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China's non-intervention policy in Africa: Principle versus pragmatism

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China's adherence to its policy of non-intervention in its engagement in Africa has sparked a lot of debate. A closer examination will however reveal some inconsistencies with Beijing's official pronouncements versus its actions on the ground. This study seeks to explore this contradiction in China's nonintervention policy in Africa. Through a focused case study on China's actions in Sudan and South Sudan, it is clear that the non-intervention policy has not always been in sync with China's actions. The study also argues that though Beijing may need to rethink its policy in light of increasing investments on the continent as well as Western and domestic pressure to take more responsibility, any potential adjustments will likely assume a more contextual and tactical nature, as opposed to broad ranging and strategic.

Key words: China, Africa, non-intervention, non-interference, foreign policy.

INTRODUCTION

The acceleration of economic engagement between China and Africa has been nothing short of impressive. Within a relatively short period of time, China has become Africa's largest trade partner, and Africa is now China's major import source, second largest overseas construction project contract market and fourth largest investment destination (IOSC, 2013). Aside the procurement of natural resources, other strategic objectives form part of China's engagement in Africa (He, 2007), including a search for new markets and investment opportunities, symbolic diplomacy and development cooperation, and forging strategic partnerships (Alden, 2005).

Of the wide range of Chinese activities in Africa, economic transactions provide the most powerful evidence

of China's increasing interests in the continent. The skyrocketing of Chinese-African trade deserves particular emphasis (Tull, 2006). For example, two-way trade grew from US\$10.6 billion in 2000 to US\$166 billion in 2011. Foreign direct investment increased thirty-fold between 2003 and 2011, from US\$491m to US\$14.7 billion.

In 2012, China pledged US\$20 billion of loans to Africa over three years for infrastructure, agriculture and manufacturing. If the funds are committed, China will become Africa's principal financial backer (ARI, 2012). Most African representatives have welcomed Chinese engagement and its philosophy (Schmitt, 2007) and view it as an opportunity to fuel economic growth, to put them into a better negotiating position with traditional Western

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donors and to amplify Africa's voice in international forums (Saferworld, 2011).

China's non-intervention policy means that it is willing to conduct business on the continent without getting involved in what it calls the "internal affairs" of African countries. However, due to deadly conflicts and general insecurity in some regions of Africa, China's interests have increasingly come under threat, placing its energy security, economic investments, and the lives of its citizens at risk. (Saferworld, 2011). Furthermore, criticisms from Western powers have condemned Beijing's willingness to conduct business with rogue regimes complicit in human rights abuses as well as its failure to partake in international interventions.

In states such as Sudan, where the government of the country are argued to be corrupt and authoritarian, they argue that the Chinese policy of non-interference compounds the problem in these countries (Pitso, 2015). Beyond that, China's rise to great power status brings with it feelings of greater responsibility, and there exist both domestic and international pressure for China to take on a more active role. After all, with greater power comes greater responsibility. Given these implications for its interests and image, Beijing therefore has an interest to intervene and assist in conflict resolution, and take on a more active role on the African continent that goes beyond just trade and investment.

However, the Chinese government has repeatedly emphasized its opposition to intervention and maintains that national governments alone should focus on and respond to matters related to domestic political, economic or social affairs, including internal conflict (Campbell, 2012). It has therefore formulated and maintained the policy of "non-intervention" in that regard, in which it is reluctant to intervene in the affairs of other nations.

In spite of this, Beijing's actions on the ground have sometimes contradicted this policy stance. An example is in Sudan, where the Chinese government departed from its long standing principle and played an active role in persuading Khartoum to accept the Africa Union/United Nations (AU-UN) hybrid peacekeeping force. This represents a foreign policy dilemma, and one that is sure to become even more ubiquitous as economic relations deepen and China undertakes a more active role in the continent. The situation therefore merits a closer examination. Several scholars, in addressing China's non-intervention policy have focused mostly on whether or not China ought to abandon the policy (Aubyn, 2013; Jakobson, 2007, 2009; Wang, 2007; Hess and Aidoo, 2010).

Some Chinese scholars believe that China must expand its role internationally (Yan, 2011; Cui, 2012), while others insist that China must continue to honor non-intervention (Liu and Xiao, 2012; Zhang, 2012; Zhong, 2012). However, the ensuing debate has largely ignored the insidious and increasingly prominent dilemma of policy versus pragmatism. This study seeks to address this inadequacy by closely examining China's actions in one of its most widely acknowledged departures from non-

intervention, namely the Sudan conflict. The importance of identifying a potential shift in Chinese foreign policy extends beyond the continent of Africa and encapsulates a global question concerning China's actions as it continues to grow (Dorman, 2014).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study adopts an empirical, single- case study approach, focusing on Chinese actions in the Darfur conflict in Sudan, and also includes an analysis of China's relations with South Sudan in the aftermath of their secession from Sudan in July 2011.

The rationale for the choice of the Sudan conflict as a case study is due to the unique role China played in the conflict. In spite of its non-intervention policy, China's presence and more importantly its actions had a huge influence. Not only has China made substantial economic investments in the region, but it has also been very instrumental in persuading Khartoum to accept the UN-AU hybrid peacekeeping force.

So far, this serves as a defining example of China's foreign policy transition, which in this case evolved from seeming apathy into active involvement in conflict resolution through diplomatic pressure. The Sudan conflict has largely challenged China's non-intervention policy; while more recently, engagements with South Sudan have contradicted the principles underpinning its sovereignty principle. The Sudan case to a large extent provides the clearest picture yet of China's dilemma and the ensuing diplomatic and foreign policy maneuverings in a bid to reconcile its non-interventionist approach against political instability in a region that is rife with Chinese investments. Sudan, quite arguably the most consequential African relationship within China's broader relations with Africa, represents a quintessential example of China's changing approach to Africa, and has in many ways illustrated the dynamism, transition and convergence in China's approach to Africa. It thus, has the ability to expose the looming complexities of reconciling China's foreign policy pronouncements against changing geopolitical realities by providing a unique opportunity to assess the evolution and change in China's foreign policy in Africa over time.

Sudan therefore presents an opportunity to closely examine China's actions and whether it really does demonstrate the beginning of a shift away from a foreign policy largely driven by the policy of non-intervention, and if so the roles that domestic and international factors have played towards that move. In so doing, it will be better to address the following questions:

1. In what ways has China's non-intervention rhetoric contradicted its actions on the ground??
2. What situations are likely to prompt China to intervene in other countries?
3. What factors are likely to influence that decision?
4. To what extent is the impact of political pressure from international and domestic actors on Chinese Foreign policy?
5. In what ways does China try to reconcile its non-intervention policy with interventionist activities?

Addressing these questions may help to identify and understand the shifting dynamics of Chinese Foreign Policy and its general tendency towards a particular trend, not only in Africa but globally as well. This study is therefore an attempt to seek answers to these and many other essential questions.

The study is based on qualitative research and relies mostly on secondary sources of data, most of which is gleaned from news reports, official pronouncements, statements by public officials and journal articles. It involved an extensive analysis of the statements and behaviours of African and Western governments, as well as

regional and sub-regional organizations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and how their actions and reactions may have played a role in China's decision to intervene in the Sudan conflict. This was in turn followed by an analysis of Chinese government responses including announcements by Chinese officials made through official statements, mediation efforts, meetings and discussions with local officials, increased troop commitments etc.

The study also analyzes the reactions of local and regional actors, and the responses of regional organizations within Africa, especially the African Union to ascertain the influence they may have had in compelling China to change its policy stance. In a nutshell, this study focuses on the discovery and validation of causal mechanisms, and through an analysis of words and actions largely based on process tracing, we can draw inferences on the shifting dynamics of China's foreign policy practices and causally link these changes to events, actions and reactions within Sudan, Africa and the broader international environment.

The timeframe under consideration in this research is the 10-year period from 2003 to 2013. The starting point of 2003 marks the beginning of the Darfur conflict and covers events throughout the period until 2013, when violence broke out in South Sudan. This period adequately represents the challenges that China faced in both Sudan and South Sudan, and this research addresses the events and actors, both internal and external that impacted China's foreign policy actions and reactions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Non-intervention in China's Africa policy

Non-intervention is generally defined as a policy characterized by the absence of interference by a state or states in the external affairs of another state without its consent, or in its internal affairs with or without its consent. (Hodges, 1915).

The principle of non-intervention includes, but is not limited to, the prohibition of the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state. The principle of non-intervention in the internal affairs of States also signifies that a State should not otherwise intervene in a dictatorial way in the internal affairs of other States (Encyclopedia Princetoniensis, 2014).

Non-intervention is generally regarded as international law and is recognized as "a corollary of every state's right to sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence" (Oppenheim, 2008). This feeling is captured in the treaties of regional organisations like ASEAN, the African Union, and the Arab League. More generally, the UN General Assembly adopted a Declaration on the Inadmissibility of Intervention and Interference in the Domestic Affairs of States (UNGA resolution 2131 (XX), 1965).

In practice however, states' attitude towards the principle of non-intervention varies widely. This is partly the result of its attendant ambiguity. While the prohibition on the use of force is quite clear, it is not easy to ascertain which actions constitute intervention and which actions do not. It mostly depends on context, for example the relations between the States in question. The term "non-intervention" is

sometimes used interchangeably with "non-interference", though the latter may suggest a wider prohibition. While interpretations of non-intervention vary widely, this study uses the term in a broad sense to encompass diplomatic interference, subversive and clandestine political action and military intervention including peacekeeping operations.

Though smaller states may support non-intervention for the purpose of defense, in the case of larger countries like China, the situation warrants a different perspective. This is because China wields great power and has the capability and sometimes the obligation to intervene in other countries domestic affairs especially in cases of conflict and gross human rights violations.

Nevertheless, the Chinese government strictly adheres to a non-intervention principle, and has time and again re-iterated its opposition to interference in what it deems the "domestic affairs" of other states. This stance has sometimes come into conflict recent global trends like the internationalization of human rights and the diffusion of responsibility to protect (R2P), which have largely promoted the evolution of non-intervention principles in international law, at least, in customary law. Therefore, the tension between human rights and state sovereignty, two pillars of international law complicates China's diplomatic decisions (Ren, 2013).

China's long standing policy of non-intervention in the "internal affairs" of other nations means it is reluctant to take any action in resolving conflicts in Africa, or anywhere else for that matter. As a result, Beijing has chosen to stay out of the spot light of African politics, limiting its support to the idea of 'African solutions for African problems'. In this way, Beijing traditionally avoids taking a leadership role in helping to manage or resolve conflicts (Kuo, 2012).

China's non-interference stance is carried over from the 1954 "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence" which includes mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence (Anthony, 2012). These five principles have since been enshrined in the Chinese Constitution (National Congress of the Communist Party of China (NCCPC), 2004), and is included in virtually every bilateral treaty made by China. As a result, as a fundamental element of the Five Principles, non-intervention has become one of China's foreign policy tenets (Ren, 2013).

Historically, the Chinese government began to turn its attention to Africa in the second half of 1954. The Bandung Asian-African conference of 1955 provided a forum for Chinese delegates to meet personally with representatives of six African states. The conference incorporated the "five principles of peaceful co-existence" into the "ten principles of Bandung".

The original five principles still remain an essential part of China's policy toward Africa, and as mentioned earlier, the States in question. The term "non-intervention" is

is the pre-cursor to China's non-intervention policy (Shinn and Eisenman, 2012). China's Africa Policy was initially influenced by ideology, which was part of the unique international environment between 1949 and 1978. This era, generally known as the revolutionary period, was characterised by Chinese involvement in the liberation struggles of many African states. China saw itself on the frontlines in the fight against colonialism, imperialism and Soviet revisionism (Theron, 2012). During this period, Chinese policymakers largely ignored the official pledge for non-interference in practice, and Beijing became another player in the violent game of Cold War politics (Hess and Aidoo, 2010).

However, the period from 1982 marked a shift towards a more pragmatic approach. Beijing officially shifted away from a policy that emphasised 'war and revolution' to one of peace and development at the 12th Communist Party of China (CPC) National Assembly. This shift included a change in policies from which 'economy serves diplomacy' to policies in which 'diplomacy serves the economy'. The focus thus shifted to practical effectiveness in assistance and the spirit of 'developing together' (Li, 2007). Integral to this decision were the new principles that were established at the CPC National Assembly. This period was marked by a resuscitation of non-intervention principles and emphasized a new type of interstate political relationship based on "independence, complete equality, mutual respect, non-interference in others' internal affairs" (Rotberg, 2008).

The principle of non-intervention is likely a genuine, deeply-held belief among many Chinese officials and academics. It is, however, a policy that has also served China's strategic interests, evidenced in its response to recent coups in the Central African Republic (2003), Mauritania (2008), Guinea (2008), Madagascar (2009) and Niger (2010). While growing, Chinese interest had been registered in all five countries prior to their respective political upheavals, a pragmatic hands-off response "allowed China to continue to consolidate its position under the new strongmen".

In this regard, noninterference serves as a means through which China can maintain stable relations with host governments, usually with an eye to ensuring that economic co-operation continues unaffected by political change (Campbell, 2012). One of the offshoots of China's non-intervention policy in Africa is its "no strings attached" policy.

The Chinese government and its African counterparts maintain that Chinese aid is typically given with few political strings attached, as opposed to Western aid that demand for African governments certain political objectives and standards such as democracy and human rights. This policy appeals to African governments and is received in favorable contrast to the more coercive and forced conditionalities attached to loans and aid from the West.

Historically, Western donors have progressively

undermined the sovereignty of African states by imposing reform agendas on them, first in the guise of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) in the 1980s, followed in the 1990s by demands for democratic reform (Tull, 2006). Structural adjustment and other Western driven economic prescriptions for Africa have proved detrimental to African countries, at worst, and unfit to African political, social and economic realities, at best (Iyasa, 2013). Tull (2006) further emphasizes this point:

"By offering their African counterparts a mix of political and economic incentives, the Chinese government is successfully driving home the message that increased Sino-African cooperation will inevitably result in a 'win-win situation' for both sides. The power of this argument is enhanced by a subtle discourse which posits China not only as an appealing alternative partner to the West, but also as a better choice for Africa" (p. 466).

With the policy of non-intervention, China has been successful in courting African regimes to ensure continued access to vital resources like oil. It has also secured markets for its exports and helped push Chinese companies into investing in foreign economies. The policy of non-interference has also proven to be a useful diplomatic tool for China by countering American hegemony through the projection of soft power and ensuring international non-recognition of Taiwan. The Chinese have found nonintervention to be a powerful brand used for projecting Chinese influence into Africa – a brand that most African leaders and some populations have embraced (Hess and Aidoo, 2010).

However critics have argued that China needs to play a more engaging and responsible role as a foreign power and that it is acting irresponsibly by conducting business with rogue regimes with bleak human rights records. They argue that China should put more pressure on these regimes and impose conditions that will ensure the protection of human rights. Chinese academic and policy elites counter that socio-economic rights take precedence over abstract political rights.

Furthermore, it is argued that political rights cannot be imposed from the outside; instead, sovereignty is to be protected and autonomy honored to allow for indigenous development strategies (Campbell, 2012). Kuo (2012) further emphasizes that, in contrast to the Western led liberal peace' – with its focus on good governance, free markets and protection of individual rights – the 'Chinese peace' emphasizes economic development led by infrastructure construction, poverty alleviation and stable governance. According to then Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao:

"China supports the development of democracy and the rule of law in Africa. But we never impose our will on others. We believe that people in every region and country have the right and ability to properly handle their own

affairs” (Jiabao, 2011).

Then Chinese Deputy Foreign Minister, Zhou Wenzhong, went as far as to say in 2004 that for the Chinese in Africa, “business is business- we try to separate politics from business” (Zhou, 2004).

The principle versus pragmatism dilemma

Although the Chinese government maintains a steadfast adherence to non-intervention in principle, in practice it has proven to be flexible with changing situations in the international environment, and China has inevitably been engaged in several international intervention activities, albeit reluctantly and cautiously.

China’s mediation and reconciliation efforts in Sudan and South Sudan, Liberia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Chad and Mali are tacit acknowledgement that China is sometimes willing to adopt a more prominent diplomatic role. For example, after 2006, China played an important role in securing Khartoum’s acceptance of the deployment of peacekeepers in Darfur. In late 2008, China actively pushed the governments of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Rwanda to resolve the conflict in eastern DRC, where Rwanda was supporting rebel groups (Saferworld, 2011). In 2012, Chinese personnel were included in six out of seven United Nations peacekeeping missions in Africa. Since December 2008, Chinese warships have participated extensively in joint “anti-piracy” escort duties off the Horn of Africa (ARI, 2012).

China has also provided support to the UN led missions in resolving conflicts in Africa. In particular, China provided support to the UN Security Council led mission in Liberia by sending 1300 troops in 2007. Interestingly, China was the first country to push the UN Security Council to intervene in the Somali conflict during the 2006 UN Security Council meeting in Addis Ababa (Korinko and Chelang’a, 2014). By May 2007, China had contributed 1800 peacekeeping troops to UN peacekeeping efforts in Africa. At the moment, China has the largest of its peacekeepers among the five Permanent members of the UN mission to Africa (Gill et al., 2007).

More broadly, China’s increasingly close relationship with African countries reveal an evolving foreign policy as Beijing strives to establish itself as a responsible world power. Beijing’s leaders do indeed want China to be regarded as a responsible stakeholder. They recognize that a world power is expected to address the challenges and crises that afflict the international order (Jakobson, 2009).

Consequently, China’s traditional foreign policy has been tested while contradictions in its noninterference policy, military relations, and economic engagement have been exposed. On the whole, Beijing has adopted pragmatic responses to the realities of a complex situation (Saferworld, 2012). China has largely justified her

intervention policies by acknowledging and emphasizing how changing situations in the international arena have increasingly forced China’s hand. In the mind of China’s policy makers, the application of the non-intervention policy has never been fixed in reality. As a result, it is common for the Chinese government to justify their intervention activities by combining the principle with flexibility in its political culture. Furthermore, China acknowledges that increasing globalization interdependence has made it difficult to differentiate between domestic issues and global issues (He, 2011).

Therefore, as its economy grows and becomes more exposed to global risks and uncertainties, Chinese foreign policy makers are being forced to react to the changes and challenges at home and abroad. For example, the slaying and kidnapping of Chinese oil workers in Ethiopia and Nigeria in 2007 and in Sudan in 2008 were reminders that China will have to deal with a growing number of non-traditional threats in countries in which it has commercial interests (Jakobson, 2009), and the deeper China ventures into the resource-abundant African continent, the more it will stumble upon various security challenges (Holslag, 2009).

Chinese workers in oil installations have been targeted in conflict zones all over Africa. In January of 2007, nine China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) Chinese oil workers were abducted and held hostage in the Niger Delta, following a separate kidnapping of 5 telecommunications workers in southern Rivers state (Harris, 2007). Additionally, during the Libya War, China recognized that it must do more to safeguard its economic interests after Chinese companies lost their investments in over 50 major projects in Libya, worth a total of US\$18.8 billion. These investments, which were concentrated in the petrochemical and gas sectors, involved almost all of China’s leading state-run oil companies, including China National Petroleum Corporation and China National Offshore Oil Corporation (China Daily, 2012).

Therefore to protect its overseas economic investments, the Chinese government will find it increasingly difficult to adhere to its long-standing principle of non-interference in another country’s domestic affairs (Jakobson, 2009). Besides, many African scholars and policy makers are increasingly of the view that China’s policy of non-interference is acrimonious and are of the opinion that China’s policy of investing in belligerent and dictatorial governments has been a contributing factor to undermining peace and security in Africa. Additionally, as the Chinese presence in Africa grows, this policy will increasingly be challenged. This is not because China harbors secret designs upon Africa but rather because on-going political instability coupled with China’s needs to sustain suitable investment environments, will demand of them a greater role in regional peace and security (Anthony, 2012).

Deciding how to free China of its ‘non-interference trap’ and formulate a more activist, yet not overly aggressive –

core principle is a major challenge for Chinese foreign policy makers today. In private, Chinese foreign policy specialists acknowledge that non-interference is no longer practical, tenable, or in line with Chinese national interests (Jakobson, 2007). Chinese researchers have also made careful formulations in academic journals about the need to adopt a more flexible approach to the nonintervention principle. For example, Wang (2007) of Beijing University writes:

“From the diplomatic point of view, non-interference of domestic affairs will still be an important principle. We should, however, see that the stability of other countries has become more and more related to our rights and interests in those countries, including the security of our overseas organizations and civilians. Therefore, China will contribute to the construction of harmonious society of other countries through diversified means of cooperation, consultation, aid, communication and so on”.

In conclusion, China's attitude toward intervention has evolved in accordance with the changes in the international environment, and as China increases its engagement in the African continent, we are likely to see some more willingness for flexibility and tactical adjustments to its non-intervention policy. According to Large (2008b), the core Chinese foreign policy principle of non-interference has in recent times come under increasing pressure in its relations with Sudan. Since 1959, China has applied its non-interference principle to its relations with successive governments in Khartoum. From the mid-1990s, however, the Chinese role in Sudan has evolved accordingly with practical realities. Today China's challenge is finding a balance between its policies of noninterference with an increasingly complex environment, the result of Chinese economic involvement in Sudan; while taking into consideration the ongoing conflict in western Darfur and changing politics after the North-South peace agreement of January 2005 (Large, 2008b). An examination of China's role in the Sudan conflict will perhaps offer more insight into the specific situations that have prompted this changing stance.

China's intervention in the Sudanese civil war

Sudan marks one of the most well-known examples of China's ensuing dilemma between adhering to its principle of non-intervention on one hand, and the pragmatism of protecting its interests. China's subsequent actions towards resolving the conflict was highly regarded as significant, and also marks a pivotal shift in its policy towards Africa.

While the emergence of the Darfur conflict in 2003, just as the North-South civil war was coming to an end, brought forth a myriad of emerging challenges for China and its investments, the period before 2007 was

nonetheless characterized by a staunch dedication to non-intervention in the Sudan conflict by the Chinese government, who continued to implement a tactical approach defined by a separation of politics from economics, the maintenance of elite-based ties and ultimately, non-involvement in the resolution of Sudanese conflicts. The period between 2005 and 2013 however, represents an evolving era of change and tactical adaptation to China's foreign policy approach as the challenges emanating from within the Sudanese context were compounded after the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005 (Barber, 2014).

President Hu Jintao's visit in 2007 with Sudanese officials in the capital Khartoum marked a turning point in China's policy stance. In a series of meetings, the Chinese President persuaded Sudanese Officials to accept UN peacekeepers in the Darfur region. China's actions did not end with only mediation. It voted in favour of UN resolution 1769 which authorized the deployment of a hybrid AU-UN peacekeeping force to Darfur, and even went as far as to contribute a substantial number of peacekeepers.

Between the period from 2011 to 2013, in the aftermath of the secession of South Sudan from Sudan, trade disputes between the two nations again bore witness to mediation efforts from China in a bid to stem the disruption of oil flow from Chinese oil fields. Not long after that, South Sudan was plunged into an ethnic conflict, this time threatening Chinese oil investments in the region. Again, China stepped and played a key role in an attempt to resolve the crisis. This section is an attempt to chronicle China's interventionist role in Sudan, first during the Darfur crisis in 2007, and then in the South Sudanese conflict in 2011 and 2014.

Diplomatic relations with Sudan were established as far back as 1959. However, the turning point of relations began when the National Islamic Front (now the NCP) seized power in 1989. It quickly lost favour with Western powers amidst accusations of links to terrorism which led to international isolation and US economic sanctions.

Consequently, Sudan turned towards China, which willingly extended a hand of friendship (ICG, 2012). A political framework and structure of bilateral investment agreements governing trade facilitated China's expanding economic relations with Sudan, but investment and activity in Sudan's oil sector remain central to relations (Large, 2008a).

In 1995, the Sudanese government extended an invitation to China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC). The company set up its offices in Khartoum and began to participate in the bidding for and exploration of oil in Sudan. Two years later, the Great Nile Petroleum Operating Company (GNPOC) was formed. CNPC's stake in GNPOC was 40%.

In 1998, CNPC's construction arm, China Petroleum Engineering and Construction (Group) Corporation (CPECC) participated in the construction of the 1,500-kilometer-long GNPOC pipeline from Blocks 1 and 2

to the Red Sea. It also built a refinery near Khartoum with a 2.5 million-ton processing capacity. CNPC has upstream investment projects in Blocks 1/2/4, Blocks 3/7, Block 6 and Block 15. The crude oil pipelines of Blocks 1/2/4, Blocks 3/7, and Block 6 were also constructed by CNPC. No doubt, China has become a major player in the Sudanese oil industry, and has built a complete oil industry system that includes production, refinery, transportation and marketing. The following is China's shares in the different sectors:

Total oil investment (47.3%), upstream oil investment (43.8%), downstream oil investment (56.9%), oil pipelines (47.6%), oil refinery (50%), petrochemicals (95%), oil refinery and petrochemicals (51%), and oil marketing, industry and manufacturing (12.5%) (Liu, 2015).

In fact, China's development of the oil sector is inextricably linked to the country's brutal civil war which was fought largely in the South between 1983 and 2005. The oil boom helped to fuel the conflict by providing a means of payment for more weapons (ICG, 2012).

According to a former minister of Finance for Sudan, as much as 70% of the income generated from oil sales has been dedicated to acquiring and manufacturing arms (The New York Times, 2006). Thus, the development of the oil sector in Sudan was deeply implicated in the political economy of conflict in Southern Sudan. Most prominently in the 1990s, oil and the territorial control of oilfields became a fundamental dynamic in the war (Verney, 2000). This has in no small doubt fuelled and perpetuated the conflict in the Darfur region. Additionally, China has played a direct role in selling arms to Sudan and in developing its weapons industry. Chinese arms sales grew from twenty-five fold between 2002 and 2005 (Save Darfur Coalition, 2007).

Another facet of Chinese military co-operation in Sudan has been the assistance of Chinese companies to the building of at least three weapons factories outside of Khartoum (The Washington Times, 2006). This occurred in direct violation of a United Nations Security Council arms embargo. Although China denies violating the UN embargo there is compelling evidence from some of the most respected international human rights organisations that implicates China.

Furthermore, on January 26th 2007, the Chairman of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to UNSCR 1591 sent a letter to the President of the Security Council, in which it was stated that "shell casings collected from various sites in Darfur suggest that most ammunition currently used by parties for the conflict in Darfur is manufactured either in the Sudan or in China" (United Nations, 2006). It later emerged that between 2003 and 2006, China sold twenty A-5C Fatan fighter bombers and six K-8 advanced trainer aircraft to Khartoum, which were instrumental in the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) bombing campaigns in Darfur during this period. China's Dongfeng

Company delivered more than 200 military trucks in 2005. In fact, within that same period, China was the largest supplier of small arms to the Sudanese government, selling on average, US\$14 million worth of weapons a year (Shinn, 2009).

Sudan's civil wars have been long and protracted, and have resulted in immense suffering and destruction. Some estimates put the death toll at more than two million over the past eighteen years; this includes victims of direct violence or conflict-related starvation and disease. Half a million refugees have spilled into neighboring countries, and roughly four million people have been displaced and driven from their homes within Sudan (ICG, 2002). Multiple causes are cited as having led to the North – South civil war, including failure to share resources equitably, ethnic and religious difference and later, the discovery of and competition for oil. The start of oil production raised the stakes, with adverse consequences for those in close proximity to actual or potential oil producing areas (World Bank, 2003).

In 2000, the peace process for ending the civil war between northern and southern Sudan resumed, and by 2005, the SPLM/A and the government in Khartoum signed a Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) which formally brought the war to an end. However, within the same period details of this agreement were being worked out, the humanitarian situation in Darfur was deteriorating. Dissidents in Darfur launched attacks against government forces in early 2003.

Initially, they comprised of two rebel factions: the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), supported largely by the Zaghawa people, and the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army which consisted mostly of the Fur people. Eventually, they splintered into numerous additional groups. The Khartoum government, in a bid to crush the insurrection, mobilized the indigenous Janjaweed militia in Darfur, choosing not to rely on government soldiers, most of who came from Darfur.

However, the situation quickly deteriorated, as the Janjaweed applied vicious tactics and egregious human rights abuses. By early 2004, an estimated 80,000 people had died or been killed, while 100,000 fled to neighboring Chad and an additional million internally displaced (Shinn, 2009). It was thus the 'Arabisation' of the conflict, with Khartoum's deployment of the Janjaweed to force the Darfuri tribes to make way for Arab resettlement that brought the taint of racism and ethnic cleansing that would shape the conflict, leading many to characterize it later as genocide (Barber, 2014).

While there was general agreement that the events in Darfur were terrible, and as such received worldwide condemnation, there was no agreement that it constituted genocide as defined in the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide. The only government to have officially declared that genocide occurred in Darfur was the United States. In his address to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on September

9th, 2004, Colin Powell, then Secretary of State said, "genocide has occurred and may still be occurring in Darfur." He blamed the Janjaweed and the Sudanese government for the turn of events. Most human rights organisations agreed with the US's assessment of the situation, but the United Nations, African Union and most other governments referred to the abuses as "crimes against humanity" or "war crimes" but not genocide (Shinn, 2009).

It was in light of China's expanding military ties with Sudan during the early part of the conflict that laid the foundations for an increasingly globalized and consequential Chinese role in the Darfur context that would emerge from 2006 and pose a significant foreign policy challenge for the Chinese government (Barber, 2014). China's role in Sudan has been widely recognized as critical to prospects for a peaceful resolution to the Darfur conflict. It is also clear that Beijing enjoys an influential standing with Khartoum that could be of major strategic value in efforts to bring peace and security to Darfur (Small Arms Survey, 2007). The fact is that China, by virtue of her engagements with Sudan, and South Sudan since its independence, is inextricably an influential actor in local, bilateral and international politics. Apart from being the largest single investor in the region, Sudan and South Sudan's oil is exported primarily to China. In 2011, of the average production of 330,000 barrels per day, China imported 66% (Energy Information Administration, 2012). Aside from the Chinese Government, there are many other Chinese actors who are involved in South Sudan, including a variety of state-owned banks, corporations and private companies (Saferworld, 2012).

In spite of this, China had initially been reluctant to take any action towards mediation and reconciliation efforts in the Darfur conflict. Chinese Scholars have characterized China's policy with regards to the conflict in Sudan's western Darfur region during the first year since the initial eruption of hostilities in February 2003 as one of 'neutrality' and 'indifference' regarding its resolution. Chinese foreign policy officials and diplomats viewed Darfur as a 'local affair' and had been "successfully persuaded by Sudan government that made Chinese leaders believe what happened in Western Sudan was just local violence that could be controlled by government (sic) (Jian, 2012).

In that vein, China was consistently opposed to the imposition of sanctions against the government of Sudan over its policy in Darfur. It had even threatened to use its veto to block the UN Security Council from imposing sanctions against Khartoum, but never actually did so. It rather relied on diluting the language of resolutions and to frequently abstain from voting (Small Arms Survey, 2007).

In fact, until 2007, it abstained from most Security Council resolutions concerning Darfur. Starting with the first Darfur resolution in 2004, China consistently removed or tried to remove any harsh language that was critical for the Sudanese government.

In July, 2004 it abstained from a resolution that demanded the disarmament of the Janjaweed, and abstained from another one in September of the same year that called for a commission of enquiry to investigate human rights abuses in Darfur. China abstained from yet another resolution in March 2005 that requested sanctions against those responsible for committing violence in Darfur and in the same month, another resolution that called for the referral of the situation in Darfur to the International Criminal Court.

In April 2006, China abstained from a resolution that requested sanctions and a travel ban against four Sudanese individuals, and in August, it abstained on one that expanded the UN peacekeeping mission in southern Sudan to Darfur (Shinn, 2009). China had effectively managed to abstain from a total of 8 out of 22 UN Security Council resolutions concerning Sudan and Darfur since 2001 (Small Arms Survey, 2007).

In essence, the Chinese government perceived the Darfur conflict to be an internal affair which was to be left to the Sudanese government to handle, and as such continued to implement a Sudan policy in line with the broad agenda of promoting strengthened bilateral state-state ties, deeper commercial and military relations, and the reassertion of China's policy of 'non-interference'. This was in line with Beijing's belief at the time that it could separate its commercial role from political involvement at the local level (Barber, 2014).

To add to that, Beijing was able to maintain its stance in Darfur due to the fact that there was next to no international pressure on China as the international community was fixated on other global issues. It didn't help in the same year the crisis began, the US-led invasion of Iraq had taken center stage in the wider geo-politics, thus relegating the Darfur to the sidelines.

However, by mid-2004 China began to gradually change its stance on the Darfur issue, and was no longer willing to offer unconditional support to the Sudanese government. This was largely the result of pressure both outside of and within China. In March 2004, strong evidence emerged from the UN of the Sudanese government's role in the mass killing, rape and displacement of citizens. This sparks a renewed interest from the international community, and drew the attention of the Security Council and Western Media (Cockett, 2010). This brought forth immense international pressure that called for China to adopt a responsible stakeholder role in international affairs. The US government in particular, began to take a special interest in encouraging China's potential role in defusing the situation in Darfur (Barber, 2014). In addition, pressure from Chinese foreign policy circles called for a review of Chinese foreign policy and for China to collaborate with the other major powers to bring a resolution to the conflict (Ahmed, 2010).

At around the same time, numerous NGOs were working tirelessly to bring Darfur to the world's attention with undoubted success. Human Rights groups argued

that China was 'the principal impediment' to swift and decisive action and identified it as indispensable to Sudan and as having significant important leverage over the government of Sudan (Macfarlane, 2013).

By late 2006, considerable pressure had mounted to the effect that it threatened to detract from its hosting of the 2008 Olympics in Beijing. While China was hoping to use the Olympics to highlight its success story and use it as an opportunity to showcase its rapid economic growth and newfound modernity, Western criticism of China's actions or inaction in Darfur was spreading concern globally, to the extent that the Beijing Olympics was being labelled as the "Genocide Olympics". Dream for Darfur was perhaps the most vocal advocacy group in this arena, in large part thanks to American celebrity Mia Farrow who purportedly found the 'lone point of leverage with a country that has otherwise been impervious to all criticism'. Mia Farrow coined the term 'Genocide Olympics' and it quickly became part of colloquial language. Three months after the term's first use, there was a 400% increase on the previous three months in the number of newspaper articles linking China to Darfur. Despite much disagreement as to whether Darfur could be termed a genocide, the rebranding of the Games sparked furor, grabbing America's attention. This visibility was capitalized on by Dream for Darfur who hosted a torch relay of genocide sites, paid for full page adverts linking Darfur and China, hosted numerous rallies and exerted pressure on Steven Spielberg (the Beijing Games' artistic adviser) to resign. On the day Spielberg resigned, two letters were sent to Beijing both condemning China's relationship with Sudan and expressing "grave concern". The first was a joint letter from Nobel Laureates and Olympic athletes, and the second was from the US Congress stating:

"There are calls to boycott what is increasingly being called the "Genocide Olympics" (Macfarlane, 2013)

These events did considerable damage to China's international reputation and led Chinese officials to engage in restoring the Chinese national image. In addition to western criticism over the Olympics, US policymakers voiced dissatisfaction with China's actions in Darfur. Ninety-six US Senators and 108 house members sent a letter to President Hu Jintao in April 2007 condemning China's actions in Darfur (Dorman, 2014). Under intense pressure, Beijing shifted from its traditional stance of non-interference in domestic affairs and began to actively lobby the Khartoum regime to accept an UN-AU hybrid force (Holslag, 2008).

Since early 2006, Beijing's approach to Darfur had shifted towards a more pragmatic stance. The shift was signaled during the debate over UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1706, which proposed the extension of UNMIS's mandate to cover Darfur (Small Arms Survey, 2007). Despite the uncertainty around UNSCR 1706, China publicly cast itself as playing a 'constructive role' in

Darfur (Sudan Tribune 2006a).

China also showed support for the Darfur Peace Agreement by working through its UN representative, Wang Guangya towards a deal on the Annan plan. The US envoy Andrew Natsios later acknowledged that this was 'a vital and constructive role' (Natsios, 2007). Prior to that, China had already begun a diplomatic campaign by deploying special envoys like Luo Guozeng to meet with Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir twice in August 2004 and February 2005.

The aim was to persuade the Sudanese government to change its policy and improve the humanitarian situation in the Darfur region. Additionally, the assistant minister of Foreign Affairs Zhai Jun also visited Sudan four times, where he urged the Sudanese government to stop the killings and make a real effort to solve the crisis, and to desist from confronting the international community through a hard-line approach. There were several other instances where Chinese officials took the opportunity to urge visiting Sudanese officials in China to work towards solving the problems in Sudan in a serious manner and providing economic, security and social assistance to the people of Darfur as quickly as possible (Ahmed, 2010).

It was pressure from the Chinese that largely contributed to the Khartoum regime's eventual acceptance of UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's three-phase plan for the resolution of the conflict, including the deployment of a joint AU-UN peacekeeping force in Darfur (Saferworld, 2011). For the first time, China had publicly encouraged Khartoum to allow UN peacekeepers into Darfur (Sudan Tribune, 2006) and called for a 'comprehensive political solution' to the crisis (Sudan Tribune, 2006b).

These events had signaled a new phase of direct Chinese pressure on Sudan, in which China took advantage of any opportunity to request for action from the Sudanese government. For instance, in November 2006 during the China – Africa summit in Beijing, President Hu Jintao directly expressed China's displeasure with the situation in Sudan to the Sudanese President and requested that he co-operate fully with the international community. "We hope the Sudanese government can find an appropriate settlement, maintain stability, and constantly improve the humanitarian conditions in the region" according to Hu (Ministry of Commerce of the PRC, 2006).

Later during his visit to Sudan in February 2007, Hu Jintao is reported to have told the Sudanese President directly:

"Darfur is a part of Sudan and you have to resolve this problem" (Washington Post, 2007).

During the same visit, President Hu Jintao announced the four key principles for resolving the Darfur conflict. These were that Sudan's sovereignty should be respected, that there should be peaceful settlement through dialogue and consultation on equal footings, that the AU and the UN

should play constructive roles and that regional stability and the livelihoods of local people should be safeguarded (Yu and Wang, 2008). In several other cases, top level Chinese diplomats were sent by the Chinese government to meet with the Sudanese leadership. For example Zhai Jun directly requested that the government of Sudan accept UN Secretary General Kofi Annan's plan in a visit in April, 2007, where he also visited refugee camps in Western Sudan (Sudan Tribune, 2007).

It is widely believed that this form of direct pressure from China on the Sudanese government was instrumental in their acceptance of the UN peacekeeping forces. Liu Guijin who was appointed in that same period as the Chinese special envoy for African Affairs stated:

'The talks between the Chinese president and the Sudanese president, in February 2007, had helped the Sudan to accept the spread of the international forces in the Darfur region' (South China Morning Post, 2014).

On 31 July, 2007 China collaborated with other western countries and voted in favour of Security Council Resolution 1769, which authorised the UN to send 26,000 joint UN-AU hybrid peacekeeping force to Darfur (UN Security Council, 2007) much to the objection of the Sudanese government.

However, faced with joint pressure from China and the West, and coupled with the threat of additional new penalties, Khartoum finally accepted the deployment of the peacekeepers (Ahmed, 2010). China's UN representative, Wang Guangya, commented on his decision to vote in favor of the resolution stating, "It should be particularly emphasized that the purpose of this Resolution is to authorize the launch of the Hybrid Operation, rather than exert pressure or impose sanctions. Representative Wang's comments highlighted China's attempt to remain in good favor with the Khartoum government, while also accepting Western pressure (Dorman, 2014). The 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement brought an end to decades of civil war in Sudan between the principally Muslim North and the mainly Christian South, even though pockets of conflict continued in a few secluded areas.

However, as time went on it became obvious that a separation would take place. The secession process was largely peaceful, and in 2011, Southern Sudan overwhelmingly voted in a referendum leading to the creation of a new and independent nation state, the Republic of South Sudan. But it wasn't long before tensions began to rise over oil, the regions most valuable resource. After the recession, land-locked South Sudan now possessed about 75% of oil reserves, while the North had the infrastructure required to distribute it to the international market in the form of pipelines and ports.

In January 2012, South Sudan cut off all oil production in protest at Khartoum's proposed oil transit fees (Think Africa Press, 2012). China's oil interests were now split,

leaving oil fields in South Sudan separate from the vital refineries and ports in Sudan. Chinese infrastructure development projects of the late 1990s and 2000s were now subject to maintaining a stable relationship between two divisions with long histories of violent disputes (Dorman, 2014). It was under these circumstances that China began its intervention by dispatching its envoy for African affairs, Liu Guijin, to the region. Liu managed to break the deadlock, warning that "the repercussions would be very serious" for all involved if the situation were not resolved (Think Africa Press, 2012).

Throughout the oil transit fee dispute between Sudan and South Sudan, China took a highly interventionist role in mediating the conflict by initiating talks between both sides and attempting to coerce the South Sudanese officials to end the conflict. China hosted South Sudanese President Salva Kiir in Beijing and directly pressured him to seek an end to the conflict in April of 2012. During fighting over the Heglig oil field in Sudan in which both Sudan and South Sudan claimed ownership, China attempted to quell the growing violence calling for the withdrawal of South Sudanese forces from the region (Dorman, 2014).

It is largely acknowledged that "China [...] has played an important role in changing peace and conflict dynamics between and within the now separated countries over the last two decades" (Attree, 2012). China's successful courting of both Khartoum and Juba politically and economically exhibits a delicate balancing act. This is largely because China has an economic interest in ensuring the peaceful co-existence of both states. To that extent it may be willing to depart from its non-intervention policy. For example In May 2012, the UNSC unanimously, with unexpected approbation from China, approved Resolution 2046. This resolution threatened economic and diplomatic measures against both Sudan and South Sudan if further border violence occurred (Kimenyi, 2012).

After violence broke out in December 2013 between South Sudanese president Salva Kiir and rebels loyal to ousted vice-president Riek Machar, Beijing once again felt the need to intervene. It took a proactive role in trying to end the violence by dispatching special envoy Zhong Jianhua to carry out mediation efforts (South China Morning Post, 2014). Both he and his US counterpart visited Juba in December in an effort to broker a ceasefire in support of the regionally-led Inter-Government Authority on Development (IGAD) negotiations, and both China and the US worked together to facilitate the rapid and unanimous adoption of UNSC Resolution 2132 to temporarily increase the overall force levels of UNMISS to 12,500 troops and 1,323 to support its protection of civilians and the provision of humanitarian assistance.

Significantly, the Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi also met separately with representatives from both the government and the rebel SPLM faction in Addis Ababa, urging both sides to end the violence and restore the rule of law and order (Barber, 2014). Again, Foreign Minister

Wang Yi, while visiting Ethiopia around the same time, also called for an end to hostilities, urging all sides to start talks. These efforts led to the two sides finally signing a ceasefire. (South China Morning Post, 2014) Zhong Jianhua later stated:

"China should be engaging more in peace and security solutions for any conflict there...This is a challenge for China. This is something new for us ... It is a new chapter for Chinese foreign affairs," (Zhong, 2014).

The most dramatic turnaround yet of China's non-intervention policy in Sudan occurred in June 2014, when the United Nation's chief of peacekeeping, Herve Ladsous confirmed that China, in a sudden break from previously observed protocol, was in the process of deploying a battalion of 850 armed soldiers to assist the UN peacekeeping mission in South Sudan (Daily Maverick, 2014). Serving under a force of 12,000 blue helmets in the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), the soldiers were to be tasked with protection of civilians, humanitarian workers and providing security escorts as well as patrols (Xinhua, 2017).

They will be equipped with light weapons for use in self-defense, armored vehicles, and bullet-proof gear (The Diplomat, 2014). This is the biggest break from China's policy, and its commitment of battle ready, full combat troops is the clearest sign of an evolving policy. Never before had China committed troops in such numbers, and especially with a mandate to use force (Daily Maverick, 2014).

Spokespeople from both the Foreign Ministry and the Ministry of National Defense have however underlined that the Chinese troops would not undertake any special missions outside their UN mandate. "The Chinese peacekeeping troops will strictly abide by the international law and stick to their mandate," Geng Yangshen of the Defense ministry told reporters. He added that the troops "will not get directly involved in the armed conflicts of the mission country" (The Diplomat, 2014).

In July 2016, two Chinese peacekeepers died and five others injured after their vehicle was struck with a rocket-propelled grenade while guarding a refugee camp near a UN compound for displaced people. Speaking during an event to mark the International Day of UN Peacekeepers in the capital of South Sudan, head of UNMISS David Shearer said despite working under difficult conditions, the Chinese peacekeepers with their colleagues from other countries have sacrificed their lives and time in the service of the people of South Sudan (Xinhua, 2017).

In conclusion, China's move towards mediation and conflict resolution in both Sudan and South Sudan highlights a significant shift away from its non-intervention policy. China's role in the conflict is a point of reference for Chinese innovation in balancing its policy of non-intervention to changing situations. Without completely

completely changing its policy, Beijing managed to maneuver itself step by step, and in a tactical manner. Rather than follow a particular laid down strategy, Beijing's actions were mostly reactive; the result of several factors both domestic and international.

Making sense of China's actions in Sudan

The different phases of China's involvement in the Darfur conflict have been observed by many as marking an evolution of China's foreign policy strategy. Yu and Wang (2008) contend that China's actions during the Darfur conflict "indicates that China's diplomacy in Africa has entered a new stage". He (2007) also notes that Darfur illustrates how "China is adapting to new circumstances in Africa" and Raine (2009) admits that "some greater flexibility on the non-interference principle is emerging. It is no longer quasi-sacrilegious in China to question the limits of sovereignty". Does this then signal the beginning of a new policy, or at least a gradual and systematic shift away from non-intervention? For many of these observers, events during the conflict represent gradual changes in Beijing's foreign policy and demonstrate that China is willing to make adjustments in its policy of non-intervention, at least in some cases. However, China's role in Darfur was the result of several unique factors. They include international pressure, economic interests and the need to enhance its international image. The study will examine each of these in greater detail.

International and domestic pressure

China suffered heavy criticism for its initial stance in the Sudanese conflict that is, backing the Sudanese government through economic investments and blocking UN resolutions targeted at Sudan. By blocking these resolutions, China prevented the UN from imposing sanctions that would have provided the needed pressure on President Omar Al Bashir to stop the killings in Darfur. Not only did the western media criticize China for hindering efforts in that direction, but celebrities and non-governmental organisations embarked on a campaign to oppose Beijing's hosting of the Olympic games, calling it the "genocide Olympics".

African leaders also added their voice by openly criticizing the Chinese government's actions and labelling China as a stumbling block to resolving the situation. This further impacted negatively on China's image and threatened its relations in Africa. While Beijing's initial aversion to intervention and its desire to abstain from the conflict situation was frowned upon by the international community, Chinese scholars, officials and experts in Beijing also acknowledged that the government could and should do more without compromising on its long standing policy.

Thus in light of these intense criticisms, China was eventually forced to abandon its initial stance. These events marked a turning point in Chinese Foreign Policy, as pressures from the international community, human rights organisations and civil society had effectively influenced a shift in China's stance in Sudan. Well aware of the criticisms it continually received, Beijing recognized the need to move from a position of self-interest to one of adherence to perceptions of the need to act more responsibly. Indeed, within the past few decades China has had to, stemming from its continued rise as a global power, contend with increased expectations from the international community to participate more actively in interventionist activities committed to peace building and prevention. Though staunchly opposed to the idea of intervening without the consent of the host state, China has gradually come to terms with several provisions contained within international norms such as the R2P doctrine.

Likewise, China has had to contend with requests from African states and regional and sub-regional organisations like the African Union to intervene in the interest of peace and security on the continent. Such calls provide some semblance of legitimacy as it falls in line with the Chinese stance that allows for intervention when a nation requests for intervention. Requests from the African Union also holds more weight, and ignoring these requests will very likely damage China's standing on the continent, thus reducing its ability to secure more beneficial partnerships with African states, which will in turn hamper its access to much needed resources.

Economic interests and safety of Chinese citizens

In line with China's economic rise, Chinese companies have increasingly turned outwards in search of natural resources, new markets and global experience. Africa has played host to an increasing diversity of Chinese companies from small privately owned enterprises to huge, multinational state-owned corporations. These companies have invested billions of dollars into not only traditional sectors like oil and mining, but increasingly towards other sectors like banking and finance, agriculture, manufacturing and real estate.

In line with this increased economic interaction, China has felt the need to show more interest in the domestic conditions of host nations, particularly with regards to economic and security concerns. This is with the understanding that issues that give rise to general instability pose a security risk to Chinese investments and personnel, and tend to increase the overall cost of doing business. China felt compelled to intervene in order to safeguard its heavy investments in the region and the lives of its citizens, especially in the oil sector.

In so doing, they recognized that a stable and secure environment was more conducive to its commercial

investments and interests. It was increasingly becoming obvious that China's investments and the lives of its citizens was at stake, especially with the kidnapping and murder of Chinese citizens by rebel groups like the Justice and Equality Movement and Boko Haram.

Increasingly, Chinese nationals are being targeted by these armed rebel groups and the Chinese government has struggled with criticism from its citizens for its failure to protect its citizens in Africa. As such, China could no longer remain strictly passive in these circumstances. For China to achieve its resource security objectives, it is imperative that they have unimpeded access to oil and other natural resources needed to sustain a burgeoning economy largely based on manufacturing for export. As it so happens, a huge percentage of China's energy and natural resource imports come from developing countries, with the attendant high incidence of instability. This consequent intertwinement of China's domestic economy with the security conditions of resource markets ensures that for the foreseeable future, China will maintain a close interest in the internal situations of their trade and investment partners, and if need be, take the necessary steps to promote security and regime stability in order to ensure a peaceful and stable business environment.

International image

Additionally, China's involvement in the conflict was motivated by concerns regarding its image both in Africa and internationally. China is presently dealing with a gradual shift in its image and self-perception of its role in the international community.

Since the 1990s, the Chinese government has gradually acknowledged the fact that improving its international image and standing requires some level of adherence to international norms. It has since taken several steps in that direction, particularly through participation in multilateral institutions. Quite simply, it may have dawned on China that with greater power comes more responsibility, and it has to change its approach to its relations with African countries to better reflect its desire to appeal to many as a responsible world power, cooperating with the west to ensure world peace. By getting involved, China hoped to improve its standing and to win the support of the international community and especially that of African countries, which is vital as a way of garnering support in advancing its interests globally. For China, adherence to international norms is a way to increase its reach and influence abroad, and project its image as a responsible power. This was more so, in light of the international reputational damage and moral costs of its initial stance.

Given its economic interests in the two Sudans, as evidenced by its heavy investments in the oil sector on one hand, and the volatility and continued instability in the region on the other, Beijing's foreign policy will continue to be challenged. The fact is, China is inextricably linked in a

mandatory, triangular and uneasy relationship with Sudan and South Sudan, a situation that will continue to test its non-intervention policy. Maintaining a positive global image and a good standing among its peers will increase the willingness of Western powers to cooperate with China, but also assure the international community that China is committed to contributing towards the overall good of the international community. The greater the perception that China is a responsible power, the less opposition it will face in the international arena. With less opposition, China can more efficiently pursue its domestic and international ambitions, thus devoting more resources and efforts towards meeting its growth, resource security and foreign policy objectives.

To add to that, Beijing has had reason to be seen taking some responsibility to conflict resolution in order to avoid the “free rider” label by Western nations. The “free rider” label is the result of China’s continuous abstention from Western-led interventionist actions in conflict areas, and its subsequent tendency to make post-conflict investment in such areas.

In line with its desire to dispel this stigma, China’s Vice Foreign Minister, Song Tao in 2013 stated “emerging economies are not free riders...as they continue to grow, emerging economies will take a more active part in international affairs to promote international cooperation and tackle global challenges” (Song, 2013).

By intervening in the Sudanese conflict, China is thus taking the necessary steps to prove to the international community that it is a responsible power dedicated to achieving stability, and not a mere opportunistic “free rider” that only benefits from others’ contributions and commitments. China’s action in Sudan has earned it the role of “responsible mediator” as opposed to its previous label of “reluctant bystander”, and has helped greatly to improve its international image and reputation in the international community.

Conclusion

China’s expanding engagement throughout Africa means that it increasingly finds itself involved in African internal affairs, whether directly or indirectly. Given that Chinese investments in Africa are expected to increase exponentially, it is expected that motivations for China to intervene in conflict situations to protect their investments will become a more commonplace. In other words, it will increasingly become difficult for China to stick to the mantra of “business is business” and not get involved in the “internal affairs” of African countries in which it has heavily invested in.

Although China’s bilateral engagement with African countries will continue to be defined broadly by the principle of non-intervention, recent events suggest that China is not indisposed to a more active engagement on peace and conflict challenges in Africa. In persuading the

Khartoum to accept an UN-AU hybrid force in Darfur, China has already demonstrated its willingness to depart from its long standing principle and play a more active role in Africa.

However, China’s role in Darfur needs to be qualified as it enjoyed a special relationship with Sudan, owing to its massive investments in the oil sector. While this may signal an increasing involvement and greater interest in African peace and security, it does not by any means represent the beginnings of a new policy. At least in official documents there is no sign that the Chinese government is considering changing this policy. For example, China’s white paper on National Defense in 2010 explicitly reiterated, “China unswervingly pursues an independent foreign policy of peace and promotes friendly cooperation with all countries on the basis of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence” (IOSC, 2012). As Large (2008c) warns:

“The Chinese government has not proactively sought to involve itself in peace processes; rather, it has affirmed the primary responsibility of the international community, and its interests have been threatened” (p.37).

He contends that the factors that pushed China into the conflict are unique, and must therefore not be interpreted as a signal towards Beijing’s deeper engagement on African conflicts. In other words, as compared to Darfur, Beijing has limited economic investments and therefore little political leverage over other African states. Expectations of changes to Chinese foreign policy should therefore remain limited and must not be overestimated.

For Beijing, any involvement in African security, as in Darfur, illustrates a careful balancing of demands. On one hand, there is a mutual interest between China and African states in upholding the policy of non-intervention, while on the other hand China needs to protect its growing economic investments on the continent. Alongside this, is the need for China to demonstrate to the world its credentials as a peaceful rising great power that is willing to collaborate with other western powers in the name of world peace.

It is increasingly becoming difficult for China to balance all these roles at the same time, hence the need for flexibility. The fact that China has demonstrated a willingness to partake more actively in conflict resolution in Africa should be welcomed by all who have a genuine interest in peace, security and stability in Africa. However, there is also the fact that China is still very much attached to the principle of non-intervention and is cautious about getting involved in other countries’ internal affairs, unless economic interests and/or international and domestic pressure drive it to do so.

Resolution of conflict in Africa is still not a broad and strategic policy of Chinese engagement in Africa. Even though Beijing regularly invokes its willingness to contribute to the peace process, the instances where it has

actually partaken in conflict resolution and peace negotiation efforts are few, considering its capability. What is clear from China's role in Sudan is the fact that the non-intervention policy does not equal indifference. What it means is that China has adopted some degree of flexibility in reality, mostly towards protecting Chinese investments on the continent, but also as a result of international and domestic pressure as well as recognition of its growing power and the need to act more responsibly.

China has come to acknowledge the fact that its economic and political interests in Africa are not fully compatible with a strict adherence to non-intervention amidst the growing realities and challenges of conflict and political instability on the continent.

In addition, China has progressively to come to terms with the fact that its definition and practice of non-intervention is not in keeping with contemporary global norms such as the R2P and the Responsibility while Protecting (RWP), which expects the international community to intervene in the interest of saving lives. With its rising status as a global power, China is expected to play a much greater role in preventing, managing and resolving conflict on the African continent. Aside from the obvious benefit of protecting its investments, it will go a long way towards enhancing China's image in the international arena as a responsible global power, and help build and foster trust among its partner countries in Africa.

Today, China is definitely a key actor in the international playing ground. The extent of its interest and willingness to engage proactively on security and conflict issues will continue to redefine the meaning and limits of the policy of non-intervention. One thing that is certain though, is that China's increasing engagement on the African continent will continue to test the efficacy of non-intervention, and in so doing expose the ever conflicting dilemma of principle versus pragmatism.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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