RESEARCH NOTE

'The Loud Dissenter and its Cautious Partner' – Russia, China, global governance and humanitarian intervention

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Abstract

The global issue of humanitarian intervention has become more pronounced and complicated in recent years due to increasingly diverging views on addressing security crises between the West on one side and Russia and China on the other. Despite their support for the principles of 'Responsibility to Protect' (R2P), both Russia and China are wary of Western intervention in internal conflicts after the Cold War and have become increasingly critical of Western-led armed intervention in humanitarian conflicts. Unease in Beijing and Moscow over the multilateral intervention in the 2011 Libyan conflict and their ongoing opposition to Western policies in the Syrian Civil War since 2011 would seem to point to ever more coincidence in their negative views of American and Western intervention policies. A conventional wisdom has thus emerged that there is something akin to a Sino–Russian 'bloc', with near-identical policies of discouraging armed intervention within state borders under the aegis of humanitarian intervention or the R2P doctrine, signed in 2005

(2005 World Summit). However, closer examination of Russian and Chinese positions on the Libyan and Syrian conflicts, drawing on normative and identity perspectives, reveals significant differences in how both states address intervention in civil conflicts involving human rights emergencies. Indeed, the Libyan and Syrian cases suggest that the distance between the two states on 'acceptable' policies toward international intervention in civil conflicts may actually be increasing. While Russia has assumed the role of the 'loud dissenter' in global dialogs on humanitarian intervention, China has opted for the position of a 'cautious partner'.

1 Introduction

Discussions about the changing global order, the rise of China, and the apparent shift in global power distribution from West to East (see Bates, 2007; Kang, 2007; Beckley, 2011/12; Glaser, 2011; Shifrinson and Beckley, 2013) have become ubiquitous in recent years (see Hurrell, 2006; Onea, 2013; Snyder, 2013). Concerns have also been expressed that China, and other emerging great powers, will seek to establish new forms of security cooperation in line with their own normative perspectives (Zhang, 2011), altering—or perhaps even usurping—the established Western-dominated international system, with its prevailing norms, institutions, and 'rules of the game' (see Lynch, 2007; Chin and Thakur, 2010; Larson and Shevchenko, 2010; Terhalle, 2011).

A fundamental issue is the way in which the international community has dealt with major humanitarian and security crises, and in particular the now-established global norm of 'Responsibility to Protect' (R2P), built around the doctrine of the same name. A source of controversy prior to its institutionalization (see Ayoob, 2004; MacFarlane et al., 2004; Bellamy, 2005; Wheeler and Morris, 2006), its utility has again come to the forefront of the global security agenda with the recent crises in Africa and the Middle East, particularly in Libya and Syria, as well as the 'Islamic State' (IS) insurgency in Iraq and attacks on minority peoples in that country, Mali, the Central African Republic and the rise of the extremist group Boko Haram in eastern Africa. However, this increased attention does not imply that the international community has now formed a consensus on the requirements necessary to intervene in a civil conflict, within which humanitarian conditions have either deteriorated or have been directly attacked (Bellamy and Williams, 2011).

Indeed, many non-Western powers such as China and Russia, together with the other 'emerging power' members of the 'BRICS' (Brazil, India,

and South Africa), voiced their suspicions and disapproval of this initiative both prior to and following the adoption of the 2005 Convention. Both on the international political stage and in the academic literature, China and Russia are frequently perceived as the most critical of the non-Western powers, due to their privileged position as permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) (Bellamy, 2009), their history of direct rivalry to Western strategy and ideology during the Cold War, and their long histories of being subject to invasion and border conflicts.

The significance of these two states' position on humanitarian intervention and R2P is magnified by their holding of UNSC veto power, as the R2P Convention states all initiatives must be pre-approved by the UN Security Council. Furthermore, they are often both depicted as actors concerned with maintaining the primacy of state sovereignty within the international system, referred to as 'neo-Westphalianism' (Lanteigne and Hirono, 2011), and as acting as a normative partnership in their misgivings regarding the R2P concept and its application. Indeed, their actions in relation to the Libyan conflict and the Syrian civil war, and the crisis over Ukraine in 2014, are often cited as evidence of their 'disruptive' or 'spoiler' policies with regards to R2P. For example, after China and Russia vetoed a UNSC resolution on potential sanctions on Syria's Assad government in June 2012, both states were harshly criticized by American and British officials for appearing to stand in the way of ending the conflict (Gladstone, 2012).

Furthermore, there has been much interest in the growing strategic relationship between China and Russia since the end of the Cold War. Moscow was the first major beneficiary of the 'partnership' diplomacy China undertook in the 1990s, and mutual concerns about Western power in Eurasia not only strengthened bilateral Sino–Russian ties but also contributed to the founding of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in 2001 (Cheng and Wankun, 2004; Lanteigne, 2006/7). The post-2011 American 'pivot' or 'rebalancing' policy of US strategic interests to the Asia-Pacific, along with American support for a potential Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement which excludes China and Russia, encouraged closer Sino–Russian cooperation out of concerns about future US intentions in the region (Chan, 2013).

Limited research has been undertaken into the perspectives and positions of China and Russia with regard to R2P, either individually, jointly, or in a comparative approach (Allison, 2009; Evans, 2009; Pang, 2009; Petro, 2008/9; Teitt, 2009; Fullilove, 2011; Tiewa, 2012). Indeed, the decision to focus primarily on China and Russia's positions on R2P, to the exclusion of the other

permanent members of the UNSC such as the United States, France or the UK,[1] was a response to existing literature in this area, which frequently highlights these two powers as the main 'disrupters' and opponents of R2P, particularly within the UNSC. Indeed, Russia and China are often considered a single bloc or alliance on this issue in opposition to Western powers, at times of major international crises (Lo, 2008; Brenton, 2013). The worsening diplomatic relationship in 2014, between Moscow and the West over the Ukraine crises and the emerging 'pivot to Asia' policies of President Putin, which include increased fossil fuel sales to Beijing and the development of a special economic zone in the Russian Far East city of Vladivostok, reinforced this viewpoint (Hill and Lo, 2013; RIA Novosti, 16 April 2013).

This work intends to shed more light on these two actors' position *vis-à-vis* R2P, the extent to which China and Russia have been effectively 'socialized' into accepting the R2P norm, whether or not they seek to subvert it and if they are in the process of building an alternative alliance around the issue. The empirical focus will be on examining Russian and Chinese responses toward the debates regarding R2P during recent security crises in the MENA region, namely the discussions and decisions to operationalize the principle of R2P *vis-à-vis* the crises in Libya (2011) and more recently in Syria (2011–). It is argued that while there are many similarities between the Chinese and Russian positions on R2P, there are also significant differences between their approaches to humanitarian intervention. In order to deconstruct the differing facets of China and Russia's positions toward humanitarian intervention, this paper adopts a multidimensional perspective – taking into account both their security 'cultures' in relation to state sovereignty, security, and intervention and the roles that they seek to play in international affairs (Katzenstein, 1996; Acharya, 2004; Kirchner and Sperling, 2010; Lantis, 2014; Scobell, 2014), particularly at times of significant security and humanitarian crises.

In line with constructivist perspectives in international relations, the security cultures of Russia and China should not be seen as static frames

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1   Indeed, France also forms an interesting case of a 'sober second thought' but Western power that often finds itself distant from the security positions of the UK and the United States as in the case of the Iraq invasion 2003. However, due to the limited space available in this article, the discussion in this article is limited to China and Russia as they are often the ones that are said to be forming an anti-Western opposition bloc in the UNSC against Western-led calls for the use of the R2P doctrine. For more information on the position of France vis-à-vis R2P, see Bellamy and Williams (2011), Davidson (2013), and Simonen (2012).

of reference, but as dynamic, fluid, and constantly evolving processes, especially in light of their shifting power levels (Snetkov, 2012, 2014). While the question of the role that great powers seek to play in international affairs is central to the current debate on the changing global order (Hurrell, 2006; Schweller, 2011; Shambaugh, 2011; Kahler, 2013), most of the current critique within the literature on humanitarian interventions stems from a normative perspective.

Many of the disagreements within the UNSC arise not only as a result of differing perspectives but because of the different roles that actors undertake or see others undertaking, along with the question of state identities. This paper argues that Russia is willing to adopt more public and declarative stances on issues such as the Libyan and Syrian conflicts, whereas conversely, China appears to prefer a more conservative, understated approach in line with international laws and norms, often assuming the identity of a middle power rather than a great power, preferring multilateral solutions to humanitarian crises and taking on the persona of a 'joiner' within international regimes dedicated to promoting peace and stability. This is partly due to Beijing's desire to counter impressions, especially in the West, of a 'China threat' (*Zhongguo weixie*) as a result of the country's rise. In China's view, as long as Chinese interests are not adversely affected and a challenge to Chinese values including the sovereignty of the Chinese state is not perceived in a particular initiative, China is in practice, more open to engagement and participation. Like Russia, China remains sensitive to Western policies of *de facto* regime change as part of humanitarian missions but has been reluctant to assume an independent 'spoiler' stance which could amplify the perception of a 'China threat'. Thus, any analysis of the two states' responses to R2P must therefore also consider the different roles China and Russia seek to play in relation to such crises.

2 The 'Loud Dissenter': Russia's security culture, global role, and the principle of humanitarian intervention

2.1 Russia's security culture

In spite of signing the R2P doctrine and adopting a softer interpretation of the principle of sovereignty, since the end of the Cold War, Russia has retained a state-centric approach to security. Drawing on its history of

mass-citizen upheavals, revolutions, civil wars and invasions, and more recent conflicts in Chechnya, South Ossetia, and Crimea/Eastern Ukraine, a strong state and respect for sovereignty is historically positioned as a pre-requisite to avoid chaos and violence ('President of Russia', 2012). Tellingly, the key focus of President Vladimir Putin's policies upon coming to power in 2000 was the re-building of a strong state within Russia, in order to address and alleviate the instability and socio-economic chaos at the end of the 1990s (Snetkov, 2015). Thus, 'human security' is viewed alongside state and societal stability, while the formal institutions and trappings of statehood are prioritized at the expense of wider discussion about the functioning of state processes. As noted in Moscows 2009 *National Security Concept*, 'the main long-term directions of state policy in the sphere of state and public security must be the reinforcement of the role of the state as guarantor of the security of the individual' (Russian Security Council, 2009).

The principles of state sovereignty and the fear of external actors becoming involved in a sovereign state's internal affairs continue to play a central role in Russian security culture, frequently resulting in frictions in its relations with the West, as Moscow becomes increasingly wary of any perceived interference in its domestic and regional affairs from state or non-state actors (Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2011). Ongoing frictions have continued over issues such as the Chechen conflicts (1994–96; 1999–2009), the Yukos Affair, the 'color revolutions' in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan in 2004–06, the high-profile assassinations of journalist Anna Politkovskaya in Moscow and former intelligence officer Aleksandr Litvinenko in London, and more recently the 2012 'Pussy Riot' legal case and the controversial June 2013 law against the dissemination of 'homosexual propaganda' (AFP/Telegraph, 2013 30 June 2013). Tensions between the West and Moscow reached new heights in 2014 with the Russian annexation of Crimea and the subsequent rebellion in Eastern Ukraine, widely viewed as being indirectly supported by Moscow. In addition, on the global stage, President Putin has continued to re-iterate his complaints about international actors which disregard state sovereignty, declaring that they adopt 'missile-and-bomb democracy' (Valdai Club, 27 February 2012). Thus, Russia remains highly critical of any suggestion of external interference into domestic spaces becoming the norm in international affairs.

The preservation of 'cultural plurality' within the international system also remains prominent, gaining an ever greater prominence in Russia's foreign security policy agenda (Herszenhorn and Kramer, 2013). The key point of contestation is not over the form, but rather, the content of these different international norms. For example, despite repeated declarations of support for human rights, Russia also maintains that 'nobody has a monopoly over what constitutes human rights' (Valdai Club, 27 February 2012). It is therefore argued that global norms should be implemented in line with national traditions and local norms (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Russia, 15 February 2013).

A clear distinction, however, exists between areas seen as local and those as distant within Russia's geopolitical foreign policy script. Events in what Moscow considers its own neighborhood and those in other regions of the world continue to be considered very differently. Its post-Soviet legacy means that Russian authorities continue to see the space of the former Soviet Union as its area of 'privileged interest' ('President of Russia', 31 August 2008). While it might not be intent on reconstituting a 'Soviet Union 2.0', Moscow's view of 'its' region or 'near abroad' (*blizhneye zarubezhye*) has closely influenced its internal security thinking since the presidency of Boris Yeltsin in the 1990s, with an emphasis on 'sovereignty, regime stability and noninterference in the internal affairs of these states' (Averre, 2009). Accordingly, Moscow follows a much less principled position toward events and circumstances within this immediate external space, as demonstrated most recently in Russia's action *vis-à-vis* Crimea and Eastern Ukraine.

By contrast, it is more circumspect in its global policies, acknowledging that the international system is becoming increasingly multipolar, with different powers and regions gaining increasing influence (Putin, 2012), with no single power or bloc able to exert complete control over the international system (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Russia, 13 September 2012). In turn, the West is seen as a disruptive actor amidst the changing global order, seeking to recover the loss of its earlier dominance in global economic and political spheres (Putin, 2007), a perception that was exacerbated by the US-led military operation in Iraq (2003–12). For Russia, such moves are said to result in increased instability and overt competition in international affairs (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Russia, 13 September 2012).

However, despite acknowledging the need to democratize the international system, Russia is also a status quo power, particularly when it comes to the United Nations, which ensures Russia a privileged position as a veto power in the UNSC. In this regard, Moscow is highly critical of what it sees as the West's 'attempts to divide States into "bad" and "good" or "pupils" and "tutors" and to dilute the interstate character of the Council' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Russia, 1 March 2011). An opponent of any attempts to revise commonly accepted legal norms within the UN Charter and weaken the power of the UN, and most importantly, the UN Security Council (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Russia, 5 April 2011), Moscow is a proponent of strengthening the legal basis of international relations, and the preeminence of international law ('President of Russia', 7 May 2012).

2.2 Russia's role and behavior in international affairs

Raising its profile internationally at the same time as pursuing an independent, unique, self-assured, and 'responsible' foreign policy remains central to Russia's contemporary security culture (President of Russia, 15 February 2013). As a defender of normative pluralism, meaning the existence and proliferation of norms from different levels and directions within the international system, Moscow riles against those actors seeking to impose foreign models of behavior onto other international actors (Putin, 2007). This theme played a considerable role in its discourse on the 'global war on terror' (Snetkov, 2012) and has continued to permeate its discourse over the prospect for changing global order.

As part of its attempts to increase its role internationally, and as a permanent member of the UNSC, it continues to consider itself as a guardian of international security. It demands that its opinion be sought and its position respected at times of crises. As noted by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, the UN veto is an important instrument for avoiding the mistakes of the League of Nations, the precursor to the UN which he suggests 'collapsed because of ignoring of the interests of the largest states' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Russia, 13 September 2012). In this respect, Russia views its UN veto as a special privilege that grants it a significant role internationally (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Russia, 15 February 2013). Moscow is sensitive to any international security crises where its voice, via the UNSC, is disregarded, and such snubs tend to lead to Russia

returning to a much more vocal, obstinate, and obdurate position, as seen during the Kosovo crisis in 1998–99 (Dobriansky, 2000), the Iraq crisis in 2003 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Russia, 21 January 2004), and most recently in the events in Libya (2011) and in Syria (2011–). It thus remains very sensitive to events or circumstances in which its position as a great power is challenged or is seen to be undermined by other international actors, while embracing its role and position as a mediator in international disputes.[2]

However, conscious of its diminished international status, the role it seeks to play in most international security crises is primarily that of an overseeing authority. Despite seeking to develop its relations with other regions, as demonstrated by its policy toward the SCO and the BRICS, the G8 and the G20 (Latukhina, 2013), the regime in Moscow acknowledges that it has neither the capacity nor the interest in becoming actively engaged in all international crises and thus continues to stress the importance of abiding by international law when resolving international disputes and crises (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Russia, 1 March 2011). Indeed, even in the case of the Ukraine crisis and the Russian annexation of Crimea, the Putin regime has sought to base its positions on what it sees as the principle of international law and the illegality of the existing regime in Kiev, thus seeking to justify—despite extensive criticism from the international community—its actions in this particular crisis according to this logic (Moiseienko 2014).

2.3 Russia's position toward the R2P norm and the principle of humanitarian interventions

Even at its signing in 2005, Russia was expressing its reservations about the Convention of R2P potentially weakening the principle of state sovereignty in international affairs. It, therefore, remains a fervent supporter of the UNSC Charter, which enshrines the principle of sovereignty, international law, and noninterference in the internal affairs of states. For Russia, as a power that proclaims its support for the maintenance of international law,

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2   Both as a result of historical circumstances and due to its ongoing interest in preserving its international role, Russia is currently involved in many of international mediation forums, such as the Six Nations talks on Iran, the suspended Six-Party Talks (SPT) on North Korea, and the Middle East Quartet.

humanitarian intervention should only ever be sanctioned through the UNSC (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Russia, 13 September 2012).

The significance of R2P, for Russia, is primarily as an institutionalized principle within the UN, rather than as representing a widespread change in valuation of state sovereignty within the international system. As Russia does not usually initiate nor veto such proposals, it sees itself as a responsible international power that uses its veto wisely and sparingly (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Russia, 13 September 2012) and as such, during most major humanitarian crises, its role is primarily that of a disinterested partner that does not seek to be involved, rather than as a disruptive force. Despite its stated goal of increasing its involvement in UN peacekeeping operations, Russia does not tend to deploy its troops on the ground in remote locations as demonstrated in the case of Darfur in Sudan, Côte d'Ivoire or the post-Arab Spring events in the Middle East ('President of Russia, 2011', 21 March 2011). Indeed, as of July 2014, Russia had deployed 107 personnel to peacekeeping missions from a total of over ninety-six thousand. China, at the same time, had 2196 personnel serving in UN peace operations (United Nations, 2014 31 July 2014).

From the Russian perspective, frictions regarding R2P arise largely as a result of the way it is applied in practice, particularly by the West, rather than from the principle itself. Events such as Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and Syria have, for Russia, become precedents by which Western powers have 'instrumentalized' the principle of humanitarian intervention to further their own agendas internationally (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Russia, 23 May 2012). This was the particular argument made during the Libya crisis,[3] and most recently in the case of Syria, when Russia's first UNSC veto was presented as a responsible response (Baklanov, 2011) to prevent the 'irresponsible' West from misusing this norm to further their own ends (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Russia, 13 September 2012), a concern shared by China.

In line with its strategic culture, Russia remains deeply suspicious of any proposal that appears to encourage regime change (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Russia, 13 February 2012; 15 February 2013). However, its critique of forced regime changes in the international sphere stems not only

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3   The Russian authorities regarded the West's actions in Libya as going beyond the narrow mandate set out in the UNSC Resolution 1973 over the establishment of the no-fly zone over Libya. See Ministry of Foreign Affairs website, 5 April 2011.

from its attempts to preserve state sovereignty as the guiding principle of international affairs (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Russia, 3 March 2012) but also from its fear of 'statelessness' as a product of Russia's own long history of civil conflict (S. Lavrov, 15 June 2012).

Instead of the use of force, Russia advocates diplomacy as the best route for resolving such civil crises (Russia Today, 11 February 2013), as in the case of the conflicts in Darfur (Sudan), Myanmar (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Russia, 13 January 2007; 23 May 2009), Côte d'Ivoire (Anishchuk, 2011), Libya, and most recently in Syria. In the latter case, Russia maintained its position that the Syrians should decide on their own future at the negotiation table with all the parties included. The Putin government publically declared their lack of concern about the survival or future of the Assad regime, acknowledging that change was needed, but refused to support any proposal advocating regime change by outside forces (President of Russia, 2012, 20 December 2012). Unlike in the case of China, Moscow's strategic interests in Syria go beyond the issue of precedent, as the Russian Naval facility at Tartus, north of Damascus, is a key port for Russian vessels in the Mediterranean and the last remaining Russian military installation outside of the former USSR, as well as a staging point for future strategic relations with nearby Cyprus (*Deutsche Welle*, 29 June 2013).

Russia supported the Geneva Communiqué in July 2012, setting out the principle of a transitional authority in Syria, primarily because it did not call for outright regime change. In contrast, Russia vetoed a July 2012 UNSC resolution against Syria and criticized the West for being too hasty in advocating policies which would amount to regime change (Lavrov, 2012), and in the process undermine international law and the 2005 Convention on the Responsibility to Protect. In a December 2013 editorial in *Pravda*, Russian support for UN actions in Libya was viewed as a 'mistake' which brought about regime change but also unleashed factional fighting which continued to plague the country long after the fall of the Gaddafi government (Lulka, 2013).

In an attempt to raise its international profile, Russia has been willing to act as a mediator and engage in shuttle diplomacy between warring parties, as in the case of Libya, and most recently, Syria. While Katz suggested that Russia's current policy in Syria undermined its previous efforts to boost its role in the Middle East (Katz, 2012), the Putin regime maintains it has acted responsibly by assuming this mediator role. Indeed, Russia's willingness to position itself both as a 'loud dissenter' and a

mediator between the warring parties was most aptly illustrated when it proposed in September 2013 to bring Syria's chemical weapons under international oversight, following a chemical attack by the Assad regime in the suburbs of Damascus in August (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Russia, 28 September 2013). Furthermore, in a controversial September 2013 opinion piece in the *New York Times*, Putin denigrated the 'common-place' policy in the United States of supporting armed intervention in civil conflicts, noting that in the cases of Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya, security was not achieved (Putin, 2013).

Despite adopting this very public role as a mediator for the regime, Moscow also emphasized that most mediation efforts should be under-taken either by the UN or regional actors (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Russia, 28 September 2013). In Syria, Russia backed the Arab League ini-tiative which was better aligned with its version of how such humanitarian crises should be resolved. In this respect, Russia appeared to have come to accept the importance of the role that regional actors can and should play in such crises as enshrined within the 2005 R2P Convention. However, fric-tions remain as much over who decides which regional actors have the le-gitimacy to speak for the region, as about the principle of R2P itself.

Moreover, Russia has begun to utilize the principle of R2P to justify its own foreign policy actions closer to home. This was most telling during the brief 2008 Russia–Georgia war, during which Russia suggested that its intervention in Georgia was to prevent mass killings in the disputed region of South Ossetia (Coppieters, 2012). This version of events was loudly cri-ticized both by Georgia and the international community (Evans, 2009), with even the EU-led Independent Fact Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia criticizing Russia's use of the terms of humanitarian interven-tion to justify its actions (EU, 2009). Similarly, in the case of Russia's pos-ition toward the Ukraine crisis in 2014 and its annexation of Crimea – the Putin regime argued that the authorities in Kiev were preparing to commit mass atrocities against the Russian-speaking populations in South-eastern regions. In turn, the Russian authorities moved to call on the principle of R2P, which, at least in part, served to justify their actions in supporting/ propping up those particular military factions. In addition, both these crises demonstrated, at least for the Russian side, that the West no longer has the sole prerogative to use or, as in the case of Russia in Georgia or Ukraine, abuse the principle of R2P in order to justify its role and behavior

in its foreign policy (for more on this debate, see Allison, 2008; Evans, 2009).

At this stage, and despite the 2008 Georgia war and the 2014 crisis in Ukraine, Russia remains reluctant to incorporate this norm within its own region. Indeed, despite making some use of this norm within its regional policy, it does so alongside other principles and justifications for its actions, such as historical precedents as in the case of Crimea or self-defense as in the case of Georgia in protecting its peacekeepers, rather than solely justifying its actions on the principle of R2P, as was for example the case in the West's attempts to use the norm of R2P in the case of Libya. However, this may change in the future. Russia is currently seeking to increase regional mechanisms and instruments within its own regional sphere giving it the capacity for future intervention in regional security crises, as demonstrated by Russian support for both the SCO and the Collective Security Treaty Organization, although both of these regional instruments are built around the core principle of maintaining sovereignty and noninterference in domestic affairs (President of Russia, 19 December 2012). Nonetheless, Russia remains reluctant to make R2P a decisive principle in its foreign policy, particularly when it comes to international, rather than regional, security crises.

3 The 'Cautious Partner': China's security culture, global role, and the principle of humanitarian intervention

3.1 China's security culture

Although China's security thinking and emerging grand strategy has long been the subject of much internal debate, most notably after the death of Mao Zedong in 1976, the current period of security policy restructuring under the administration of Xi Jinping (2012–) has presented new challenges both domestically and internationally. Much of this evolving policy thinking has stemmed from Beijing's views that conflict in the international system was being defined less by state-to-state conflict and more by civil wars and nontraditional security issues, including the threat of international terrorism. As well, since the 1990s, Beijing has participated more frequently in international regimes and 'norm-making' in proportion to its growing political, economic, and strategic power. Yet, there remains a level

of sensitivity in Chinese foreign policy toward 'great power chauvinism' from the West, coupled with unease in the face of having to assume both the responsibilities and the rights inherent in great power status, resulting in the persistence of 'stage fright' (*qiechang*) in some of China's international relations, particularly in regions outside of East Asia (Lanteigne, 2013a,b).

Since the 1990s, Beijing has sought to counter perceived Western strategic trends toward more activist intervention in civil conflicts by reinforcing its traditional ideas of state sovereignty, modifying these views by adapting a policy which argued that intervention needed to be carried out in the 'right' fashion, via multilateral regimes such as the UN and not via great powers (read: the United States). This was a considerable shift from the Maoist era in the 1950s–60s, when Beijing advanced a strategic doctrine which stood against great power 'imperialism' and stressed the need for developing states, especially those in Asia, to respect each other's territorial integrity, avoid interference in other states' sovereign affairs, and solve disputes through dialog rather than force (Odgaard, 2012). These ideas were given new life immediately after the cold war due to concerns about American 'hyper-power' and unilateral activism within local and civil conflicts, including the 1991 Iraq–Kuwait war (although Beijing opted to abstain during that particular UNSC vote rather than veto), and subsequently in UN interventions in Bosnia–Herzegovina, Haiti, Rwanda, and Somalia. Beijing was even less pleased with the unilateral American military actions undertaken outside of the egis of the United Nations, the primary example being the 1999 Kosovo conflict (Chen, 2003).

The most concrete example of these new policy shifts had been Beijing's evolving post-cold war policy of a 'New Security Concept' (*xin anquan guandian*), an idea which despite its vagueness, assumed increasing levels of importance in Chinese foreign and strategic policies first developed under President Jiang Zemin in the 1990s. The NSC offered a far more multifaceted approach to security and cooperation, as evidenced by Beijing's attempts to develop bilateral strategic 'partnerships', as well as interacting more positively with multilateral institutions, especially on the regional, Asia-Pacific level. As well, the NSC had been designed as a primary tool for Beijing to downplay any perceived coercive or revisionist nature of its rising power in Asia and beyond, while emphasizing the country's increasing importance as a strategic partner rather than emerging adversary (Lampton, 2005).

The NSC was heavily influenced by Maoist era 'Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence' and stressed equality and noninterference (Sha, 2000). The Principles had their origins in regional talks between China, Myanmar (Burma), and India in the 1950s as means were sought to promote peaceful interaction between states with different social systems in ways which discouraged alliance or bloc mindsets. Then-Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai was credited with their integration into Chinese foreign policy doctrine in 1954. The Five Principles, mutual respect for sovereignty and territory, non-aggression, noninterference in internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful co-existence, were also praised in China for their flexibility and resiliency, since they were adaptable to both cold war and post-cold war strategic interactions (Scobell, 2003; Cheng and Wankun, 2004: 185).

However, what distinguished the NSC was that unlike previous strategic ideologies, which aligned China against perceived enemy forces, especially imperialism and later hegemonism, the NSC did not identify a third party as an adversary, but rather nodded to the Deng Xiaoping-era idea of 'do not seek an enemy' (*bu xunzhao di*) (Liu, 2004), and avoid becoming entangled in great power security concerns. During the 1991 Gulf War, China reacted to American views of a 'new world order' (*shijie zhixu*) with some distrust, interpreting this idea as Washington's attempt to consolidate a hegemonic position on the international level in the wake of the Soviet Union's fall. Beijing policymakers instead referred to the more statist idea of an 'international order' (*guoji zhixu*), which was multipolar and respected state sovereignty. There were hopes that the post-cold war international system would become increasingly multipolar (Ren, 2010), with the United States, Russia, China, Europe, and possibly India becoming main great powers.

China also advocated increasing political, economic, and technological cooperation as a further means of strengthening ties between states, rather than using only military power as a basis for linkages (Miller and Liu, 2011). Since the 1990s, Beijing argued that the alliance-based forms of cooperation were being inappropriately carried over into the post-cold war international system, as in the case of NATO. The 1999 NATO operations in Kosovo did much to fan both nationalism and anti-Americanism in China due to perceived disdain in Washington toward international norms and the accidental destruction of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade by NATO airstrikes in May of that year (Gries, 2004). The development of the R2P principles in the late

1990s was also not well-received by policymakers in Beijing, who initially feared that such ideas amounted to a codification of great power rights to intervene under the guise of humanitarian intervention.

Alternatives to the formalized alliance system were suggested within China's 2000 and 2002 National Defense White Papers, which stressed that security cooperation should be based on mutual respect and consensus rather than great power confrontation (China's National Defence in 2000: 48). A revised 2008 Defense White Paper focused on the fact that China's overall security situation was improving and that various forms of strategic cooperation were bearing fruit. However, the paper added that the primary concerns of separatist forces both in Taiwan and Tibet, as well as the fact that global terrorism and economic insecurity problems, were still prevalent. These matters were echoed in China's 2010 Defense White Paper, which was only released in March 2011. The unrest which took place in Tibet in 2008 and Xinjiang a year later bolstered Chinese concerns about separatism and potential tacit intervention by foreign actors (China's National Defence in 2008, 2010).

The NSC, and China's overall evolving approach to humanitarian intervention, could therefore be considered as a means for Beijing to create greater linkages between maintaining a stable periphery and ensuring greater security on the international level. While the concept did not stand against R2P *per se*, it did seek to prevent perceived abuses of humanitarian intervention norms. This idea was very much in keeping with cooperative security theory and was a result of China's growing confidence in its diplomatic skills, as evidenced by what was termed China's 'new flexibility and sophistication' in its approaches to bilateralism, multilateralism, and security relations (Medeiros and Fravel, 2003). These issues became more evident as China accelerated its strategic activities in East Asia after 2009, including the modernization of its military and the further pressing of its maritime claims to the East and South China Seas despite regional opposition from Japan and Southeast Asia and growing unease in the United States (Scott, 2012; Hobart, 2013).

However, the Chinese policies of the NSC and the broader and more nebulous 'peaceful rise' (*heping jueqi*) concept, or the less politically sensitive 'peaceful development' (*heping fazhan*) doctrine under then-President Hu Jintao (Glaser and Medeiros, 2007), are increasingly giving way to a heightened pragmatism under Xi as China's international power develops. China is now beginning to distinguish between acceptable and

unacceptable forms of intervention, and therefore, Beijing's policy is demonstrating greater flexibility than the Russian model and encompassing a more internationalist viewpoint. Indeed, Beijing now has the confidence to accept and sometimes even participate in international peacebuilding operations, even in civil conflicts, and is also able to link disparate forms of security together as it formulates its own distinct views of how humanitarian operations should be implemented.

3.2 China's role and behavior in international affairs

Despite its remarkable rise in power on several fronts, including political, economic, and strategic (Barnett and Duvall, 2005), it is unlikely China's strategic behavior will be changing toward overt 'empire-building' or attempts to challenge Western-dominated organizations and norms, primarily because much of the international system has served Beijing well as it emerged from the isolation of the late-Maoist period and began to engage the international system on several fronts in the 1980s. Nonetheless, despite China's ascension to great power status by 2000, there remains a sensitivity in Chinese policy circles toward 'peaceful evolution' (*heping jinhua*), namely the erosion of the communist government in China not through direct force, but rather through tacit political, economic, and cultural means (Ong, 2007). The ex-USSR color revolutions and the subsequent Arab Spring protests only increased these sensitivities.

Beijing also remains determined to avoid any recurrence of diplomatic seclusion, which it experienced during the height of the Cold War, resulting in a mindset of being 'isolated and surrounded' (Kennedy, 1988). As China settles into great power status, it has demonstrated unusual sensitivity toward its international image. Institutional engagement and a more comprehensive and flexible approach to security have addressed these concerns and have created stronger ties between Chinese policy and international security issues. Despite much talk in Western governments since the 1990s about 'embedding' Beijing within various international networks in order to prevent the country from developing into a giant revisionist power, the current embedding process is having an opposite effect. As China develops a more distinct strategic policy through institutional engagement, what sovereignty Beijing might be losing through institutional cooperation is being increasingly offset by the fact that international security is being increasingly tied to Chinese strategic interests. In short, as China rises, its

security interests are frequently attracting greater international scrutiny. Arguably until the Ukraine crisis in 2014, the same could not be said for Russia.

Beijing's primary strategic concerns on the regional level have been that of 'containment' policies, or 'strategic encirclement' (*zhanlue baowei*), by the United States and its allies (Garver and Wang, 2010). Like Russia, China is a country with several land and sea neighbors and a history of border conflicts. Beijing had noted, using the USSR as an example, aggressive foreign policies can often trigger a counter-balancing coalition, as evidenced by the onset of the Western containment policies against the Soviet Union in the twentieth century. Beijing could ill-afford such a scenario during a time of delicate domestic reforms. Under Hu, and continuing under President Xi, with China's strategic and economic interests spread out over a much wider area beyond Asia, concerns about 'containment' are not limited to the standard definition of having one's own territory ringed by adversarial actors. Rather, Beijing is also increasingly wary of having its overseas commitments challenged by the West under the guise of human rights promotion and interference in civil conflicts, especially in resource-rich areas such as Africa and Central Asia. Thus, compared with Russia, concerns about 'economic containment' weigh much more in China's opinions about humanitarian intervention, especially since the Chinese economy is growing at a much stronger pace than Russia's, a situation likely to continue given Western sanctions on Moscow in 2014, following the deepening Ukraine crises.

There is also the realization in Beijing that many of its security issues have become increasingly intertwined, and thus far too complex to address unilaterally. Community-building and the growing number of bilateral and multilateral ties in the region have become increasingly important for China to ensure the safety of its interests both within and outside of its borders. However, these initiatives will need to be supplemented with a more robust policy toward humanitarian intervention, better reflecting China as a great power with interests rapidly spreading far beyond the Pacific Rim.

3.3 China's position toward the R2P norm and the principle of humanitarian interventions

As a result of its increasing global role, the prospect of a more independent Chinese stance on humanitarian intervention has slowly begun to gain

currency. In this case, Beijing is being increasingly viewed in the West as stepping onto center stage and obtaining enough power to not only become a dominant actor in the international system, but also to set the rules for the creation and maintenance of international norms. Nonetheless, Chinese views on intervention in the name of human rights remain subject to internal debates, especially as the government of Xi Jinping began to construct its foreign policy platforms after 2013.

In comparison with Moscow, Beijing's stance on intervention has shifted, becoming more nuanced since the end of the 1990s (Ding, 1990), as evidenced by China's increasingly positive response to United Nations' operations, including in East Timor (now Timor-Leste) in 1999 (Gill and Reilly, 2000; Lanteigne, 2012), and greater enthusiasm for and participation in other UN peacekeeping initiatives elsewhere. Beijing has repeatedly indicated that certain conditions are required, such as specific UN Security Council approval, for 'proper' intervention to take place. Thus, at the beginning of the Iraq conflict, Beijing did not openly oppose US actions but was dismayed at both the lack of participation of the UN and the nature of the American-led 'coalition of the willing', which served to further bypass, in China's view, the primacy of international law when addressing global threats (Green, 2008). In response to the 2005 World Summit on R2P, Beijing's responses were largely positive, and in a government position paper on the subject, the Chinese government guardedly noted that each state held the responsibility for the safety of its citizens and that 'reckless intervention' should be discouraged. When international intervention was required, the paper added, its conduct should be undertaken with 'prudence' and within UN guidelines (Teitt, 2008; Foreign Ministry, China, 7 June 2005).

Furthermore, since 2008, China made further adjustments in its R2P policies as the country became more widely accepted as a great power both on a regional level and increasingly on a global level. More recent examples of intervention on humanitarian grounds have prompted further reconsideration of whether the country should or should not support such operations, starting with the Russian military operations against Georgia over South Ossetia that year. Beijing declined a request from Russia to sign a communiqué supportive of the operation. China's unhappiness at the conflict erupting during the long-planned Beijing Olympics produced a measured rebuke from the Chinese government stating that the spirit of the 'Olympic truce' had been broken. China refused to support a precedent

which would negatively affect its own national interests. It was felt that Beijing could not decry 'splittist' (*fenlie zhuyi*) or secessionist forces seeking to promote illegal secessionist movements (such as in the case of Taiwan or Tibet), while at the same time condoning Russia's actions against Georgia (Swanström, 2008; Turner, 2009).

Beijing found itself in a similar situation as a result of the 2014 Crimea crisis, trying to juggle its antipathy toward unilateral great power intervention with the desire to maintain strong links with Moscow. This has resulted in considerable diplomatic contortions on Beijing's part. For example, when asked about whether the Crimea invasion could be considered intervention in the affairs of another sovereign state, the response from a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman was that Beijing upheld its views on nonintervention but that 'we take into account the historical facts and realistic complexity of the Ukrainian issue' (China Foreign Ministry, 2014; Ding, 2014).

Post-cold war civil conflicts, and international responses to them, also demonstrated the asymmetrical nature of the Sino–Russian relationship, as well as their sometimes-differing views on how intervention and R2P should be interpreted. As one study noted, China can ill-afford to allow its relations with Moscow to adversely affect its lucrative Western linkages, and at the same time, 'China as a partner confers a degree of respectability on Russian foreign policy, whereas the reverse is not the case' (Lo, 2008). The question of what China's direct strategic interests were in the Russia–Georgia conflict is also relevant, since as one editorial noted shortly after the conflict, Beijing did not have a very strong stake in the war given that the nature of the conflict was a geopolitical dispute between Russia and the West rather than a larger ideological struggle, despite Chinese misgivings about Western strategic advances in Eurasia as a result of the color revolutions (Hsin Pao, 2008, 31 August).

The Arab Spring protests across the Middle East and North Africa also created a challenge for the Chinese government. As with the color revolutions in the former Soviet Union, the Hu government was anxious to avoid a 'demonstration effect' of sympathetic protests in China (Kennedy, 2012). While the changes in government in Tunisia, Egypt, and Yemen took place largely without external influence, the situation was far different for Libya when the Gaddafi regime sought to militarily push back against the protests, which by 2011 had turned into full-scale rebellion. Similarly to Russia, China abstained rather than veto the UNSC Resolution 1973 in

March 2011, allowing it to pass even though a Chinese spokesperson after-word noted that his government 'had serious difficulty with parts of the resolution' largely due to concerns about precedent (Bellamy, 2011). Beijing was supportive of the international sanctions placed on the Gaddafi regime during the previous month, which underscored Chinese opposition to the escalating violence.

During early 2011, Beijing also took the extraordinary step of diverting one of its naval vessels, the frigate *Xuzhou*, which had been serving with the multinational counter-piracy coalition off the coast of Somalia, to provide cover for the evacuation of over 35,000 Chinese nationals living and working in Libya (Yan, 2011; Lanteigne, 2013a,b). This was a clear break from previous resistance from China within the UNSC to interfer-ence in what Beijing viewed as strictly internal affairs, as evidenced by China's controversial January 2007 use of the veto against a Security Council resolution, which would have punished the military junta in Myanmar for systematic human rights abuses. Russia had vetoed that reso-lution as well, marking the first use of the Sino–Russian 'double veto' (*shuangchong foujue*) since 1972, with Moscow siding with China in the view that the Security Council was not the best forum for addressing in-ternal human rights issues (China Daily, 13 January 2007).

Shortly after the Gaddafi regime was toppled, Beijing found itself at odds with the successor National Transitional Council in Tripoli over Beijing's longstanding support for the previous regime, and China was also sensitive to attempts by the West to limit new Chinese financial initia-tives in postwar Libya (Dow Jones, 21 October 2011; *Xinhua/BBC Monitoring*, 9 September 2011). Beijing paid a heavy price for its *de facto* abandonment of the Gaddafi government, as it was suggested that Beijing lost approximately US$20 billion in bilateral economic deals with Tripoli after the regime collapsed (Yun, 2013). As well, China remained vexed with what it perceived was the use of UNSC to essentially force regime change in Libya by proxy. There was the impression in Beijing that China had been maneuvered into tacitly supporting Libyan regime change under the guise of halting hostilities.

Beijing's irritation with the Libya issue would resurface when the United Nations sought to address the worsening security situation in Syria, when protests against the regime of Bashar Al-Assad descended into full civil war between regime loyalists and various rebel forces during 2012. Like Russia, the Chinese government saw history about to repeat

itself and China, alongside Russia, used its veto four times since 2011 to block resolutions calling for punitive measures against the Assad government for violence against the Syrian people.

Outgoing Chinese Foreign Minister Yang, 2012 stressed in July 2012 that the best solution to the Syrian crisis was peaceful dialog and opposed the imposition of a political solution from outside actors. His successor, Wang Yi, followed the same path by condemning the presence of chemical weapons in Syria, noting that China had been the victim of such weapons during the Second World War and supporting the immediate destruction of such arms, but also calling for nonmilitary solutions (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China, 1 July 2012; Ministry of Foreign Affairs China, 15 September 2013, 28 September 2013). The insistence by both governments that diplomacy was the best solution to the crisis at the same time as the Assad regime was openly suppressing dissent through violence rankled Western policymakers who were under increasing pressure to directly intervene.

The third double-veto on action in Syria, in July 2012, brought condemnation from Washington and London and halted the possibility of the UN imposing direct sanctions on the Assad regime (Goldstone, 2012). Similarly to Moscow, Beijing viewed the resolution as 'problematic' and one-sided in favor of the splintering rebel forces. In explaining its decision, there was the stressing that China's objections were procedural rather than political, namely that the resolution opened the door to excessive outside interference in the conflict, and were not based on any direct interests Beijing had in the outcome of the dispute (*Xinhua*, 19 July 2012). A fourth double-veto was issued in May 2014, when a US-backed, France-drafted proposition was introduced to refer Syria to the International Criminal Court, which China and Russia do not recognize (ironically, neither does the United States). China's primary concern was that such actions would hamper international attempts to broker a cease-fire (Sengupta, 2014; *People's Daily*, 22 May 2014).

As the violence continued, however, China attempted to walk more of a middle diplomatic road in keeping with the country's growing Middle East interests and sensitivity to being labeled obstructionist. Beijing maintained that any solution to the Syrian conflict had to come from within the country but also advocated a cease-fire and called upon the Syrian government to accept peace talks and a negotiated leadership transition. Beijing was also scornful of American threats, later retracted, to use military

strikes on Syria in the wake of a chemical weapons attack outside of Damascus in August 2013. China was supportive of the Russian-led initiative to have international observers locate and destroy chemical weapons supplies. At a September 2013 SCO summit in Bishkek, President Xi applauded the deal and reiterated his call for a cease-fire (Pennington, 2013; Kyrgyz Television 1/BBC Monitoring, 14 December 2013). Akin to Russia, Beijing also sought to turn the Syria situation to its benefit, however, by painting its policies as conservative and constructive in contrast to the erratic and activist stances taken by the West. In the days before an international conference on the Syrian conflict was held in Geneva in January 2014, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi introduced a broad five-point plan for addressing the conflict, namely that the solution must be political, that a settlement must be determined by the Syrian people, that the peace process must be inclusive, that the successor government must achieve 'national reconciliation and unity', and that the international community must provide humanitarian aid to the country (Xinhua/People's Daily, 20 January 2014). However, unless diplomacy in any form contributes to an end to the violence in Syria, a process further complicated by the 2014 rise of the Islamic State insurgency in next-door Iraq, it will become more difficult for Beijing to shake off the impression that it is a spoiler, not a helper, in that conflict.

Despite impressions that China and Russia have similar goals in denouncing the possibility of Western-led military intervention in Syria, China's concerns were more abstract as compared with Moscow's worries about losing a key ally (and strategic military installation), in the Middle East. Unlike in other parts of the Middle East, China has few economic assets in Syria, and Beijing has only made baby steps into the labyrinthine process of Middle East peace negotiations, partially out of concern about losing what one commentator referred to as its '*tabula rasa*' status of being nonaligned in that region (Tiezzi, 2014). After supporting UN resolutions against Libya when the country fell into civil war, Beijing was nonetheless dismayed when NATO began operations which directly contributed to the fall of the Gaddafi regime in August 2011 (Calabrese, 2013: 10–13) Thus, Beijing was wary of making the same mistakes with Syria and benefitted from having similar views as Russia, preventing Beijing from being the only Security Council dissenter and possibly causing greater damage to its delicate regional relations with the Middle East.

4 Conclusion: the illusory partnership

Both China and Russia remain powers committed to the principle of sovereignty and a state-centric view on security, yet they have to a certain degree accepted the notion of R2P in international affairs. Most of the current frictions on this issue within the UNSC are based on the content, rather than the form of R2P, and the different roles that international actors play in such crises. In particular, tensions persist over who plays the role of the 'adjudicator' in such crises. In other words, who, how, when, which strand, and with whose consent is the R2P norm put into practice. In this respect, both China and Russia are very keen to preserve their role as 'permission givers' and even 'norm makers'.

Rather than intending to be obstructionist, both China and Russia have branded themselves as acting as responsible, 'sober second thought' powers in addressing humanitarian crises, ensuring that the current international rules are upheld. Conversely, they portray the West as an impulsive disruptive global force which has often left countries subject to intervention in a worse security position than before (Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya). Reluctant to directly intervene on the ground during these types of civil conflicts, at least in a unilateral fashion, both favor mediation and diplomacy as primary crisis resolution mechanisms. Moscow, at least until the Crimea/Ukraine crises, did not demonstrate a willingness to act singly during civil conflicts. As for China, despite its growing power and its focus on developing into a 'responsible great power', Beijing retains a degree of wariness about being seen as assuming too much global responsibility too soon and instead has often addressed humanitarian crises in multilateral formats. Thus, within the UN, both countries have found each other useful to lean on during difficult Security Council votes. That is, however, a far cry from a looming 'partnership of spoilers'. As one analyst noted, 'Moscow touts its partnership with Beijing mostly to prove to the rest of the world that Russia still matters, while China views it as a low-cost way of placating Russia' (Mankoff, 2013). This difference is very visible in the area of humanitarian intervention policy.

Despite certain similarities between their perspectives on R2P, the notion that China and Russia form a common bloc obscures as much as it reveals. Key differences within their policies toward intervention remain, and if anything are becoming increasingly magnified. While Moscow has been satisfied to play the role of a loud and visible dissenter on the

international stage in addressing of civil conflicts, Beijing prefers to follow a course of quiet diplomacy and is more sensitive to being labeled a spoiler. In the case of Syria, both have demonstrated their willingness to use each other as diplomatic cover to demonstrate a united front, while stressing the need for diplomatic solutions to that crisis despite the worsening security situation (Yang, 2012). The synergy between the two states can better be described as a marriage of convenience, which does not necessarily set a precedent.

Russia is seeking to boost its international role from a position of weakness, at the same time as China's global presence is growing exponentially, with its interests increasingly intertwined with regions further afield. Nonetheless, China continues to foster an international identity as a 'reliable partner' with many developing regions, including the Middle East, while Russian actions continue to project a much more zero-sum approach amid its ongoing concerns about 'losing ground' in key regions to the West. Since the end of the Cold War, the roles of China and Russia in international affairs have subtly reversed, with Beijing set to play a much more active role in future crises, because it now has much deeper ties with various regions across the globe. At present, China is developing more concrete strategic policies for regions further afield from the Asia-Pacific, as its so-far equivocal policies in Ukraine have demonstrated, but this hesitancy has begun to fade in proportion with overall Chinese power. Thus, China's involvement in humanitarian intervention and R2P may in fact increase in the future as its global interests, particularly in the economic sphere, develop in conjunction with its deepening engagements in regions further afield. Should that occur, the supposed Sino–Russian convergence on intervention would likely become, at best, transitory.

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