China’s imperishable role in anti-fascist war

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By Charles Onunaiju  
  
Eighty years after the Second World War, the preamble of the United Nations charter adopted in its immediate aftermath noted the determination of the peoples of the world “to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind”. And given the scope of the devastations, human sufferings and deaths, it is proper to examine how humanity was pulled back from the brink of total destruction.  
  
The path to securing the “succeeding generations from the scourge of war” lay in understanding historical facts relating to the war that brought “untold sorrow to mankind”, and taking the necessary steps to avoid the occurrence of the scourge.  
  
In most of the stories especially in Western accounts, a principal victim to the aggression and the main bulwark in the defeat of the axis forces of Japan, Germany and Italy, the People’s Republic of China was rarely mentioned and if mentioned at all, is mostly treated as a footnote. Yet, China was the first country to face the onslaught of the axis powers in 1937, two years before Britain in 1939, four years before the U.S (December 7, the Pearl Harbour) and four years before the Soviet Union, (Operation Barbarossa, June 22, 1941).  
  
China fought the longest of all Allied powers for eight years till the end of the war in August 1945.  
  
On July 7, 1937, using the pretence of the so-called Marco Polo Bridge incident, Japanese occupation forces stationed at the Lugou Bridge outside Beijing requested for permission from the nearby garrison to enter in to a walled town of Wamping to search for one of their missing soldiers. The Chinese garrison who sensed that the demand was a mere smokescreen to further humiliate the sensibilities of the Chinese people, whose parts of the country have been occupied by Japan since 1931, refused and the cross fire that ensued effectively triggered Japanese fascist aggression and the Chinese people’s war of resistance against the Axis power.  
  
Earlier in 1931, Japan wantonly violated the treaty of the League of Nations by the invasion and occupation of Manchuria in North East China, where it established a puppet state of Manchukuo, stirring and fuelling passionate anti-Japanese sentiments among the Chinese and this culminated in the Chinese people’s war of resistance and imperishable contributions to the world anti-fascist war and the victory over Nazis, fascism and especially the vicious Japanese militarism.  
  
Without holding down the more than 800,000 Japanese troops on the Chinese mainland in the far East, the better known European fronts in the anti-fascist war may have still struggled to contain the ferocity of the brutal Nazi onslaught without the resistance of the far Eastern front for which China was the incontrovertible bulwark.  
  
The inestimable cost of the Chinese people’s war of resistance against militarist Japanese aggression and contributions to the victory of the world anti-fascist war consisted in the untold human sufferings and loss of lives estimated at more than 20 million, following closely the loss of 27 million lives by the former Soviet Union, now comprised of nearly 20 sovereign states.  
  
The China’s then incipient modernization efforts were summarily destroyed, including most of the rail network, highways and industrial plants. According to some records, 30% of the infrastructure in the rich Pearl River Delta near Canton, 52% in Shanghai and a staggering 80% in the then capital, Nanjing were ruined. And then, the unforgettable Nanjing massacre also referred as the “rape of Nanjing”. The massacre was one of the bloodiest atrocities of Japan’s invasion and occupation of China from 1931 to 1945.  
  
More than 300,000 civilians and disarmed soldiers were killed in the most gruesome manner with countless women raped during the six weeks from December 1937 to January 1938 by Japanese forces, following their capture of the then Chinese capital, Nanjing. The Nanjing massacre and the suffering of the Chinese people are definitely part of humanity’s experience of the second world war, and without the appreciation of this historical fact, the determination of humanity “to save succeeding generation from the scourge of war”, would not proceed from the historically established expression of “seeking truth form facts”.  
  
Despite immense sufferings of the Chinese people, the world-wide anti-fascist victory indicated a vital step in China’s progression from a semi-colonized of vicious imperialism to her rise, however, tentative then, on the global stage as a sovereign power with wider regional and global responsibilities. The Chinese people’s war of resistance also forged the second United Front during which the Communist Party of China established itself as the leading force in the anti-Japanese military campaign and through immense sacrifice secured her imperishable vanguard role in the anti-fascist war of resistance and the construction of modern China.  
  
In the early stage of the founding of modern China, it dug through its bitter war experience for formulate the immutable principles pf peaceful co-existence. The five principles (-mutual respect for each other’s territorial integrity and sovereignty. – mutual non-aggression, -mutual non-interference in other’s internal affairs, -equality and cooperation for mutual benefit, and -peaceful co-existence) have been adopted and mainstreamed in major resolutions and statements.  
  
Having been first mentioned in the 1954 China-Indian agreement, and also included in the historic Ten principles of the Bundung conference in 1955, its core message reflected in the founding charter of the United Nations (UN).  
  
Despite the challenge of the contemporary times, China continues to exert herself to generate important initiatives that have implications to foster international understanding, peace and development. The Belt and Road Initiative framework of international cooperation spanning infrastructure connectivity within countries and across countries, policy coordination, financial integration and vigorous people-people contact has become widely accepted a s core fabric of contemporary international relations.  
  
According to World Bank study, trade flows among 155 participating countries will surge by 4.1 % and would have cut cost of global trade by 2.2 %. A London based consultancy, Centre for Economics and Business Research estimated the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) would likely increase world GDP by US$7.1 trillion per annum by 2040 and that the benefits would be “widespread” as improved infrastructures reduces “frictions that hold back world trade”, with an obvious consequence of universal peace dividends.  
  
The Belt and Road whose cumulative Chinese engagement has reached US$1,308 trillion since 2013 with US$775 billion going into construction and US$533 billion into investments, is considered the foremost international public good of the 21st century. As vital international mechanism for cooperation, the BRI has continue to evolve, bringing into its purview, emerging global challenges and offering tailored insights to ameliorate them. Since international cooperation is critical, China has made enormous efforts to contribute her wisdom. The Global Development Initiative outlined by President Xi Jinping in 2021 offered to share Chinese experience which at the same year brought to an end extreme poverty and enabled China to achieve the Global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), 10 years ahead of its conclusion in 2030.  
  
In 2022 and 2023, President Xi Jinping announced the Global Security and Civilization Initiatives respectively to boost and encourage inclusive global security framework and deepen dialogues among various civilizations of the world.  
  
The pivotal initiatives have been mainstreamed into several international discourses, offering scopes for vigorous exchange of ideas, viewpoints and perspectives, thus enriching global intercourse.  
  
Africa, whose many of her contemporary states were under colonial domination, have many of her citizens drafted to various war fronts in the second war where they fought under banners of the European empires to which they were subjects, and therefore contributed in the victory of the world anti-fascist struggle. And many of the African war veterans inspired by among others, the victory of the Chinese people’s war of resistance against the Japanese, added their experience to then, emerging anti-colonial struggle for independence.  
  
The confluence of the Chinese people’s anti–imperialist struggle and Africa’s push for the end of colonial domination provided the historical starting point, culminating in the vigour, and dynamism of their contemporary cooperation that is widely known for generating practical inputs in their respective efforts at modernization, rejuvenation and renaissance. In the forefront for the struggle for universal peace and inclusive development for broadly shared prosperity, China-Africa relations forged in the heat of anti-imperialist struggles hold out the manifesto of peace, international justice, fairness and development by the example of their cooperation reaffirming the immutable principles of peaceful co-existence with the added practical value of win-win outcomes.  
  
Despite the pockets of hotspots in some regions of the world, the compelling and evolving trajectories towards a community of shared future for humanity means that mankind would never come again to the horrors of the global mass slaughter that claimed the estimated 75 million to 80 million lives in the Second World War.  
  
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