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() Being a prosperous and successful great power today requires more than just trade, tribute and mutual back-scratching among sovereigns. From Darfur to Burma, various crises are forcing China to recognize that being a serious international player means accepting some responsibility for maintaining international order.

Recent signs seem promising. China has begun taking baby steps away from its longstanding position on nonintervention abroad. It's helped push the North Korean government into a nuclear-disarmament deal and reversed its opposition to U.N. intervention in Darfur. It's even exerted modest pressure on Sudan to accept U.N. troops and committed 400 of its soldiers, medical officers and engineers to the mission.

() And there's a crisis looming even closer to home: in Burma, where antigovernment demonstrations have been met with violent reprisals. The crackdown demands an international response. Two years ago, the U.N. General Assembly adopted a doctrine known as the "**responsibility to protect**," under which all U.N. members affirmed their duty to protect their own people from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. The General Assembly also committed the United Nations to take collective action should a member state "manifestly fail" to live up to this obligation. With the Burmese generals now turning on their own people at the same time as world leaders are declaring their commitment to peace and human rights at the U.N. in New York, the Security Council must act.

That will put China, Burma's closest friend and a permanent member of the Security Council, in a tough spot. Although Beijing blocked two Council resolutions condemning Burma this year, in September China's former foreign minister reportedly urged his Burmese equivalent to restore stability, promote reconciliation and "move toward a democracy process that is appropriate for [Burma]." Until Darfur, Beijing generally argued against interventions in other states and hoped in turn to be left alone. But as a rising great power determined once again to export its civilization throughout the world, China no longer has the luxury of staying out.

() Beijing is not going to change its policies overnight. But China is discovering, as the United States has learned, that whatever it decides in a crisis like this will be seen by outsiders as a choice to support one side or the other. Beijing therefore can't afford to back the wrong party, at least not if it hopes to keep its benign image intact. The Tang model of reaching out to the world continues to bring China prosperity. But in the 21st century, unlike in the ninth, wealth and power bring responsibility as well.

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