



Master's Thesis – 30 ECTS



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Summary

The role European Union (EU) and the People's Republic of China (China) as global security providers is gaining more relevance, following the United States (US) taking a step backward in their engagement to security at the international level. This has raised the interest in the study of the possibilities for cooperation between the EU and China in the field of security and its different dimensions – i.e. military. The EU and China are bound by a “comprehensive and strategic partnership”, which encompasses not only economic but also security relations. The expansion of their interests outside their borders eventually led them to be face to face in a third region – for instance, in Africa. The interests that both players hold in Africa motivate their military presence there. This leads to the following research question: To what extent is there room for military cooperation between the EU and China in Africa? Through this formulation, I outline three areas that I aim to explore within this paper. The first one is the EU-China security relations, one dimension of the overall relationship between the actors where military cooperation is included. The second area is the EU and China's military deployment in Africa, where their security interests motivated the engagement of their military forces. The third area is the cooperation – and its limits – in those instances where the EU and China have their military personnel deployed on the same field, i.e. in the Gulf of Aden (off the coast of Somalia) and in Mali. The EU is militarily present in Africa with its Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) interventions, while China has its military troops in the continent either as an ‘independent deployer’ (in the Gulf of Aden) or within the framework of the United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (UNPKOs; in Mali). In order to answer the research question, I make use of the International Cooperation Theory (ICT) to investigate the ongoing interactions between the EU and Chinese naval forces in the Gulf of Aden, and the more complex interactions in Mali. While the coordinated efforts between the EU Naval Forces (EUNAVFOR) and the Chinese People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) to counter piracy are in development and present a larger extent for cooperation; the absence of direct interactions between the EU and Chinese troops in Mali – and the ambivalent relations between some EU Member States' and China's troops under the UNPKO MINUSMA – restrict considerably room for military cooperation.

Keywords: Africa; China; EU; Gulf of Aden; ICT; Mali; military cooperation.

摘要

随着美利坚合众国（美国）在国际安全事务中地位的下降，欧洲联盟（欧盟）和中华人民共和国（中国）作为全球安全提供者的地位越来越重要。这引起了国际上对研究欧盟和中国在安全领域及其不同方面（即军事领域）进行合作可能性的兴趣。欧盟与中国通过“全面战略伙伴关系”结成伙伴。他们在境外的利益扩张，最终导致了他们在第三方地区的会面——例如非洲。在非洲，欧盟与中国都拥有经济及安全利益，这使得他们在非洲部署军队。因此，我所研究的问题是：欧盟与中国在非洲的军事合作能进行到什么程度？就此问题，我阐述了在本文中要研究的三个领域。一是作为中欧整体关系一个方面的中欧安全关系（这方面包括军事合作）。二是欧盟和中国因它们在非洲的安全利益而推动的军事部署。三是合作及其局限性，即在亚丁湾（索马里海岸外）和马里，欧盟和中国军事人员的共同部署。欧盟依照其共同安全与防务政策在非洲部署军队。中国或以“独立部署者”的身份（即在亚丁湾），或参与联合国维和行动（即在马里），在非洲部署军队。为了回答这个问题，我运用国际合作理论，首先考察欧盟和中国的海军在亚丁湾的互动，接着考察双方在马里更为复杂的互动。欧盟海军与中国人民解放军海军正在对打击海盗进行协调努力，并呈现出更大程度的合作。而在马里，欧盟和中国的军队之间缺乏直接的互动，并且一些欧盟成员国和中国的军队在联合国维和部队领导下存在矛盾关系，这很大程度上限制了军事合作的空间。

关键词：非洲；中国；欧盟；亚丁湾；国际合作理论；马里；军事合作。

Abbreviations

AFISMA	African-led International Support Mission to Mali
CARD	Coordinated Annual Review on Defence
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
CMF	Combined Maritime Forces
CSDP	Common Security and Defence Policy
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EEC	European Economic Community
EUCAP	European Union Capacity Building Mission
EUGS	European Union Global Strategy
EUMS	European Union Member State
EUNAVFOR	European Union Naval Force
EUTM	European Union Training Mission
FOCAC	Forum on China-Africa Cooperation
HR/VP	High Representative of the Union for the Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission
ICT	International Cooperation Theory
MINUSMA	<i>Mission Multidimensionnelle Intégrée des Nations Unies pour la Stabilisation au Mali</i> (United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali)
MNLA	<i>Mouvement National pour la Libération de l’Azawad</i> (National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad)
MSCHOA	Maritime Security Centre – Horn of Africa
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
PESCO	Permanent Structured Cooperation

PLA	People's Liberation Army
PLA-N	People's Liberation Army Navy
SHADE	Shared Awareness and Deconfliction
UNPK	United Nations Peacekeeping
UNPKO	United Nations Peacekeeping Operation
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UNWFP	United Nations World Food Program

1. Introduction

On October 16, 2018, the European Union (EU) and Chinese naval forces completed a combined exercise of an “unprecedented level of coordination” (Stanley-Lockman, 2018). This happened in the Gulf of Aden, in the waters off the coast of Somalia, where both the EU and the People’s Republic of China (henceforth, China) have been militarily present for more than ten years, after the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) passed the Resolution 1816 on June 2008 authorising the international action to deal with the rise of piracy in the region (UN, 2008).

Notwithstanding the economic feature of the relationship, which is indeed at the core of the EU-China relationship, the two actors have proved that their relations can be and are indeed extended to other fields – i.e. security¹. The growing interest within security studies in analysing actors such as the EU and China is directly connected with the decrease of the role played by the United States (US) as a security actor. The US is often regarded as *the* world security provider, being the major contributor to the world’s biggest military alliance – North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) – and United Nations Peacekeeping (UNPK). However, Trump’s presidency (2017 – present) has taken a step backward from this role. In July 2017, the US achieved to cut more than half a billion dollars of the UNPK budget, declaring that they were “only getting started” (Lederer, 2017). This trend was countered by China, which decided instead to increase its commitment and became the second-largest financial contributor and the largest provider of UNPK personnel within the “Permanent Five” of the UNSC (Lanteigne, 2019: 3). China has made clear its intention to play a major role in the field of security, increasing its defence spending and making the Chinese military a “world-class force” by 2050 (Godement and Vasselier, 2017: 27; Joyce, 2018: 1). Similar aspirations are shared by the EU, which manifested in its «Global Strategy» (EUGS) its determination to make “the European Union (to) play a major role, including as a *global security provider*” (EEAS, 2016: 3; emphasis added). It became increasingly important for the EU to take the security of the European region in its own hands since President Trump vented in July 2018 the possibility of the US withdrawal from NATO, if the other Member States were not to start increasing their defence spending to share the burden of the security of the region (Harding, 2018). The EU has thus made some major

¹ Here security is intended in terms of ‘traditional’ security (see sub-chapter 3.4).

improvements, such as the establishment of the Permanent Structure Cooperation (PESCO)² and the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD)³, making the realisation of the “long-term vision” of a “European army” (MSC, 2019: 14) closer. In the realm of global security, the stepping backward of the US and the stepping forward of the EU and China creates more interest in the study of military interactions between these two actors.

Simultaneously, the expansion of their interests outside their borders eventually led them to be face to face in a third region – for instance, in Africa. Both players hold not only economic but also security interests in the continent, which motivate their military presence there. Besides the colonial past that ties many of the African countries to some of the European countries (which are now members of the EU), the Union has been deploying its military personnel in Africa since 2003, when it launched its first military mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Currently, it is conducting four military interventions on the continent (EEAS-SC, 2018). As for China, it has been increasingly militarily present in the continent since the 1990s, both as an ‘independent deployer’ and within the framework of UN Peacekeeping Operations (UNPKOs).

1.1. *Research question*

Taking into account the aspirations of the EU and China to become global security providers, their overall relationship – especially the security dimension, and their military presence in Africa; in this paper, I aim to answer the following research question:

**To what extent is there room for military cooperation
between the EU and China in Africa?**

² 25 out of 28 EUMSs are part of this cooperation; among them, 20 are also members of NATO (EEAS-SC, 2017). This is explained by the German Minister of Defence: “We want to remain transatlantic – while also becoming more European” (MSC, 2019: 14, 16). In the EUGS (2016), the role of NATO is defined in terms of “complementarity” (EEAS, 2016: 20). The three EUMSs outside PESCO are: Denmark (NATO member; holds an opt-out in the EU defence policies), the United Kingdom (UK; also NATO member; voted to leave the EU in 2016) and Malta (neither in NATO nor in PESCO) (NATO, 2018).

³ Both came as a result of the implementation of the EUGS (Barrie et al., 2018: 4).

Through this formulation, I outline three areas that I aim to explore within this paper. The first one is the EU-China security relations, one dimension of the overall relationship between the actors. I deem necessary to introduce their security relations because military cooperation is included in them. The second area is the EU and China's military deployment in Africa, where their security interests motivated the engagement of their military forces. The third area is the cooperation – and its limits – in those instances where the EU and China have their military personnel on the same field.

Here, I regard 'military cooperation' as part of the realm of security relations – in other words, as security relations cover different dimensions (e.g. environmental, nuclear, and so on), military is one of these. The broadness of the term "security" makes its conceptualisation difficult and arguable, for there is not a single definition which is commonly shared in the academic world⁴. The most generic – and likely acceptable – way to look at this term is to define it as *the state of being safe and free from danger or threat*. Therefore, I regard security relations as the interactions between two (or more) actors aiming at the achievement and preservation of this state. Considering that the EU and China are accountable for the wellbeing of about a quarter of the population of the globe (Wang and Mogherini, 2015), and that their economic and security concerns grow intertwined, these two actors have the interest "to secure the fruits of their economic success through a growing number of bilateral and multilateral cooperative security arrangements" (Kirchner et al., 2016: 9). Hence, I regard military cooperation as encompassing those forms of interactions between two (or more) actors, involving their military capabilities, aiming at outcomes that are favourable for the parties engaged. In order to better understand and therefore analyse the concept of cooperation in the realm of military matters, I make use of the International Cooperation Theory (ICT), introduced in Chapter 4.

1.2. *About the EU*

The choice of the title and the research question may leave someone perplexed, to say the least. How is it possible to talk about the EU in terms of security – or even

⁴ Conceptualizing "security" means not only answer the question "what is it?", but many others, such as "security for whom?" and "security from what?". For more details, see Baldwin, 1997.

military? The EU and China hold substantial differences. China can be regarded as a unitary actor, with its proper military forces and its military strategy⁵. The same cannot be said for the EU. The Union regroups 28 States which all possess their own military forces – that can be and are indeed deployed outside the EU framework (as I show later in this paper, with the case of Mali). The EU does not possess a *unitary* military strategy – instead, it has a *common* strategy: the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). Rather than a Defence Policy, the CSDP is more “the military component of the EU security policies” (Keohane, 2018: 2), since it is part of the broader Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). The responsibility for proposing and implementing CSDP decisions belongs to the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission (HR/VP). This Policy still presents a strong intergovernmental feature, since it is the Foreign Affairs Council (the configurations of the Council of the European Union which reunites the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Member States) which is accountable for the adoption of such decisions (EUR-Lex, 2019). The EU does not possess a unitary military either – the Member States instead (with one exception⁶) provide their military personnel for the CSDP interventions. Nonetheless, the leadership of CSDP missions and operations is indeed at the EU level, as the command structure of the CSDP involves the HR/VP, the Military Committee (composed by the Member States’ Chiefs of Defence) and the Military Staff (a Directorate-General of the European External Action Service, directing the military interventions) (EUR-Lex, 2019). Moreover, the EU and China has initiated a Dialogue on Security and Defence in 2014, where the Chairman of the EU Military Committee meets with China’s Minister of Defence and the Chief of General Staff (Yao, 2014). This means that it is still possible – and relevant – to discuss the military interactions between the EU and China.

Individual EU Member States (EUMSs), such as France or the UK, have undoubtedly a longer and more involved security engagement with China than the EU does. Nevertheless, the EU has proven to be a security actor in its own right, also when

⁵ Notwithstanding the differences or even contradictions that there might be between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Defence and the officers of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA), the single leadership of the Communist Party of China ensure the unity of the strategy and action of China’s military.

⁶ Denmark has an opt-out for defence matters, which means that it does not participate in EU military operations or in the cooperation on the development of military capabilities within the EU framework (DMD, 2018).

dealing with China: in fact, besides the cooperation in countering piracy, other examples of cooperation are witnessed in the field of environmental security – and the related climate change negotiations – and nuclear security – with the achievement of the Iran deal (Kirchner et al, 2016: 8). More specifically, the EU military interventions under the CSDP prove that there are instances where the EUMSs, despite their different and maybe even contrasting security agendas, do choose to act in unison, under the single flag of the EU. The EU's military efforts are mainly focused on international security beyond the borders of the Union – in practice, intervening “when the US has been unwilling or unable to do so” (Keohane, 2018: 2, 7). In this regard, Benjamin Barton points out that “Africa offers a more conducive environment for international bilateral cooperation to the EU and China due to its lesser strategic relevance to US foreign policy interests” (Barton, 2017: 61).

In this paper, I do not dwell more on the ‘US factor’, but rather focus on the EU and China and those three areas outlined with the research question. I first proceed with presenting, in the following chapter, the literature review I conducted to gather more information on the EU-China security relations, more specifically referring to those instances of interactions between their military forces. In Chapter 3, I explain the methodology I follow for this project. In Chapter 4, I present the ICT and how I intend to apply it for my analysis. In Chapter 5, I provide the frame for the military cooperation to take place, first introducing the overall EU-China security relations, then focusing on their respective security interests and related military engagement in Africa; the frame is necessary to prove that there is room for military cooperation on the continent. Therefore, in Chapter 6, I proceed with the analysis to answer the question “to what extent” is there room for such cooperation, starting with a preliminary application of the ICT, then proceeding to investigate the two instances of military interactions between the EU and China in Africa, i.e. in the waters off the coast of Somalia and in Mali; I also provide a brief discussion pushed beyond the research question, on the trilateral cooperation between the EU, China and Africa. In Chapter 7, I sum up the results of the analysis and answer the research question.

2. Literature review

For the analysis of this topic, I read academic publications dealing with the EU-China security relations, looking more specifically for references on military issues. I also checked papers written by those scholars who focused on the military presence of the EU and China in Africa and elaborated on the interactions between the two on the field.

While it is true that the majority of the academic literature is mostly centred on the economic side of the EU-China relationship, there are scholars who deal with the topic of security relations. One of the major contributions to this field comes from Emil J. Kirchner, Thomas Christiansen and Han Dorussen, authors of the book «Security Relations between China and the European Union – From Convergence to Cooperation?» (2016). Their work covers the topic of the relations between the EU and China in the different dimensions of security. They outline the context where the EU-China security relations take place, with a stress on the interwovenness between economy and security, as well as other considerations about their nature and their limits (Kirchner et al., 2016). In particular, one chapter is dedicated to the analysis of the EU-China military cooperation, presenting their respective military thinking, and the consequent possibility of cooperation, at the bilateral and multilateral level (Duke and Wong, 2016). In their conclusion, they picture the cooperation in military security with “low levels of convergence” but “low/medium levels of cooperation”. Among the factors that explain a discrepancy between convergence and cooperation and the obstacles to the overall security cooperation, they put forward the presence of inner differences (in terms of political systems and system of values – i.e. respect of sovereignty and principle of non intervention), as well as external factors, the role of the US in primis (Christiansen et al., 2016).

Other scholars give their contributions to the broader topic of EU-China security relations. There is a number of elements that appear transversal in different academic works. The first one is geography, which explains the absence of the “security dilemma” between China and the EU (Kirchner et al., 2016; Cottey, 2018). This dilemma is explained as “a structural notion in which the self-help attempts of states to look after their security needs tend, regardless of intention, to lead to rising insecurity for others,

as each interprets its own measures as defensive and measures of others as potentially threatening” (Herz, 1950: 157). Due to their geographical distance, neither the EU nor China considers the other a ‘potential threat’. At the same time, this element justifies also the more economic- and less security-oriented relationship on the other (Men, 2014; Cottey, 2018). Another element is the so-called “economy-security nexus”, which counterbalances in a way the geographic factor, explaining the evolution and expansion of the relations (Zaborowski, 2008; Bund and Makocki, 2016). Some scholars presented a more comprehensive picture, where the increasing number of security threats is what motivates great powers such as the EU and China to commit themselves to the cause of global security⁷ (Zaborowski, 2008; Cottey, 2018). Many scholars share the idea that multilateralism⁸ is what both the EU and China’s foreign policies have in common: the joint promotion of multilateralism in various instances is considered as a factor that fosters EU-China security cooperation (Men, 2014; Duggan, 2017). However, the ‘US factor’ can be a source of limitations to this cooperation, for the ambivalent relations entertained by the EU with the US hinder the trust of China towards its partner (Men, 2014; Cottey, 2018). Partly related to this is the issue of the EU arms embargo imposed on China since 1989, which for some scholars remains an obstacle to a deeper cooperation (Men, 2014). Others stress that the embargo is not limiting China’s military development (Duchâtel, 2018), nor its path in building international security cooperation (Saarela, 2018).

Notwithstanding the tendency among scholars in perceiving a convergence – albeit limited and of a slow pace – between China and the EU towards a military cooperation, some others see more of a divergence, outlining those factors that hinder this cooperation, e.g. China increasing its military capabilities domestically and overseas (Joyce, 2018), and a closer relationship between Beijing and Moscow (Godement and

⁷ Concerning the aspirations of the EU to become a global security provider, in relation with the broader discourse on the defence of the Union (projects, achievements and obstacles in building an EU army; NATO membership) see Barrie et al., 2018, and Munich Security Conference, 2019. For an encompassing analysis of the role of the EU as a security provider in Asia, see Banim and Pejsova, 2017.

⁸ While there is a tendency to interchange the term “multilateralism” with “multipolarity”, Zaborowski holds that while the former means “the rule of international law”, the latter is a synonym of “the rule of a few big, powerful states and perennial instability” (Zaborowski, 2008: 2). In this regard, the EU is very clear: the promotion of multilateral institutions is fundamental to build peace and security in this “multipolar, disordered world” (EEAS-PT, 2018). This is in contrast with Kirchner et al. who hold that “both the EU and China support a multipolar international order” (Kirchner et al., 2016: 1).

Vasselier, 2017), because these factors are sometimes in contradiction with the policies and stands of the EU (Legarda and Hoffmann, 2018). While it is true that also the ‘Russia factor’ should be taken into account⁹, others see a less bright future for China and Russia, picturing a rather “uneasy partnership” between the two (Stronski, 2018).

Adopting a different perspective on the categorisation of the dimensions of security, some scholars identify four fields that present “concrete cooperation” between the EU and China: nuclear security, cybersecurity, peacekeeping and anti-piracy; the latter two are considered as the best examples – and they both take place in Africa (Saferworld, 2016). In this regard, there are some papers dealing with the military presence of the EU and China in Africa and the interactions between the two. One is focused on the differences in the engagement of the two players in the African continent, suggesting a more pragmatic approach to overcome the differences in principles and develop concrete cooperation (Liu, 2011). Others analyse the contrast between the rhetoric adopted and the convergence of their security interests evinced in practice (Stahl, 2011) – considering the latter as the basis for cooperation. A more comprehensive study has been made on the EU and China’s security engagement in Africa investigating the presence or lack of trust between the two actors in different scenarios (Barton, 2017). More studies are available on the Chinese military presence in Africa, describing the nature and the evolution of China’s commitment to UNPKOs in the continent, and the implications for the EU (Duchâtel et al., 2016). One of the key issues is the Chinese base recently built in Djibouti and its impact on China’s role and strategy in relation to the security of the continent (Duchâtel et al., 2016; Sun, 2018; Ursu and van den Berg, 2018). Much attention is also given to Chinese presence in Mali (Turkstra, 2013; Duchâtel et al., 2016; Duggan, 2017; Lanteigne, 2019) and the interactions with the EU States present there (Barton, 2017; Weibezahl, 2018, specifically on Germany); as well as in the Horn of Africa and the ongoing EU-China military cooperation in counter-piracy operations off the coast of Somalia (Liu, 2011; Turkstra, 2013; Duchâtel et al., 2016; Barton, 2017; Duggan, 2017; Stanley-Lockman, 2018; Ursu and van den Berg, 2018). China’s military presence in Africa is part of a broader debate on two of the main principles traditionally followed by China in its foreign policy – i.e. respect of sovereignty and non-interference (Duchâtel et al., 2016; Cottey, 2018) – and how the

⁹ It is noteworthy that China entertains also with Russia a “comprehensive and strategic partnership”.

increasing discrepancies between rhetoric and practice are opening the way for alternatives (Sørensen, 2019).

Besides the EU-China security cooperation in Africa, there is little academic literature available on the trilateral cooperation, considering Africa (and the African Union – AU) not only the place where cooperation between the EU and China takes place, but also as active player in this cooperation. The key factor is the European Parliament Resolution of 2008, that called for a new EU strategy on China because of the latter's growing presence in Africa. This was followed by a proposal of trilateral cooperation issued by the European Commission (Turkstra, 2013). However, African countries, and China as well, have showed little interest in the initiative (Liu, 2011); security cooperation, therefore, appears more feasible at the EU-China bilateral level (Bund and Makocki, 2016).

In sum, many scholars rather focused on the overall EU-China security relations, with less been said about cooperation, and more specifically, military cooperation. Other scholars analysed China's military presence in Africa and its relative implications for the EU and its own engagement. Hence, the purpose of this study is to bring together these two major discourses, trying to understand to what extent there is room for military cooperation between the EU and China in Africa.

3. Methodology

This chapter explains how I am going to answer the research question. I introduce the research method employed for this study, the theoretical framework supporting the analysis, the data collected in order to conduct this study, as well as delimitations of and potential limitations to this research paper.

3.1. *Choice of method*

For this study, the documentary method of research is used as a primary tool for investigating this issue. The first step to take is to look at the primary literature – i.e. white papers and other forms of official statements, for instance, published in governmental websites. This is necessary to understand what are the stands of the EU and China on their security (and more specifically, military) engagement, not simply in general, but with particular regard to Africa. Therefore, the second step is to look at the secondary literature: the critical interpretation of these secondary sources (academic articles and book, mass media publications, etc.) is necessary to put into perspective what has been found previously, in this case, enlarging and completing what the EU and China say – about themselves, their commitments, and about each other – and what they do in practice. That is, the study starts by outlining the EU-China security relations, limiting the scope to their military engagement in the African continent, narrowing further down to the issue of military interactions and cooperation. In order to do so, the choice of a theory is necessary to provide the tools to extrapolate data and guide the analysis towards an answer to the research question.

3.2. *Choice of theory*

The theory provides some concepts that I intend to use as tools in the work of the analysis. I first considered the possibility to work with one of the mainstream International Relations theories, such as Realism or Liberalism. In particular, I considered the Realist school as the best choice to explain the logic of security at the international level. However, it would be relatively weak to provide a thorough

understanding of the existence of international cooperation. For this, the Liberalist school appeared to me as more appropriate: Liberalist theories are indeed often used to explain the relationship between China and the EU. Yet, Liberalism is mostly developed in the field of economics, and less experienced in explaining the logic of security, and more specifically, military cooperation. One option would thus be to try to combine these two major schools of thought, using one to explain the logic of international cooperation and the other to examine it in the realm of security matters.

However, aside from the mainstream theories, another option would be to look for some minor yet more specific theories that could be more appropriate. In the absence of a theory exclusively centred on military cooperation, I found that the International Cooperation Theory could be the most pertinent one to the topic of this study. This theory is presented as part of the Neoliberal Institutionalism, counterposed to Neorealism. Bearing in mind the option of a combined theoretical approach mentioned above, it is worth to mention that Neoliberal Institutionalism and Neorealism can be actually considered as complementary (Whyte, 2012). However, while Neorealism has a rather pessimistic approach towards the concept of cooperation, Neoliberal Institutionalism holds an optimistic view, believing that cooperation is achievable albeit difficult (ibid.). Hence, it is more appropriate for this study to opt for Neoliberal Institutionalism: more specifically, the ICT appears to fit better the analysis of the EU-China military cooperation. In addition, the ICT does not hold limitations on its application based on the nature of the actors taken into account. In fact, one of its key assumptions holds that international cooperation can take place even among intergovernmental actors – as further explained in the following chapter.

3.3. *Choice of data*

As I outlined in the choice of method, this study is based on qualitative data, making use of the existing literature, both primary and secondary. Examples of primary literature are white papers: documents such as «China's Military Strategy» (2015) or the «EU Global Strategy» (2016) are essential to understand what are the positions of respectively China and the EU in terms of global security. Other white papers, e.g. the EU's «New Strategy on China» (2016) and last China's «Policy Paper on the EU»

(2018), as well as joint statements and other official publications, help to understand how the two actors address security and – more specifically – military issues.

However, to assess to what extent is there room for military cooperation, it is necessary to analyse what the two entities have achieved in practice besides the rhetoric adopted. Therefore, the secondary literature constitutes a fundamental resource for this study. The critical analysis of what has been written by scholars on the issue constitutes the basis for this discussion, from the broader introduction to EU-China security relations to the narrower description of the military presence of the two actors in Africa. In addition, due to the recent developments, for instance, of the ongoing military cooperation in the Gulf of Aden, some news articles may be useful to complete the picture.

3.4. *(De)limitations*

The purpose of this study is to assess the military cooperation between the EU and China, which is contained in the bigger box of EU-China security relations. As it can be read further in the paper, while the EU (European Economic Community – EEC – at that time) and China established diplomatic ties in 1975, security relations matured only in a second time, making the military cooperation an issue of a relatively young age. Hence, the choice of data has been focused on the most recent publications, in order to have a bigger and more complete picture of the origins and developments of the relations between the EU and China in the field of security. The latest publications encompass also the first examples of military cooperation, shedding new light on the rhetoric of the officials, providing a new perspective to the broader discourse of EU-China security relations.

Military cooperation is intended as the coordination between two (or more) actors involving military capabilities – personnel and resources. Forms of this type of cooperation space from the exchange of information to the discussion and coordination of strategies, from exercises and simulations to coordinated actions in the field. I regard military cooperation as part of military security, which is just one of the several

dimensions of security¹⁰. Among IR scholars, security is understood in terms of traditional and non-traditional. As it is difficult in practice to make a clear distinction between the two, IR scholars generally consider as of traditional security those aspects concerned by the interplay between armed offensive and defensive capabilities of states – i.e. military security, nuclear proliferation and regional security (Kirchner et al., 2016: 14). This leaves the other aspects to the realm of non-traditional security, which is concerned with issues of organisational stability, access to resources, preservation of cultural traits and environmental sustainability; examples of these aspects are climate change and energy security, economic security and human security (Kirchner et al., 2016: 14-15). Kirchner, Christiansen and Dorussen clearly considered the EU-China joint antipiracy naval exercise as a form of cooperation in the realm of traditional security (Christiansen et al., 2016: 234). This appears to be in contrast with other scholars who classify piracy as a non-traditional security threat (for instance, Men, 2014: 6; Duchâtel et al., 2016: 2). Nonetheless, I chose to adopt and adapt the above description of traditional security as linked to “the interplay between armed and offensive and defensive capabilities of states *and non-state actors*”. As both the EU and China have deployed their military capabilities on African soil and waters, their interactions are deemed a matter of military and thus traditional security.

As for the third element included in the research question – Africa – some limitations are needed for the analysis to be more specific and not to simply dwell in generic considerations. The assumption for military cooperation to take place is that there has to be an actual interaction between two military forces. Therefore, it is necessary to look at where exactly the two actors have deployed their troops and see where both of them are present. Since the Chinese presence is more widespread throughout the continent, it is easier to check where the EU military personnel is deployed. The EU is currently conducting four CSDP military interventions: two in Somalia (one on land and one off the coast, including the Gulf of Aden), one in the Central African Republic, and one in Mali. Out of these three regions, only two are taken into account: the waters off the coast of Somalia¹¹ and Mali. In spite of the major differences that they present,

¹⁰ A rather comprehensive approach outlines ten dimensions: military security, regional security, nuclear proliferation, terrorism and organised crime, climate and energy security, human security, civil protection, cybersecurity, economic security, migration and immigration (Kirchner et al., 2016: 13).

¹¹ China does not hold troops on the Somali ground (Duchâtel et al., 2016: 3).

the military interactions between the two actors in these two areas appear particularly relevant for the analysis of military cooperation. The same cannot be said for the Central African Republic: as China has sent some military instructors on December 2018 (aBangu, 2018), it is too early to assess the eventual interaction and even cooperation with the EU personnel.

Finally, the limitations of this study are imposed by the data itself. In order to assess the extent of military cooperation between the EU and China in Africa, it is necessary to look at both the rhetoric and the practice. Among the academic publications consulted for this study, only a few are elaborated not simply on policy papers but also on interviews, for instance, of former officers who personally witnessed and took part in the interactions between the military troops. That is why I make extensive use of works of authors such as Duchâtel et al. (2016), Kirchner et al. (2016), Duke and Wong (2016) and Barton (2017). Articles from Chinese authors too, e.g. Liu (2011), Men (2014) and Ren (2018), contain useful material for this study. All these publications, however, are in English, as it appears to be particularly difficult to find articles in Chinese. In fact, the main reference for academic research in China – the Chinese National Knowledge Infrastructure¹² – does not provide any relevant result in relation to “China-EU military cooperation” (中欧军事合作), nor “China-EU military relations” (中欧军事关系). I faced a similar problem when searching for official news on the ongoing cooperation between the EU Naval Forces (EUNAVFOR) and the Chinese PLA Navy (PLA-N) in the Gulf of Aden. The EUNAVFOR official website offers several pieces of news (in English) reporting the several interactions with the Chinese navy, since the very first episode in 2009. The China Military official website, on the contrary, offers limited access to the news. There are only two significant references to the cooperation with EUNAVFOR: one is about the joint exercise which took place in October 2018 (Zhang and Tan, 2018); the other is the press conference of the Chinese Ministry of National Defence held on December 27, 2018, where Senior Colonel Wu Qian quickly mentioned the cooperation with the EU (Li, 2018). Therefore, it is necessary to be aware that this restricted availability of data represents a limitation to the completeness and objectivity of this paper.

¹² 中国知识基础设施工程(中国知网): <http://www.cnki.net/>

4. Theory

The theory I have chosen for my study is the International Cooperation Theory, which has been conceptualized in the work of Xinyuan Dai, Duncan Snidal and Michael Sampson (2017). In this chapter, I start with an introduction to the theory and its key assumptions outlined by the authors; I then present the core elements of the ICT, necessary for the study of international cooperation, thus showing the relevance of using the ICT for the analysis of EU-China military cooperation.

4.1. *Introduction to the ICT*

This theory is part of the family of Neoliberal Institutionalism. As outlined in the methodology, Neoliberal Institutionalism differs from its Neorealist counterpart because of its positive view towards cooperation. The ICT appears to fit the best the analysis of this topic because of its central focus, as it can be understood from its name, on international cooperation.

According to this theory, the concept of cooperation, as we currently understand it, can be defined as “the coordinated behaviour of independent and possibly selfish actors that benefits them all” (Dai et al., 2017: 3). The studies of international cooperation within the framework of IR theories began in the 1980s, when war among Western countries seemed more and more unlikely, and international systems such as Bretton-Woods had proved to be fairly stable cooperative arrangements contributing to a dramatic rise of interdependence (Dai et al., 2017: 4). *Interdependence* is indeed a key issue in the study of international cooperation. What differentiates Neoliberal Institutionalism from Neorealism is the belief that the key to build trust (and therefore enhance cooperation) “relies upon both parties’ ability to develop an interdependent relationship” (Barton, 2017: 11). According to Dai, Snidal and Sampson, individual selfishness does not impede cooperation “in situations of interdependence where one individual’s welfare depends on others’ behaviour” (Dai et al., 2017: 3).

Another key element is the presence of common interest. An early contribution to the study of international cooperation is found in «The Strategy of Conflict», by Thomas Schelling (1960). In Schelling’s work, it can be read that actors with conflicting goals

nevertheless share a *common interest* that leaves room for cooperation, leading to view most situations as of bargaining. In fact, the actors bargain over their differences in order to reach a mutually beneficial deal – i.e. cooperation. The bargaining perspective is related to other concepts, e.g. issue-linkage and the effect of reputation (ibid.). These issues are further developed later when exploring the possibilities for cooperation.

Another contribution comes from Robert O. Keohane, in «After Hegemony» (1984), in which he affirms that cooperation and conflict should be seen as two sides of the same coin. This idea that Keohane had elaborated within the realm of international political economy had been later developed by James Fearon in its «Rationalist Explanation of War» (1995). In line with the considerations made by Schelling, Fearon holds that the actors share a common interest – in this case, avoid war, as war is costly. War is thus seen as “the failure of the parties to cooperate on a peaceful solution” (Dai et al., 2017: 3-4).

4.2. *Key assumptions*

In their comprehensive work on the ICT, Dai, Snidal and Sampson outlined four key assumptions, on which they build their further considerations on the possibilities for cooperation.

First, the international system is anarchic – meaning that “there is no central enforcement” (Dai et al., 2017: 5). While this may sound very much close to the rhetoric of the Realism, the ICT “avoids the too common fallacy of equating anarchy with conflict”, leaving the question of whether and when anarchy results in conflict or cooperation as something to be demonstrated in the theory (ibid.).

Second, the scope of international cooperation is not limited to states as unitary actors, but it encompasses also other actors, e.g. intergovernmental organisations and non-governmental organisations (Dai et al., 2017: 3, 5). This assumption is fundamental for this study as it makes the analysis of the EU-China cooperation through the ICT legit.

Third, the ICT assumes that these actors act “according to a more general conception of rationality – meaning only that they are consistent in pursuing their goals” (Dai et al., 2017: 5) – without dwelling on the content of these goals. It can thus be inferred

that the content of the goals does not affect the mechanism of cooperation, without restraining the application of this theory.

Fourth, the ICT “takes preferences of actors as given and explains outcomes in terms of changes in the environment rather than changes in preferences” (ibid.). This assumption is much close to the rationalist approach and aims to explain the behaviour of international actors. The stress is on “preference over *outcomes*” that are taken as given, whereas “preference over *action*” may evolve (ibid.; emphasis added). In this regard, however, the ICT holds that “even when states agree on the efficiency gains of avoiding the *undesirable* outcome, distributional considerations lead them to disagree on the *preferred* outcome” (Dai et al., 2017: 8; emphasis added). This discussion is linked to the consideration presented in the next paragraph on the necessity and limitations of common interests.

4.3. *On the possibilities for cooperation*

The first consideration is about “the possibility of cooperation in any recurring situation where there are *joint gains* to be made from cooperation” (Dai et al., 2017: 5-6; emphasis added). It is clear that “joint gains” play the same role as the above-mentioned “common interest” in the establishment of cooperation: they are the motives that move actors to operate together rather than individually (or even against). Nonetheless, neither “joint gains” nor “common interests” are enough to give birth to cooperation: these elements are strong enhancers¹³, yet not self-sufficient. While this is not explicitly stated by the ICT itself, it appears as the logical connection between the first and the second consideration. In fact, the ICT holds that “whether cooperation emerges depends on the circumstances and strategic choices of the actors” (Dai et al., 2017: 6). This is another very much broad consideration and indeed much scholarly effort has been focused on codifying the conditions of the likelihood of cooperation. In this regard, a major theme of the ICT is “the iteration of the game” (ibid.).

¹³ They cannot be considered as necessary as there exist examples of cooperation that occurred spontaneously as a consequence of exogenous events such as natural disasters (Kirchner et al., 2016: 3). However, this potential scenario goes beyond the realm of theory and remains to be established by empirical research.

The iteration of the game is firstly connected to the concept of *reciprocity*, and it can be explained in simple terms: if A chooses to cooperate with B, then B will cooperate with A in the future; but if A does not cooperate, neither will B. In other words, the ICT holds that “cooperation is supported in repeated settings because of the possibility of reciprocity” (ibid.).

This idea of cooperation “in a repeated game” is further developed in relation to international institutions. In fact, the ICT holds that actors can cooperate with one another if “the shadow of the future” (i.e. long-term benefits) is long enough. However, this requires a minimum of density of interactions that actors may not share on a given issue. In this setting, the idea of *issue-linkage* is that international institutions can therefore promote cooperation by connecting different matters to create a situation similar to a repeated game (Dai et al., 2017: 14).

In relation to this concept, the ICT introduces the one of *reputation*, holding that it is a mechanism that “extends a similar logic to actors who do not interact frequently enough for the shadow of the future of their own interaction to support cooperation” (Dai et al., 2017: 6). While the actual relevance of reputation in international cooperation is still object of debate among scholars, one relevant argument holds that states strive to establish reputation for honesty in diplomacy in order to enhance their ability to resolve future disputes using diplomacy rather than force¹⁴ (Dai et al., 2017: 7).

Ultimately, the salience of reputation comes down to whether an actor can be trusted to reciprocate cooperation (ibid.). *Trust* is another factor that can indeed foster cooperation: in fact, “an instigating actor (places) trust in a receiving actor in the belief that the latter will reciprocally act in a way that makes the former better off, and vice-versa” (Barton, 2017: 9). Yet, there are examples showing that cooperation can be achieved even when actors distrust each other (Dai et al., 2017: 7) – leaving the necessity of trust for international cooperation open to debate.¹⁵

¹⁴ See Sartori, Anne E. (2005), *Deterrence by Diplomacy*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

¹⁵ Very much related to the concepts of reputation and trust is the one of *transparency*. The ICT holds that: “simulating a repeated game, however, is not sufficient to induce cooperation. In order to make future benefits contingent on current cooperation, current behaviour must be observable” (Dai et al., 2017: 14). The ICT looks at international institutions and their ability to strengthen cooperation by enhancing transparency. This paper is focused on the study of the cooperation between the EU and China which is believed to take place outside the central enforcement of international institutions.

4.4. *On the relevance of the ICT*

Among the concepts outlined within the ICT, interdependence appears as the most fitting one for the analysis of EU-China relations. Both EU and Chinese officials indeed insist on the interdependence of their economies, as they are each other's first or second largest partner in terms of imports and exports (Cottey, 2018: 140-141). Moreover, the idea of common interest and especially joint gains resonates with the Chinese rhetoric of "win-win" (双赢) cooperation – rhetoric shared also by the EU in the joint publication of the «EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation» in 2013 (EEAS-PITDC, 2013: 2). These considerations are not limited to the economic sphere but enlarged to other issues, i.e. security – this is the spirit of the EU-China comprehensive and strategic partnership, as the two have demonstrated throughout the evolution of their relationship. More specifically, the "comprehensive" feature of the relationship can be related to the concept of issue-linkage outlined above. While the ICT conceives the issue-linkage as the ability of international institutions to promote cooperation between states in a top-down dynamic, I observed a similar logic of fostering cooperation by linking different issues together at the horizontal level of the EU-China relations. In fact, after the first development of the economic relations between in the 1980s, the EU and China took a step further in their relationship. The institution of the EU-China Summit (first round held in 1998) formalized the political dialogue between the actors, which started addressing to each other as "strategic partners" (Cottey, 2018: 139). Furthermore, the comprehensive and strategic partnership was upgraded in 2010 to include foreign affairs, security matters and global challenges – with regular EU-China dialogue on security and defence policy initiated in 2014 (Kirchner et al., 2016: 2; Men, 2014: 3). This expansion from purely economic to security relations can be considered as the joint action of the EU and China implementing the idea of issue-linkage in the optic of their comprehensive and strategic partnership. These considerations are necessary for the explanation of military cooperation between the EU and China.

However, the argument of transparency is still noteworthy as in international institutions stances (e.g. the UN), different actors often called for more transparency from the Chinese side, for instance, in relations with military issues (Zaborowski, 2008: 4).

5. Frame

The formulation of the research question as “to what extent is there room for military cooperation between the EU and China in Africa?” implies another question: “is there room for such cooperation?”. The purpose of this question is twofold, as the answer should prove that there is room ‘in theory’ and ‘in practice’. Accordingly, I first introduce the overall EU-China security relations which I regard as the frame within military relations (and cooperation) take place. I then focus on Africa and present the EU and China’s security interests in the continent and their consequent military engagement, which eventually brought their military forces to be side-to-side in two areas of Africa.

5.1. *EU-China security relations*

Official diplomatic relations between the EU (EEC, at that time) and China were established in 1975. This step reflected the new competences of the EEC, on the one side, for external trade policy, and the hope of China, on the other side, that the EEC might be a counterweight to the hegemonism of both the Soviet Union and the US (Cottey, 2018: 138). The first decade of this relationship was a time for the development of economic cooperation: the first trade agreement was signed in 1978, replaced in 1985 by a Trade and Economic Cooperation Agreement (EEAS, 2013). The relationship then encountered a critical phase, as the events of June 1989 in Tian’anmen Square led the EEC to freeze diplomatic relations with China and impose economic sanctions and an arms embargo. However, this phase did not last long: in 1990 all the Member States agreed on re-establishing the relations step by step, reaching the full normalisation in 1992 (Cottey, 2018: 138-139).

In that year, the Member States signed the Maastricht Treaty (officially the Treaty on the European Union), giving birth to the proper European Union, expanding its competences beyond economic matters. The Treaty provided – inter alia – the basis for the CFSP and a European Security and Defence Policy, rebaptised Common Security and Defence Policy with the Lisbon Treaty (EU, 2019). Besides, it was exactly in 1992 that the EU, after having normalised the relations with China, established a bilateral

political dialogue (EEAS, 2013). The 1990s were marked by the effort from the EU to institutionalize and broaden the relationship. In these years the two sides began to refer to their relationship as a “comprehensive” and “strategic” partnership (Men, 2014: 3). In fact, after the publication of the EU’s first China policy paper in 1995¹⁶, the European Commission published a second one in 1998, under the title of «Building a Comprehensive Partnership with China», right before the first EU-China Summit (Cottey, 2018: 139, 154). The adjective “strategic” is particularly problematic to define and understand. In «On the Uses and Functions of ‘Strategic Partnership’ in International Politics» written by Luis Fernando de Moraes y Blanco, the author provides a rich analysis of the concept, comparing different and sometimes contrasting definitions. He argued that a “strategic partnership” should be regarded as a “frame [of] different kinds of bilateral engagement in comparison to previous forms of cooperation” (de Moraes y Blanco, 2015: 58). A more encompassing definition is the one provided by the EU foreign policy specialist Giovanni Grevi: “strategic partnerships are those that both parties regard as essential to achieve their basic goals” (Giovanni Grevi in de Moraes y Blanco, 2015: 60). While neither the EU nor China has ever defined what exactly means to be a “strategic” partner, both have commonly adopted this wording and used it to address each other ever since.

Later on, the EU published in 2003 its «European Security Strategy» – particularly relevant in this context because China featured as “one of the key partners for the EU’s strategic security relations” (CEU, 2003: 2). The same year, not only the EU published its third China policy paper¹⁷, but also China issued its first «EU Policy Paper». As the two parties agreed in their joint statement at the end of the Sixth EU-China Summit in October 2003, these two documents were considered as the guides for their “overall strategic partnership” (CEU, 2003: 5). The fact that the first policy paper published by China on a foreign entity was the one on the EU is a proof of how much China valued this relationship. Subsequently, in November 2005 took place the first EU-China Strategic Dialogue, which was followed by others of its kind on yearly base until 2010, when it was upgraded to *High Level Strategic Dialogue*, inaugurated by the then-EU High Representative Catherine Ashton’s visit to China (EEAS, 2013).

¹⁶ European Commission (1995), *A Long-Term Policy for China-Europe Relations*.

¹⁷ European Commission (2003), *A Maturing Partnership: Shared Interest and Challenges in EU-China Relations*.

At the end of 2013, the EU and China jointly adopted the «EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation». The two parties held that “EU and China share responsibility for promoting peace, prosperity and sustainable development for the benefit of all” (EEAS-PITDC, 2013: 2). The Agenda was meant to be implemented throughout the existing instances of cooperation, i.e. annual Summits and the “three pillars”: the annual High Level Strategic Dialogue, the annual High Level Economic and Trade Dialogue, and the bi-annual People-to-People Dialogue (ibid.). Appropriately, for this analysis, “peace and security” figured as the first topic of the Agenda. In this regard, the two partners agreed on fostering their consultations at the bilateral, regional and international levels, enhancing their cooperation in multilateral fora (EEAS-PITDC, 2013: 3). In particular, they confirmed their commitment in continuing the cooperation on maritime security¹⁸ and holding “regular dialogues on defence and security policy, increase training exchange, and [...] advancing towards more practical cooperation” (EEAS-PITDC, 2013: 4), as it was reiterated in 2016 (EC-HR/VP, 2016: 11-13). As a result, the EU and China has initiated a Dialogue on Security and Defence in 2014, where the Chairman of the EU Military Committee meets with China’s Minister of Defence and the Chief of General Staff (Yao, 2014). At present, the Strategic Agenda is the highest joint document guiding the EU-China partnership.

This shift in the relevance of security and defence in EU-China relations did not happen all of a sudden, but it was the result of gradual evolution. The individual commitment of both actors in the fight against the pirates off the coast of Somalia eventually gave room for constructive interactions between the two respective navy forces. As a result, in the 15th EU-China Summit Joint Press Communiqué «Towards a Stronger EU-China Comprehensive Strategic Partnership», they “committed to holding a regular dialogue on defence and security policy, increasing training exchanges and organising a High Level Seminar on Defence and Security in 2013” (CEU, 2012: 5). This was the first time that the EU and China directly addressed the issue of defence.

Since the first political consultations at the ministerial level which had taken place in 1984 (EEAS, 2013), it took almost twenty years before the EU and China started to address security and defence matters. The expansion from the economic to the security field is firstly witnessed at the individual level, as they have both been increasing their

¹⁸ I.e. the military cooperation in the Gulf of Aden, discussed in Chapter 6.

commitment to international affairs. Subsequently, the evolution has been reflected also in the nature of their relationship. This is explained by the fact that economic and security concerns are intertwined: in fact, the development of economic relations has entailed new political and security challenges, which require cooperative measures (Zaborowski, 2008: 1; Men, 2014: 3; Kirchner et al., 2016: 2).

5.1.1. *Key elements*

There are three key elements that characterize the EU-China security relations. The first is geography. It is exactly because of their geographical position that the relations between the two have been more of the economic nature and less about security (Cottey, 2018: 141). In addition, the long distance is also the main reason explaining why they are free of the security dilemma, as neither of the two considers the other as a potential enemy or military threat (Kirchner et al., 2016: 1; Cottey, 2018: 140). This element is counterbalanced by the so-called “economy-security nexus”, which explains the evolution and the expansion of the relations, bringing the EU and China to discuss together common solutions to secure their economic interest (Kirchner et al., 2016: 2; Bund and Makocki, 2016).

The second element is multilateralism – intended as “the rule of international law” (Zaborowski, 2008: 2). The EU-China security relations indeed can be seen as a manifestation of a wider regional and international commitment in fora such as the Asia-Europe Meeting, Shangri-La Dialogue, as well as the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crimes (Duke and Wong, 2016: 29).

The third element is the will from both sides for closer and more practical cooperation in the field of security. In the «EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation», the topic of “peace and security” figured at the top of the list – preceding others such economy and prosperity, conventionally considered as more prominent. Both actors expressed this will in different instances. Although it was not mentioned in terms of security cooperation in the 2016 EU Global Strategy, two references were made to China in the second EUGS report, published in 2018. Here the EU put forward the necessity and the will of continuing the cooperation with China in their engagement in global issues (EEAS, 2018: 12, 15). In line with this will, the EU Delegation in Beijing

organised the EU-China Peace and Security Forum in 2017. Experts, officials and scholars were invited to this “unique platform to exchange views on EU-China peace and security cooperation” (EEAS-PITDC, 2017). Both sides agreed on the growing relevance of peace and security relations over the economic ones, believing in an “optimistic prospect of future cooperation” (“未来合作前景乐观”) (Wang, 2017). Also the Chinese side engaged in the co-organisation of similar activities, e.g. the EU-China Informal Security Dialogue, held in December 2018, to discuss “security issues on common interest and explore possibilities for further cooperation between the EU and China” (EUISS, 2018). In the same year, China published its third policy paper on the EU, in which the issue of “politics, security and defence” was mentioned – once again – before the one of economy (Yang, 2018). The Paper echoed the shared intent put forward in 2013 and reiterated by the EU in 2016 to increase exchanges and practical cooperation, expand personnel trainings and joint exercises (ibid.).

5.2. *Security interests and military engagement*

The evolution and the expansion of the EU and China’s economy have lead them to be increasingly involved in international affairs (Zaborowski, 2008: 1; Men, 2014: 3). Because of the size and the interdependence¹⁹ of their economic relations, both have the interest to keep them secured (Kirchner et al., 2016: 7). Economic and security concerns are indeed intertwined: the development of the economy at the international scale has entailed new political and security challenges. Security threats such as terrorism and piracy cannot be afforded by single states, they need political cooperative measures (Kirchner et al., 2015: 2) – this is the case in Africa. In the «Elements for a New Strategy on China» issued by the European Commission in 2016, “Africa in particular offers significant potential for the EU to co-operate with China where interests are shared” (EC-HR/VP, 2016: 12). As outlined by the ICT, common interests are key factors to create room for cooperation. In order to analyse to what

¹⁹ In 2013, at the issue of the Strategic Agenda, they declared that “the EU and China have become highly interdependent” (EEAS-PITDC, 2013). This was reiterated in 2018 in the third «China’s Policy Paper on the European Union», defining the EU and China as “indispensable partners to each other’s reform and development” (Yang, 2018).

extent there is room for military cooperation between China and the EU in Africa, it is necessary to understand their military presence in Africa.

5.2.1. *The EU in Africa*

The EU adopted its first «Strategy for Africa» in 2005 (Stahl, 2011: 148), which was substituted with the signature of the «Joint Africa-EU Strategy» by the heads of State and Government of the AU and the EU at the Lisbon Summit in 2007. The Strategy encompasses the Africa-EU Comprehensive Partnership – the political framework which defines their bilateral relations (CEC, 2008; EEAS-SC, 2016). The creation of this “strategic partnership” seemed to have rebooted the relationship between the two regions – notably in relation with “the history of colonialism (that) continues to haunt the Europeans” (Schneidman and Wiegert, 2018). Indeed, over the last decade, the EU has worked (“with a large degree of success”) to establish a partnership model based on reciprocal trade (ibid.). To this end, the Commission is negotiating or has already concluded free trade agreements (called “Economic Partnership Agreements) with 40 African nations in sub-Saharan Africa (ibid.). Besides the substantial economic interest that the EU (and its Member States) hold in Africa, the Joint Strategy adopted by the two Unions has its first focus on peace and security. In fact, the EU sees its own security as depending on the development and stability of Africa. In particular, the EU aims to tackle the root causes of the refugee crisis – made of people seeking a brighter future outside their country (Bund and Makocki, 2016; Weibezahl, 2018: 30-31). Moreover, the EU involvement in fostering development and stability in Africa aims also at drying up the breeding ground for international terrorism (Weibezahl, 2018: 31) – one of the major threats to the security of the EU. This explains the position of the EU held in its Global Strategy: “We [the EU] will invest in African peace and development as an investment in our own security and prosperity” (EEAS, 2016: 36). Following an implicit hierarchy of preference regulating the approaches to conflict management of African security crises, the EU has primarily promoted African ownership of the crisis situation, in particular supporting the leadership of the AU. Only when this proved not to be enough, the EU has advocated for a multilateral resolution (Barton, 2017: 55).

Since the launch of its first military mission in 2003 (when the CSDP was still named European Security and Defence Policy), the EU concluded 11 interventions²⁰ in Africa. Currently, half of the 16 ongoing CSDP interventions are taking place in Africa: four civil missions²¹, three military missions²² and one military operation – EUNAVFOR Operation Atalanta. Among these four military interventions, only Operation Atalanta has an executive mandate – which makes it more interesting for the study of military cooperation. The EU declared to be “concerned with the effect of Somali-based piracy and armed robbery at sea off the Horn of Africa and in the Western Indian Ocean” (EUNAVFOR, 2019). Several EUMSs were among the very first to bring awareness to the problem of piracy at the international level. In particular, Spain (because of its tuna fishing fleets repeatedly under Somali pirates’ attacks) and France (because of two episodes of yachts hijacked – one ending with a murder) were the promoters of the Zaragoza Summit in June 2008 and tried to convince the other Member States of the need for a EU operation to protect their interests where they were far beyond their reach and of that of their individual naval forces (Barton, 2017: 128-130). As a result, Operation Atalanta was launched in December 2008 within the framework of the CSDP and in accordance with relevant UNSC Resolutions (Stanley-Lockman, 2018). The main tasks of this Operation are: to protect vessels of the World Food Programme (WFP)²³ and other vulnerable shipping; and to deter, prevent and repress piracy and armed robbery at sea (EUNAVFOR, 2019). Operation Atalanta is part of the Integrated Approach promoted by the EU, which entails the fight against both current symptoms and root causes of the problem. In fact, besides this Operation, the EU is also conducting a civilian mission to support regional maritime capacity-building (EUCAP Somalia). Furthermore, the EUTM Somalia aims to strengthen the military of the Somali National Armed Forces so that to support the government and the institutions of Somalia (EUTM, 2019). On July 30, 2018, the Council of the EU extended the mandate until December 2020 (EUNAVFOR, 2019).

²⁰ CSDP military interventions are referred as either “operations” when they have an executive mandate, or “missions” when they do not have an executive mandate (EEAS-SC, 2018).

²¹ Three Capacity-building missions: EUCAP Somalia, EUCAP SAHEL Niger, EUCAP SAHEL Mali; one Border Assistance Mission: EUBAM Libya (EEAS-SC, 2019).

²² Three Training Missions: EUTM Somalia, EUTM Mali, EUTM RCA (EEAS-SC, 2019).

²³ WFP shipments are a favoured target for pirates mostly because of the slow speed and low boarding of the vessels making the deliveries (Barton, 2017: 162).

5.2.2. *China in Africa*

China's economic and human presence in Africa began to grow increasingly in the 1990s (Duchâtel et al., 2016: 1), as the country's domestic growth began to surge, creating a tremendous demand for natural resources and job creation (Schneidman and Wiegert, 2018). China was thus forced to look for markets abroad, and found Africa, "a willing partner, due to its abundance of commodities and need for infrastructure development" (ibid.). The growing interdependence between the two blossomed in 2000 in the creation of the Forum for China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). Later, in 2006, at the occasion of the first FOCAC Summit hosted in Beijing, China issued its first «Africa Policy Paper» (Ursu and van den Berg, 2018: 4). Opposite to the EU approach, "peace and security" figured as the last issue of "all-round cooperation between China and Africa" (SCPRC, 2006). China primarily supports "African countries' efforts in independently resolving their continent issues in their own way" (Global Security, 2015). Nevertheless, China expressed its determination – both in the first and «Second Africa Policy Paper» (2015) – in establishing military cooperation, with the commitment to promote high-level military exchanges, military personnel trainings and army building (SCPRC, 2006; Global Security, 2015).

The nature of Chinese interests in the African continent has been first and foremost economic (Ursu and van den Berg, 2018: 2). Africa is a strategic area for the realisation of the Belt and Road Initiative, and China holds great expectations towards this regional market (Ren, 2018). Nonetheless, economic interests are eventually intertwined with security concerns. This has been made clear since the end of Hu presidency, when the protection of Chinese overseas interests was declared to be a foreign policy priority (Duchâtel et al., 2016: 2). As the Chinese presence has kept on growing, Chinese citizens and facilities have been more and more often the targets of attacks and kidnappings (Turkstra, 2013: 3). Being one of the major investors in the continent²⁴, China has the need to protect its business and its citizens (Bund and Makocki, 2016; Cottey, 2018: 149; Duchâtel et al., 2016: 5; Ursu and van den Berg, 2018: 2; Turkstra, 2013: 1, 3). Therefore, China put the issue of peace and security at the top of the agenda of the FOCAC Summit in 2009 (Stahl, 2011: 163). Later, in 2012, the China-Africa

²⁴ In 2009, the growth of China's trade with Africa surpassed European and America levels (Lanteigne, 2019: 14).

Cooperative Partnership for Peace and Security was established within FOCAC (Sørensen, 2019: 14).

China's military presence in Africa is diverse and includes maritime and anti-piracy operations, counter-terrorism, disaster relief, support for arms sales, and, most notably, contributions to UNPKOs (Duchâtel et al., 2016: 2). All these forms of involvement of the Chinese military capabilities go under the category of MOOTW – Military Operations Other Than War (非战争性军事行动). This concept has been included in Chinese Defence Papers since 2008 (Lanteigne, 2019: 6) and reiterated in the most recent version of China's Military Strategy issued in 2015 (Niu, 2015). China's PLA is among the most active partners of African militaries, as it entertains military ties both directly with individual countries and with the AU. For instance, China made some conspicuous financial donations to the AU's counter-terrorism and stabilisation mission in Somalia, as well as to the AU's rapid response mechanisms – i.e. the African Standby Force and the African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crises (Duchâtel et al., 2016: 5; Barton, 2017: 42). China also developed some bilateral military training programs – both in Africa, sending its officials in Tanzania, Sudan and Zimbabwe; and at home, training the military personnel of Angola and Congo (Barton, 2017: 42). Moreover, China is the second largest supplier of weapons to Sub-Saharan Africa – the trade includes ships, submarines, combat aircraft and drones²⁵ (Barton, 2017: 45).

One of the most relevant forms of China's military engagement in Africa is through the contribution to UNPKOs. Since the 1990s, China has sent both military personnel next to civilian policy officials to several UNPKOs, including in Africa. By 2009, it became the largest supplier of UNPK personnel among the permanent members of the UNSC (Lanteigne, 2019: 3)²⁶. Moreover, China has also substantially increased its share in the UNPK budget over the past decade, becoming the second-largest contributor after the US (ibid.). The relevance of Chinese contribution to UNPKOs lies in the fact that China has been deploying its troops in Africa only on the basis of UNSC Resolutions (Liu, 2011: 14; Duggan, 2017: 11; Lanteigne, 2019: 2), while sticking to its major foreign

²⁵ Chinese drones are much cheaper and easier to buy than those proposed by the American competitor (Barton, 2017: 45).

²⁶ Moreover, in his speech to the UN in September 2015, President Xi Jinping promised to double the number of the Chinese deployed personnel to UNPKOs. For a country whose principle foreign policy motto has been devised around the theme of non-intervention, this is a clear sign of the determination in enhancing the security presence in the continent (Barton, 2017: 41).

policy guidelines, i.e. the respect of state sovereignty and the principle of non-interference²⁷. Therefore, China has voted in favour and consequently taken part in UNPKOs that had previously received the approval of the host government (Stahl, 2011: 143; Cottey, 2018: 148). Chinese contingent troops are currently deployed in four UNPKOs in Africa: in Sudan (UNAMID), South Sudan (UNMISS), Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and Mali (MINUSMA) (UNPK, 2019a). Besides the UNPKOs, China has engaged its military forces under other UNSC Resolutions. For the purpose of this study, the most relevant instance is the deployment of PLA-N in January 2009 off the coast of Somalia, under the UNSC Resolution 1816 to counter Somali piracy (Barton, 2017: 132).

In the pursuit of their security interests, the EU and China have engaged their military personnel in the African continent, eventually finding each other in some specific areas – i.e. in the waters off the coast of Somalia and in Mali. The fact of having military forces deployed in the same area opens the way for three possibilities: operate individually, against, or together (co-operate). At this stage, I make use of the elements provided by the ICT to analyse to what extent is it possible for the EU and China to cooperate at the military level in these two areas.

²⁷ This has become an object of debate, especially after the construction of the base in Djibouti. Chinese officials have consistently downplayed the importance of the outpost, first calling it an “overseas logistical supply facility”, then a “supply base” – never a “military base”. Nevertheless, the base has been developed and used by the Chinese military (Sun, 2018). The base in Djibouti represents the formalisation of China’s security interests in the continent showing China’s growing willingness to act as a protector and provider of African security and development (Lanteigne, 2019: 16; Sørensen, 2019: 15). For more details about the debate, see Sørensen, 2019.

6. Analysis

After having introduced the frame of the EU-China security relations and understood what are their stands in terms of security interests and military engagement in Africa, I proceed with the analysis of the military interactions between the two actors through the lenses of the International Cooperation Theory, aiming to answer the question “to what extent is there room for military cooperation between the EU and China in Africa”.

6.1. *Preliminary application of the ICT*

In line with the first key assumption of the ICT, which holds that the international system is anarchic, the field of peace and security in Africa is “a relatively anarchic milieu [...] due to the paucity of credible national, regional and continental or international bodies with the authority to ensure third parties commit to cooperative standards” (Barton, 2017: 61). It is this same anarchic environment that appears to be conducive to bilateral cooperation (ibid.). Referring to the definition put forward in Chapter 4, I regard the concept of military cooperation as the coordinated behaviour *involving the military capabilities* of two or more actors that benefits them all. Both the EU and China hold security interests in the African continent – which entail the employment of their military forces. The presence of common interests and joint gains is a strongly favourable condition for cooperation to take place. Therefore, identifying them is the first step to take for this analysis.

First of all, there is the interest shared by the EU and China in the promotion of multilateralism in international affairs (EC-HR/VP, 2016: 13-14). They both advocate in their foreign policies for inclusiveness and multilateral solutions at the international level, from the South China Sea to the Gulf of Aden. This attitude shows the openness towards – and even the seek of – cooperation.

More specifically in the African continent, both the EU and China are interested in enhancing prosperity and openness to international business (CEC, 2008: 4; Ursu and van den Berg: 2018: 9). As they are major investors in and trading partners with Africa, supporting the security in the continent is a matter of common interest (Duggan, 2017:

9). They are both interested in sustaining high economic growth for the sake of Africa's stability – as this stability is directly related to the security of their business. To put it differently, the security of the continent is a source of joint gain for both the EU and China. On the Chinese side, the security of overseas interests is a priority for the country (Duchâtel et al., 2016: 2). On the EU side, besides the economic benefits, the security of the African countries is tightly related to the security at home – as the citizens of those countries would cease to flee their homeland, putting an end to the refugee crisis that is affecting the EU. The EU and China both believe in the interdependence of peace, security and development. Chen Xu, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Director General of European Affairs, held that “without peace, we cannot talk about development; without development, there is not durable peace and security”²⁸ (Chen Xu in Wang, 2017). The same view is shared by the EU, which described its global engagement as of a dual nature – security and development (EEAS, 2016: 30).

Furthermore, the EU and China hold other interests that are not identical, but convergent – in other words, their different interests lead them to seek cooperation as this would result in joint gains. As China is relatively a newcomer in the overseas deployment, it lacks experience and it is willing to learn from the EU counterpart, considering that the EU (and its Member States)²⁹ has more experience in military operations in Africa (Stahl, 2011: 165; Appendix 1). As for the EU, some scholars hold that it proposes “to establish a more effective [security] framework alongside the UN framework with other global actors³⁰, i.e. in accordance with the principles of the UN charter, but not necessarily within the UN framework” (Liu, 2011: 15). The EU has made these aspirations more evident when it issued the Global Strategy in 2016. Therefore, it can be inferred that the EU needs the support of global players like China

²⁸ Translated from the original quote in Chinese: “没有和平，发展就无从谈起；没有发展，就没有长久的和平与安全”. Barton expresses the same concept with different words: “China perceives security and development as two sides of the same coin” (Barton, 2017: 44).

²⁹ The advantage for China to learn from the EU is that it would get the opportunity to modernise the PLA but with a lower level of scrutiny and restriction when dealing, for instance, with the US (Joyce, 2018: 2).

³⁰ “The predominant US unilateralism has undermined the capacity of the UN system to effectively implement the principle of human security. The EU, together with existing and emerging global actors, should reverse this trend both within and alongside the UN” (de Vasconcelos, 2010: 34).

to legitimise the new framework – as China has undoubtedly the advantage of manpower³¹ (Liu, 2011: 15; Stahl, 2011: 164).

As put forward by the ICT, while common interests and joint gains are strong enhancing conditions to make room for cooperation, they are not sufficient to make it happen. The ICT indeed holds that the establishment of cooperation depends on the “circumstances” and “strategic choices of the actors”. In the case of the EU and China, the circumstances are that both actors hold security interests in Africa. To some degree, they are equally vulnerable to the collateral effects of instability across the continent. The EU, as a direct neighbour, suffers from the repercussions engendered by the instability in Africa – e.g. terrorism, illegal migration, criminal networks, and so on. China (its government, companies and citizens), because of its economic and political ascendancy in Africa, is as susceptible to these collateral effects as the EU – despite the geographic distance (Barton, 2017: 10). That is why both actors are militarily engaged in the continent. More specifically, China is present in the three areas where the EU is conducting military interventions, i.e. Somalia, Central African Republic and Mali. As illustrated in Chapter 3, only two areas are taken into account, i.e. the waters off the coast of Somalia and Mali.

For what concerns the so-called “strategic choices of the actors”, the question is more problematic. In Chapter 5, I reported a definition of strategic partnership as “that of both parties regard as essential to achieve their basic goals”. Faced with the lack of an adequate definition in the ICT, I adopt my own understanding of “strategic choice”. Since the adjective “essential” is slightly excessive and exclusive, I rather define as strategic those choices that bring (or are ought to) bring significant changes in order to achieve a goal. This appears still too vague to be called a definition, therefore I will further justify on the basis of concrete instances why I will deem some choices as strategic.

The concept of “strategic” is intrinsically related to the other main feature of the EU-China relationship, i.e. comprehensiveness. The partnership between the actors began to be “comprehensive” as they started seeking forms of cooperation other than economic – in a dynamic of “issue-linkage”. While the ICT conceives the issue-linkage

³¹ China has provided more peacekeeping troops than all of the other permanent members of the UNSC combined since 2012 (Pauley, 2018).

as the ability of international institutions to promote cooperation between states in a top-down dynamic, a similar logic of fostering cooperation by linking different issues is observed at the horizontal level between the EU and China. In fact, since its formalisation in 2013, the structure of the relationship is composed by three pillars: the central pillar (or better, colossus) is the Economic and Sectoral Dialogue, sided by the Political Dialogue and the People-to-People Dialogue (Appendix 2). Symbolically, it is the Political Dialogue which figures as the first pillar, and it includes – among others – the Security and Defence Dialogue and the Political Dialogue on Africa (ibid.).

As I showed in the previous chapter, the development of the EU-China relationship, the expansion of its scope including security issues and more specifically defence issues, supported by the call in policy papers and joint press communiqués, proved the existence of room for military cooperation in theory. This is corresponded by the existence of room for such cooperation also in practice, with the presence of both military forces on the field in the pursuit of common interests. Looking through the lenses of the ICT, it can be said that the “circumstances” have brought the two actors closer to each other in those two African regions, and closer to the possibility of concretely realizing cooperation. In addition to this, the expansion of the scope of the relationship and the establishment of an institutionalised dialogue on defence issues, as well as on issues related to the African continent, is the result of the choice jointly made the EU and China to “systematize” (制度化) and “normalise” (常规化) their relations also in these field – a choice that I deem as “strategic” because it represents a shift in the possibility to better understand one another and establish cooperation to achieve common interest (Saferworld, 2016: 1; Christiansen et al., 2016: 245). However, to what extent is there room for such cooperation? The analysis of the case of the Gulf of Aden and Mali has the purpose of answering this question.

6.2. *The EU and China in the Gulf of Aden*

Following the agreement with the Transitional Federal Government of Somalia, the UNSC approved unanimously the Resolution 1816 in June 2008, not simply authorising but even calling for international intervention to deal with the rise of piracy in Somali territorial waters (UN, 2008).

Before the surge of attacks around 2008, the UNSC and the International Maritime Organisation had already tried to raise awareness at the international level about the phenomenon. As a result, the US-led Combined Maritime Forces 150 (CMF 150) made some sporadic attempts at deterring attacks. In 2008, because of the international financial crisis, several countries felt more economically sensitive to the pirate attacks that were on the rise in one of the world's most strategic shipping lanes. Therefore, more than a dozen nations sent their ships off the Somali coast. Some of them decided to act under a coalition, e.g. the CMF (replacing the previous CMF 150 with CMF 151³²). Another grouped intervention started under NATO Operation Ocean Shield³³. The third coalition to be deployed on the chessboard was EUNAVFOR with Operation Atalanta. For this mission, EUNAVFOR developed two technological devices: the Maritime Security Centre – Horn of Africa (MSCHOA), a web-based system used to organise Group Transits for interested shipowners; and the Mercury communication system, a web-based security communication platform made available to any interested naval forces engaged in counter-piracy and distributed via the SHADE (Shared Awareness and Deconfliction, a voluntary international military platform to share information among the navy forces operating in that area). As a result, EUNAVFOR has been playing a primary role in countering piracy in that area, co-chairing – together with the CMF 151 – the SHADE conferences (Duggan, 2017: 10-11; Duke and Wong, 2016: 33; Barton, 2017: 126-128, 142-143).

The SHADE mechanism has been particularly helpful because, besides those three coalitions, several countries³⁴ decided to intervene singularly – China being one of these. China possesses the world's largest merchant fleet, making it the one to have the more to lose than anyone else through piracy (Duke and Wong, 2016: 34). In fact, in 2008, 20% of all commercial vessels being targeted by Somali pirates were either Chinese, registered in China or carried Chinese mariners (Barton, 2017: 133). However, although also PLA-N ships were sent off the coast of Somalia, there was no room for

³² CMF 150 was set up in May 2002 and substituted by CMF 151 in January 2009 (Barton, 2017: 132).

³³ While this Operation was launched only in March 2009, NATO already intervened once in October 2008 to escort a WFP vessel (Barton, 2017: 128).

³⁴ These 'independent deployers' are: China, India, Indonesia, Iran, Japan, Malaysia, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Korea, Thailand, Turkey, Ukraine. The Gulf of Aden thus became the theatre of the largest influx of out-of-region naval forces in the world since the Second World War (Barton, 2017: 132).

cooperation with the other navies in the first time. China (as other independent deployers such as Russia) was wary of the coalitions and their recommendations, and concentrated on the defence of its own shipping rather than shipping in general (Barton, 2017: 137). While the EU, for instance, proposed itself “to protect vessels of the *World Food Programme* [...] and other vulnerable shipping” (EUNAVFOR, 2019; emphasis added), China made clear that its primary goal was to “provide security for *Chinese* vessels passing through the Gulf of Aden” (Ma Luping³⁵ in Duggan, 2017: 10; emphasis added). Furthermore, PLA-N officers were not comfortable with the SHADE, because of “the idea of ceding sovereign control of a subsequent part of its operations to this Western (read American) conception” (Barton, 2017: 139). China held its own vision for the organisation of counter-piracy in the region, exposed in its 2009 concept paper, entitled «Proposed Implementation Plan on Area of Responsibility Escort Cooperation in the Gulf of Aden and Waters off Somalia». In this concept paper, China suggested the division of the water surface into 54 Areas of Responsibility, allocated to warships of coalitions and individual states, which should not cross the delineated boundaries. In this proposal, the stress was put on the condition that “the command and control of each individual state or organisation shall remain intact” (Barton, 2017: 138). What China conceived was a limited and controlled form of cooperation, far from the integrative approach proposed by the coalitions – proving that, as affirmed by a former EUNAVFOR officer, PLA-N was becoming a “difficult partner” (Barton, 2017: 138-139).

Nevertheless, on October 19th, 2009, after less than one year from the start of the mission, the Chinese navy had to face a failure in dealing with the hijacking of the Chinese ship *De Xin Hai* (德新海)³⁶ by Somali pirates. The episode caused much embarrassment and frustration because the attack could have been prevented if PLA-N had coordinated more closely with the other naval forces (Barton, 2017: 141). As a result, “the need for security cooperation became clear” (Duggan, 2017: 11).

Since then, PLA-N and EUNAVFOR have been entertaining an increasingly closer relationship, holding several meetings between the navy officials every year,

³⁵ Director of the Navy Bureau of Operations of the PLA.

³⁶ The ship – which was carrying coal from South Africa to India – was captured by the pirates and released two months later after a ransom of 4 million USD (Barton, 2017: 141).

exchanging information and opinion to foster mutual understanding and trust. The first meeting between the EU and China navy forces took place after the event of October 2009. When EUNAVFOR delegates visited their counterparts in Beijing, they agreed that “China would also be considered as a co-chairman of the SHADE” (EUNAVFOR, 2009). However, this remained just a symbolic expression of goodwill, as the final decision was left to the following SHADE conference – which eventually ended without any change. This did not discourage the will of China to play a more active off the coast of Somalia. At the end of 2011, the several interactions between EUNAVFOR and PLA-N resulted in first participation of a Chinese warship in a coordinated escort with a EU warship of a UNWFP cargo ship (EUNAVFOR, 2011). A similar episode of cooperation between the navies took place in June 2013, as a PLA-N warship took over escort duties of a UNWFP vessel from EUNAVFOR. According to EU navy officials, such successful examples of cooperation “demonstrate the interoperability between the EU and Chinese military assets at sea” (EUNAVFOR, 2013b). Indeed, it was after this episode that the two players started the discussions for conducting a joint counter-piracy exercise later the same year (EUNAVFOR, 2013a). Eventually, the exercise took place on March 28th, 2014. This first EU-China joint naval exercise³⁷ in the Gulf of Aden was a proof of “the growing cooperation between the EU and China on issues of international security and defence” (EUNAVFOR, 2014). Both sides showed their satisfaction towards the ongoing cooperation led by the common goal of keeping the International Recommended Transit Corridor in the Gulf of Aden safe (EUNAVFOR, 2014; Wang and Mogherini, 2015). The two partners went further in their exchange of information and practice of joint exercises, demonstrating another example of successful cooperation on March 2016, when the EU and Chinese navies coordinated their efforts in escorting another UNWFP vessel (EUNAVFOR, 2016; Saferworld, 2016: 2).

China has been showing increasingly confidence in the deployment of its navy forces overseas. On November 2nd, 2018, at the 43rd SHADE Conference, Chinese navy officials emphasized: “the high level of protection PLA-N has given to vulnerable shipping transiting the high-risk area and *the ongoing progress witnessed in recent exercises with EUNAVFOR*” (EUNAVFOR, 2018d; emphasis added). Indeed, in 2018

³⁷ The exercise consisted of the coordination of joint warships manoeuvring and ships’ crew practical demonstrations (EUNAVFOR, 2014).

there were two major examples of cooperation: the first happened on February 10th, when PLA-N successfully escorted a merchant ship transporting humanitarian supplies for the UNWFP, responding to the request sent out by EUNAVFOR which was involved in counter-piracy operations (EUNAVFOR, 2018a)³⁸. The second example dated October 16th, when the EU and Chinese navy personnel conducted a joint exercise. What made that exercise more significant compared to the previous ones was that for the time it took place in the Chinese base in Djibouti³⁹ (EUNAVFOR, 2018c).

Referring to the ICT, it is possible to evince which are the circumstances and strategic choices taken by the actors that brought them to cooperate. The circumstances are that the EU and China deployed their naval forces where the rise of piracy became harmful not only for their individual but also mutual interest – as around 80% of their trade passes through the Gulf of Aden (Barton, 2017: 133). While it was the first military naval operation for the EU, EUNAVFOR could count on the expertise of the marines of the Member States. Conversely, for China, it was the first time to deploy its navy outside its territorial waters. As proved by the hijacking of *Xin De Hai*, China understood the need to cooperate with the three major coalitions. Considered that two of them (CMF and NATO) are under the leading role of the US, PLA-N made the strategic choice of getting closer to the EU – also considering the fact of its preeminent role gained after the development of MSCHOA and Mercury. This choice was taken despite the fact that the request of co-chairmanship of the SHADE had been refused: deciding not to step backwards and instead opting for closer interactions with EUNAVFOR can also be regarded as a strategic choice. Furthermore, in relation to the fourth assumption of the ICT, even though there was a general agreement “on the efficiency gains of avoiding the undesirable outcome” (i.e. the spread of piracy), the initial reluctance of China to cooperate within the SHADE and the proposal of its own vision on how to counter piracy demonstrated that there was no agreement on how to act. Eventually, the choice of China to cooperate proved that the ‘preference over outcome’ prevailed on the ‘preference over action’.

³⁸ At the end of the mission, PLA-N Deputy Commander Wang Haijiang declared: “We showed navy’s demeanour and *China’s responsibility as a great power*” (CCTV-VNA, 2018; emphasis added).

³⁹ The two sides agreed on the joint exercise after the first visit of the EUNAVFOR commander to the Chinese base in Djibouti on August 8th, 2018 (EUNAVFOR, 2018b).

In relation with the concept of the iteration of the game, EUNAVFOR and PLA-N repeated joint exercises and joint actions – which were essential to build also mutual understanding and trust, supporting indeed cooperation. Another important factor is reputation. As it has played an increasingly important role in the escort of UNWFP vessels, China is showing to take its responsibility as a global power. Since the salience of reputation, as stated by the ICT, comes down to whether an actor can be trusted as a partner for cooperation, Chinese and EU navy officials have been holding several meetings since the launch of their operations, in order to exchange not only information but also experience and opinions, to build a mutual trust that can foster cooperation. The room for cooperation appeared limited when, in 2013, the EU tried to transfer the coordination witnessed on the sea to the fight against the root causes of piracy on land, but the Chinese refused to assist the EU operations in this regards, i.e. EUTM Somalia and the now concluded EUCAP NESTOR (Barton, 2017: 161). Nonetheless, in 2015, in the joint statement with the HR/VP Federica Mogherini, Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs Wang Yi expressed the intention of acting together to address the root causes of piracy on the land (Wang and Mogherini, 2015), thus leaving more room for cooperation. Furthermore, considering the most recent example of cooperation of October 2018 and the fact that it is “extremely rare, if not unprecedented” that Western militaries were allowed to enter the Chinese facility (Stanley-Lockman, 2018), it can be assumed that the choice of China of letting EUNAVFOR personnel enter and visit its base was a strategic one – creating new room for the EU-China military cooperation.

6.3. *The EU and China in Mali*

Mali is the other area in the African continent where both the EU and China have deployed their military personnel. Yet, the situation here is different, because it is not only the EU to be military present, but also some of its Member States. Before moving to the actual analysis of this puzzle, I first introduce the crisis in Mali that has led to the military intervention of China and the EU.

The conflict in the north of the country between the Tuareg rebels and the Malian government has been going on for a long time. However, it was in spring 2012, after the fall of the Gaddafi regime, that the rebels reinvigorated their claims, united under

the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA, from the French *Mouvement National pour la Libération de l'Azawad*). The central government in Bamako sent its troops in the attempt to stop them, without any success. Subsequently, the Malian military seized a coup soon after because dissatisfied with the government and upset at having been sent to fight a battle they knew in advance they could not win. While the intention was to adopt stronger measures to face the rebels, the coup obtained the opposite effect, as the country ended up being weaker, favouring the advance of the rebels. Meanwhile, some radical Islamist organisations (e.g. al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb) took the stage, defeated the Tuaregs, imposed the Sharia and declared the north of the country independent. It was at this stage that the then-interim Malian President began raising awareness of the gravity of the situation to its international allies, the AU and the UNSC. The UNSC Resolution 2085 of December 2012 thus approved the creation of AFISMA – the African-led International Support Mission to Mali, a military mission of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Despite that, the Malian army was already seriously weakened, thus not in the conditions to stop the rebels even with the support of the allies. Therefore, the President of Mali's transitional government issued a formal request to France, asking for military intervention. The French *Opération Serval* began on January 11th, 2013, supported by the military forces of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Nigeria, Togo, Senegal, MNLA, as well as AFISMA (Weibezahl, 2018: 25-26; Barton, 2017: 181).

The French intervention preceded the collective decision of the EUMSs to act unite in the help of stabilisation in Mali. Less than a week after, on January 17th, an extraordinary summit of the foreign ministers of the EUMSs was held with the presence of the Malian counterpart to give the official approval of a military Training Mission in Mali under the EU flag – the EUTM Mali (Weibezahl, 2018: 27). The decision of this engagement came as a response to the request previously made by the President of the Republic of Mali directly to the HR/VP (EUTM, 2019). The Mission constitutes the military pillar of the EU strategy in the country, responding to the need to strengthen the capabilities of the Malian Armed Forces, with the ultimate result being self-sustaining armed forces capable of contributing to the defence of their population and territory (ibid.).

Also China decided to engage in the stabilisation of country – within the framework of the UN. The UNSC issued a new Resolution (2100) on April 25th, 2013, launching the

peacekeeping operation called MINUSMA – United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (Weibezahl, 2018: 27). MINUSMA took over the responsibility for patrolling the north of the country from the ECOWAS’ AFISMA (Al Jazeera, 2013), while France maintained its military operation until 2014 (Barluet, 2014). China had started playing an active role from the backstage, as a permanent member of the UNSC, when it had voted in favour of the Resolution 2071⁴⁰, declaring the “threat to international peace” – opening the way for military intervention (Turkstra, 2013: 3-4). For the second time⁴¹ in the PLA’s history, the PLA was deployed in the African continent under full combat mandate (Duchâtel et al., 2016: 11).

Differently from the situation in the Gulf of Aden, the military intervention in Mali does not offer direct cooperation between China and the EU, as there has not been interactions between the Chinese troops and those of the EUTM⁴². Nevertheless, there are some elements – some “circumstances”, in ICT terms – within the framework of the UN mission that may indirectly foster the EU-China military cooperation. First of all, there is a substantial presence of EUMSs in MINUSMA: more than half of the countries of the EU⁴³ are contributing to the UN mission with military force troops (MINUSMA, 2019). In terms of numbers, Germany ranks ninth in the top ten troop contributors, preceded by seven African countries (plus Bangladesh ranking third), and followed by China (UNPK, 2019b). Furthermore, the EU countries have been literally playing a leading role within MINUSMA: the first Force Commander in charge was the Belgian Major General Jean-Paul Deconinck, later succeeded by the Swedish Lieutenant General Dennis Gyllensporre (MINUSMA, 2019). It is noteworthy that military personnel from both Belgium and Sweden is deployed also within the EUTM framework. Following the argument that personal connections (together with joint

⁴⁰ UNSC Resolution 2071 directly called on regional and international organizations, (including the EU) to provide coordinated assistance, expertise, training and support for the development of the Malian Armed and Security Forces in order to restore state authority (UNSCR, 2012; EUTM, 2019).

⁴¹ China deployed its first infantry platoon in South Sudan in 2012 (Duchâtel et al., 2016: 11).

⁴² There has been a joint exercise between the MINUSMA troops and those of EUCAP SAHEL Mali, which is the other CSDP mission in Mali that the EU launched in 2015. However, besides the fact that it is a civilian and not a military mission, there were no Chinese troops among those of MINUSMA taking part in the joint exercise (FIEP, 2015).

⁴³ Precisely, 17 out of 28: Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom (MINUSMA, 2019). All these countries (plus other six EUMSs and five European countries) are also involved in the EUTM Mali – with the exception of Denmark.

trainings and shared professional culture) are “highly conducive of establishing ‘good working relationships’” in the realm of military cooperation (Barton, 2017: 135), the development of cooperation between China and EUMSs under within MINUSMA could foster the establishment of a cooperation between the PLA and the EU military forces of the EUTM. Therefore, the UN mission in Mali can be seen as a useful framework that provides an “unprecedented opportunity for the military cooperation between China and the EU” (Duchâtel et al., 6; Appendix 1). The growing interactions have already brought some fruits: one example is the close relationship matured between Chinese and Dutch peacekeeping troops on the field, which have conducted joint exercises and made proof of mutual security assistance (Saferworld, 2016: 2; Duggan, 2017: 14). Another example is offered by the military assistance that the UK provided to China with pre-deployment training, opening the way for an agreement on establishing a China-UK International Peacekeeping Cooperation Mechanism (Saferworld, 2016: 2; Duchâtel et al., 2016: 11). Agreement on military cooperation has been found also between China and France, as declared by the French President Macron at the occasion of his visit to his Chinese counterpart in January 2018 (Brunet, 2018).

While the lead in terms of military intervention has been taken by single EUMSs, such as France (Duggan, 2017: 12-13) and Germany (Weibezahl, 2018), the EU has taken the lead in terms of peacebuilding, adopting a comprehensive approach to the conflict. Through its two CSDP missions (EUTM Mali and EUCAP SAHEL Mali), the EU is offering a number of non-combatant aspects of the mission, including funding projects targeting the underlying causes of the conflict, such as food insecurity (Duggan, 2017: 13). This approach appears to converge with the one adopted by China. The Chinese Foreign Minister described the deployment of PLA troops in Mali as a “comprehensive security force”, dispatching officers and soldiers not only in guard detachment but also in the engineer and medical ones (ibid.). Besides patrol and escort tasks, Chinese troops carried out also construction and support tasks (ibid.). Despite the comprehensive approach shared by both China and the EU, military forms of interaction concern only China and single EUMSs – and not the personnel commanded at the EU level. While in 2015 the Chinese Foreign Minister, Wang Yi, and the High Representative of the EU, Federica Mogherini, jointly called for cooperation in Africa referring specifically to Mali (Wang and Mogherini, 2015), room for EU-China military cooperation remains only in potential, and has yet to take place in reality. Moreover, even the extent to which

cooperation could possibly take place appears to be limited. Taking into account the element of reputation included in the ICT, there are two opposite stands. They both come from the consideration that China's intervention in Mali is not perceived as having an economic rationale – as China is involved in the mission despite the fact that the bilateral trade volume is significantly inferior compared to other African countries where Chinese troops are deployed (Duchâtel et al., 2016: 7; Appendix 1). Therefore, considering that it was in Mali that China for the first time sent a PLA combat unit responsible for the security of other countries' forces, Chinese contribution symbolizes a major step in shouldering more responsibility in the international society, enhancing its reputation in Africa as a partner with interests beyond the strictly economic (Appendix 1; Barton, 2017: 51; Lanteigne, 2019: 2, 14). However, the ICT holds that reputation is relevant only if an actor can be trusted as a partner for cooperation. In this regard, the lack of trust figures as the number one challenge for EU-China military cooperation. While the example of positive relationship between Chinese and Dutch troops proves a certain degree of mutual trust, Czech troops, for instance, are reported to be more wary towards China (Appendix 1). In addition, the fact that there are no major economic interests behind the Chinese deployment troops in Mali is believed to affect their behaviour. Chinese personnel in Gao is indeed reported to rarely venture outside their base, and UN officials have even questioned the skills and the professionalism of the Chinese medical staff⁴⁴ (Duchâtel et al., 2016: 7). This lack of trust hinders interactions and further limits the room for EU-China military cooperation.

6.4. *Further discussion: EU-China military cooperation with Africa*

The object of the analysis is to assess the military cooperation between the EU and China in Africa. Room for this bilateral cooperation is given by the common interest to secure and stabilize the continent, so that to protect other interests – primarily economic, and, in the case of the EU, related to domestic security. As evinced in their respective African policies, the security of Africa is a matter of high concern for both China and the EU. However, there is an entity that is even more concerned – Africa

⁴⁴ European officers have insisted that their personnel are evacuated “hundreds or even thousands of miles if they are wounded rather than use the Chinese facilities” – and in this regard, even Chinese have recognised the limitations of their facility (Duchâtel et al., 2016: 7).

itself. Both the EU and China have been entertaining a bilateral relationship with Africa. As mentioned above, the EU signed with Africa (more precisely, the AU⁴⁵) the «Joint Africa-EU Strategy» in 2007 (EEAS-SC, 2016). This happened one year after China and quasi-totality of African countries held their first FOCAC Summit in Beijing – while the cooperation had already been initiated in 2000 with the first Ministerial Conference held in Beijing (FOCAC, 2019). The initiative for trilateral cooperation came from the EU, which had started to identify China as a possible security partner in Africa. In 2007, the then-High Representative of the Union Javier Solana welcomed the role the PLA troops were playing in under the UN missions in Africa and proposed cooperation between the EU and China (Stahl, 2011: 164). Subsequently, the European Parliament issued a Resolution at the beginning of 2008, «China’s Policy and Its Effects in Africa», urging for a new EU strategy to deal with China and the growing overlapping interests in Africa (Turkstra, 2013: 2). A strategy proposal eventually came later the same year from the European Commission – «The EU, Africa and China: Towards Trilateral Dialogue and Cooperation». As “both long-standing partners of African countries”, the Commission proposed a trilateral cooperation, indicating four sectors which the three actors should focus on: “peace and security in Africa”, “support for African infrastructure”, “sustainable management of the environment and natural resources” and “agriculture and food security” (CEC, 2008: 5-6). Peace and security figured at the top of the list, as it was believed to be the category offering more room for cooperation (Stahl, 2011: 165; Turkstra, 2013: 2). Little information is available on this topic, and even less on its achievements. What is known is that in 2012, two steps were taken – one forward, with the creation of the Africa-China-EU Expert Working Group on Conventional Arms (Turkstra, 2013: 6); and one backward, with negative result of the EU’s attempt in gaining the observer status at the 2012 FOCAC Conference (Turkstra, 2013: 2). The creation of the Working Group marked the commitment to tackle the illegal trade of small arms and light weapons – as approximately 95% of Africa’s conflict weapons are imported from outside the continent. However, several obstacles hinder this form of cooperation, e.g. the ongoing EU arms embargo on China (Turkstra, 2013: 6). China has thus demonstrated some reluctance to this trilateral cooperation, clearly manifested with the denial of the observer status for the EU at the

⁴⁵ Differently from Europe and the EU, Africa and AU can be considered as synonyms, for the AU is the organisation spanning the entirety of the African continent, with all UN-recognised states based in Africa and African waters are members of the AU (AU, 2019).

2012 FOCAC Conference. This proved that China, in dealing with some international issues, “is more inclined towards the bilateral approach”, instead of a trilateral one (Liu, 2011: 28). Moreover, also African countries have showed little interest in the initiative (Liu, 2011: 29). Therefore, the trilateral cooperation has not achieved any tangible results (Bund and Makocki, 2016). However, it is noteworthy that the initiative was conceived by the EU as a complement – and not a substitute – to the bilateral cooperation with China (CEC, 2008: 4), meaning that the eventual failure of the trilateral cooperation should not influence the development of the bilateral one.

7. Conclusion

In the “anarchic milieu” of international relations, where the US has started taking a step backward, interactions between two major actors such as the EU and China have become increasingly worthy of attention. These two actors have made clear their aspiration to become global security providers. On the EU side, the most relevant instance is the publication of the «EU Global Strategy» in 2016, which has been followed up by the Reports in 2017 and 2018; achievements such as the establishment of PESCO and CARD give more credibility to the role of the EU as a security actor. The EU is playing this role through its CSDP missions and operations – half of them focused on the African continent. On the Chinese side, Xi’s presidency (2013 – present) has marked a shift in the development of China’s military, with the increase of the defence expenditure, the strengthening of the PLA and of its contribution within the framework of the UN. As part of this process, with the parallel development of the economic interests in Africa, China has become one of the most active partners of African militaries. These are the preliminary conditions under which EU and Chinese military troops are deployed next to each other on African territory and sea.

In order to explore the limits towards which military cooperation between the EU and China in Africa can be pushed, I chose to use the ICT. This theory is developed in the realm of Neoliberal Institutionalism, and therefore implies two major concepts: interdependence and issue-linkage. Interdependence is a key issue in the study of international cooperation, and is indeed a feature of the EU-China relationship. As for the issue-linkage, I decided to apply the concept according to my own understanding. In fact, the ICT holds that the issue-linkage is a mechanism developed by international institutions in order to enhance cooperation. In my study, I remained closer to the first key assumption of the theory (“the international system is anarchic”) and did not investigate the presence and the eventual role of international institutions fostering military cooperation between the EU and China from above. Instead, I explored the cooperation in bilateral terms, therefore considering the issue-linkage as the mechanism developed at the horizontal level between the two actors in expanding the scope of their relationship, following the logic of the “comprehensive and strategic partnership”. This dynamic does not stand alone: it is animated by the pursuit of common interests and joint gains. Their presence constitutes a very much favourable condition for cooperation

– yet not self-sufficient. In support of these elements, the ICT elaborates other elements supporting the development of cooperation, e.g. reputation and trust. These are the elements that I took into account in the analysis.

The purpose of my analysis was to investigate the limits of the room for military cooperation between the EU and China in Africa. This presupposed that there exists room for such cooperation. I dedicated Chapter 5 to present the overall EU-China security relations, which is the frame within which military cooperation is depicted. History showed how the relationship became more ‘comprehensive’ and ‘strategic’ expanding its scope to security issues and more specifically to the military dimension. In this paper, I hold that the development of the EU-China security relations (including the military dimension) is due to the connection with the economic dimension. This “economy-security nexus” is manifested at different levels. Firstly, within the EU itself, for the Union was born not only with the purpose of economic prosperity but also as a “conflict-prevention project” (Banim and Pejsova, 2017: 10); this explains the slow but consistent development of the CFSP and the CSDP. Secondly, the nexus is detected in the relations both the EU and China entertains with Africa – where security concerns (and military engagement) increased following the development of the economic interests in the continent. This appears to be more evident in the Chinese case, and less in the EU case – as the interests in African security and stability are more strongly connected with domestic security concerns. Thirdly, the interconnection of economic and security is manifested at the EU-China level, for the development of their relationship started from the economic dimension and slowly integrated security and defence issues.

Security relations can cover many different dimensions: in this study, I wanted to focus on a single one – the military dimension. Since my purpose was not to investigate all the possibilities of military cooperation, but only those taking place in Africa, I deemed necessary to portray the EU and China respective security interests and correlated military engagement in the continent. Eventually, only two are the areas where there is room for military cooperation, i.e. the waters off the coast of Somalia (more particularly, in the Gulf of Aden) and Mali.

The EU and China started addressing security issues only at the end of the 1990s, institutionalising a regular dialogue including defence even later, in 2012. This came as

a result of the “positive interactions” begun in 2009 between the two military forces dispatched in the Gulf of Aden. This was the first instance explored in the analysis. The ongoing cooperation between EUNAVFOR and PLA-N is a good example that proves not only the feasibility of but also the increasingly large room for military cooperation between the EU and China. Looking through the lenses of the ICT, I showed that the circumstances that brought the two actors closer to cooperate were given by the convergence of their security interests and the consequent military deployment in the area. Furthermore, the need of PLA-N to cooperate with other naval forces was met by the leading role acquired by EUNAVFOR among the other actors – making Chinese officials take the ‘strategic choice’ to open the dialogue and seek cooperation with the EU counterpart. In addition, the fact that China did not make U-turn when it saw denied its request for the co-chairmanship of SHADE should not be taken for granted and should be regarded instead as a strategic choice.

Other elements have contributed to the development of this process. One of these is the iteration of the game, as proved by the repetition of joint exercises. Another element is reciprocity, where on the one side, EUNAVFOR shares its technological tools with PLA-N useful for the protection of vessels and the fight against piracy; and on the other side, PLA-N gives its supports to EUNAVFOR, for instance, in taking over the duties of escorting UNWFP vessels. This is particularly relevant for the consideration of another element – reputation. In fact, differently from the EU, China first deployed its navy with the primary mission of escorting Chinese vessels. With the choice to begin escorting also the vulnerable UNWFP vessels, China wanted to enhance its reputation as a responsible actor. Nonetheless, as stated by the ICT, reputation can foster cooperation only if there is trust. In this regard, the several meetings and joint exercises organised by both parties are fundamental for mutual understanding and building trust. Furthermore, the most recent choice made by PLA-N to organize a joint exercise with EUNAVFOR in its base in Djibouti (conventionally not open to Western militaries) proves the high extent of appreciation of the ongoing military cooperation – leading to the expectation of a large extent of the room for such cooperation.

This is counterbalanced by the second instance explored in the analysis. In fact, while the HR/VP and the Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs expressed in a joint statement in 2015 the intention to continue the cooperation, addressing the causes of piracy on land and working together in places such as Mali – this has yet to happen. Mali is the

only other area in Africa where both EU and Chinese military troops are on the field. Yet, there has not been any direct interaction between the officials of the two sides. Nonetheless, differently from the previous instance, European troops are deployed not only under the EU flag, but also under their respective national flag, within the framework of the UNPKO MINUSMA. China takes also part in this operation, being the tenth largest troops contributor, after six African countries, Bangladesh, and Germany. At first glance, MINUSMA appears to offer room for military cooperation between China and EUMSs. More than half of the EUMSs are involved, and the Mission itself has been led by European commanders. Sparks of military bilateral cooperation have been detected between China and the Netherlands, the UK, and France. These examples of military cooperation foster mutual trust at the China-EUMSs level, open to the possibility of transferring this trust at the China-EU level. However, this trust appears to be not strong enough. While some EUMSs troops are able to cooperate with the Chinese counterpart in Mali, some others – e.g. Czech Republic – are not. This lack of trust hinders also the reputation that China is trying to build with its intervention in Mali. The fact that PLA is deeply engaged in the region in spite of the minor relevance of the bilateral trade between the two countries is used by China as an argument to prove that its engagement is not moved by an economic rationale, but by a sense of responsibility. However, this reputation as a responsible global actor and security provider is damaged by the less responsible behaviour that Chinese personnel is reported to have on the field.

In both cases, the deployment of military personnel by both sides has been done within the framework of the UNSC Resolutions. Until now, these Resolutions have constituted a fundamental condition for China to deploy its troops under combat mandate a third country; this conduct appears in contradiction with Chinese foreign policy's traditional principle of respect of sovereignty and non-intervention, thus becoming object of debate among scholars (see Sørensen, 2019). Also the EU has launched its CSDP in accordance with UNSC Resolutions – which are respected by the EUMSs too. Besides that, the EU tried to create new instances for cooperation with China on security issues in Africa *with* Africa. In 2008, the European Commission issued the proposal of trilateral cooperation. However, with the reluctance of China and some African countries to take part, such cooperation has not achieved any tangible results. The EU even tried to approach the China-Africa bilateral cooperation, applying for the status of

observer at the 2012 FOCAC Conference. The refusal of the application given by China proved that there is a limit to the common interest of promoting multilateralism and inclusiveness in relation with the security issues in Africa – therefore a limit to the possibility of military cooperation.

While the failure of the trilateral cooperation does not directly influence the bilateral one between the EU and China, it does show that such cooperation is limited. The ongoing fight to counter piracy in the Gulf of Aden has proved a large extent for room for military cooperation between the EU and China. However, this remains limited to that area. When it comes to military cooperation on land, Mali has proved that deploying troops on the same ground, pursuing the same goals, can create room for cooperation but does not imply that such cooperation can take place in reality. Examples of military cooperation between China and some EUMSs are counterbalanced by the lack of trust and the consequent absence of cooperation with other EUMSs, further shortening the extent for room for military cooperation between China and the EU.

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Appendix 1

27/03/2019

Re:RE: Re:Fwd: Info about China-EU security/military relations

Re:RE: Re:Fwd: Info about China-EU security/military relations

chenyang [REDACTED]@[REDACTED].cn]

Sent: 26 March 2019 13:18

To: Giovanni Giamello

Attachments: Chinas Evolving Role in Pe~1.pdf (614 KB) ; An African Afghanistan.pdf (877 KB) ; china peacekeeping policie~1.pdf (395 KB) ; EU-China security cooperat~1.pdf (304 KB)

Dear Giovanni Giamello,

[REDACTED]

Speaking to your thesis, it is a good choice for you to do some research on the subject about the Chinese role in MINUSMA. It was the first time that PLA's combat unit participated UN peacekeeping mission protecting not just Chinese people and assets. That means our armed troop should take part in the guarding of the whole regional UN headquarters in Gao in northern Mali. The MINUSMA mission also include 16 European countries and is under the leadership of European General. That situation provide unprecedented opportunity for the military cooperation between China and EU, and so for your research. In my opinion, the Sino-EU security cooperation should not limited in the conceptual debate but should focus on the empirical practice step by step. That's the only right way to boost the cooperation.

China's engagement with the MINUSMA was not motivated by economic concern. The bilateral trade volume is only \$0.4 billion in 2017. Our contribution to the peacekeeping mission in Mali, especially deploy the combat troop in a foreign country, symbolized a major step for China to shoulder more responsibility in international society and execute more flexible, actively policy in handling the emergency in crisis region.

However our Chinese army is the new comer in the oversea depolyment and short of experience, particularly in the francophone area. How to adapt to the new environment became a great challenge to Chinese Blue-Helmet. We should fill the gap through learning from the European developed countries' experienced army. And as I know, EU countries also show their interest to communicate and cooperate with PLA in such area. Nonetheless there are still lots of challenges in front of them. The number one is the lack of mutual trust. As a Czech military councilor told me, they even rarely went to the other side's barracks. In a word, it would be a long way to go for buliding the trust and promote the cooperaton. I do expect your research can give us some advice to construct some available cooperation approach.

In addition, I suggest you can widen your view to the peacekeeping mission in Lebanon and South Sudan. There are also some military cooperation between EU countries and China in that missions.

BTW, Enclosed please find some relevent articles, May be helpful.

Best regards!

陈阳/Chen Yang

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