China’s New Absence from UN Peacekeeping

Economic Interests and Prestige in Mali and the Central African Republic
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Introduction

As of November 2017, the People’s Republic of China contributes 2,651 personnel to United Nations (UN) peacekeeping operations across ten different missions, ranging from Lebanon to Liberia (UN 2017a). At the broadest level, China’s increasing involvement in international security issues has potentially profound implications for the international security community, such as the public development of China’s armed forces, and a more effective international peacekeeping regime (Huang 2011). The trajectory of increasing involvement, and therefore its saliency, is likely to continue, especially in African contexts, as China has chosen Djibouti as the location for its first overseas military base (Jacobs and Perlez 2017). However, in most coverage of the China-Africa relationship coming out of the West, mainly the United States (US), the focus is on China’s pursuit of its economic interests. This often frames China as a neo-colonial power primarily interested in extracting natural resources and protecting its ability to do so (e.g. Scimia 2016; Larmer 2017). This narrow focus obfuscates alternative interpretations of China’s activities in Africa, for example, as part of a strategy to foster its reputation as a responsible member of the international community. A more discerning view that considers this aspect could help anticipate China’s willingness to participate in African security and interventions. This would allow for more efficient collective decision-making in the UN Security Council, especially in humanitarian crisis situations where expediency is crucial.

The latest development of China’s participation in UN peacekeeping interventions is its contribution of contingent troops, which were deployed for the first time in 2013 to the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). They are also present in three missions in central Africa, but China is entirely absent from one extensive operation, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA). Given such a peacekeeping presence in the region, and China’s increasing involvement in UN peacekeeping overall (e.g. Stähle 2008; Sun 2017), it is now this absence that is anomalous, and which merits further investigation. I will thus focus on MINUSCA, as well as MINUSMA for comparison. Both missions aim to address conflicts that originated in areas which have been ungoverned and neglected (Lombard and Carayannis 2015; Cline 2013).

Explanations for increasing Chinese involvement in peacekeeping can be categorized under different types of theories about the motives behind third-party intervention in intrastate conflicts, such as material or status rewards. One potential explanation that falls under material rewards and aligns with dominant Western perceptions is that China is contributing troops in order to ensure the protection of its economic interests (Stähle
This also incorporates the objective of regional stability as it is conducive to preserving and furthering economic interests (Hanauer and Morris 2014: 6). Another possible explanation, securing reputational benefits, fits under status reward theories. China is the only permanent member of the Security Council which is also a member of the South, a category broadly encompassing countries which are less developed than those in the West. Towards its fellow members of the South, including Mali and the Central African Republic (CAR), China aims to maintain a culture of respect and sovereignty1 (Davis 2011: 225). Conversely, as a permanent member of the Security Council and with its perception of itself as a great power (People’s Daily 2017), China may participate in peacekeeping interventions to project an image of responsibility and major power status to other powerful states, namely the penholders, the P3, of the Security Council: the United Kingdom (UK), France, and the US.2

Modern China’s rise is a popular area of research, but China’s potential as a global security provider is often overlooked (Florini 2011). I aim to address this niche by testing two types of third-party intervention theories, economic interests and status rewards. In the remainder of my thesis, I use these theories to answer: what explains China’s participation in the intervention in Mali and its absence from the mission in the CAR?

When tracing China’s participation in peacekeeping operations, scholars (e.g. Stähle 2008; Davis 2011; Li 2011; Huang 2013; Fung 2016) have paid little attention to missions where China participates but does not have overt economic interests and even less attention to missions in which China does not participate. This is problematic for two reasons. First, there are selection biases in only examining cases in which China participates, and only the missions in countries where China has economic interests. I aim to account for variation by helping to fill the dearth of explanation for China’s absence from peacekeeping missions. Second, selecting only cases where China’s economic interests are deemed most important not only presumes the gravity of economic interest theories but also ignores the significance of smaller economic relationships.

Following this introduction, I further contextualize this thesis within theories of third-party intervention and ongoing research on China’s peacekeeping in Africa, and explain my case selection and method. I then conduct a controlled comparison to test economic interest and prestige theories for explaining China’s participation in the UN-led peacekeeping intervention in Mali and its absence from the similar mission to the CAR. Finally, I will end with some discussion of my results and my conclusion.

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1 These are part of the ‘Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence’ that, originally articulated in the 1950s, are now part enshrined in the preamble to China’s constitution. See Davis (2011: 225) for the full English quotation.

2 They are so called because they largely take on the responsibility of drafting the text of resolutions (Curran and Williams 2016: 6).
Theory

In order to determine the causes of China’s participation in MINUSMA and its absence from MINUSCA, I use primarily actor-centric, as opposed to phenomenon-centric, theories of third-party intervention. Whereas phenomenon-centric theories focus on the circumstances that lead to the necessity of intervention, actor-centric theories focus on the intervening party’s motives. Although actor-centric theories make up a limited portion of intervention literature, they are more appropriate for assessing the potential reasons behind China’s foreign policy regarding peacekeeping interventions in Africa.

Established intervention literature mentions the motives of intervening parties only in passing. Regan (1996: 341), for example, contends that although the type of motive can affect the intervention strategy, the aims of the intervener are essentially straightforward: stability always comes first. Later, Regan (2000: 40-49) broadly discusses intervening parties’ motives with an expected utility framework, meaning that for any potential intervener, the benefits must outweigh the costs. The possible costs include human and material resources, and negative international audience perception. There is thus an implication of reputation concerns, but Regan (2000) does not discuss the possible benefits for the intervener, neither material nor reputational. More detail is provided in Cooper and Berdal (1993: 134), who focus on ethnic conflicts and list the motives for intervention present in their cases, including regional stability concerns, ethnic sympathy, a sense of international responsibility, and humanitarian concerns. Though they find that motives are often mixed, they distinguish interventions motivated by third-party interests from those which are more altruistically driven (ibid). Carment and James (2000: 176, 188) also divide motives into instrumental considerations, such as economic gains, and affective considerations, such as cultural affiliations. However, this classification is not key to their model (ibid). Fisher (2011: 161) is more direct, noting that an intervener always benefits, either through the process of intervening, where the benefit could be improved status, or from the outcome of the intervention, which could advance the intervener’s interests.

Mitchell (1988) studies the motives for third-party actors in conflict mediation and asserts that they should not be taken for granted, for they have a substantial effect on the mediation process, the reactions of the conflicting parties, and the form of the outcome. Although mediation is not peacekeeping, the motives Mitchell puts forward are more comprehensive than those discussed above, and they equally serve as motives for third-party intervention. Mitchell (1988: 45) classifies the motives of the third party as various kinds of rewards, proposing a model that sorts them by source and nature. Mitchell’s (1988: 46) figure is reproduced below, with the addition of indicators to show where in his model my studies fall. I narrow Mitchell’s formulation of rewards to two
potential motives for China’s participation in peacekeeping interventions. The rewards and their corresponding theories are categorized into economic interests as a type of material reward, and status rewards. For each group of theories, I test a separate hypothesis.

**Figure 1: Mitchell’s (1988) Model: Sources and Types of Intermediary Rewards**

**Economic Interest Theories**

Economic interests as material rewards include investment, trade, and access to natural resources. These theories argue that material rewards motivate states to participate in interventions. They also stress the role of stability and security for obtaining and protecting these economic interests. More explicitly than in the scholarship discussed above, Pearson (1974: 262) classifies foreign military interventions in domestic disputes according to which issues are of concern to the intervening government, notably the protection of economic interests in the target state, including business enterprises and natural resources. He further relates types of interventions to types of domestic conflicts and finds that interventions by large powers are devised to stabilize targets so that any detriment to major power interests is avoided (1974: 281). Appropriately not a major power in Pearson’s 1974 definition, 3 China sees itself as one (People’s Daily 2017).

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3 Pearson includes the US, the UK, and France.
While Pearson (1974) stresses protection, Taft (2008) focuses on the creation of material rewards. Taft (2008: 82-83) details the specialized skills required to redress post-conflict security vacuums, and claims that China’s contributions to African peacekeeping missions also create an environment conducive to future Chinese economic investment. Additionally, Stähle (2008: 652) examines China’s gradual adaptation to the principles of UN peacekeeping, citing China’s push for a joint African Union (AU)-UN mission to Darfur. While using the case to underscore China’s insistence on the consent of the target state, Stähle (ibid) also acknowledges the importance of China’s business interests in Sudan and its subsequent contribution of personnel to the mission.

These economic interest theories constitute the first group of theories that I test, which I do by examining the level of Chinese economic interests in Mali and the CAR. According to these theories, the higher the level of economic interests China has in the target state, the more likely it is that China will participate in the intervention. My first hypothesis is that China’s economic interests are a significant but not necessary motivation for its participation in the peacekeeping mission in Mali and its absence from the one in the CAR.

**Status and Prestige Theories**

Status reward theories emphasize positive international reputational benefits, fitting into Mitchell’s model at the intersection of status rewards from an audience. In this case, the audience is the international community, particularly the P3 of the UN Security Council. Status is an identity issue because while China sees itself as a major power (People’s Daily 2017), there is no international consensus on its status (e.g. Schiavenza 2014 as opposed to Shambaugh 2013; Larson 2015) Though prestige is often cited as a motive for intervention (Regan 2002: 42; Fisher 2011: 161; Mitchell 1988: 45), Löwenheim (2003) contends that realists often give it little weight. In his research on an early humanitarian intervention, the British intervention in Algeria over the issue of white slavery in 1816, he concludes, “it was the desire to re-establish moral prestige and credibility on the part of Britain that was the decisive motive” (2003: 27) Though Löwenheim’s case study is quite old, it illustrates that prestige has long been a motive for intervention.

More recent examples of interventions on the basis of identity emphasize rudimentary affinities between the intervener and the target state (Cooper and Berdal 1993; Carment and James 2000). This is important in terms of the scope conditions for my study since China, Mali, and the CAR are all members of the South. China should thus identify with both target states. Fung (2016) asserts the importance of China’s identification with other South states for its involvement in the AU-UN intervention in Darfur. Fung (2016), however, fixates on China’s dual identity, arguing that both of China’s peer groups, members of the South and major powers, must adopt a unified
stance before China will act. While Fung stresses the necessity of this convergence of opinion, I suspect this may not be the case and so consider China’s South group identification separately from its identification with the group of major powers. Thus, I use identification with other South states as one of my scope conditions. Although similar to the status reward theories, in the reward model, it is more of an influence reward from China’s allies. China seeks to maintain its influence within the South rather than improve its status in relation to the group. For theory testing, I am concerned with the status and prestige facets of China’s identification with other major powers.

Wohlforth (2009: 29) argues that the concept of prestige driving behaviour now has firm scientific support. In his discussion of polarity and status competition, Wohlforth (2009: 35) states that Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Tajfel 1981) offers a compelling explanation for competitive interstate behaviour because ingrained human impulses of self-definition and self-esteem induce people to define their identity by their in-group and to want to compare themselves favourably against out-groups. Though based in psychology, SIT has become part of international relations scholarship (e.g. Mercer 1995; Abdelal et al. 2006; Johnston 2008; Dafoe et al. 2014). Applying SIT, Wohlforth (2009: 55) designates China as a status quo power under unipolarity which aims to improve its standing, but only through strategies that align with existing global norms. Larson (2015) also uses SIT, observing that China may achieve this upward mobility by emulating the institutions, values, and ideology of the leading powers in order to be accepted into the great power club (Larson 2015: 331). Li (2011) and Huang (2013) view China’s participation in peacekeeping interventions as essentially this type of strategy. These theories based on status rewards are the second group of theories that I test. My second hypothesis is that China participates when other major powers have also shown a high degree of interest in the mission, in this case, MINUSMA. It does so for the P3 audience as part of its effort to achieve status parity. I expect there to be stronger support for this hypothesis than for the first one. To test these theories, I will examine the interest levels of each P3 state and China towards each mission.

Most of the literature on China’s increasing participation in peacekeeping does not include any in-depth analysis of specific missions. The only case study thus far used to test these status and prestige theories, or indeed the economic interest theories, is Fung’s (2016) work on the aforementioned mission in Darfur. To address this niche and allow for comparison, more case studies are needed, both in cases where China does and does not partake. My testing of two types of theories in the cases of Mali and the CAR is part of filling this niche.
Method

To examine why China participated in the intervention in Mali but not in the CAR, I conduct a controlled comparison. Support for each hypothesis would be 1) a higher level of Chinese economic interests in Mali compared to the CAR, and 2) a greater level of P3 and Chinese interest in MINUSMA compared to MINUSCA. Examining the level of congruence with each theory’s predictions provides a framework to identify and interpret the essential differences.

I have selected these cases because the nature of the peacekeeping operations is the same. The conflicts also share certain characteristics, reducing confounding factors. Moreover, the missions are both in African states; in China’s growing relationship with the continent, economic, identity, and status concerns are substantial. The following two paragraphs provide brief backgrounds of the conflicts.

In Mali, the conflict which eventually led to the authorization of MINUSMA was an uprising in the north by the Tuareg population, a nomadic group (Cline 2013: 618). Mali’s population is concentrated in the south around the capital, Bamako, and this has led to the neglect of the north (ibid). Many Tuareg uprisings have occurred, but the one which began in January 2012 was bolstered by Tuareg soldiers who had been in the Libyan army but returned to Mali after the fall of Muammar Gaddafi. This uprising was further bolstered by alliances between the main Tuareg separatist group and at least three radical Islamist groups which had been useful in developing the local economy and providing basic services in the absence of the Malian state (Cline 2013: 625). However, by July 2012, the Tuareg had lost control of Mali’s northern cities to these Islamist movements (Lotze 2015: 857). After this point, human rights abuses increased significantly and the links between the rebel movements and terrorist groups garnered international attention (ibid).

In the CAR, a lack of state capacity has also led to vast ungoverned spaces, such as the northern provinces where a largely Muslim collection of local militias united as Séléka and ultimately took power in the capital, Bangui, in March 2013 (Lombard and Carayannis 2015: 6). Séléka’s nominal leader, Michel Djotodia, was unable to control the many factions as they spread across the country committing human rights abuses (UK 2013b). A counter-movement assembled called the Anti-Balaka; this was also an umbrella organisation comprised of traditional self-defence groups (Lombard and Carayannis 2015: 6). With both sides having disparate interests and objectives, violence escalated and became more sectarian, the Anti-Balaka carrying out brutal retaliation against the Séléka, then Muslims in general (Lombard and Carayannis 2015: 7). Though both the Séléka and the Anti-Balaka have officially disbanded, fighting amongst their former constituent groups continues (Al Jazeera 2017).
I use a most similar systems design to compare the cases of Mali and the CAR and test my two hypotheses. The first factor of interest, directly related to theories of economic interests as material rewards for intervention, is the level of Chinese economic interests present in each country. Mali has a higher level of Chinese economic interests, and the CAR has a much lower level. I examine the level of trade between China and each country as well as Chinese foreign direct investment (FDI) outflows. I exclude aid from my analysis because accurate, detailed data is difficult to obtain, especially bilateral data, given China’s lack of transparency concerning aid and its different definitions for measuring developmental assistance (Brautigam 2009: 167). Furthermore, aid is often in the form of grants or prestige projects. These could be considered economic interests because of their potential payoff in securing influence and eventual contracts; nonetheless, I categorize them as political issues because there are usually no tangible interests at the outset.

I also attempt to avoid the conflation of the economic interests of China as a state and those of Chinese companies. Some scholars (Kaplinsky and Morris 2009; Holslag 2011) argue that they are the same, citing the support that overseas Chinese companies receive from Beijing. Kaplinsky and Morris (2009: 559) note that often for an agreement to be reached on a construction project, the receiving government must award the contract to a Chinese company. Alden and Davies (2006: 95), however, also acknowledge that Chinese firms are becoming more marketized and thus are accountable to their shareholders. Further along this line, Brautigam (2009: 298) observes that most private Chinese companies active in Africa cannot access subsidized loans. Moreover, the perception that Beijing is directing the activities of all Chinese companies abroad is erroneous; the companies have considerable freedom to operate and have no obligation to send their output to China (2009: 281).

The second factor to be tested is other powerful states’ level of interest in the conflicts. This aligns with the second group of theories which emphasizes status rewards for intervention. This specifically has to do with China’s self-identification as a major power. By demonstrating its capacity and responsibility in international peacekeeping interventions, China aims to gain equal status among its fellow members on the UN Security Council. I establish the collective level of interest in each mission using primarily P3 government sources and the total financial and personnel contributions. The UN missions in both Mali and the CAR are successors to African-

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4 However, Kaplinsky and Morris (2009: 561) describe China’s investment in Africa as strategic, building infrastructure only to support its commodity extraction. They thus conclude that it is virtually impossible to unbundle what constitutes Chinese aid and FDI. Even including aid estimates though, the stark disparity in the bilateral relationships remains. According to AidData’s (2017) recent estimates, from 2003 to 2014, Mali received approximately US$ 795.7 million in aid from China while the CAR only received US$ 187.56 million over the same period.

5 Prestige projects are fully-financed yet unnecessary construction projects with a high degree of exposure (Alden and Davies 2006: 90).
led missions which received international support through the EU and the UN as well as from French military interventions. Given these interconnected efforts, it is not accurate to disaggregate the interest of each state towards MINUSMA or MINUSCA from its interest in the preceding endeavours. As such, I also take into account the attention given to each conflict before the establishment of the UN missions. Although both missions are ongoing, I limit my analysis of contributions and interest levels to up to one year after the establishment of the missions, by which time they were to be fully operational (UN 2013; UN 2014a).

The scope conditions are similar for each test: the nature of the mission, and identification with a fellow country of the South. First, the nature of the mission is determined by the type of UN peacekeeping operation. Both Mali and the CAR have multidimensional integrated stabilization missions, meaning they have similar mandates, including robust peacekeeping which authorizes the tactical use of force (United Nations 2017b). Both missions are considered highly dangerous (for example, see Sieff 2017 on Mali and Al Jazeera 2017 on the CAR) and are of similar size (United Nations 2017b), indicating that force generation efforts involved similar requests to the international community.

Second is China’s identification with the target state as a fellow member of the South. As noted previously, I take China’s identification with its two peer groups separately, so this condition is distinct from its efforts to increase its status among other major powers. The foundation of South membership has traditionally been respect for sovereignty (Fung 2016: 419); therefore, when considering interventions, China has tended to side with regional organisations. Since both ongoing UN operations are successors to missions led by African regional organisations and the AU, the factor of China’s identification with the South, conceptualized through China’s accordance with regional initiatives, can be considered the same in both cases.

The conditions and test theories are summarized below.
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**Analysis**

**Economic Interest Theories**

In this section, I aim to provide evidence for Chinese economic interests in Mali and the relative paucity of them in the CAR. A discussion of the findings follows.

*Mali*

China and Mali have maintained positive diplomatic relations since the 1960s and have shared development and cooperation programmes. China is the third most important destination for Malian exports, and the second most important source of imports; the value of overall trade in 2016 was US$563 million (CIA 2017a). The scope of trade includes cotton and other agricultural products as exports from Mali, and pharmaceutical products, machinery, and electronics as imports from China (CIA 2017a; Esterhuys and Kane 2014).

In terms of investment, Esterhuys and Kane (2014) note the growing presence of Chinese construction and manufacturing companies in Mali. These companies provide a significant number of jobs, but they are also in direct competition with local firms (2014: 2). Large state-owned enterprises, their subsidiaries, and private companies have had projects in Mali as early as 1992 and continue to operate there (Kernen 2010: 257; COVEC 2012; CSCEC 2017). In September 2014, China concluded deals with Mali worth US$11 billion to take effect over the next five years (Reuters 2014). Moreover, China’s FDI in Mali has increased dramatically, from US$3 million in 2010 to US$48 million in 2011, decreasing only slightly in 2012 (UNCTAD 2014). For FDI to benefit
from on-the-ground support from Chinese troops, FDI should come first (Sun 2017: 334). Accordingly, Chinese FDI into Mali surged around 2011-2012 (UNCTAD 2014), just before the establishment of MINUSMA in April 2013 to which China deployed support personnel peacekeepers and also, for the first time, contingent troops.

Given these relations and activities, there is incentive for China to be concerned with the security of these economic interests. In 2013, the year in which MINUSMA was established, The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs noted that “economic cooperation and trade between China and Mali made progress. As stability was gradually restored in Mali,” at least partially due to the presence of MINUSMA, “China swiftly resumed the implementation of road and other business cooperation projects” (PRC 2014). In September of the same year, the two governments signed an economic and technological cooperation agreement (ibid). This “swift” resumption of business reflects an urgency to return to normal activities, thus implying the importance of the economic relationship, and moreover, forming a direct connection between the establishment of security and stability in Mali and Chinese economic interests there. The considerable presence of state-owned enterprises and their stronger ties to the interests of the Chinese state lend credence to economic interest theories of China’s participation in the peacekeeping intervention in Mali.

Central African Republic

China’s relations with the CAR have been inconsistent given the CAR’s intermittent recognition of Taiwan since 1966; these sporadic diplomatic relations also affected other areas (Brautigam 2009: 67-68). Although the CAR has recognized Beijing since 1998, China’s economic relationship with the CAR remains fairly limited; overall trade in 2016 was just US$31.4 million. Despite the CAR’s exports of diamonds, timber, and cotton, China is not even amongst its top five export destinations (CIA 2017b). The CAR imports several kinds of industrial and consumable products from China, but these make up only 6.8% of its total imports (ibid).

Chinese investment in the CAR has also been minimal; it is not even included as a destination for FDI outflows from China (UNCTAD 2014). Most of the funds flowing from China into the CAR are in various forms of aid (AidData 2017). There is, however, one substantial area where Chinese companies operate: the timber industry. Five affiliated Chinese companies operate timber concessions that cover over 10,000 square kilometres of forest, more than any other company operating in the CAR (Global Witness 2015: 14). Following the 2003 coup which brought François Bozizé to the CAR presidency, the trade value of the timber increased considerably until 2013, dropping slightly in 2014 (United Nations 2017c). According to Global Witness (2015: 19), however, this drop was not directly related to the increase in violence in the CAR, but a result of technical problems at the
port of Douala in Cameroon, the main export route, and the prioritization of shipments of military equipment. The logging companies were only moderately affected by the chaos in the country (ibid); China’s reported trade values of imported timber from the CAR fell 15% (United Nations 2017c).

Given the drop in business, a small but not insignificant result of the outbreak of conflict in late 2013, it would make sense for China to have participated in MINUSCA, established in early 2014, if it was motivated by protecting its economic interests. However, I have not found evidence that the Chinese state shares the interests of the timber companies. Nonetheless, if its economic interests were sufficiently served and protected in spite of the ongoing civil war, it would lack this type of motivation for participating in the peacekeeping mission. Holslag (2011: 380) studies coups in Africa between 2003 and 2010, including in the CAR in 2003, and finds that they are not seen as major threats to Chinese economic interests because China excels in adaptability. Chinese companies appear to have followed this strategy in the CAR as well. The fragile situation in the country has resulted in logging companies possessing a disproportionate amount of power, and they continue to operate by paying warring factions for the protection of company property and personnel, paying to pass roadblocks, and ingratiating themselves with new leaders whenever there is a change in government (Global Witness 2015). These practices are problematic since they effectively fund the conflict, yet they have not been condemned by the international community. In fact, since the commencement of MINUSCA, peacekeepers on the mission have taken over the role of providing protection for logging companies (Global Witness 2015: 15, 21). From the perspective of economic interests, it was not necessary for China to join the mission because its interests were already protected. The AU-led support mission before MINUSCA also performed these security functions (2015: 15), so it is reasonable that China would have expected the protection to continue when the mission authority was transferred to the UN.

In either case then, if the Chinese state does not share the same economic interests as the timber companies, or if it does but it assumed them to be sufficiently protected, it follows that China would not have the necessary economic motivation to participate in the peacekeeping intervention in the CAR.

China has substantially more economic interests in Mali than it does in the CAR, and its economic relations with Mali are much more significant and entrenched. Two factors support the notion that China participated in MINUSMA in order to protect its economic interests. First, the escalation of Chinese FDI in Mali before the authorization of MINUSMA was convenient timing. Second, the strong presence of Chinese state-
owned enterprises suggests the potential for a higher level of direct state interest. This is bolstered by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ statement expressing an urgency to resume construction and business projects.

Conversely in the CAR, Chinese economic interests are limited, with only the timber companies being visibly active. Two scenarios are possible. First, if China shares the economic interests of the timber companies, then their interests were not severely threatened. Business was not overly affected by the outbreak of violence, and protection was already being provided by the multinational missions. In this case, the economic interest theories hold because what few interests existed were already insulated from any negative effects. Alternatively, the Chinese state does not share the timber companies’ interests. Here, the only interests are the levels of trade, which are very low. In either scenario, and given the above on Mali, the evidence fits with the expectations of economic interest theories.

With these theories, however, the evidence is limited and weak. It is difficult to go beyond showing a correlation between economic interests in Mali and its participation in MINUSMA, and a lack of economic interests in the CAR and its absence from MINUSCA.

Status and Prestige Theories

In this section, I aim to establish the interest levels of other powerful states towards the missions in Mali and the CAR. If there is a higher level of interest in the mission to Mali across the P3 states, it provides support for my second hypothesis, that China joined MINUSMA but not MINUSCA to improve its status and project its identity as a major power in the face of other powerful states.

France has demonstrated its high interest in both Mali and the CAR, conducting UN-approved unilateral military interventions into each country. China consulted with France regarding these missions and offered to send peacekeepers on both occasions (Holslag 2015: 223) though its peacekeepers for the CAR never materialized. These operations took place alongside regional efforts prior to the authorization of the UN-led missions. Given France’s own responses to the crises and its significant contributions to the multilateral initiatives, I focus on establishing the level of importance of each mission to the US and the UK.

Mali

While the UK has provided mostly financial support to MINUSMA, it gave more direct support to the preceding efforts. Before the start of MINUSMA, the UK provided logistical support to the French intervention mission with transport and surveillance aircrafts, and liaison personnel stationed in Bamako (Mills et al 2013: 6).
Additionally, the UK contributed personnel to the EU Training Mission of the Malian armed forces (2013: 11). At the time, it was also willing to contribute personnel to train the Anglophone troops from other countries who were sent to Mali as part of the African-led mission (2013: 7).

Regarding MINUSMA itself, the UK has provided military personnel since 2014 (Lunn 2016: 3). While these troops are minimal, the UK sees the mission as confronting part of a regional security challenge, encompassing terrorism, migration, narcotics, and the illicit small arms trade (Lunn 2016: 2). British citizens have been kidnapped, held for ransom, and murdered by terrorist groups, especially Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) (UK 2017a). With the growing number of terrorist attacks in Britain carried out in the name of radical Islamist groups, the containment or eradication of these threats is a high priority for the government. Coordination in North Africa is listed as part of the ongoing operations of the Ministry of Defence’s five-year plan and has been worked into the current Counter-Daesh effort (UK 2017b).

These concerns are reiterated in the EU’s Sahel Strategy, which builds on its security and counter-terrorism strategies, and emphasizes its commitment to the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (EU 2016: 7). Specifying Mali as one of the three core Sahelian states, the strategy foregrounds the increasingly direct impacts on the interests of European citizens, especially from the security threats of uncontrolled migratory flows, violent extremism and radicalisation, and terrorist activity (EU 2016). Preventing attacks by AQIM and affiliated groups in the Sahel and on EU territory is an urgent priority (EU 2016: 4). However, it would be misleading to surmise that the EU reached an agreement on the appropriate action to take when faced with the situation in Mali. Francioni and Bakker (2013: 5) claim that the French intervention in itself highlighted the EU’s lack of common purpose in confronting the atrocities and the security threat posed by the radical Islamists. Still, the EU established two training missions to Mali, one military as a response to UN resolutions (EU 2013), and one civilian to cooperate with MINUSCA (UK 2015a).

The US has had a continuous security interest in Mali for over ten years. Mali has been involved in, if not the focus of, four American operations, where US forces work with and provide training to their regional counterparts (Arieff 2013: 15). Prior to MINUSMA, the US supported the French operation by sharing intelligence and lending logistical and technical support. It also provided support, trainers, and equipment to the AU-led mission (US 2013). To MINUSMA itself, the US contributes few personnel (UN 2017b), but the number is not low given that wealthy states contribute fewer troops (Huang 2011: 263).

6 See also Reykers (2017) on the failure to deploy an EU Battle Group.
Arieff (2013: 4) contends that the threat posed by AQIM and associated groups is a key factor behind the American approach. The Congressional Report on Mali begins with an overview of Islamist extremist groups active in the northern region, illustrating this concern. Moreover, among the states most affected by AQIM, Mali has been the least willing or militarily capable of countering the group (Arieff 2013: 8). As a result, US officials have been uneasy about the prospect of AQIM and its affiliated groups leveraging their presence in northern Mali to carry out training and recruitment, and to advance transnational terrorist plots (Arieff 2013: 10).

From an American perspective, France’s urgent focus on Mali also appears to stem from an assessment that AQIM and other such groups pose a direct security threat, particularly that French citizens could be recruited to radical Islamist movements in northern Mali (Arieff 2013: 9). France’s sizeable West African immigrant populations are considered especially vulnerable to receiving training or financing to commit terrorist attacks in France or against French interests (Arieff 2013: 9).

Together, the P3 states appear to have a high level of concern with respect to the situation in Mali, including MINUSMA. Each country’s security priorities, namely the violent extremist groups operating in the north, have aligned. As such, there is a collective interest.

For its part, China is also increasingly concerned about violent Islamist groups. In 2009, AQIM attacked a convoy protecting Chinese workers in Algeria (Branigan 2009). Three weeks later, after protests among Muslim Uyghurs in China’s far western province of Xinjiang resulted in nearly 200 deaths, AQIM threatened retaliation against Chinese workers and projects in Africa (ibid). Furthermore, as Trédaniel and Lee (2017: 183) note, China has been trying to adopt a role in the ‘global jihad’ narrative since November 2001 by securitizing its historical animosity with Uyghurs and framing violence in the region as the work of ‘East Turkistan terrorist groups.’

Following the 2009 protests, a Strike Hard campaign was launched by Beijing against Islamic violence (Hastings 2011: 912). Strike Hard campaigns are short, intense crackdowns targeting specific issues. At least three more violent incidents occurred in 2013, including on 23 April (Trédaniel and Lee 2017: 188; BBC 2013), just before the authorization of MINUSMA. Finally, in March 2014, an attack in Kunming, the first in a series of five that year (Xinhua 2015), was proclaimed ‘China’s 9/11’ (Xinhua 2014).

China has approached France and the UK about AQIM in the past (Holslag 2015: 223), and it is clear that the P3 and China all view violent Islamist movements as a security threat.
Central African Republic

The UK’s support for MINUSCA has been mostly financial, and its interest in the conflict has been primarily driven by humanitarian concerns (UK 2013a; UK 2014b). The earliest British engagement with the conflict in the CAR was furnishing transport for the African-led International Support Mission to the Central African Republic (MISCA). The UK also provided additional bilateral financial support to the African-led mission (UK 2014a). To the French operation, the UK provided the same type of transport as it had for Mali, but it did not supply the aircraft with surveillance capabilities (UK 2013a). In early 2014, the UN approved an EU military stabilisation force, EUFOR CAR, which later transitioned to an advisory mission, to work with MINUSCA on security sector reform. (UK 2015b). The UK has not provided personnel to any of these initiatives. Despite this, according to Curran and Williams (2016: 3), the UK has taken a particular interest in MINUSCA, for which it co-sponsored resolutions and mandates. To the situation as a whole, the UK seeks improved security and humanitarian access as well as a strong, inclusive political process (UK 2014b). Overwhelmingly, the content of government sources about the CAR is descriptive of the conflict and void of any policy relevance (UK 2013a; UK 2013b; Lunn 2014).

The main concern for the EU is also humanitarian (EU 2014). The EU has shown concern about the potential regional instability caused by the conflict and Central African refugees (EU 2014), yet as with the UK, there is an absence in EU documents of links to overarching policies. While humanitarian concerns are evident, the nature of the conflict does not appear to pose a direct threat to Europe or European interests. Indeed, for EUFOR CAR, “very few member states saw the CAR as a priority for the EU. No less than six force generation conferences were needed to acquire the planned strength and, as a consequence, the formal launch of the operation was delayed on several occasions” (Tardy 2015). The force generating process was further impaired by the transpiring of the Ukrainian crisis, which took place at the same time and affected the prioritization of security threats; ultimately, France provided the majority of the missing troops (ibid). Furthermore, despite the ideal conditions for its use, no EU Battle Group was deployed (ibid).

The US, for its part, also prioritized humanitarian issues and framed the circumstances in the CAR as a threat to regional stability (Arieff and Husted 2015). The US provided logistical support and equipment, both for African countries that contributed troops to MISCA and for the French operation (Arieff and Husted 2015: 10). Further, the US seconded an unspecified number of officers to MISCA and has deployed staff officers to MINUSCA (MISCA 2014; UN 2017b). Additionally, the US allocated bilateral support to MISCA and MINUSCA (Arieff and Husted 2015: 10). According to White House archives, these efforts aimed to restore
security and provide humanitarian aid, while promoting accountability, reconciliation, and democratic governance (US 2014), which are similarly broad objectives to those professed by the UK and the EU.

However, the US also connects the CAR to other topics of interest to Congress, such as the prevention of mass atrocities, American efforts to counter the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA), and transnational crime in the region. First, while US engagement with the CAR has historically been limited, in 2013, it significantly increased humanitarian aid and diplomatic efforts to the state as part of making the prevention of mass atrocities a core principle of American foreign policy (Arieff and Husted 2015: 10). Second, the US supported Ugandan operations against the LRA, a violent Christian rebel group, from 2009 to 2017 (Cakaj 2015: 276; Okiror 2017). LRA fighters took advantage of the instability in the CAR to evade capture and increase their illegal trafficking activities (Arieff and Husted 2015: 9). These activities, the third area of concern, finance the parties to the conflict as well as the LRA (Cakaj 2015). The instability in the CAR was not conducive to the counter-LRA operation; the US would thus have had a further interest in improving the situation. More broadly, transnational criminal networks or violent extremist organizations establishing safe havens in ungoverned areas of the CAR or radicalizing local populations is a persistent source of anxiety (Arieff and Husted 2015: 11, 13).

Overall, there is clearly greater P3 interest in Mali than there is towards the CAR. This is largely due to their mutual security concern of violent Islamic extremist groups and their policy priority of containing and eliminating these threats. The links between instability abroad and security at home are at the fore of British policy. While it is difficult to find connections between the CAR and UK policy, British interest in Mali is directly linked to national and European security policy.

The US has also made clear connections between instability abroad and national security concerns, in its case, for both Mali and the CAR. However, its primary concern in Mali, the presence of violent Islamist extremist groups, is more tangible than the potential threats from the CAR. American levels of financial and personnel contributions also demonstrate a greater interest in Mali than in the CAR.

France contributed in both military and financial terms to each of the multinational efforts in addition to its own unilateral interventions, but it contributed significantly more to Mali.

China’s greater level of interest in Mali compared to the CAR is most clearly demonstrated by its participation in MINUSMA and its absence from MINUSCA. While China shares the security concern of violent Islamist extremist groups, in its few pronouncements on the CAR, China does not explicitly share the P3’s
humanitarian concerns (People’s Daily 2013; PRC 2017). Dealing with shared concerns accords with China’s self-proclaimed efforts to be a responsible great power (e.g. Sun 2017), and this strategy has also been used for China’s increasing engagement in humanitarian interventions (e.g. Davis 2011; Huang 2013). Nonetheless, the security concern in Mali is a much more dominant issue for the P3 than humanitarian matters, and given China’s continuing efforts to position itself as dealing with the same problems, Mali would be an ideal stage for China to demonstrate its responsibility and solidarity against a mutual threat.

In Table 2 below, two numbers that are higher for the CAR are the financial contributions from China and the UK. This is because the budget was slightly higher for MINUSCA than it was for MINUSMA (UN 2016a; UN 2014b). In fact, efforts in the CAR have been chronically underfunded (UN 2016b).

<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contributions</td>
<td>Personnel</td>
<td>Financial (€ millions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>403</td>
<td>34.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>4129</td>
<td>448.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>355.8</td>
</tr>
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Note: For ease of comparison, financial contributions have been converted into Euros at average year rates. Troop contributions are at final month levels for each time period where possible.
*This number does not include the unknown number of officers apparently seconded to MISCA.
**This number assumes an equal division of US$ 70 million allocated to Somalia and the CAR.

There is stronger support for these status reward theories. It follows that if China wishes to be a fellow great power, it would perform for this more powerful peer group, taking on an issue that the P3 countries all have a stake in on a stage where their attention is more focused and collectively so.

Conclusion

I have conducted a controlled comparison to investigate why China participated in the UN-led mission in Mali and not in the one in the CAR, despite its very similar nature. Using a framework of rewards as motives for intervention, I tested two sets of theories, one based on economic interests as a material reward for intervention, and one based on status and prestige as a reward from an audience of major powers. I have concluded that there is a correlation between China’s level of economic interests and its participation in the mission, but there is
insufficient evidence to demonstrate a causal effect. The second hypothesis was that China’s desire to be perceived as an equal by the UK, France, and the US was a more important motivation behind its participation in the mission to Mali and its absence from the CAR. I have concluded that there is stronger support for this hypothesis, especially due to all four states’ collective security concern of violent Islamist groups. Thus, in these cases, status reward theories exhibit greater explanatory power than economic interest theories.

My method has inherent weaknesses (Van Evera 1997: 56-57), as is evident from my conclusions, which allow for minimal analysis beyond assessing the level of congruity with the expectations of the theories. Interpreting the opaque administration of China entails challenges in access to information, but stronger methods should be used to examine China’s presence in, and especially its absence from, these and other peacekeeping interventions.

Within the scope of my study, I was unable to include the potential impacts of less visible economic interests, such as small arms sales, to both Mali and the CAR. Outside the scope of my study, there are a number of motives for intervention that could offer additional and perhaps better explanations for China’s behaviour, such as its relations with other South actors in the conflicts. For example, Chad has historically exercised considerable influence over events in the CAR.

Policy implications are somewhat premature as more case studies are needed, yet the most compelling takeaway is that China, in its quest for status, may not participate in peacekeeping interventions when there is a lack of interest from other powerful states. Two possibilities extend from this information, both assuming that China’s continued participation is desirable. First, in order to utilize China’s resources in potential peacekeeping situations, the P3 could aim to demonstrate a certain level of collective interest. In other words, the P3 could change the criteria for what constitutes great power behaviour, emphasizing responsibility. This could be effective, not only because China already seeks to present itself as responsible, emulating this value, but it could have significant positive impacts on the outcomes of peacekeeping missions.

Second, for the same purpose, knowing that China seeks respect and equal status, small measures could be effective, such as the public commendation by P3 states of China’s peacekeeping contributions. A greater measure could be including China in military training or advisory missions, an activity that the P3 states all take part in; it would indicate trust in their intentions and respect for their capacity. China’s assistance to peacekeeping efforts could be invaluable, and as the P3 learn more about China’s motives to participate, they could use the knowledge to create and take advantage of more opportunities for China’s engagement.
Reference List


