



RECOMMENDATIONS

- China is emerging as a new force in post-conflict reconstruction in Africa. The strengths of its bilateral role could complement existing efforts by African and other international institutions. Academic and policy dialogue on how to operationalise practical synergies to enhance delivery of tangible peace dividends should be promoted.
- Failure to produce agreement between North and South Sudan, and address conflict in their border areas as well as in Darfur, will have significant and lasting repercussions. Given Beijing's experience and unique leverage with Khartoum, China's role in supporting negotiations and resolving differences between the NCP and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement is potentially important and should be explored more seriously.
- The new South Sudan faces immediate humanitarian needs and overwhelming development challenges, while China, besides its important existing economic stakes, has considerable financial means, ability to mobilise resources and deliver infrastructure rapidly. The best way to address the South's needs and benefit from its emerging China partnership in a sustainable long-term manner should be defined and pursued according to, and within, the Republic of South Sudan's own economic development strategy.

China and Post-Conflict Reconstruction in Africa: The Case of Sudan

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

From Darfur to Zimbabwe, the DRC to Guinea, China's African engagement is linked commonly to different forms of conflict. A less-observed phenomenon, however, is China's developing post-conflict role in Africa. This trend shows signs of becoming an increasingly important area of policy engagement, political involvement and practical action between China and African governments, the African Union as well as broader multilateral architecture of security and post-conflict response.

INTRODUCTION

China is involved increasingly in post-conflict settings around the African continent. In this regard, Sudan has been a key battleground, not least because of its various, linked domestic conflicts but also as a result of domestic, regional African and more geopolitical dimensions of China's role. Different narratives exist about China's relation to conflict. Some regard Sudan as the paradigmatic example of China's complicity in African conflict, through militarised Southern oil wars and then genocidal conflict in Darfur. Others emphasise the positive Chinese contribution and that of oil to successful negotiations producing Sudan's North-South Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005. Despite its controversial status, Sudan also demonstrates an evolving, engaged Chinese role in supporting Sudan's peace agreements and the political transition to a new independent Republic of South Sudan.

CHINA'S POST-CONFLICT AFRICAN ENGAGEMENT

China's Africa relations feature notable engagement in areas of

ongoing conflict and in different contexts of states seeking to establish peace and promote development. There is no uniform, consistent engagement in post-conflict reconstruction; nor is there any apparent dedicated, developed policy. China's role appears to be context dependent and ad hoc, blending business entrepreneurialism with government diplomacy.

China's formal commitments to play a more active role in post-war reconstruction, like that made at the fourth Forum on China–Africa Cooperation in November 2009, have yet to be backed up by concerted, substantive involvement. Despite the lack of a dedicated policy framework, core elements of China's stance might be delineated. This, firstly, is embedded in the defining principles of China's foreign policy and Africa policy, which enshrine respect for sovereignty and non-interference. Beijing's continuing adherence to these principles has been counterposed against some flexibility in their practical application, as seen in Darfur, amidst ongoing policy discussions about their usefulness in changing circumstances. Opposition to prescriptive, intrusive, eternal interference, on normative and practical grounds, remains central to China's general approach to Africa, including in post-war contexts. Secondly, China's aversion and direct opposition to the application by outsiders of their own prescriptions is coupled with a stated faith in the efficacy of domestic solutions. Emphasis is placed upon indigenous African agency, or the responsibility incumbent upon affected political authorities and societies to define and pursue their own solutions. This allows for the possibility, and potential value, of external participation in peace negotiations but prioritises and largely defers to domestic ownership. Thirdly, a foundational notion of economic modernisation as the route to peace is also salient. It emphasises meeting basic needs first rather than political reform (ie housing and food not just democracy or human rights) and the timely delivery of material infrastructure.

China's ambivalence towards 'liberal peace' doctrine is longstanding. Its former more categorical opposition has been tempered somewhat, however, by selective support for and participation in aspects of multilateral post-conflict policy engagement. More recently Beijing has become

involved in international dialogue, like that with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee on peacebuilding and statebuilding, indicative of a new interest in learning, policy development and practical engagement. This can be attributed partly to Beijing's own experience over the past decade on the African continent. Internal pressures coupled with changing, heightened international expectations about China's growing role and concomitant responsibilities in Africa, and world affairs more generally, is suggestive of a new phase in which the Chinese government is seeking to address the new challenges of its deepening role in Africa.

This deepening role has produced a selective convergence with aspects of the statebuilding agenda. Beijing concurs with the widely held view that exogenous statebuilding does not work, but recognises the need for functional state competence, including the ability to manage economic policy. This raises the issue of what kind of state ought to be built. China supports an involved, active, maximalist state and, in a further divergence with liberal peace tenets, is averse to the imposition of multiparty electoral democracy. Although agreeing on the broad ends of such a venture, Beijing appears to disagree over the appropriate means, in effect arguing that there can be liberal means to liberal political and economic outcomes.

CHINA'S SUDAN ENGAGEMENT

China's multidimensional role in Sudan reflects different, connected patterns of ongoing conflict (Darfur) and formal peace (East, North–South) in Sudan, and has been rooted in full spectrum – economic, political, military and cultural – relations. China is Khartoum's most important political patron and economic investor. War in Darfur and China's links with Khartoum long overshadowed the North–South CPA, which enshrined a 'one Sudan, two systems' political framework and established the semi-autonomous Government of Southern Sudan (GoSS). An important departure in China's Sudan role has been the growth of bilateral relations with GoSS since 2007, which were converted into full diplomatic relations in July 2011.

Four areas of China's post-conflict Sudan engagement, between the signing of the CPA and South Sudan's secession, are worth noting. The first is China's participation in the UN Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) supporting the CPA since 2005 and in the African Union (AU)–UN Hybrid Mission in Darfur since 2007. Both have predominantly taken the form of multifunctional engineering units providing logistical support services to the UN and local areas. Beijing has also provided financial support for AU peacekeeping in Sudan.

In the second area, China has sponsored humanitarian and development assistance programmes. Part of China's wider Sudan aid programme, they blend government assistance with that mounted on market terms, and allow Beijing to mobilise the legitimating language of humanitarianism. The programmes have the added value of responding to external critiques of China's role, while being seen to practically address identified needs. They feature support for 'early recovery' infrastructural projects like roads implemented by Chinese contractors in Darfur, where chronic underdevelopment was one factor behind war. Although comparatively small in relation to other external engagements, and aligned to Khartoum's policy, this nonetheless represents a notable area of activity and helps to address longstanding grievances. Following the creation of a Chinese consulate in Juba in September 2008, China also increased its aid programme to South Sudan, in tandem with cultivating political relations.

The third area, economic co-operation, is fundamental, but mostly proceeds outside the formal parameters of multilateral architecture of post-war assistance. Beijing's support for development projects in Darfur or East Sudan is connected closely to funding Chinese contractors as project implementers, as part of a broader structure of expanding economic relations. The oil industry is central to this, but Chinese business has developed important stakes in other sectors of the northern Sudanese economy, including construction of transport and energy infrastructure. Since the CPA, South Sudan has been a new economic frontier for Chinese entrepreneurs and, more recently, efforts to enhance economic co-operation between Beijing and Juba. China also plays a key role of providing

finance to the central Sudanese state and as a potential source of budget support for Juba; with the South's independence, this is likely to become more important.

Finally, China's political role has grown in importance. It now participates more in multilateral forums pursuing a negotiated resolution to conflict in Darfur. From being an observer at the CPA signing in January 2005, Beijing came to be a *de facto* CPA guarantor. The CPA endgame witnessed a significantly more involved and evolved Chinese role, although not one approaching that of the US. Having supported the CPA's unity provisions, Beijing recalibrated its engagement following recognition of the possibility and then the inevitability of Southern secession. In public, Beijing played a role as a peace stabiliser advocating peaceful, stable transition. It also appears to have practised its form of 'influence politics' to support CPA objectives, particularly where its potential and actual leverage lies, with the NCP.

Beijing's default bilateral engagement evolved to exhibit variations in the nature and degree of its multilateral role in the CPA. Besides diplomacy at the UN Security Council, UN peacekeeping, or support for the AU, Beijing's limited multilateral participation in Khartoum, with the possible exception of Darfur, contrasted with a more active multilateral orientation in Juba. In Khartoum, China engaged on the referendum, and underlined the importance of final post-referendum arrangement negotiations. It showed little direct public interest in post-referendum UN planning of its future mission in Sudan, although it supported the extension of the UNMIS mandate and creation of a new UN mission for South Sudan. In Juba, by contrast, the Chinese consulate was more involved in interaction with the UN and other agencies prior to July 2011. China's Darfur engagement was influenced partly by Sudanese politics but importantly entangled in its African and international relations, which catalysed its more active engagement. In South Sudan, by contrast, China had to square the CPA's referendum clause with the geography of Chinese oil interest; its political engagement responded more to internal political imperatives. In both cases, however, China's engagement has been largely ad hoc, flexible and responsive to changing politics. Beijing's Juba

diplomacy also appeared to anticipate the different international engagements in the new Sudans: the UN is set to continue to play an important role in South Sudan, whereas Khartoum appears keen to minimise its presence in the North.

ADVANCING CHINA'S POST-CONFLICT ROLE IN AFRICA

China's engagement in post-conflict reconstruction has been predominantly economic but supplemented by a more involved political role. Emphasis on the economy and role of development in peacebuilding displays a self-reinforcing logic: economic development can overcome causes of conflict, and China is in a good position to support economic development. However, in different parts of the new Sudan, its tangible contributions remain important and could become even more so.

Statebuilding looms as a salient question in the new Sudans. China faces a number of interlocking political challenges centred on prospects for the established, dominant state in Khartoum, engaged as it remains with ongoing conflict, and those for the new Republic of South Sudan. Beijing's relations with Juba have been enhanced qualitatively in the past three years, with China emerging from nowhere to recognise the sovereign new state. Given the overwhelming challenges facing the new South Sudan state, the means through which it can be assisted by Beijing is the central policy challenge: how Juba and Beijing can convert mutual need into tangible mutual benefit.

China's bilateral engagement modality contains inbuilt comparative advantages. These are rooted in economic co-operation and stress the need for rapid infrastructure delivery, backed up by the ability to finance such projects relatively quickly. However, an organic tension remains between China's proven effective bilateralism, which is seen as easier (more efficient) and cost-effective (cheap), and selective multilateralism, regarded as more cumbersome and expensive (not just financially but also in political

terms). There is an important difference between China's Africa role and its ready support for African institutions, and China's more qualified relations with Western-dominated forums. As such, it is at the interface between the practices, experience and knowledge of China's approach and those of African regional and international organisations, that much of the policy dialogue and options for action is most possible.

Beyond Sudan, China's policy on statebuilding and fragile states is clearly to become a more important area of policy and scholarly research, including research by Chinese and African constituencies. There has been an enhanced importance of this subject for China as a direct consequence of the deepening Chinese role in Africa, which has elevated expectations that China will match its growing economic interests with commensurate political and security responsibilities. There is also policy interest from different quarters in the modalities of Chinese assistance in delivering benefits in post-conflict settings in ways that might enhance existing responses. In turn, there is apparent interest in China to learn about African and other international experience.

China has an inbuilt self-interest in the success of post-conflict statebuilding; a range of conflict-affected African contexts like Sudan also have self-interested reasons to seek and potentially benefit from Chinese assistance. A priority for moving the debate and policy forward is an African-led dialogue on what it wants China's future post-conflict role to be and how this can best address pressing security and human needs in conflict-affected societies.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Daniel Large is a research associate with SAIIA's China in Africa Project. This policy brief has benefited from support from the Open Society Institute which enabled the research, on which it was based, to be carried out.

The China in Africa Project is funded by the Open Society Institute, the United Kingdom's Department for International Development and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency. SAIIA gratefully acknowledges this support.

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