

# Enhancing EU-China cooperation on peace and security

## Introduction

The aim of this briefing<sup>1</sup> is to provide an overview of the level of convergence (or divergence) in the approaches taken by the European Union (EU) and China in the sphere of peace and security; it identifies concrete measures that have been put in place and the results of existing security cooperation; it points to areas where security cooperation remains weak; and it concludes with observations on priority areas for strengthened China-EU engagement on security.

The focus is on the EU as a security actor in its own right when dealing with China, although the paper also makes reference to the role of those EU Member States that – because of geopolitical factors and their long-standing bilateral strategic partnerships – may have a longer and deeper security engagement with China.

## The success story of EU-China cooperation

Over the past decade China and the EU have made significant progress in institutionalising cooperation on a range of issues. China and the EU declare their partnership to be ‘strategic’ and ‘comprehensive’, not only in economic terms, but also on global peace and security issues. The creation of the EU-China Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in 2003 generated opportunities for cooperation in a number of areas, including in the sphere of peace and security, while the adoption of the EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation in November 2013 provided a blueprint for cooperation over the next decade on four key pillars. One of these pillars is peace and security, and a key commitment in the

agenda promises to “raise the level of EU-China dialogue and cooperation on defence and security, advancing towards more practical cooperation”.<sup>2</sup> Annual High-Level Strategic Dialogue meetings are meant to provide more strategic guidance for the cooperation. During his visit to Europe in March 2014, President Xi Jinping met with the Heads of the EU institutions,<sup>3</sup> and the ensuing Joint Statement reiterated and confirmed the results of the November 2013 EU-China Summit. To further institutionalise and regularise China-EU cooperation, in April 2014, China published its second Policy Paper on the EU titled ‘Deepen the China-EU Comprehensive Strategic Partnership for Mutual Benefit and Win-win Cooperation’.<sup>4</sup> Signalling a fairly high degree of conformity with the EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda, the paper defines China’s EU policy objectives and the fields of cooperation, including in the areas of counter-terrorism, counter-piracy, international nuclear security, non-proliferation, export control and cyber security.

Taking a broad definition of security, which incorporates both hard (related to state and military security) and soft (dealing with issues of human, environmental and economic security) approaches, the key question is: what have been the concrete measures and actions to strengthen security cooperation? There are four areas where cooperation has been constructive: nuclear non-proliferation, peacekeeping, anti-piracy and cyber security. The following section gives an overview of progress in each.

Some of the most fruitful cooperation has taken place in the area of **nuclear security**. Since the 1990s, China’s arms control and non-proliferation policy has undergone drastic changes and improvements. As China has become more engaged abroad and more

<sup>1</sup> This briefing is framed around a presentation given by Bernardo Mariani at the EU-China Think Tank Dialogue, 6–7 April 2016, Beijing, China.

<sup>2</sup> EU-China (2013) ‘EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation’, 23 November, p 4.

<sup>3</sup> Meetings were held with the then European Council President Herman van Rompuy, the European Commission President Manuel Barroso and the President of the European Parliament Martin Schulz.

<sup>4</sup> The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China (2014) ‘China’s Policy Paper on the EU: Deepen the China-EU Comprehensive

Strategic Partnership for Mutual Benefit and Win-win Cooperation’, 2 April, [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/widit\\_665385/wjzcs/t1143406.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/widit_665385/wjzcs/t1143406.shtml)

appreciative of the risks of proliferation, it has signed several international treaties and conventions and, compared with a relatively passive attitude in the past, has become more proactive in relation to international non-proliferation initiatives to stem the spread of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). This has created important linkages with the EU non-proliferation policy, known as 'effective multilateralism', which supports and works with multilateral non-proliferation regimes and assists non-EU countries to implement commitments under relevant international non-proliferation regimes to which they are party. Recognising the need to work together as strategic partners in the area of disarmament and non-proliferation, China and the EU signed a Joint Declaration on Non-proliferation and Arms Control at the 2004 EU-China Summit. This Declaration set out a broad range of priority areas for cooperation on non-proliferation of WMD. Cooperation on the Iranian nuclear issue has been an example of an active strategic partnership between the EU and China. At the last High-Level Strategic Dialogue in May 2015, Brussels and Beijing praised China-EU coordination on the Iranian nuclear issue. On 14 July 2015, Iran, the five permanent members of the United Nations (UN) Security Council, plus Germany and the EU signed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), known commonly as the Iran nuclear deal. In the case of North Korea's nuclear issue, although China and the EU have shown different attitudes – China insists on a peaceful solution through dialogue and negotiation, while the EU hopes for more pressure and sanctions from the international community, especially from China – they both share the same basic objective of opposing North Korea's development of nuclear weapons.

**Peacekeeping operations** also arguably provide a good example of a common agenda for EU-China security cooperation. China's increased engagement in UN peacekeeping operations has attracted interest and support from the EU and its member states. Both China and the EU share similar views on the significance of peacekeeping operations, which are seen as an important and effective means of maintaining international peace and security. International exchanges, including professional training with EU countries, such as the UK, have demonstrated a mutual interest in capacity building and cooperation. China's peacekeeping contributions in Mali demonstrate a new commitment to Chinese involvement in the security aspects of UN peacekeeping missions. In particular, the Chinese contingent has worked closely with Dutch peacekeepers in Mali, conducting joint training and providing security. This is noteworthy as it is the first

time that Chinese peacekeepers have provided security for foreign troops. While not all reports of this cooperation have been positive,<sup>5</sup> these steps suggest that China-EU cooperation in peacekeeping will continue to increase with China's expanding role.

Cooperation on **maritime security**, including counter-piracy, is also among the key initiatives highlighted in the EU-China Strategic Agenda for Cooperation and in China's 2014 Policy Paper on the EU. The level of policy and practical convergence between China and the EU has been quite high, with an appreciation from both sides for the ongoing cooperation including intelligence and personnel information exchange and joint counter-piracy exercises. One of the most prominent examples of China-EU cooperation in counter-piracy has been in the context of EU Operation Atalanta – a mission launched in 2008 to combat Somali-based piracy and armed robbery at sea off the Horn of Africa and in the Western Indian Ocean. As part of this operation, there have been numerous information-sharing and coordination exercises with the Chinese navy aimed at improving organising and commanding capabilities, cooperation and tactical capabilities, and abilities in conducting escort operations.<sup>6</sup> It is expected that EU-China maritime security cooperation will increase further with the development of the Maritime Silk Road.

**Cyber security** is another arena in which China-EU interest has been directed. This area has been prone to tension, especially given accusations about a number of cyberattacks originating from Chinese soil. However, an EU-China Task Force has now been established to enhance cooperation on cyber issues. This focuses not only on immediate practical cooperation between China and the EU to prevent and respond to cyber-crimes, but also on establishing more broad, global norms for the governance and security of the Internet, in particular in relation to cyber-war and cyber-crime. The UK has also developed its own agreement with China on cyber security with the aim of ensuring that neither side condones or conducts spying on the other's intellectual property or confidential corporate information – again, an area which has previously proved contentious for EU member states engaging with China in particular.

## The challenges

Despite the positive examples highlighted above, patterns of China-EU cooperation to enhance global peace and security leave a lot of scope for further development. In contrast to the EU's broad engagement with China on trade and commercial

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Frans Paul van der Putten (2015) 'China's Evolving Role in Peacekeeping and African Security: The Deployment of Chinese Troops for UN Force Protection in Mali', Clingendael, September, p 11.

<sup>6</sup> This includes, for example, talks between Rear Admiral Barbieri and Rear Admiral Chen Qiangnan in January 2016 on strengthening the EU and Chinese

Navy's maritime security efforts through joint planning and counter-piracy exercises. More recently, on 27 February 2016, a joint anti-piracy drill was held by China's 22nd Naval Escort Fleet and the EU 465 formation in the eastern waters of the Gulf of Aden.

issues, concrete measures in the pursuance of practical security cooperation – to which the Agenda 2020 aspires— have lagged behind. Although both China and the EU promote multilateralism and the central role of the UN in achieving and maintaining peace, they have divergent, even conflicting, interpretations of statehood, sovereignty, values and principles. Examples include the universality of fundamental human rights, humanitarian intervention and the responsibility to protect. The EU arms embargo on China is another contentious issue that is often left unaddressed when debating China-EU security cooperation. The EU's increasing ties with China also generate tensions with the US, a key international ally. This creates a situation where China's position on regional and international security affairs is sometimes at odds with that of the EU, for example on relations with Sudan, North Korea and Russia, and on how to deal with complex conflicts in Syria and Ukraine.

There has been little progress on the development of the EU-China 'Partnership for peace, growth, reform and civilisation' that President Xi Jinping proposed during his visit to EU headquarters in 2014, with no details of what such a partnership would entail. Despite recent contacts between China's Ministry of Public Security and Europol, China-EU cooperation in combating transnational crime remains weak. Official EU outreach to China on conventional arms and dual-use export controls has yet to materialise into concrete cooperative actions. No joint practical actions have been taken to tackle the millions of illicit small arms in circulation across Africa and the unlimited capacity of non-state armed groups, people committing acts of piracy and other criminals to obtain these weapons. The interpretation and application of China's arms export control principles have been a source of controversy with the EU and its member states, who have argued that they are too vague and broad and do not specify criteria for a robust risk assessment process to determine whether an arms transfer should proceed<sup>7</sup>. Moreover, there are different views and opinions concerning the legitimacy and appropriate conditions for the authorisation of arms transfers. Crucially, the process of creating an Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) – the first international instrument establishing legally binding obligations for the trade in conventional arms, ammunition, parts and components, which came into force on 24 December 2014 – was an opportunity to bridge this gap, to get a clearer sense of what is and is not internationally acceptable, and to raise common standards in the field of conventional arms exports. However, China did not sign the treaty before its entry into force and to date has not acceded to it. Additionally, while China-EU dialogue on cyber security is recognised as important in the transnational fight against cyber-crime and in preventing cyber-warfare, it has also

highlighted the discrepancies between the approaches of China and the EU with regard to their cyber policies and has raised controversial issues such as those related to content and information control.

## Expanding security cooperation

Can the China-EU security dialogue advance towards more practical cooperation?

So far, the EU has kept a low profile regarding the hard security concerns in the Asia-Pacific region, where geopolitical competition, conflicting claims to islands and waters and a sense of historical grievance between some states have created a dangerous form of brinksmanship over potential inter-state conflict that is evidenced by increased military activity and defence spending, and belligerent rhetoric in the South China Sea. Opinions among Western experts are divided as to whether the EU could/should do more to promote its own conflict management diplomacy and soft security tools in the Asia-Pacific region, or whether European engagement on regional security policy would be dismissed by China as irrelevant or considered unwelcome interference in Chinese affairs. However, there are constituencies in China interested in European security policy advice and the EU's experience in security multilateralism. There is also scope for the EU to become more engaged in Asian security issues, starting with relatively simple measures such as increased participation in Asia's main regional forums, for example the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the East Asia Summit (EAS) and the Xiangshan Forum. Although the EU usually attends these forums, it is often with relatively junior delegations. However, there is also some cause for optimism in this field. The EU is, for example, already supporting ASEAN capabilities such as crisis rooms that promote information-sharing and better informed and coordinated responses to early warnings concerning a range of emergencies, including escalating violence, geopolitical instability, and exposure to pandemics.

A deeper level of engagement worth exploring is EU support for a 'roadmap' process to reduce tensions and build confidence in the region. This would allow states in the Asia-Pacific region to manage and possibly remove sources of conflict and mutual distrust with suitable step-by-step corrective actions on all sides. The roadmap should look at areas of common concern and interest for Asia-Pacific states, including but not limited to: nuclear non-proliferation and strategic arms control; maritime security, in particular the conduct of military vessels in exclusive

<sup>7</sup> Saferworld, China Arms Controls and Disarmament Association (2012) 'The Evolution of EU and Chinese Arms Export Controls', 1 September.

economic zones; the prevention of unnecessary arms competition, including an arms race in outer space and cyberspace; and the impact of military doctrines and postures on regional and global security. Clearly, progress on such a roadmap would be incremental and it would not eliminate all tensions. But a roadmap based on overlapping interests could help to build trust by preventing perceived territorial aggression and ensuring freedom of navigation, a key concern for all actors including Europe.

China and the EU can look for early progress on some specific outstanding matters of global security where their interests are more congruent, especially in addressing non-traditional security threats which have grown in importance for both Europe and China – for example climate change; the threat of pandemics; food and energy security; continuing cooperation on combating piracy in the Horn of Africa; and finding common causes on which to de-escalate crises, prevent conflict and build peace and stability in conflict-affected states.

A relatively uncontroversial and therefore good starting point for increased cooperation is crisis response. In 2015, Chinese ships helped evacuate – aside from Chinese nationals – hundreds of foreigners, including European nationals from war-ravaged Yemen. Similarly, Chinese nationals were evacuated from Libya in 2011 by Greece, Malta, and other EU countries. This preceded the dispatch of the Chinese Navy to evacuate thousands of Chinese citizens from Libya as unrest surged within the country later that year. This operation was coordinated by Chinese military attachés based in Europe and the Middle East.<sup>8</sup> Increased cooperation in this area could lay the foundations for greater cooperation and coordination in planning, and potentially lead to the establishment of mechanisms for a quicker and more efficient response to the escalation of crises.

Increased China-EU cooperation on UN peacekeeping also offers opportunities. With the global human security agenda shifting primarily military peacekeeping mandates to more holistic peacebuilding processes, China and the EU will be key contributors to the goal of building peace in post-conflict countries. There is potential to deepen consultation and doctrinal discussions, provide personnel training and examine closer cooperation on building indigenous peacekeeping capacities in regions affected by conflict, for example Africa. This should help implement a new vision for international peacekeeping that is less oriented towards military responses and more people-centred. In particular, China and the EU need to consider the potential for a greater civilian focus and civilian expertise in peace support operations, and making greater efforts to anticipate crises and protect civilians. The current

review of UN peacebuilding architecture and operations provides an international context within which future China-EU cooperation can be pursued. In June 2015 a High-level Panel Review Report<sup>9</sup> recommended that the UN continue to strengthen its ability to undertake diplomatic and preventive political missions, elections support, human rights work, peacemaking and mediation support, and post-war peacebuilding efforts. This suggests an increasing focus on conflict prevention activities to either complement or, ideally, pre-empt the need for military-led peacekeeping. As China increasingly takes a front-line role in peacekeeping operations, the incentives for it to take a similarly front-line role within these expanding UN-led conflict prevention activities may also increase.

The flagship Belt and Road Initiative, comprising the 'Silk Road Economic Belt' and the '21st Century Maritime Silk Road', with its network of railways, roads, air and sea links, pipelines and transmission grids better connecting China to Europe and the wider world, should make it easier to develop the China-EU strategic partnership at a more practical level. As many of the countries along the route are affected by conflict, China and the EU should seize the opportunity to explore synergies to broaden and elevate regional cooperation. At the formal level, simple exchanges of information between Chinese and EU institutions operating within unstable regions and countries along the Belt and Road route appear to be an obvious and fairly uncontroversial first step. More specific ideas could include the introduction of mechanisms for information exchange between Chinese and EU institutions responsible for analysing conflict trends at the country level to facilitate more effective early warning and response and to inform longer-term peacebuilding and development efforts. Chinese and EU institutions should also explore the potential for joint analysis on issues of common concern/interest such as radicalisation, counter-terrorism, organised crime (including the fight against human trafficking), border management, migration and conflict-sensitive engagement. Such analysis could be particularly relevant where it concerns Central Asian countries – the bridge between China and Europe, and soon to be even more closely linked to both by the Belt and Road. Similarly, there could be scope for introducing mechanisms for greater information exchange and coordination between Chinese and EU institutions responsible for development cooperation at the country level to facilitate more joined-up upstream conflict prevention and development efforts. This dialogue could potentially be framed around the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and tailored to context.

<sup>8</sup> Duchâtel M, Gill B (2012) 'Overseas citizen protection: a growing challenge for China', Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 6 February.

<sup>9</sup> United Nations (2015) 'Uniting our Strengths for Peace – Politics, Partnership and People: Report of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations', 16 June.

The adoption of the 2030 Agenda in September 2015 brings with it an opportunity to rethink how conflict prevention and development are implemented and to help revitalise a shared culture of conflict prevention within the international community. Given that China and EU Member States are actively committed to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the new Agenda could provide a platform, or at least a common language, around which cooperation could be built. The agenda includes a focus on peace, including through Goal 16, which calls for the international community to “promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels”. The EU and China have already agreed to strengthen their coordination to promote the achievement of the SDGs. They have, for example, committed to explore “operational development coordination in synergy with local partners” in their June 2015 Joint Statement.<sup>10</sup> China is also engaging with specific EU Member States on this issue – for example, in October 2015 a China-UK development partnership was announced, committing the two countries to work together towards the achievement of the SDGs. While addressing Goal 16 may not, at present, be the primary focus of such partnerships, cooperation towards other development goals also has the potential to positively affect conflict dynamics. By working together on such development issues China and the EU may help to mitigate some of the local root drivers of conflict. It will be interesting to see how far China, the EU and EU Member States will approach the implementation of Agenda 2030 at the domestic level and through their overseas engagement.

With regard to cooperation in conventional arms control, the Chinese government must strike a balance between the profitability of arms sales against their potentially far-reaching negative consequences. This may lead in different directions, including whether China remains constructively engaged in the ATT process. In the meantime, there is potential for China and the EU to address gaps in the implementation and enforcement of dual-use and arms trade controls through activities that inform and train front-line officials and practitioners and establish dialogue structures that engage China and other leading manufacturers and exporters of arms and dual-use goods and technologies, for example through technical expert working groups. Track 1.5 outreach activities can break new ground in terms of the opportunities that China and other leading producers and exporters of arms and dual-use goods and technologies have to promote and further strengthen export controls and the challenges they face in doing so. There is potential for greater sharing of EU experiences, policies and practices with China, and to enhance China’s practical capacities to control exports of arms and dual-use items, particularly in the

areas of preventing diversion and commercial export controls compliance.

## Conclusions

A mix of factors will be crucial to the cost-benefit rationale that will motivate China and the EU to engage further on peace and security issues. Clearly, there are differences of opinion and sometimes divergent priorities between China and the EU as to what peace and security should entail and the dilemmas associated with the issues of sovereignty and non-interference. However, both China and European states share a fundamental interest in the maintenance of regional and international peace and stability. As China’s global status, economic influence and commensurate responsibilities grow and with global and regional security challenges (such as transnational terrorism, nuclear proliferation, environmental degradation and organised crime) increasing, the challenges are so great that the pressure on the EU and China to take on more responsibility in peace and security matters can be expected to grow. Beyond rhetorical commitments and a broad set of joint consultations on shared crisis risks and security issues of mutual interest, the EU-China security agenda will be judged by the development and adoption of a ‘Partnership for Peace’ that consists of joint security policies and the implementation of cooperation programmes, dialogues and projects that address both traditional and non-traditional security challenges.

### About Saferworld

Saferworld is an independent international organisation working to prevent violent conflict and build safer lives. We work with local people affected by conflict to improve their safety and sense of security, and conduct wider research and analysis. We use this evidence and learning to improve local, national and international policies and practices that can help build lasting peace. Our priority is people – we believe in a world where everyone can lead peaceful, fulfilling lives, free from fear and insecurity.

We are a not-for-profit organisation with programmes in nearly 20 countries and territories across Africa, the Middle East, Asia and Europe.

**Saferworld** – 28 Charles Square, London N1 6HT, UK  
Registered Charity no 1043843  
Company limited by guarantee no 3015948  
Tel: +44 (0)20 7324 4646 | Fax: +44 (0)20 7324 4647  
Email: [general@saferworld.org.uk](mailto:general@saferworld.org.uk)  
Web: [www.saferworld.org.uk](http://www.saferworld.org.uk)

<sup>10</sup> China-EU (2015) ‘EU-China Summit Joint Statement: The way forward after forty years of EU-China cooperation’, 29 June.