸⁷ Nonetheless, there is no doubt that this is a potential turning point for Chinese security engagement abroad. Since growing Chinese military activism abroad has happened so far through the UN, and not through unilateral actions, the opportunities for constructive engagement are difficult to overestimate.

Finally, this article wants to remind us of the dangers coming out of the difficult relationship between the academic and policy worlds. On the one hand, the study of non-traditional security has been undermined by the difficulties for academia to approach the complex reality of today's wars. On the other hand, certain policy interests have shaped the academic discourse on Chinese foreign policy, pushing scholars to neglect a subject that can potentially lead to real cooperation opportunities.

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⁸⁶For example: Xinyu Xing, 'Zhongguo canyu zhongdong diqu nanmin wenti zhili de xianzhuang yu qianjing' ['China's contribution to the refugees crisis in the Middle East: retrospect and prospect'], *Alabo shijie yanjiu* [Arab World Studies] 4, (2016), pp. 20–32.

⁸⁷For example: Xiaolin Ma, 'Shen li wei qiang: zhongguo canyu weihe de leng sikao' ['Carefully standing close to an imminent danger: thinking about China's participation in peacekeeping missions'], *Beijing Youth Daily*, (4 June 2016), available at: http://epaper.ynet.com/html/2016-06/04/content_201565.htm?div=-1 (accessed 10 June 2017).