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## **China and the Security Council:**

Congruence of the Voting  
between Permanent Members

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## ABSTRACT

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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## Introduction

China's incredible rise to international status and economic power has raised concerns among many observers about whether it will eventually become an intractable adversary of the United States and the Western world order (in the fashion of the Soviet Union during the Cold War), or whether it could be integrated as a stakeholder in the international system, and China's behaviour on the United Nations Security Council is perceived by many as an acid test of its commitment to becoming a cooperative and constructive member of the international community. According to a number of analysts and scholars, who cite its opposition to sanctions and peace-keeping intervention, China appears to be failing this test.<sup>1</sup> A common refrain is that while the United States and the United Kingdom attempt to push the Council forward on these issues, China and Russia consistently apply the brakes, and impede the council's progress. However, empirical evidence suggests that although there may be some truth to the notion that China and Russia tend to vote against the United States and the United Kingdom, the portrayal of China and Russia as the intransigent and backward antagonists on the Security Council is simply not justified. This essay will examine China's record of voting in the Security Council during the period from 1999 to 2009: how it tends to vote on various issues, how it perceives and attempts to further its national interests, and whether it sees itself as having common goals or outlooks with the other permanent members of the Security Council.

Much of the existing literature on the way China votes in the Security Council is now out of date. Nigel Thalakada studied China's voting pattern in the Security Council from 1990 to 1995, and determined that China attempted to maintain a 'status of neutrality', in order to 'balance [its] material interests with [its] foreign policy principles'.<sup>2</sup> Samuel Kim undertook a broader study of China in international institutions, including the Security Council, from 1990 to 1996, and argues that China is indeed a fairly cooperative player on the world stage, and that its participation in these inter-governmental organizations is guided primarily by national interests, and shaped by a slightly different worldview to that of the United States.<sup>3</sup> However, the Security Council today faces a very different environment than the one it faced during the 1990s. The events of September 11<sup>th</sup> in 2001

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1 Carlson, Allen. (2004). 'Helping to Keep the Peace (Albeit Reluctantly): China's Recent Stance on Sovereignty and Multilateral Intervention'. *Pacific Affairs*, 77(1), 9.

2 Thalakada, Nigel. (1997) 'China's Voting Pattern in the Security Council, 1990-1995' in Russett, Bruce. (Ed.). *The Once and Future Security Council*. New York: St. Martin's Press, p. 103.

3 Kim, Samuel S. (1999). 'China and the United Nations'. In *China Joins the World: Progress and Prospects*. Oksenberg, Michel and Economy, Elizabeth (Eds.). New York: Council on Foreign Relations, Inc.

and the resulting ‘war on terror’ have accelerated the trend towards intervention in the affairs of sovereign states; consequently, it could be argued the Council is under more pressure than in previous decades, as China has frequently touted the principle of state sovereignty as sacred and inviolable.

It is essential to understand China’s behaviour in this most crucial organ of the international security architecture, as it grapples with the demands of the twenty-first century. This essay will review China’s voting record during the past decade, and attempt to clearly identify any possible patterns of voting and areas congruence between the permanent members of the Security Council, with a view to developing an updated theory of how China interacts with major players in the Council. It will argue that while there is some degree of congruence between the way that China and Russia vote, it is not fixed and there are exceptions.

## How China Votes

Firstly, it should be stressed that the Security Council is, in reality, a very cooperative forum. An analysis of the voting records of the Security Council from the January 1999 to the present (September 24, 2009) reveals that 636 out of 684, or 93 percent of all resolutions on the agenda were passed unanimously (and included in that category are those resolutions passed without vote).

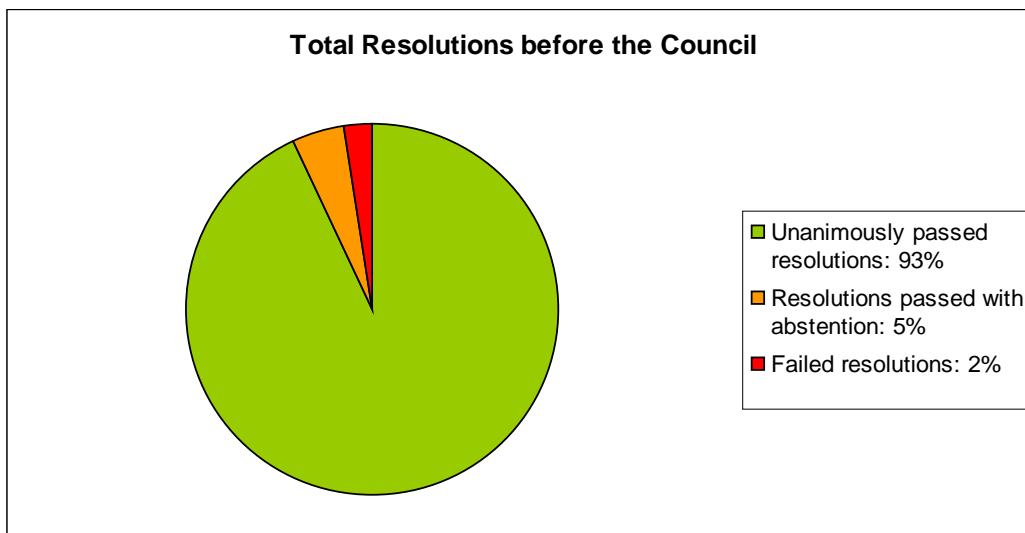


Figure 1: Figure 1: Passage of all resolutions on Security Council agenda, 1999-2009 (Source: UNSC Resolutions 1220, January 12, 2999 through to 1887, September 24, 2009).

Secondly, the evidence suggests that China is simply not the recalcitrant antagonist on the Security Council that it is sometimes portrayed to be. During the period under examination, it used its veto power only three times, compared to Russia's four vetoes, and the United States' eleven. Nor did it even abstain the most frequently overall of the permanent members. However, as can be seen below, China and Russia do stand out as two states who abstain more than the other permanent five.

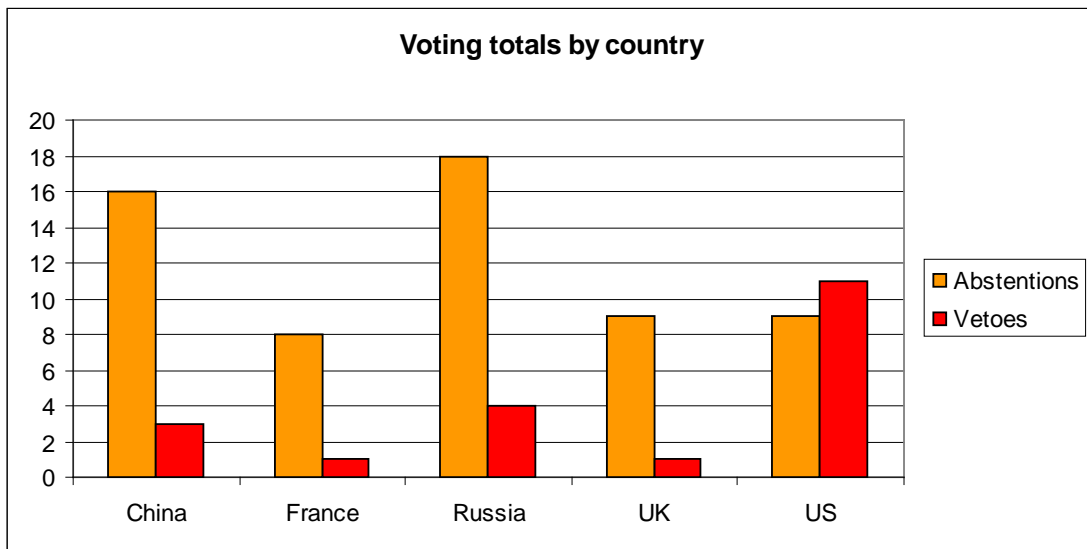


Figure 2: Vetoes and abstentions for each permanent member, 1999-2009 (Source: UNSC Resolutions 1220, January 12, 2000 through to 1887, September 24, 2009).

Interestingly, there seems to be a cluster of abstentions as well as a veto at the start of the period under consideration, followed by a gap of three years where China neither vetoed nor abstained. In the last three years, however, China used its veto power twice.

Year	Veto	Abstain
1999	1	5
2000		2
2001		
2002		
2003		

2004		2
2005		2
2006		3
2007	1	1
2008	1	
2009		1

Table 1: Chinese vetoes and abstentions by year (Source: UNSC Resolutions 1220, January 12, 2000 through to 1887, September 24, 2009).

With regard to how China votes on specific issues, the situation in Sudan scored highest for abstentions, followed by the situation in Lebanon, while the criticism of Myanmar's human rights record and a proposal to impose sanctions on Zimbabwe won two of China's three vetoes for this period.

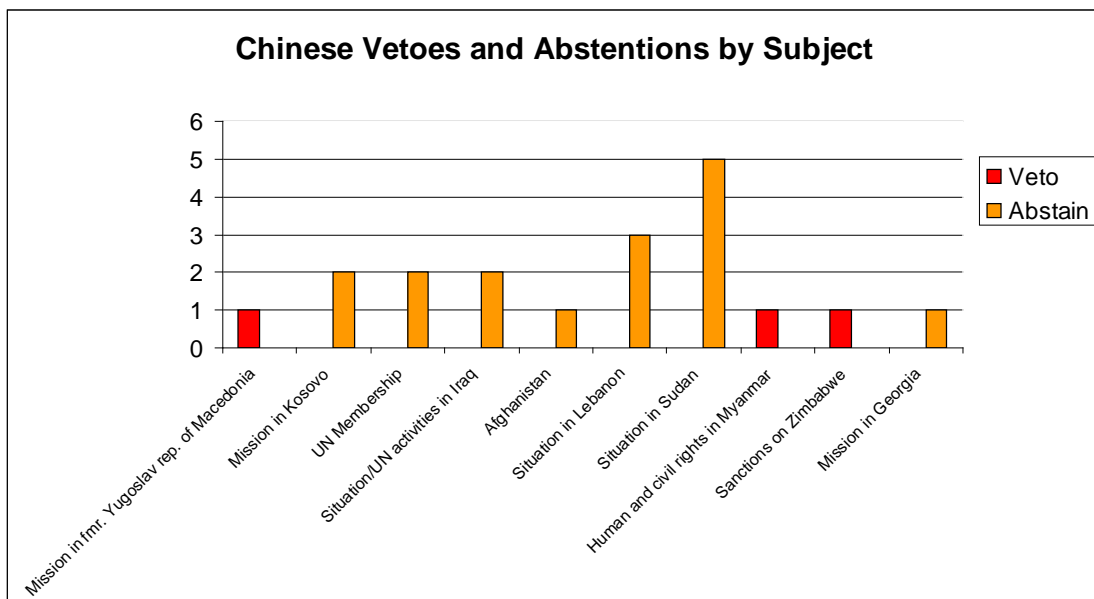


Figure 3: Chinese vetoes and abstentions by subject, 1999-2009 (Source: UNSC Resolutions 1220, January 12, 2000 through to 1887, September 24, 2009).

## How China votes in Relation to the other Permanent Members

An analysis of all contested (i.e. either failed or not unanimous) resolutions has revealed a number of interesting observations. This first graph shows all the different voting ‘alliances’ in which members or groups of members either vetoed, abstained, or vetoed and abstained. It shows a fairly high degree of congruence between China and Russia, between the UK and the US, with France siding equally with both sides.

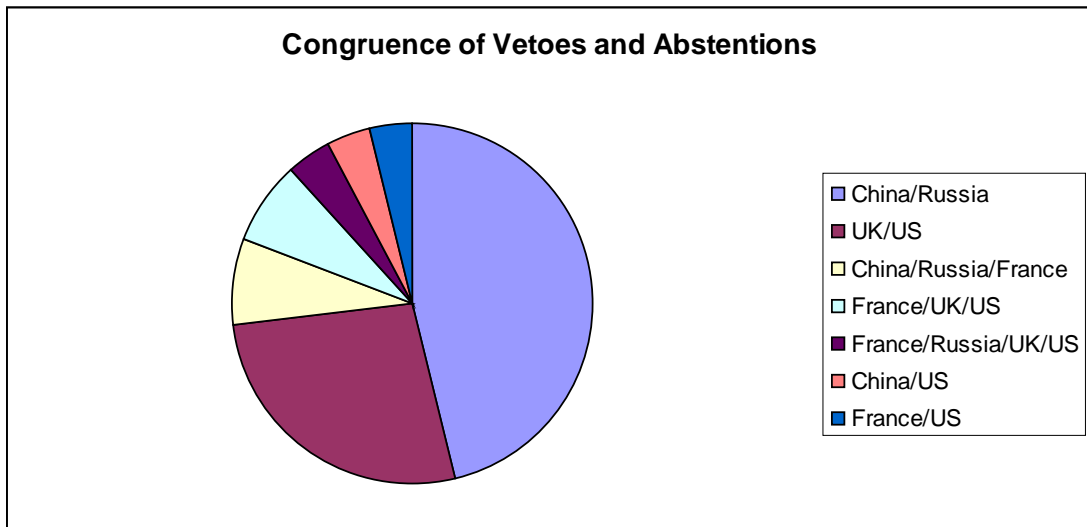


Figure 4: Vetoes and abstentions cast together by any two or more states (Source: UNSC Resolutions 1220, January 12, 2000 through to 1887, September 24, 2009).

The following graph is a holistic analysis of voting congruence between any pair of states, and it covers a range of votes which indicate a degree of congruence, namely: Yes/Yes; Abstain/Abstain; Veto/Veto; and Abstain/Veto (and vice versa). Using these categories, congruence between each pair appears relatively even.

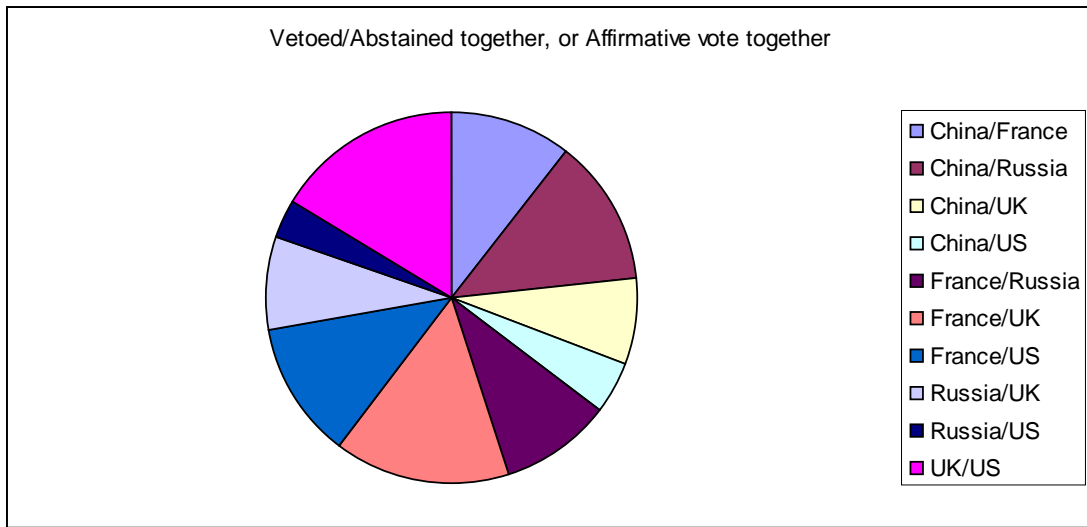


Figure 5: Coincidental voting on any contested resolution - includes affirmative votes (Source: UNSC Resolutions 1220, January 12, 2009 through to 1887, September 24, 2009).

The next graph is a breakdown of the data presented above; the dark purple bar indicates resolutions where each pair of countries voted affirmatively, and the blue bar represents resolutions in which either each pair of countries vetoed together, abstained together, or in which one vetoed and one abstained. It is shown that China and Russia contest resolutions together more often than any other pair of countries.

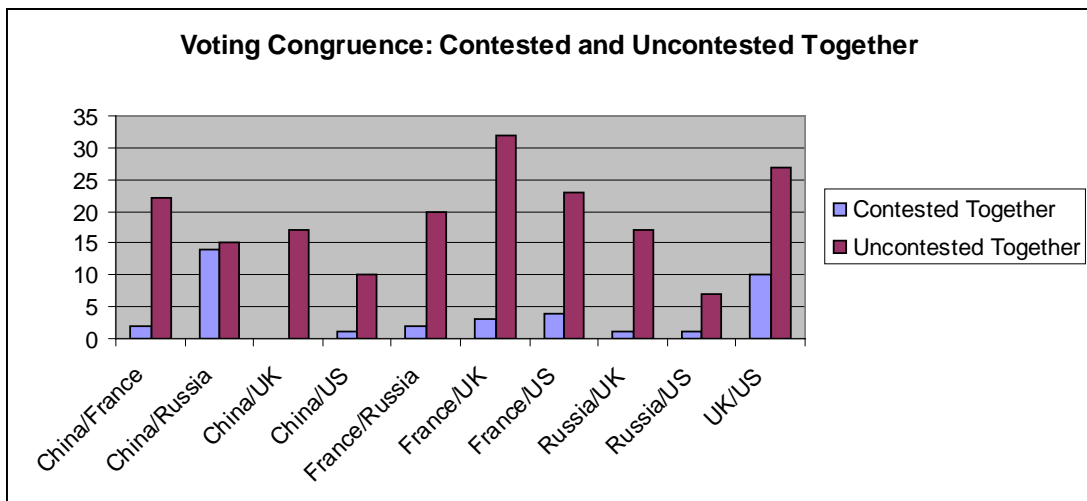


Figure 6: Bilateral congruence, both affirmative and negative, for all non-unanimously passed resolutions (Source: UNSC Resolutions 1220, January 12, 2009 through to 1887, September 24, 2009).



However, looking at resolutions where any two (or more) states either vetoed and/or abstained together, the relationship between Chinese and Russian voting becomes clearer. Congruence between the UK and the US is also very strong.

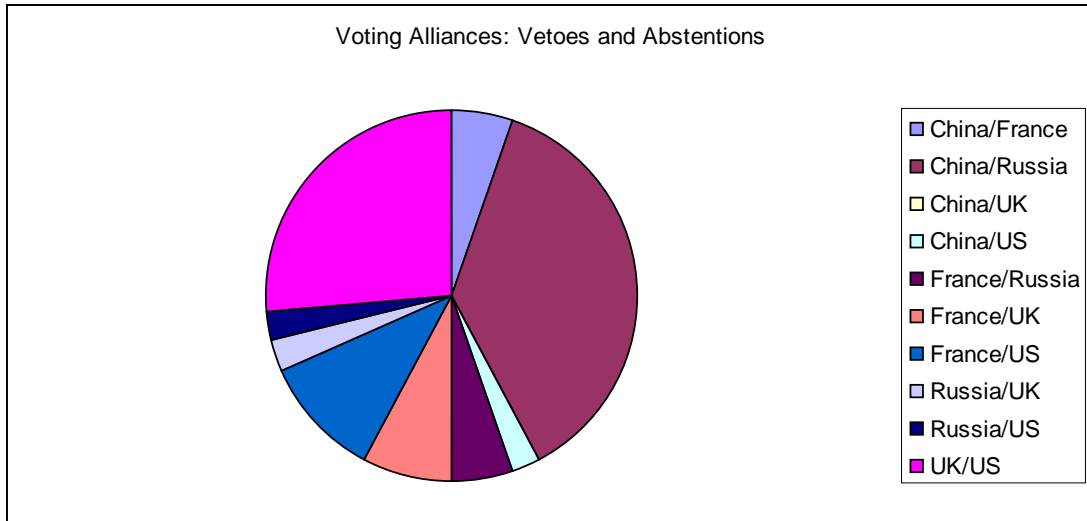


Figure 7: Bilateral congruence of vetoes and abstentions (Source: UNSC Resolutions 1220, January 12, 2999 through to 1887, September 24, 2009).

Looking resolutions where any two states both contested a resolution with the exact same vote (i.e. both abstained or both vetoed), evidence of Sino-Russian cooperation is even stronger.

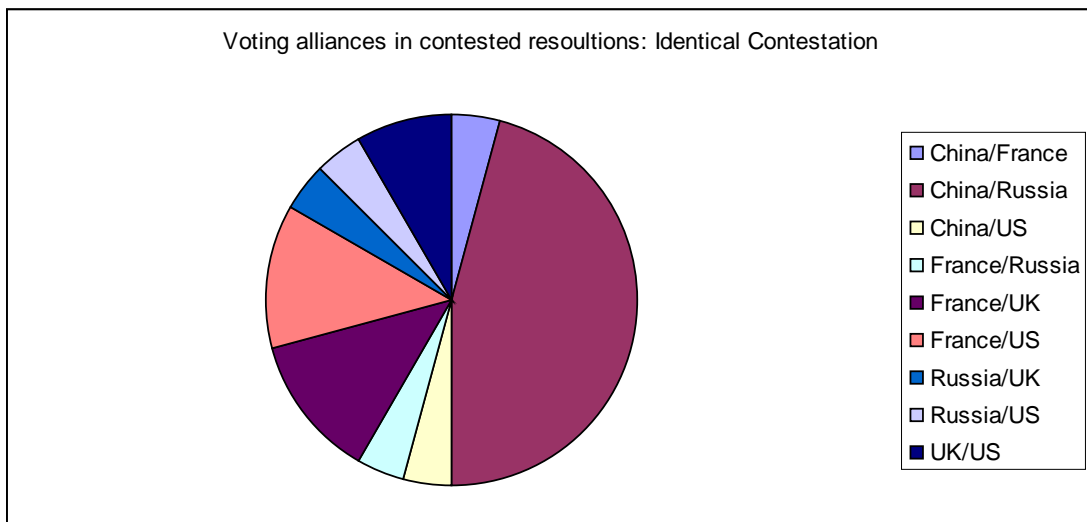


Figure 8: States casting identical negative votes, i.e. Veto/Veto or Abstain/Abstain (Source: UNSC Resolutions 1220, January 12, 2999 through to 1887, September 24, 2009).

To analyse which particular issues offer areas of congruence for China and other states, the next graph looks at all contested resolutions. Russia and China maintain fairly similar levels of contestation for each subject. Of particular note are their repeated objections to resolutions on the Sudan and Lebanon.

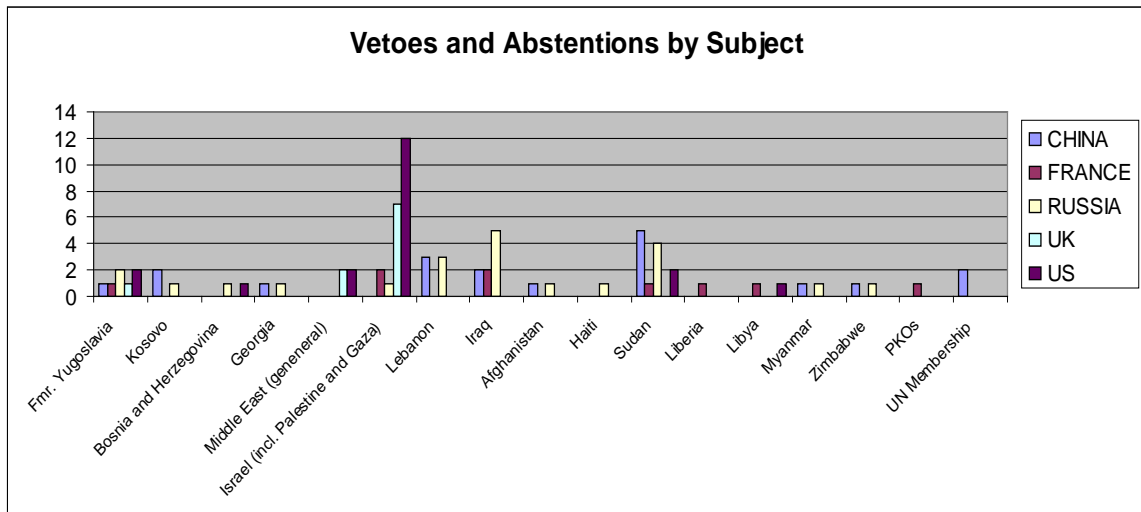


Figure 9: Negative votes (i.e. vetoes and abstentions) by subject (Source: UNSC Resolutions 1220, January 12, 2009 through to 1887, September 24, 2009).

An analysis of voting congruence would not be complete, however, without looking at unilateral voting. This graph shows that China is third most likely to act unilaterally on the Council, behind the United States and Russia. China has never vetoed alone, but has abstained alone just four times, once in 1999 on the UN mission in Kosovo, twice on the issue of UN membership (Nauru in 1999 and Tuvalu in 2000), and once again in the year 2000 on a resolution which imposed measures against the Taliban. On one occasion, also in the year 2000, China voted for a resolution which would have established a UN observer mission in Palestine, but the other four permanent members abstained, and the resolution did not receive the required number of votes.

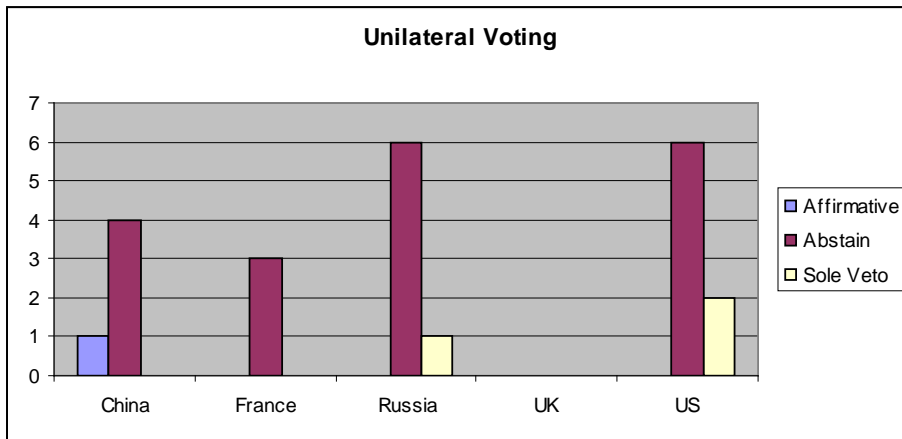


Figure 10: Votes cast by one permanent member against the other four (Source: UNSC Resolutions 1220, January 12, 2009 through to 1887, September 24, 2009).

To further illustrate the degree of congruence between China and Russia, the next graph looks at all non-unanimous resolutions, and compares those in which they voted unilaterally, contested with a different member, contested together and voted for a contested resolution together. The graph shows that in these contentious resolutions, they do indeed vote similarly, but not at all identically, as a whole third of the graph is taken up by dissimilar votes.

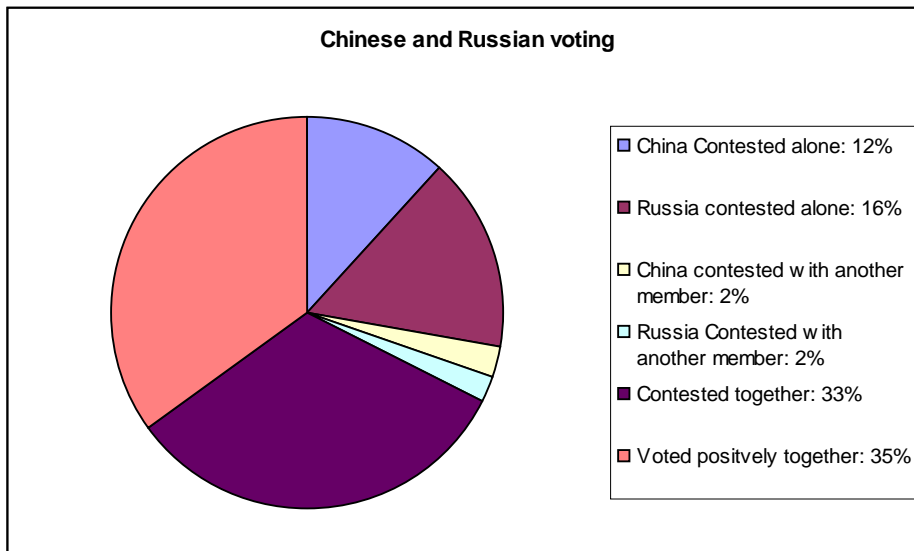


Figure 11: Votes cast by China and Russia in all non-unanimous resolutions (Source: UNSC Resolutions 1220, January 12, 2009 through to 1887, September 24, 2009).

What all this data demonstrates is that there does appear to be a trend in which China and Russia, where they contest a resolution, will often do so together. The same correlation exists in a weaker form between the United States and the United Kingdom. However, the trend does not always hold true, as both countries do sometimes act unilaterally, or with another state. It should be noted however, that, as was mentioned above, the five occasions on which China voted by all occurred in 1999 and 2000. Furthermore, in 2007 and 2008, China and Russia cast double vetoes, so it does appear that the two countries are cooperating more closely.

## **Resolution by Resolution analysis of voting on the Security Council**

To understand the rationale behind the way China votes, this section will assess, by turns, every single resolution which China vetoed or abstained on, as well as a few other interesting cases. It will pay particular attention to statements made by Chinese and Russian delegates, and point out trends and possible alliances throughout the discussion.

### **1999**

In February 1999, China vetoed a resolution which was to have extended the mandate of the former Yugoslavia by a further six months.<sup>4</sup> The Chinese representative on the Security Council, Qun Huasun, said that the initial aims of the mission in Yugoslavia had already been achieved.<sup>5</sup> He further stressed that there were many countries in Africa which were suffering conflict and strife, and which urgently needed the attention of the Council.<sup>6</sup> The Russian Federation abstained from the vote, stating that it felt the mission in Yugoslavia was still relevant, and it wanted the extended mission to include a system of monitoring an arms embargo in the region.<sup>7</sup> Thus, although at first glance Russia may at first glance appear to be lending some support to China by abstaining from the vote, in fact its reasons for voting the way it did were in direct opposition to China, as Russia wanted a larger mandate for the Yugoslavia mission.

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4 United Nations Security Council. (1999, February 25). 'Security Council fails to extend mandate of UN preventive deployment force in Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia'. United Nations Security Council Press Release SC/6648.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

The Council rejected a resolution sponsored by the Russian Federation in March 1999.<sup>8</sup> It would have demanded the immediate end to the use of force against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and called for the urgent resumption of peace talks.<sup>9</sup> Russia and China both voted for the resolution, while the United States, the United Kingdom and France all vetoed the resolution, signalled emphatic disagreement.<sup>10</sup> Russia argued that NATO's attempt to mask its military interference with humanitarian motives 'bordered on blackmail', and that NATO's actions constituted a significant threat to international stability and violated the principles of the UN charter.<sup>11</sup> China agreed with Russia's position, and added that the Kosovo issue was an internal matter for the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and that any settlement of the issue needed to proceed with respect for sovereignty as well as human rights.<sup>12</sup> The United States, on the other hand, used its veto because the resolution alleged that NATO had violated the United Nations Charter.<sup>13</sup> The US argued that the UN charter does not by any means imply that attacks on ethnic groups or other humanitarian disasters should be tolerated, and France and the UK agreed, stressing that the Council had pursued all possible means to bring about a peaceful solution to the Kosovo problem.<sup>14</sup> This resolution may perhaps be seen as a stereotypical example of the positions of the permanent five; Russia and China on the one side, and the US, UK and France on the other, with China and the US articulating opposite extremes.

In May 1999, China and Russia abstained on Resolution 1239, regarding the work of the UN High Commission for Refugees in Kosovo, inviting it to attempt to aid internally displaced persons as well as externally displaced persons.<sup>15</sup> The statement made by the Chinese representative, Qin Huasun, expressed concern at the fact that the NATO-led operation circumvented the UN, and may have been doing more harm than good.<sup>16</sup> He also condemned the NATO bombing of China's embassy in Belgrade, calling it a 'flagrant

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8 United Nations Security Council. (1999, March 26). 'Security Council rejects demand for cessation of use of force against Federal Republic of Yugoslavia'. United Nations Security Council Press Release SC/6659.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 United Nations Security Council. (1999, May 14). 'Security Council calls for access for UN and other humanitarian personnel operating in Kosovo and other parts of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia'. United Nations Security Council Press Release SC/6677.

16 Ibid.

encroachment on China's sovereignty and a serious violation of international law and the norms governing international relations'.<sup>17</sup> He also stated that China had proposed amendments to the Resolution, including a call for a cessation of all violence in the area, but this was not accepted by the council. The representative for the Russian Federation similarly stated that 'the tragic course of events since 24 March showed that actions taken outside international norms of warfare had created the emergency in and around Kosovo'.<sup>18</sup> However in the official press release, no mention of the Belgrade bombing was made. But both states seem to have more on their minds than the particular issue on the table, which was narrowly concerned with provisions for refugees.

Adopted in June of 1999, Resolution 1244 welcomed Yugoslavia's 'acceptance of peace principles', and authorized a Civil Operation there.<sup>19</sup> It identified a number of principles on which the political solution to the Kosovo crisis should be based, which included:

...an immediate and verifiable end to violence and repression in Kosovo; the withdrawal of the military, police and paramilitary forces of the Federal Republic; deployment of effective international civil and security presences, with substantial North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) participation in the security presence; establishment of an interim administration; the safe and free return of all refugees; a political process providing for substantial self-government, as well as the demilitarization of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA); and a comprehensive approach to the economic development of the crisis region.<sup>20</sup>

China cast the sole abstention on the resolution, expressing anger about the whole handling of the Kosovo situation over the past two months.<sup>21</sup> The Chinese delegate Shen Guofang stated that 'NATO had seriously violated the Charter of the United Nations and norms of international law, had undermined the authority of the Security Council, and had, hence, set an extremely dangerous precedent in the history of international relations'.<sup>22</sup> He also referred to mass casualties as a result of an indiscriminate NATO bombing campaign, which even targeted the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Belgrade.<sup>23</sup> The

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17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

19 United Nations Security Council. (1999, June 10). 'Security Council, welcoming Yugoslavia's acceptance of Peace Principles, authorizes Civil, Security presence in Kosovo'. United Nations Security Council Press Release SC/6686.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

delegate stated that China did not approve of ethnic discrimination, but also that China believed that ethnic problems were a domestic problem and should be solved domestically.<sup>24</sup> It opted to abstain rather than veto in light of the fact that the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia had already accepted the peace plan, that NATO had ceased bombing, and that the resolution affirmed the position and authority of the Security Council as well as the commitment of all Member States to Yugoslav sovereignty.<sup>25</sup>

Russia also made reference to what it described as the destabilizing, unilateral action of NATO, and the irreparable harm it had done to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.<sup>26</sup> The Russian representative said that Russia was glad NATO had come to its senses and acknowledges the authority and legitimacy of the security council, and that Russia believed the Resolution would make an important contribution to resolving the problem in Kosovo.<sup>27</sup> It can be seen here that although Russia and China voted differently on this resolution, they held fairly similar opinions on the subject, and the reasons which led Russia to vote for instead of against the resolution were the same ones which lead China to abstain rather than veto the resolution.

China abstained from voting on Resolution 1280 in December 1999, which extended the oil-for-food programme in Iraq by a week.<sup>28</sup> Russia also abstained, and France refused to participate in the vote.<sup>29</sup> The Chinese representative stated that although the oil-for-food programme had made some progress towards easing hardship in Iraq, the programme itself was quite flawed, and did not correspond closely enough to the particular needs of the Iraq people.<sup>30</sup> The Russian delegate stated that Russia had continually emphasized the seriousness of the humanitarian situation in Iraq, and that the humanitarian programme was not equipped to deal with the tasks that were required of it, and that the Council had ignored suggestions by France and by Russia which would have improved the proposal.<sup>31</sup> France refused to participate in the vote – a very rare decision, which seems to express a more profound disapproval than an abstention, as it indicates a kind of disparaging criticism of the discussion process as whole. The French representative stated that the

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24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

28 United Nations Security Council. (1999, December 3). 'Security Council Extends Oil-for-food programme for Iraq by one week, pending further consideration'. United Nations Security Council Press Release SC/6686.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.

resolution was being imposed to pressure council members for another purpose, and that confusion (or deceit) regarding the purpose behind the text meant that the only rational option for France was to not participate in the vote.<sup>32</sup>

Iraq came on the agenda again just two weeks later, and the council voted on resolution 1284, which was to establish a committee to monitor Iraqi compliance with the United Nations' dictate that Iraq get rid of any weapons of mass destruction it may have had.<sup>33</sup> Similar to the previous resolution, China, France and Russia abstained.<sup>34</sup> China's reasons for casting its vote this way were: firstly because the monitoring agency, the United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission, had previously behaved somewhat deviously by concealing information from the Council and thus needed to be replaced; secondly, because there was still an unmet need for clarity in the way the fact-finding mission was being carried out; and third, because sanctions in place on Iraq were hurting the Iraqi people, and an ineffective weapons monitoring committee would not contribute to their speedy removal.<sup>35</sup> Russia was quick to blame the US and the UK for creating a delay in completing the weapons inspection process by circumventing the Security Council.<sup>36</sup> The Russian delegate was unconvinced that the new committee would be effective, and expressed disappointment that the resolution did not fully incorporate the recommendations of expert panels.<sup>37</sup> This view was also shared by France.<sup>38</sup> All three countries expressed concern that the resolution would not be properly effective, but Russia was particularly acidic towards the US/UK, while France and China expressed more of a concern for the people of Iraq.

## 2000

China is the only permanent member ever to have abstained on the issue of UN membership, and an example of this occurred in February 2000, regarding resolution 1290 and the question of Tuvalu's admission into the UN.<sup>39</sup> The Chinese representative stated

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32 Ibid.

33 United Nations Security Council. (1999, December 17). 'Security Council establishes new monitoring commission for Iraq adopting resolution 1284 (1999) by a vote of 1-0-4'. United Nations Security Council Press Release SC/6775.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.

39 United Nations Security Council. (2000, February 17). 'Security Council recommends admission of



that he had considered Tuvalu's application very carefully, and stressed that 'most important thing was that the principles and purposes of the Charter should be implemented, as well as General Assembly resolution 27/58'.<sup>40</sup> Resolution 27/58, of course, was the historic resolution which recognised the government of China in Beijing over the government of China on Taiwan. However, because of China's 'long-term shared interests with the people of Tuvalu and the strong wish of the Pacific States to admit that country', he stated that his delegation would not block the resolution.<sup>41</sup> The exact same scenario had occurred (and almost the exact same statement articulated) in June of the previous year, when the Council voted on the membership of Nauru.<sup>42</sup> The passage of these resolutions indicates the difficulties of balancing China's competing interests in undermining Taiwan, but also reaffirming its ties with the third world.

A particularly interesting vote occurred in December 2000, wherein the Council failed to adopt a mission for the Occupied Palestinian Territories, not due to any vetoes, but to failure to receive the required nine positive votes.<sup>43</sup> China voted for this resolution, along with members of the non-aligned movement, while the other four permanent members of the Council abstained.<sup>44</sup> China stated that its reasons for voting for this resolution were shaped by concern for the hardships faced by the Palestinian people, and reiterated the Chinese government's 'opposition to violence of any kind'.<sup>45</sup> Russia stated that its decision to abstain had not been taken lightly, but that it felt that any observer force in the Occupied Territories need to have the support of both parties to the conflict, and broad-based approval in the Security council.<sup>46</sup> Russia's position represents a kind of middle ground between China and United States, which stated that it would have vetoed the resolution, if there had been a chance of it passing.<sup>47</sup>

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Tuvalu; Adopts Resolution 1290'. United Nations Security Council Press Release SC/6807.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.

42 United Nations Security Council. (1999, June 25). 'Security Council recommends to General Assembly that Republic of Nauru be admitted to membership in United Nations'. United Nations Security Council Press Release SC/6693.

43 United Nations Security Council. (2000, December 18). 'Security Council fails to adopt draft resolution on observer mission for occupied Palestinian territories'. United Nations Security Council Press Release SC/6976.

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.

The very day after the session mentioned above, the council voted on resolution 1333, which concerned terrorism in Afghanistan sponsored by the Taliban authorities; China was the only member of the permanent five to abstain.<sup>48</sup> The resolution demands cessation to the provision of sanctuary and training for international terrorists, issued a condemnation and imposed sanctions on the sale of arms and related material to Afghanistan.<sup>49</sup> In an explanation of his vote, the Chinese delegate stated that his country ‘did not favour the easy resort to or the continued use of sanctions’, as they were injurious to the poor.<sup>50</sup> While it could easily have been a coincidence, it is interesting that this lone abstention from China comes the very day after its lone affirmative vote; there could have been a tit-for-tat motivation behind its vote on this particular resolution.

## 2001

During 2001, China neither vetoed nor abstained on any resolutions. However it did make some interesting statements in relation to two resolutions which were vetoed by the United States. In March of 2001, the United States vetoed a resolution which would have established an observer force to protect Palestinian civilians;<sup>51</sup> this was to be the first of many vetoes cast by the US on this subject. The American delegate stated that timing was not right for the Security Council to vote on this issue, since it was obvious during the debate leading up to the vote that there would be no consensus, due to the unbalanced nature of the draft resolution.<sup>52</sup> He further stated that the Security Council needed to call for an end to violence on both sides.<sup>53</sup> France and the United Kingdom both abstained on the vote, and while both agreed with the US that the timing of the vote was improper, the French representative described the draft resolution as ‘substantial and balanced’, and the British representative did not make any judgement regarding the rightness or wrongness of the resolution itself, but rather abstained to show that it disagreed with attempts to seek a vote at that time.<sup>54</sup>

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48 United Nations Security Council. (2000, December 19). ‘Security Council imposes wide new measures against Taliban authorities in Afghanistan, demands action on terrorism’. United Nations Security Council Press Release SC/6979.

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid.

51 United Nations Security Council. (2001, March 27). ‘Draft resolution on Middle East rejected by Security Council’. United Nations Security Council Press Release SC/7040.

52 Ibid.

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid.

China, on the other hand, stressed the Security Council's responsibility to check the violence going on in the Middle East, which was causing large casualties and could result in increased regional instability, and reaffirmed its support for the text.<sup>55</sup> Russia drew attention to the sad fact that the situation in the Palestinian territories was slowly deteriorating.<sup>56</sup> The representative also stated that consensus on an agreed reaction was very close, and the concerted efforts put forward by council members in the past few days showed that it was possible.<sup>57</sup> It further stressed that when negotiations resumed, they needed to take care to cater to the needs of both parties.<sup>58</sup> Thus, again, Russia's position appears to be slightly more conciliatory towards the US than the position adopted by China.

Another resolution in the situation in the Middle East failed to pass the Security Council in December of 2001, again, vetoed by the United States.<sup>59</sup> The resolution would have 'condemned all acts of extra judiciary executions, excessive use of force and wide destruction of property', demanded an immediate halt to all acts of violence, and would have called for the establishment of a monitoring mechanism to help keep the peace.<sup>60</sup> The delegate from the United States stated that the draft legislation represented an attempt to 'isolate politically' one of the parties to the conflict, and also failed to 'address the dynamic at work in the region'.<sup>61</sup> The United Kingdom abstained from voting because, while it agreed with much of what the resolution was advocating, felt that the draft was incomplete (presumably in terms of the different emphases given to each party's share in the blame for the conflict).<sup>62</sup>

France, on the other hand, voted for the legislation on this occasion, stating that it felt the resolution was fair and balanced, and offered a clear-cut direction for the Council to follow in the resolution of the issue.<sup>63</sup> The Russian representative stated that both sides needed to realise that the use of force would never resolve anything, but went on to single out Israel, saying that 'Israeli leaders could not deny the reality and the Palestinians' right to an independent State. Neither could Israel question the right of the Palestinians' choice of Yasser Arafat as their leader'.<sup>64</sup> China was even more vocal in throwing its weight behind Palestine, stating that 'the only way to solve the question of the Middle East was by the

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> United Nations Security Council. (2001, December 14). 'Security Council fails to adopt resolution on Middle East situation, to condemn use of force, encourage monitoring mechanism'. *United Nations Security Council Press Release SC/7242*.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

cessation of Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory and the establishment of a Palestinian State on the basis of land for peace and the implementation of established agreements and resolutions'.<sup>65</sup> Again, with regard to the issue of the Middle East, their appears to be a sort of rhetorical continuum from the United States, which promotes 'balance' and sticks up for Israel, to the UK, to France, to Russia, through to China which appears to express strongest support for Palestine.

## 2002-2003

During this period, again, China neither vetoed nor abstained on any resolution, nor, even did it make any particularly interesting statements in relation to other resolutions. Only one provides some information of any significance. In June 2002, the United States vetoed a draft resolution which proposed to extend the UN mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina for six months.<sup>66</sup> Its principal reason for voting against the text was that it was concerned about the safety of its peacekeeping personnel, with the International Criminal Court coming into effect, as while the US stressed its commitment to security in Bosnia and Herzegovina, it was simply not willing to expose its peacekeepers to the risk of prosecution by the International Criminal Court.<sup>67</sup> In this case, the other four permanent members all voted in the affirmative and each of their policy statements expressed understanding of the reasons behind the US veto, but also a thinly-veiled frustration that those reasons had halted progress on the issue at hand. The outcome of the vote on this resolution is evidence to refute the idea that China is overly antagonistic or difficult on the United Nations Security Council.

## 2004

In September 2004, China and Russia both abstained on resolution 1564, which declared the Council's intention to consider sanctions in order to secure Sudan's compliance with disarmament obligations, and called on the Secretary-General to establish an inquiry commission for possible human rights violations in Darfur.<sup>68</sup> The Chinese delegate stated

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> United Nations Security Council. (2002, June 30). 'Security Council rejects draft proposing extension of United Nations mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina'. *United Nations Security Council Press Release SC/7437*.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> United Nations Security Council. (2004, September 18). 'Declares intention to consider sanctions to obtain Sudan's full compliance with security, disarmament obligations on Darfur'. *United Nations Security Council Press Release SC/8191*.

that Sudan had demonstrated real commitment to resolving the situation in Darfur, and gave its support to the African Union for its efforts in searching for a solution to the problem.<sup>69</sup> China stressed that it was against the use of sanctions in general, and urged the Council not to automatically resort to using sanctions as a threat.<sup>70</sup> The representative for the Russian Federation noted the progress Sudan had made towards stabilizing and controlling the situation, but stressed that there was still much to be done before the situation returned to normal.<sup>71</sup> Like China, Russia emphasized the importance of supporting the African Union to negotiate a peaceful resolution, and stressed that sanctions would be highly counterproductive to the peace process.<sup>72</sup>

In the same month, China and Russia abstained on Resolution 1559, which declared support for free and fair elections in Lebanon, and called for the withdrawal of foreign forces.<sup>73</sup> China's representative stated that 'respect for sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and non-interference in internal affairs constituted a centrepiece of China's foreign policy and were principles of the United Nations', and since the draft resolution concerned Lebanon's internal affairs, it therefore had nothing to do with the Council.<sup>74</sup> Russia's reasons for abstaining were different to China's. It had made suggestions to the Council that the resolution be couched in terms of broader Middle Eastern security. When his proposals were not accepted, it became impossible for him to support the resolution.<sup>75</sup>

## 2005

China and Russia again abstained on a resolution concerning the situation in Darfur, in March, 2005. Resolution 1591 imposed financial sanctions against those among the leadership of the Sudan who were impeding the peace process there.<sup>76</sup> China stated that it had reservations about the resolution as, while in this case the deployment of a UN mission to Sudan (Resolution 1590) was the right decision and would contribute to peace and

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69 Ibid.

70 Ibid.

71 Ibid.

72 Ibid.

73 United Nations Security Council. (2004, September 2). 'Declares support for free, fair presidential election in Lebanon; calls for withdrawal of foreign forces there'. United Nations Security Council Press Release SC/8191.

74 Ibid.

75 Ibid.

76 United Nations Security Council. (2005, March 29). 'Security council imposes travel ban, assets freeze on those impeding peace process in Darfur, adopting Resolution 1591'. United Nations Security Council Press Release SC/8346.

security, the council had not done enough to involve the African Union.<sup>77</sup> It further emphasized that China was wary of sanctions, and felt that the Council had better support the African Union rather than attempt the imposition of sanctions.<sup>78</sup> Russia also expressed doubts about the impact of sanctions, worrying that it might make Sudanese leadership less amenable to seeking a peaceful solution, and stressed that both the African Union and the League of Arab States were opposed to sanctions.<sup>79</sup> In this case, Russia and China voted the same way for exactly the same reasons.

Resolution 1593 presents an interesting case, as in this instance, China and the United States both abstained.<sup>80</sup> The resolution, passed in March, 2005, refers the conflict in Darfur to the International Criminal Court.<sup>81</sup> China's reason for abstaining was that it supported a 'political solution', and while it joined the rest of the Council in deploring the human rights violations in Darfur, it questioned whether the International Criminal Court was the most appropriate method of bringing the perpetrators to justice.<sup>82</sup> It stated that, 'while ensuring justice, it was important to sustain the hard-won gains of the North-South peace process', and would prefer the perpetrators be tried in a Sudanese court.<sup>83</sup> The United States' stated reasons for abstaining were actually fairly similar to China's, as the US deplored the human rights violations in the Sudan, but said that it believed some kind of hybrid tribunal in Africa would have been a more appropriate forum.<sup>84</sup> However, while China's main motives for its position are its staunch advocacy of domestic sovereignty and determination to be seen as a champion of the developing world, the United States has in the past had issues with the ICC. As mentioned above, the United States even vetoed a resolution concerning the ICC as it did not want US peacekeeping personnel falling under the jurisdiction of the International Court, because it did not recognize its authority,<sup>85</sup> and in the context of this resolution, may have been attempting to undermine the Court. Thus, while at face value there would appear to be some congruence between the US and China, in reality their motives may have been quite different.

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77 Ibid.

78 Ibid.

79 Ibid.

80 United Nations Security Council. (2005, March 31). 'Security council refers situation in Darfur, Sudan, to prosecutor of International Criminal Court'. United Nations Security Council Press Release SC/8351.

81 Ibid.

82 Ibid.

83 Ibid.

84 Ibid.

85 United Nations Security Council. (2002, June 30). Press Release SC/7437.

## 2006

In April of 2006, China and Russia abstained on a resolution which imposed travel and financial sanctions against four Sudanese individuals associated with the human rights abuses there.<sup>86</sup> The delegate of Russian Federation stated that while violations of international norms, such as humanitarian law, should be punished, he did not think that the sanctions were the best way to achieve a much needed peace settlement in Darfur.<sup>87</sup> The Chinese delegate expressed a similar, but slightly more strongly worded belief that sanctions in general were not a good idea because they did not work and they only harmed the poor and vulnerable.<sup>88</sup> Furthermore, the delegate stated that many African members had expressed concerns about the timing of the sanctions, and felt that the African Union had not had enough time to conclude negotiations.<sup>89</sup> He expressed concern about the humanitarian situation in Darfur, and hoped that it would be resolved, and the perpetrators brought to justice.<sup>90</sup> Thus, both China and Russia officially expressed a concern for human rights, and a belief that intervention in the form of sanctions was not the best way to protect those rights. China again reaffirmed its image as a champion for the third world.

China and Russia again abstained together, in May 2006, on resolution 1680, which encouraged Syria to delineate its border with Lebanon and establish diplomatic relations.<sup>91</sup> China's representative stated that 'he had hoped that the co-sponsors of the text would make changes in order to send out a more balanced message. While he appreciated their efforts, the changes made did not solve fundamental concerns.'<sup>92</sup> He expressed the wish that Lebanon and Syria continue their efforts towards resolving their border issues.<sup>93</sup> The Russian delegate stated that while he strongly advocated normalization of relations between Syria and Lebanon, he did not feel that the resolution before the Council today was appropriate, as the strengthening of Lebanon's sovereignty and territorial integrity was a

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<sup>86</sup> United Nations Security Council. (2000, February 17). 'Security Council imposes travel, financial sanctions on 4 Sudanese, Adopting Resolution 1672'. *United Nations Security Council Press Release SC/8700*.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> United Nations Security Council. (2006, May 17). 'Security council strongly encourages Syria to respond to Lebanon's request to delineate border, establish diplomatic relations'. *United Nations Security Council Press Release SC/8723*.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

matter best left to itself and Syria.<sup>94</sup> Here again, while China and Russia have voted the same way, their reasons for doing so are not necessarily congruent. Russia's abstention was a direct result of the way it perceived the function and role of the Council. China's (somewhat more enigmatic) response which called for more 'balance' and attention to unspecified 'fundamental concerns' appears to be an attempt by the PRC not to take sides between Syria and Lebanon, perhaps in pursuit of its public relations with less developed countries.

Russia and China once more cast double abstentions in August 2006, on resolution 1706, which expanded the mandate of the UN mission in the Sudan to include Darfur.<sup>95</sup> China reiterated the substantial efforts that the African Union had made to soothe the conflict in Darfur, and went on to state that while there was definitely a sense of urgency when it came to the Darfur situation, the Council also needed to show patience, and obtain the consent of the Sudanese government.<sup>96</sup> It stated that the Secretary-General had proposed holding a dialogue with the Sudanese government to smooth the way for the UN mission.<sup>97</sup> However the Council had deemed it necessary to rush the resolution through, and China contended that that could have significant negative impacts on the peace process, and for that reason, China abstained from the vote.<sup>98</sup> The Russian delegate likewise stated that it was imperative to secure the acceptance of the Sudanese Government before expanding the UN mission to Darfur.<sup>99</sup>

## 2007

Both China and Russia vetoed a resolution on Myanmar in January 2007.<sup>100</sup> Sponsored by the US and the UK, the proposal would have called on the government to cease violence against civilians and ethnic minorities, make tangible progress towards democracy, and release Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. The Chinese delegate stated that he voted against the draft resolution because 'the matter was an internal affair of a sovereign State and did not pose a

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> United Nations Security Council. (2006, August 31). 'Security council expands mandate of UN mission in Sudan to include Darfur'. *United Nations Security Council Press Release SC/8821*.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>100</sup> United Nations Security Council. (2006, April 25). 'Security Council imposes travel, financial sanctions on 4 Sudanese, Adopting Resolution 1672'. *United Nations Security Council Press Release SC/8939*.



threat to international or regional peace and security'.<sup>101</sup> The Russian delegation took the same view, and further stated that specialized UN bodies were better equipped to deal with the situation in Myanmar.<sup>102</sup>

In May, 2007, China and Russia both abstained on resolution 1757, which authorized the establishment of an international tribunal to bring to trial suspects in the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri.<sup>103</sup> The representative of China stated that his delegation condemned the assassination of former Prime Minister Hariri, had all along supported the idea of a formal inquiry and expressed the hope that the perpetrators would be brought to justice.<sup>104</sup> However, China considered it an internal matter for Lebanon, and worried about the precedence this resolution would set for interference in the domestic affairs of sovereign states.<sup>105</sup> Russia advocated a very similar position to China, and stated that 'the Russian Federation had negotiated for a more balanced text, but the one before the Council, which unilaterally imposed a decision on Lebanon, was fraught with legal inconsistencies'.<sup>106</sup> He also expressed concern that the inquiry would exacerbate the 'deep rift in Lebanese society and government structures', and called for the Council to be more balanced in its approach.<sup>107</sup>

## 2008

China and Russia again cast double vetoes against a resolution which would have imposed financial sanctions and travel bans on the Zimbabwe leadership.<sup>108</sup> The United States delegation, who sponsored the resolution, were bitterly disappointed, saying that 'China and Russia stand with Mugabe against the people of Zimbabwe. A majority of the Council stand with the people of Zimbabwe'.<sup>109</sup>

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101 Ibid.

102 Ibid.

103 United Nations Security Council. (2007, May 30). 'Security council authorizes establishment of Special tribunal to try suspect in assassination of Rafiq Hariri'. United Nations Security Council Press Release SC/9029.

104 Ibid.

105 Ibid.

106 Ibid.

107 Ibid.

108 United Nations Security Council. (2008, July 11). 'Security council fails to adopt sanctions against Zimbabwe leadership as two permanent members cast negative votes'. *United Nations Security Council Press Release SC/9396*.

109 Ibid.

The representative for China stated that he found intractable problems with the draft resolution.<sup>110</sup> He stated that China had been in close consultation with the African Union summit and encouraged dialogue with Zimbabwe and the establishment of a Government of National Unity, and reiterated that the African position was for more time to be allotted to diplomatic efforts, and China felt that the Council should respect that position.<sup>111</sup> Moreover, China ‘had long believed that negotiations and dialogue were the best approach to solving problems’, and that ‘a threat of sanctions was not conducive to that goal’.<sup>112</sup> Moreover, the situation in Zimbabwe was an internal Zimbabwean affair, and did not present any major threat to international security.<sup>113</sup>

The Russian Federation stated that recently there had been attempts to take the Security Council beyond the prerogatives of its Charter, which could ‘unbalance’ the entire international system.<sup>114</sup> He further stated that the way to improve the situation in Zimbabwe was not by securitizing it and interfering in this country’s internal affairs, but rather by committing to dialogue and mediation.<sup>115</sup> Like China, Russia also drew attention to the position of the African Union, and reminded the Council that the AU had urged it to be cautious, and avoid exacerbating the situation.<sup>116</sup> The delegate qualified this position, however, by saying that just because sanctions were an inappropriate response, did not mean that the international community had to turn a blind eye to Zimbabwe’s problems.<sup>117</sup>

## 2009

In June 2009, the Security Council failed to adopt a resolution extending the mandate of the UN mission in Georgia for two weeks.<sup>118</sup> In this case, the Russian Federation voted against the proposal, and China abstained from the vote.<sup>119</sup> The resolution was intended to

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> United Nations Security Council. (2009, June 15). ‘Security Council fails to adopt resolution extending mandate of Georgia mission for two weeks, as Russian Federation votes against text’. *United Nations Security Council Press Release SC/9681*

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

allow extended debate about a new security regime in the region.<sup>120</sup> China expressed regret that the Council had not been able to reach an agreement upon the expiry of the mission in Georgia.<sup>121</sup> When the debate became ‘bogged in an impasse’ and neither side was prepared to budge, the Chinese delegation had decided to abstain.<sup>122</sup> The delegate reiterated China’s central position on sovereignty, and also reaffirmed China’s commitment to peace and security in the Caucasus, expressing a hope that all parties would calmly begin talking with each other to resolve the problem.<sup>123</sup> The Russian Federation stated that there was no sense in extending the mandate of the Georgia mission, since it was out of date and anachronistic, and a new regime in Georgia was desperately needed.<sup>124</sup> This was a particularly interesting case, however, as China would not have had any tangible interests in the matter at hand (it involved neither sanctions or sovereignty, and concerned the renewal of a long-established mission), yet it still chose to show support to Russia by abstaining.

## **Rationale Behind China’s Voting Pattern**

These case studies above provide numerous illustrations of the similar thinking of China and Russia with regards to the Security Council. In particular, both countries have demonstrated several shared imperatives in the way they operate on the Council, which specifically include:

1. Concern for sovereignty.
2. Anti-interventionism.
3. Anti-sanctions – repeated belief that they are ineffective and harm the citizens of countries which are subject to sanctions.
4. Sometimes anti-Western and pro-third world (although this is less true of Russia than of China).
5. Lip-service to human rights, but unwilling to follow up with action beyond ‘dialogue’, or even criticism.

A further imperative for China would include the systematic undermining of the Republic of China on Taiwan by constant reinforcement of the one-China policy.

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

China and Russia have a sort of shared legacy, as a semi-communist state and a former communist state, which could make them less amenable to action by the international community, and particularly Western, US-led, ‘imperialistic’ action. For China this could be especially pertinent, as Carlson writes that on another, related level, the legacy of the ‘century of humiliation’ functions as a lens through which the Chinese elite viewed issues of intervention.<sup>125</sup>

Another theory of China’s voting behaviour is explained by Samuel S. Kim as ‘maxi/mini diplomacy’, by which China expresses ‘principled opposition’ to the resolution in the form of abstention, but does not stand in the way of the rest of the council.<sup>126</sup> It thereby manages not to abandon its principles, but also to save face and maintain cordial relations within the Council by being flexible in finding a way out of difficult issues, thus it extracts maximum benefits for minimum costs.<sup>127</sup>

Beijing has also been accused of being vague with regard to its policy towards the council, and of not making its intentions clear. This is still true of many of the votes it casts on the Security Council. Abstentions on membership issues are a good case in point. China consistently reiterates the ‘one China policy’, and strives to undermine Taiwan, which leads it to abstain on the admission of those member states which it feels have not done enough to commit to this policy. However, as seen in the case of Tuvalu’s membership, it also strives to promote its image as a representative of the third world, and thus does not want to be seen to be thwarting poor developing countries like Tuvalu. Furthermore, it does not want to alienate itself on the council by standing in the way of the majority will. Thus, China sometimes does one thing, says another, but actually wants something else all together.

In other cases, however, its behaviour is less ambiguous. Where it takes strong action against Western criticism of or intervention in places like Zimbabwe or Myanmar, it sends a clear signal that if the Council cannot change Myanmar, it certainly cannot hope to change China. It is important to note that the mandate of the United Nations Security Council was initially not intended to cover internal conflicts and human rights violations; it was created in response to the World Wars as a mechanism to prevent interstate conflict and aggression.<sup>128</sup> However as inter-state conflicts decrease in relation to intra-state

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125 Carlson, Allen. (2004). ‘Helping to Keep the Peace (Albeit Reluctantly): China’s Recent Stance on Sovereignty and Multilateral Intervention’. *Pacific Affairs*, 77(1), 9-27

126 Kim, Samuel S. (1999). ‘China and the United Nations’. In Oksenberg, Michel and Economy, Elizabeth (Eds.), *China Joins the World: Progress and Prospects* (pp. 42-89). New York: Council on Foreign Relations, Inc., p. 62

127 Ibid.

128 Carlson, Allen. (2004). ‘Helping to Keep the Peace (Albeit Reluctantly): China’s Recent Stance on

conflicts, the Council has had to adapt to deal with this new reality of war in the modern era in order to remain a relevant organ of international security. Russia and China, with their somewhat questionable human rights records and histories of internal conflicts with separatist movements, might understandably be concerned by the new direction taken by the Council. China is particularly quick to invoke the principle of sovereignty in relation to human rights, both with regard to itself and to other nation states, although it is careful not to go too far down that path, and always states its commitment to humanitarian values.

## Concluding Remarks

Empirical evidence suggests that, of all the relationships between the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, the cooperation between Russia and China is strongest. Evidence also shows that congruence of voting between Russia and China on the one hand, and the UK and the US on the other, is comparatively weak. However this does not by any means indicate that China is the antagonist of the Security Council, and is out to thwart the United States and the will of the majority. In fact, China uses its veto power very sparingly (particularly in comparison to the US), and instead abstains from voting if it needs to express ‘principled opposition’.<sup>129</sup> Furthermore, it rarely votes unilaterally.

China’s voting rationale has several factors in common with Russia. Both are unreceptive of US-led intervention, perhaps as a result of residual anti-Imperialist sentiments, but also as an affirmation of the principle of state sovereignty. Also while they both pay lip-service to humanitarian security imperatives, they both seem to neglect to follow through with action in the form of a positive vote. This can be seen as a show of force, and clear prioritization on both sides of national interests over normative interests. On the other hand, Russia does not share China’s need to undermine Taiwan, nor China’s desire to be seen as a spokesperson for the third world.

While China and Russia may have a somewhat similar outlook on a number of issues, they could not be said to have any kind of tangible or even tacit ‘alliance’ as such. In 1995, a Chinese representative to the UN stated that ‘China will not enter into alliances with any countries, but can coordinate with different sides, and can say and dare to say what others cannot easily or dare not say. China enjoys high fame and plentiful friends in the UN’.<sup>130</sup> While this statement was made outside the time period under consideration, it is still a

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Sovereignty and Multilateral Intervention’. *Pacific Affairs*, 77(1), 16.

<sup>129</sup> Kim, 62.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid*, 48.

useful summary of the way China approaches the Council. It makes no guarantees to anyone, but coordinates with others as its interests dictate, it is very concerned with its reputation and popularity, and takes pride in speaking out for its principles and on behalf of the third world. However, China certainly 'dares to say' a great deal more than it dares to do, and its behaviour on the Security Council can be characterised as one of 'principled caution'.

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The New Zealand Contemporary China Research Centre provides a national platform for China-related capability building and knowledge sharing among tertiary institutions, the business community, and public sector organizations in New Zealand for effective engagement with China.

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