

Review

The rise of China and conflicts in Africa: The case of Sudan

Constance Ayabei

School of Arts and Social Sciences, Rongo University, Kenya.

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As China's economy rise in the world order, there is a higher demand for more resources in Africa. China has relative scarcity of crucial resources notably oil, gas, and minerals. The growing China-Africa relation is seen by some international relation scholars as part of the "foundation" on which their broader strategic ambitions are built. It is from this perspective that the growing relation seems to suggest that Africa is somehow "critical" for Chinese economy. Africa's rich natural resources and underdeveloped market create abundant business potential for Chinese products. China's interests in Africa not only include economic interests but also political, security and ideological interests. This rapidly evolving relationship presents opportunities and challenges for Africa. Chinese trade, investment and infrastructure aid are fundamentally re-shaping Africa's economies. Nevertheless, the rise of China is also posing a 'security dilemma' in the global balance of power. U.S being a super power is not happy with the rise of China. US sees Africa continent hungry for their investment, expertise, and rule of law. However, there are contentious issues affecting this relationship: African continent was a victim of 'western colonization' and 'strings attached' approaches. 'Strings attached' approach is brought about by quasi- state actors and is often being criticized by most Africa leaders for meddling with internal affairs of some Africa states and also making the continent dependent on western foreign aid. This paper offers a critical analysis of the China's-Africa relations and conflicts in Africa, using Sudan as case study. This paper examines how china's activities in Africa are contributing to conflicts by looking at the transfer of Chinese-made arms to Sudan in the name of acquiring oil to protect her national interests.

Key words: 'Balance of power, quasi-state actors, resources, conflict, colonialism.

INTRODUCTION

In 1950s to 1970s, China's foreign policy to Africa started to grow mainly because China wanted to break international isolation, displace Taiwan as the internationally recognized government of China and replace it with Beijing policy. In addition, China also wanted to battle the former Soviet Union for supremacy in

the world communist movement (Fantu and Cyril, 2010). The end of cold war brought the end of superpower proxy wars fought on Africa soil. US becoming a hegemon in the international system.

Before Mao Zedong's death in 1976, China was a communist state, with the Chinese Communist Party

E-mail: Constance.ayabei@gmail.com, Ayabei@consultant.com.

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exerting enough political control to prevent Western political ideologies values of democracy, freedom of speech and information being fully absorbed into Chinese Society. This was a challenge to the country's economic growth. After his death in 1976, China embarked on a gradual economic restructuring which resulted in positive impact on economic growth and more interaction with the outside world. To that end, China started cooperating with Africa countries by assisting independent African governments economically.

As China economy rise in the international system, most scholars predict that by 2025, it may China may be the most dominant diplomatic and political players on the world stage. Intrinsicly, it has all the attributes to make a country great and powerful country: An immense population skilled and disciplined and brimming with national pride and dedication, vast land and a home grown civilization and identity. Its interest is centered on building ideological solidarity with African countries to advance Chinese-style communism and on repelling Western "imperialism" (Scobell, 2007). Nevertheless Chinese interests in Africa have evolved into more pragmatic pursuits such as trade, investment, and energy. According to realists, every state is sovereign and pursues her national interests in the pursuit of preserving her survival. It is from this regard that China's aims to satisfy her political, ideological, and economical interests in order to preserve her survival in the international system.

Politically, Africa is seen to be part of the "foundation" on which China's broader strategic ambitions are built. Africa is the second largest continent after Asia and China seeks Africa's support in multilateral forums such as the United Nations given the size of her voting bloc. All African states account for more than one-quarter of U.N. member states and votes hence China has continually relied on African countries support at the U.N. for its political agenda. China makes every effort to cultivate the maximum number of African countries on all issues of interest to Beijing that arise in international forums. For example, in 1972 China saw Africa's very real political importance and value when 26 African countries voted for the People's Republic of China to resume its seat at the United Nations. African votes represented more than one-third of the countries who supported the resolution. Both China and Africa have also been advocating for reforms within the United Nations. For instance, Africa Union have proposed programmes for the UN reforms in which it is demanding increasing the seats in the United Nation Security Council from five. This serves as an opportunity for China to gain support from Africa continent. Ideologically, China and Africa share the same underlying historical victimization by Western colonial powers and a common affinity as developing countries.

Economically, China primarily engages in Africa in matters of investment and trade. Apart from supplying raw materials to Africa, Chinese products find their way easily into ready African market. According to the Africa Center

for Strategic Studies, 2007, trade between Africa and China has been growing at 40% per year, with over 480% increase in clothing imports from China between 2003 and 2014. China, as an emerging industrial state has also surplus labour that it exports to Africa to promote and increase capital returns, maximize profitability and to lessen the burden of dependency on its domestic economy (Rotberg, 2007). China has also been assisting independent Africa governments economically providing loans as a principal instrument of development. It has also developed an operational infrastructure to support growing network of relations in Africa. For example China gave Tanzania \$500 million towards the construction of Tanzania-Zambia railways (Soares de Oliveira, 2008)

Although China has always regarded herself as the center of the world economy, her escalating influence in Africa is challenging the Western vision of democracy, human rights, rule of law and free markets in Africa. On many occasions, China is being criticized for abusing human rights and promoting poor democracy as well as not making any effort to transfer skills and knowledge to Africa (Fantu and Cyril, 2010). Across Africa, Chinese has been accused of meddling with internal affairs of African states such as in Sudan where Chinese has shown support for the ruling government and undermined the efforts of the opposition to bring change (Christian Aid, 2011). This is an indication that with China's heavily economic and military support in some African countries undermines good democracy.

China has depicted herself as the World's largest country which is developing with Africa (Rotberg, 2007). This representation has proved very useful to her when dealing with Africa continent and this has allowed her to gain several advantages compared to the Western states. China and Africa share a natural common ground as a result of their shared historical experiences: They were both victims of "colonization by the capitalists and imperialists" and faced the same task of national independence and liberation after World War II (Xinwen, 2013).

Unlike the US, the relationships between China and Africa have also been witnessing a remarkable intensification. Since the end of Cold War, and the emergence of a unipolar world dominated by the western powers, most Africa intellectuals and political leaders have viewed it as the source of discomfort for their countries' development. It is in light of this that the rise of China is welcomed among some African leaders (Tull, (2006). China is often cited in some circles in Africa as broadly comparable to Western colonialism and neo-colonialism in Africa. Some African leaders also see the west as "the paradox of development and China is the partner of development."

Some of the contentious issues affecting Africa's relations with western countries include the western models of capitalism and liberal democracy which are seem by most Africans as unsuitable to Africa's material

conditions and to its history and cultures. Bretton Woods-inspired economic reforms have failed to alleviate poverty (Fantu and Cyril, 2010). The Western countries have been coercing Africa governments to embrace democracy to justify continuing aid flows to their countries (Melville, 2005). Most African leaders argue that democracy is irrelevant to Africa's development needs citing China as an exemplar of development.

Another contentious issue affecting Africa's relations with West is the doctrine of privatization which has been imposed in some government institutions in Africa. According to some African leaders, China has a genuine home-driven policy agenda as opposed to the western policy of privatization. China does not pursue doctrine of privatization policy but encourages state enterprise side by side with private enterprise with the eye on value-adding activities, employment creation and inclusive development Shirk, (2007).

China's foreign policy to Africa has been criticized by many scholars who say it is not built on initiative and entrepreneurship but it is built on exploiting the opportunities offered by African continent (Holsti, 1995). China has also been criticized by some African leaders such as the former president of South Africa Thabo Mbeki and the former Nigerian president Olesegun Obasanjo who accused China for neo-colonization. In addition, a meeting of experts and diplomats by Africa Union in Addis Ababa in September 2006, warned about China Africa relationships repeating the "historical trajectory of African's relations with the west.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Hegemonic stability

Realists have always viewed international system as a field for contest for power. Power can be defined as the ability to influence the behavior of other actors and the ability to prevail in conflict. Mearsheimer, 2006 urges that there are two types of power: Latent power and Military power. Latent power refers to the socio-economic ingredients that go into building military power and is largely based on a state's wealth and overall size of its population. Military power refers to the ability of a state to possess well trained military soldiers and good military equipment. In this case, China is using the latent power to gain access to Africa resources so as to build its economic growth as well as exacerbating conflicts.

For realists, international system is anarchic hence the need for hegemonic stability in which states are distinguished by their degree of power and degree of satisfaction. Degree of satisfaction refers to whether a state is satisfied or dissatisfied with the current World order. Satisfied states are interested in preserving their status quo, whereas dissatisfied states are revisionist states that want change in the existing world order. At

the top of power hierarchy is the dominant power or hegemon. A hegemon is a status quo power interested in preserving the existing order. In the 21st Century, U.S. has been hegemon since the end of Cold War. Below this hegemon are great powers, middle powers, small powers, and dependencies. China is not a hegemon but it is a great power.

Although the collapse of the Soviet Union left U.S. as a dominant nation in the world with strong military and economic power, there are a lot of speculations that China is rising in order to prevent this domination. Hegemonic stability theory predicts that a counter-America coalition will not emerge because of other major powers (Japan, Britain and France) are all essentially satisfied powers interested in preserving the existing world order (Ray, 1990)

John Mearsheimer argues that the rise of China in the international system creates a potential for intense security competition with the U.S. that might result in considerable potential for war. He views international system as the field of contest for power in order to be the only great power in the system. Mearshiner argument is invalid because in the author's view, the rise of China in the international system will not lead to war because major powers like Britain, Japan and France are satisfied in preserving the US hegemony.

The role of China in managing conflicts in Africa

China's policy towards Africa was insignificant before 1950s. From 1950s to 1990s, the China's Africa policy has tremendously grown. This policy aims at breaking international isolation, battling the former Soviet Union for primacy in the world communist movement and also displacing Taiwan as the internationally recognized government of China. In 1964, China announced the "Eight Principles on Economic and Technical Aid" to Africa which many African leaders see as a genuine African-driven policy agenda as opposed to the branded neo-liberal IMF and World Bank Policies. The Chinese Government has never ask for any privileges or attached any conditions and this has made Africa to remained part of the China's broader global engagement.

The problem of conflicts in Africa and how they are managed effectively and efficiently is still one of the biggest challenges in the 21st Century. With the growing presence and influence of China in the continent, many scholars have been left speculating about the future of African continent as far as conflict management is concerned. China may be Africa's biggest trade partner, but it has generally taken arm's length approach to the continent's conflicts.

Despite been a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, and possessing the veto power to actively address the responsibility of all states to abide by their international commitments such as promoting international peace and security, China has been accused

of irresponsible arms transfers to Africa in exchange of minerals. For instance in Sudan, Chinese military arms has been used to intimidate the poor and the marginalized in hence resulting to conflicts and human rights abuses.

From Darfur to Zimbabwe, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to Guinea, China has been criticized for its role in causing conflicts in Africa. Nevertheless China has also played both a critical role in conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction (Saferworld, 2011). For example, in 2005, the Chinese played a role in supporting Sudan's Peace agreements which led to the signing of Collective Peace Agreement (CPA) and consequently a political transition to a new independent republic of South Sudan. In dealing with conflicts in Africa, China has participated in four key areas. These are: Participation in United Nations Missions, Sponsoring humanitarian and development, Economic co-operation and finally participating in multilateral forums pursuing a negotiated resolution to conflicts, de-mining assistance and finally in anti-piracy operations.

Participation in United Nations Missions

China has been providing financial support for UN peacekeeping in Africa by providing logistical support services to the United Nations and the local areas. It also has participated in the United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) which objective was to support the Collective Peace Agreement that led to the birth of South Sudan (UNDC, 1996).

Sponsoring humanitarian and development

China has sponsored humanitarian and development assistance on programmes. For example, during the Darfur conflict, China donated food, clothing and medicine to the thousands of people who were displaced as a result of war. Darfur region in Sudan is characterized by chronic underdevelopment and this is one of the factors behind war in the region. In order to counteract this, China has been engaging in the construction of infrastructural projects. Chinese contractors have implemented the construction of major roads within the Darfur region and when the Chinese Consulate was created in Sudan in September 2008, China has increased her aid programme to South Sudan (Kevin, 1996).

Participating in multilateral forums pursuing a negotiated resolution to conflicts

China has partly played a role in resolving conflicts in Africa. For example, Chinese pressure is partly responsible for bringing Bashir to the table and to the eventual Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) with the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement (SPLM).

This agreement culminated in the independence of South Sudan in 2011.

De-mining assistance

China's de-mining assistance has contributed positively to peace in Africa. China engaged in mine clearance in Eritrea where it trained 120 Eritrean mine clearance specialists (Hilsum, 2005). Since 1998, China has worked with the UN to provide training in land mine disposal and donated equipment to Chad, Burundi, Guinea-Bissau, Sudan, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Angola and Eritrea. This has reduced conflicts.

Anti-piracy operations

China has contributed in fighting maritime piracy in the Gulf of Aden and Indian Ocean. Some 20 percent of the 1,265 Chinese ships passing through the Gulf of Aden in 2008 came under threat from Somali pirates, who captured a Hong Kong registered tanker (Taylor, 2008). China deployed early in 2009 two destroyers and a supply ship to help combat piracy in the Gulf of Aden. The ships have about 800 crew and seventy special operations troops. This naval experience gives the PLA Navy valuable experience far from its shores and permits China to project power in an area that is important to its trade (Kevin, 1996). By all accounts, the Chinese naval contingent has performed well and coordinated effectively with other navies in the region.

China contributing to conflicts in Africa: A case of Sudan

China- Sudan relations was insignificant before Sudan's independence in 1956. From 1956 to early 1990s, the bilateral relations between the two countries started to grow tremendously. This relationship is predominately economic as it is largely motivated to a great extent by China's attempt to safeguard its national interests. China aims at controlling and exploiting Sudan's resources particularly oil. This demand is propelled by China's growing demand for oil as a result of her rapid economic expansion. In addition, China is supporting development projects in various regions of the country. It has invested billions of dollars, particularly in the oil production. Since the ratification of the CPA in January 2005, Beijing has been a new frontier for economic entrepreneur in Sudan. It has been supporting development projects such as construction of schools, hospitals, and transport and energy infrastructure in the North Sudan which is the source of oil as well as providing finance to support Juba. On trade, Sudan exported sesame, cotton and metal scraps to China in exchange of small arms, fabrics and some textile.

As China pays more attention to soft power in Sudan, the rapid growing relation presents immense opportunities as well as challenges to the developing country. (Scobell, 2007). Although China has mediated talks between warring factions in Southern Sudan, her role is rather unusual. The flipside is that China is on the side of Salva Kiir government and as such she has played part of the Sudan problems. During referendum in Sudan in late 2000s, China engaged on the referendum in Khartoum, while in the South Sudan, by contrast, China had to square the CPA'S referendum clause with the geography of Chinese oil and this is fuelled further conflicts in the region. Even as China participated in multilateral forums pursuing negotiated resolution to conflicts in South Sudan, there has been criticism over her role in violating human rights. Sudan has security forces in brutal civil wars regions.

Being one of the leading oil producing countries in Africa, the presence of China in country presents a strategy to control and exploit Sudanese oil. Chinese economic assistance is not only encouraging neo-colonialism but also encouraging dictatorship and tyranny in Sudan. Ironically, China claims that she does not interfere in the internal affairs of the countries it deals with. This is misleading and provocative not only to Africa but also to other states aspiring to further democratic values (Large, 2008). For example, when the relationship between Sudan and international financial institutions became problematic due to poor democratic values, Sudan turned to China.

A recent meeting between the Sudan President Omar Al Bashir and the Chinese government revealed the extent of China's interference in domestic Sudanese affairs in favour of the ruling Junta while undermining all the support of the opposition to effect change in the government. Based on the realist perspective, it is clear that Junta would be unable to rule the country without heavy Chinese economic and military support (Soares de Oliveira, 2008). Most political analysts posit that Chinese economic aid to the Sudanese Junta has come to an extremely high human cost in Sudan and Darfur where thousands have been killed and communities displaced. Sudan is internationally recognized as one of the African countries where displacement and human rights abuses have taken place at a higher magnitude.

As China develops large scale projects in Sudan, it also condones human rights (Christian Aid, 2001). China's activities in Sudan are often characterized as "evil" when they are seen as representing China's selfish quest for natural resources and damaging Sudan's fragile efforts to improve peace and build a sustainable future. According to the Christian Aid, 2001, the construction of the pipeline from western upper Nile to the Red Sea in 1998 has displaced thousands of people; hence resulting in heavy fighting between the locals, government and investors. There has been strategic arms delivery from government garrisons. Hundreds of cases of ammunition were delivered to one of the Sudan factions fighting for the

control of western upper Nile and its vast oil reserves which sometimes the government and the oils companies call 'Warlordism' (Richard, 2005).

Since the construction of the pipeline to the Red Sea in 1998 by the Chinese company, hundreds of thousands of villagers have been displaced and were terrorized by government security system.

Chinese involvement in Sudan goes beyond oil. For instance, the Darfur conflict was characterized by gross violations of human rights involving a range of military, security and police equipment (Amnesty International Report, 2011). China is one of several states including France, Iran and Saudi Arabia that have exported large amounts of small arms and light weapons and ammunition to Sudan. The Darfur Region was deeply affected by the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. Due to these, violence accelerated at a high level. The scale of the human rights disaster and the killing of people and destruction of major parts of Darfur were massive: an estimated 1.6 million people were displaced within Darfur and 200,000 Sudanese refugees have fled across the border into Chad and thousands were killed (UN News Service, 2006).

Western countries have always criticized China for continuing to allow military equipment to be sent to Sudan despite well-documented and widespread killings, rapes and abductions by government armed forces and allied military groups in conflict zones. Currently, China is also a major supplier of arms to Sudan since the Chinese firms have the largest foreign stake in Sudanese oilfields. The Sudanese government has used increases in oil revenues – oil which China is heavily dependent on, but also heavily invests in - to fund a military capacity that has in turn been used to conduct war in Darfur, including carrying out violations of international human rights and humanitarian law (Amnesty International Report, 2003).

China does not only respect human rights and but also relies on armed forces and security personnel to enable them continue their appropriation of natural resources at the expense of the people as in the case of Merowe dam construction project. This dam was implemented by the Chinese Joint Venture between the China National Water Resources and China Hydropower Engineering and China Water Engineering (Amnesty International Annual Report, 2000). The project displaced small farmers and conflict ensued between them and the police. They were finally resettled in a desert by the dam authorities. Nevertheless there is also a strong tendency of China exacerbating conflicts in Sudan. For example, in 2005 the Chinese contractors building the power tower occupied water wells in Bayuda deserts and prevented the Manasir nomads from accessing water. Many of these nomads were shot by the heavily military units (Andersson, 2008).

As Chinese investors in Sudan carry out their work in close coordination with the security organs and armed forces, it is now clear that their foreign policy towards Sudan and most of the African countries is not build

on initiative and entrepreneurship but on exploitation of opportunities available in Africa.

China's operations in Africa have affected peace and stability negatively through the transfer of Chinese made arms to Africa. Since Cold War, China has remained an important and large arms exporter in Africa. Currently, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) has ranked China as one of the largest supplier of major conventional weapons in the World (SIPRI Yearbook, 2013). Ironically, China believes that arms exports are conducive to the self-defense of the recipient country, do not harm the peace, security and stability of the region concerned and the world as a whole, and do not interfere in the internal affairs of the recipient country.

Despite possessing the Veto power in the United Nations Security Council, China has been also accused of selling arms to Sudan government especially during Darfur conflict. Moreover, China has also been accused of providing helicopter gunship to Khartoum governments to suppress opposition in Southern Sudan and Darfur (Schearf, 2007). Outside Sudan, China is accused of selling millions in weapons and ammunitions to Robert Mugabe's repressive regime in Zimbabwe. In 2011, China also offered the Gadhafi regime in Libya arms worth \$200 million to fight NATO and rebel forces (Shinn, 2008).

As China rewards its African friends with diplomatic attention, financial and military assistance, there is need for a deeper research to be done to establish the effects of China's long term relationship in Africa. China is encouraging Africa's most repressive regimes, thereby increasing the likelihood of conflicts. It is therefore imperative for African countries to remember that as China provide loans, develop operational infrastructure and provide limited military equipment and training to African countries, they need to exercise more caution as they conduct bilateral relationships.

Conclusion

The rise of China in Africa has impacted both positively and negatively on peace and stability in the continent. In some countries undergoing democratic transitions such as Ghana, Tanzania, and Zambia, China has offered significant aid such as investing in infrastructure, making technical grants and supporting joint ventures. On the other hand, in countries that have strategic resources such as Angola, Sudan and Nigeria, China exacerbates the 'resource curse' and strengthens neo-patrimonial structures which are hardly democratic hence leading to human right abuses (Richard, 2008). For instance since 1990, China has helped Sudan develop domestic arms industry that has no doubt fuelled violence all over the region. In addition, China has been supplying small arms to these countries. These arms are now infamous instruments for staff repression and brutality. Finally, China has contributed to peacekeeping interventions to Africa states emerging from conflicts such as in Liberia.

However, realists argue that international system is characterized by anarchy and indeed China's influence in Africa has demonstrated that. Despite being a permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, and possessing the veto power to actively address the responsibility of all states to abide by their international commitments such as promoting international peace and security, China is fueling conflicts across Africa. She has been accused of irresponsible arms transfers to Africa which has led conflicts and human rights abuses (Richard, 2005).

Being a permanent member of the United Nations, China has the primary responsibility for controlling the flow of arms and ensuring that its arms transfers do not contribute to persistent violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. It is in light of this that African leaders and Africa international relations scholars must carefully evaluate the tactics that China is employing in the continent and the impact it has on the future of Africa. There is more research to be done to determine whether China can bring durable peace to Africa, what are the underlying motives for China's involvement in Africa and can China work in hand with African countries to achieve Millennium Development Goals (MDG) in Africa?

RECOMMENDATIONS

- i. There is need for Africa leaders to enhance investments and transfer of skills into the continent. China investment is giving Africa new leverage but is not making any effort to transfer skills and knowledge to Africa. There is need for African leaders to demand from Chinese leaders' transfer of skills and knowledge to Africa.
- ii. There is need for China leaders to embrace democracy alongside development in Africa. Liberalists urge that democratic states are more peaceful than undemocratic states. It is because of this that there is need for China to promote democracy and human rights alongside development in Africa. It conceivable that China will be compelled by instability and conflict in Africa to realize that its long term economic interest are best served by promoting democracy in Africa through encouraging representative governments not dictators.
- iii. Chinese investor should mount pressure on their governments and Africa governments to avoid policies likely to exacerbate conflict in Africa. For instance Chinese government should discourage exporting military weapons to conflicts hotspots in Africa.
- iv. Africa civil society needs to examine how best to react to the challenges presented by China's engagement in Africa by deriving lessons from experiences of other countries engaging with China.
- v. Strengthen transparency over arms transfers by reporting annually and publicly on all military, security and police transfers that have been authorized for export and delivered – data should include how many articles have been licensed to which country and to which end-user.

Conflict of interests

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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