



From conflict resolution to conflict prevention: China in South Sudan

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Introduction

Despite some successes in the short and medium-term, bilateral and multilateral efforts by the UK, China and other international actors have largely failed to resolve or prevent conflict in South Sudan. All actors have a responsibility and an interest to reflect on the shortcomings of recent international engagement and to work together to develop new approaches to support conflict resolution and long-term peacebuilding in South Sudan. This paper looks at the evolution of China's relationship with Sudan and then South Sudan after independence, with a particular focus on the potential for the transition of Chinese engagement from reactive, short-term conflict resolution to longer-term conflict prevention. The paper goes on to suggest potential entry points for cooperation between China and the UK that could provide mutual learning opportunities and ultimately lead to better collaboration in support of sustainable peace in South Sudan.

When seeking to explore and compare the engagements of the UK and China in relation to early warning, crisis response, and upstream conflict prevention, the example of South Sudan is illuminating. In particular, these countries' responses to the outbreak of civil war in South Sudan at the end of 2013 show how this engagement is in some respects evolving. For countries such as the UK, that have policies, strategies and operational experience on early warning, crisis response and conflict prevention, the civil war in South Sudan presented an opportunity to mobilise and review these approaches. However, for countries without such comprehensive tools, such as China, the experience has been more a process of 'learning through doing'.

Both Sudan and South Sudan have presented a number of new challenges for China's foreign policy, with China having learnt a lot through its engagement in conflict resolution and conflict prevention activities during the South Sudanese civil war.

Since the mid-2000s, China was driven, in large part by international pressure, to respond to the Darfur crisis in Sudan and later felt compelled to play a

bigger role in the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the North and the South of then Sudan.

After the independence of South Sudan, China shifted back to its standard 'development-first diplomacy', prioritising the (re)construction of the nation. The outbreak of civil war in South Sudan in 2013 highlighted the absence of conflict sensitivity in China's engagement in South Sudan, particularly in terms of early warning, crisis response, and upstream conflict prevention. Such a steep learning curve in terms of responding to crisis within a relatively short period of time has potentially accelerated China's evolution from a reactive and passive actor in conflict resolution to one that is more active and positive in both conflict management and conflict prevention. However, despite such progress, China can learn more from the international community and increase dialogue through sharing experience and lessons learned from conflict resolution and conflict prevention efforts. This presents a potential entry point for future cooperation between China and the UK.

Conflict Prevention Working Group

Saferworld is working with partners in China, the UK and conflict-affected states to increase awareness and expertise on different approaches to conflict prevention, focusing on three main themes: early warning mechanisms, crisis response, and the root drivers of fragility and conflict. This work is facilitated by a [Conflict Prevention Working Group](#) (CPWG) composed of Chinese and UK policy experts, which is increasing understanding and [creating opportunities for constructive dialogue](#) on ways to prevent violent conflict and build stability overseas. In order to raise awareness of how China and the UK currently engage and cooperate conflict prevention efforts, Chinese and UK CPWG members are co-authoring a series of joint briefings. This is the first such briefing, authored by CPWG members Dr Zhang Chun (SIIS) and Mariam Kemple-Hardy (Oxfam International),

focusing on crisis response in South Sudan. The briefing was reviewed by members of the CPWG.

Aims of the Conflict Prevention Working Group

- Create opportunities for constructive dialogue on conflict prevention among international experts, including those from the UK, China, and conflict affected or fragile states.
- Develop a source of expertise and knowledge on the policies, practices and attitudes towards conflict prevention in both China and the UK.
- Identify policy areas where China-UK dialogue or cooperation on conflict prevention could be most productive.

China-Sudan relationship

The contemporary China-Sudan relationship began in 1959, three years after the latter's independence. Since then, this bilateral relationship has experienced three phases: between 1959 and 1995 engagement between the two countries was characterised by close political relations; 1996 to 2005 witnessed increased economic engagement; and from 2005 onwards conflict mediation and peace and security cooperation emerged as the third pillar of bilateral relations.

During the first stage of the China-Sudan relationship (1959-1995) there were similarities with China's engagement with other African countries —countries with a shared history of colonialism and liberation movements contributed to political and ideological sympathy from China, but little material support. As Bruce D. Larkin argues in *China and Africa 1949-1970*, it was a 'politically correct' relationship with limited cooperation.¹ Sudan was among the ten African countries that Zhou Enlai, China's Premier at the time, visited on his historic trip to Africa in 1963-1964. Other high level political visits between the two countries also took place, including two trips to China by the Sudanese President Gaafar Nimeiry, and a visit to Sudan in 1984 by Chinese Premier Li Peng. However, economic and social exchanges between the two countries were relatively weak at the time. China did not start its assistance to Sudan until late 1970, when it pledged US\$138.9 million in aid from 1970 to 1983 (around US\$80 million of which was dispersed).²

When China commenced oil exploration in Sudan in 1995, Sino-Sudanese relations entered into their second stage. An economic dimension was added to a relationship which had hitherto been characterised by political closeness. In 1995 Sudanese President

Omar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir visited China in a trip which, alongside the launch of China's 'Going Global' policy, greatly facilitated bilateral economic cooperation, especially within the oil industry. Sudan had asked the US for help to explore oil reserves in the late 1960s but was later left deeply frustrated when US-Sudan relations deteriorated and the US government subsequently asked its companies to retreat. In response to President Ahmadal-Bashir's request, the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) entered Sudan for the first time in 1995, quickly helping the latter build its own oil industry and begin oil exportation by 1999. Bilateral trade also boomed, rising from \$867million in 1996 to \$4,640 million in 2005, with machinery and manufactured goods being the main exports from China. Naturally, the addition of this economic pillar into bilateral relations contributed to the strengthening of the first pillar – political intimacy; however, many international observers misread a causal relationship between these two pillars.

The deterioration of the Darfur crisis forced Sino-Sudanese relations into its third stage with the introduction of an additional pillar to the bilateral relationship: conflict mediation or peace and security cooperation. Rightly or wrongly, by 2005 China was being criticised by western governments and civil society for supporting the Sudanese Government through its oil deals. Campaigning by a coalition of international non-governmental organisations drove this agenda, supported by high-profile advocacy by celebrities who publically criticised China's stance.³ This strategy was relatively successful and, alongside diplomatic pressure from other states, spurred China to become involved in Darfur's conflict resolution process. As part of this, China appointed its first Special Envoy on African Affairs in 2007, whose primary focus was on Darfur. Such international pressure accelerated China's learning curve on adapting its foreign policy to conflict settings. It should be noted that this international pressure did not negatively impact bilateral economic and political relations between China and Sudan. China maintained its strong support for the Government of Sudan, especially after the indictment by the International Criminal Court of Sudanese President Ahmad al-Bashir in 2009. Furthermore, trade volume reached a historical record of \$11.5 billion in 2011,⁴ although the figure dropped significantly after the independence of South Sudan.

China-South Sudan relationship

China has always been very clear that it follows a 'non-interference policy' when engaging with other

¹ Bruce D. Larkin, *China and Africa 1949-1970*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971, p. 174.

² Central Intelligence Agency, *Communist Military Transfers and Economic Aid to Non-Communist Less Developed Countries*, 1983, Washington DC: CIA, 1984, p. 176.

³ Morton Abramowitz, Jonathan Kolieb, "Why China Won't Save Darfur," *Foreign Policy*, June 2007, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2007/06/05/why-china-wont-save-darfur/>; See the website of 'Olympic Dream For Darfur', <http://www.dreamfordarfur.org/>.

⁴ National Data, National Bureau of Statistics of China, <http://data.stats.gov.cn/workspace/index?m=hgnd>, accessed on November 20, 2014.

states. It is this policy which determined China's engagement with the South of Sudan. It was only after the signing of the CPA in 2005 that China began to communicate with the representative of the South, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-led (SPLM) autonomous Government of Southern Sudan. Before the independence of the Republic of South Sudan, China adopted a policy of 'one country, two systems' to deal with the GoSS under the sovereign framework of Sudan. Former Chinese President Hu Jintao and President Salva Kiir Mayardit of South Sudan met twice in 2007, leading to China opening a new consulate in Juba in 2008; many Chinese companies also opened representative offices in Juba. Most significantly, the Chinese Government's Special Representative for African Affairs, who had a special interest in Sudan, and particularly Darfur, attached great importance to the implementation of the CPA. While there was scepticism from the international community given China's strong support for the government in Khartoum, China confirmed that it supported the full implementation of the CPA and would collaborate with the US to promote this. Former Special Envoy Ambassador Liu Guijin met with America's Special Envoy to Sudan, Princeton Lyman, at least five times in the six months leading up to the referendum on independence in January 2011, and Ambassador Lyman expressed that he believed China had delivered the right message to both parties of Sudan at that time.⁵

After the independence of the Republic of South Sudan in July 2011, China applied its traditional development-first diplomacy in South Sudan, part of which was pursuing post-conflict (re)construction in the country. In the eyes of the Chinese, the core task for the South Sudanese after separation was economic and social development: to (re)construct their country.⁶ Based on its fresh memory of reform and opening up, China believed that economic development was essential to the resolution of peace and security challenges. China's experience approaching state bankruptcy at the end of the 1970s led to economic development, which was used to address security and development challenges, aiding its rise as a global power. However, applied to South Sudan, it was clear that the approach was limited: the security risks, conflict dynamics and political economy of the host country could not be ignored.

Moving away from its initial oil-focused approach, China broadened its sights to support the overall development of South Sudan following independence in 2011. One of the key drivers for this change was the shutdown of oil production by the GoSS in early 2012 in response to escalating tensions with Sudan. China shifted its focus away from the oil sector and

towards the country's general social and economic development. This change in emphasis is evident from the subsequent projects China supported in South Sudan, including the construction of Juba International Airport and the provision of humanitarian assistance to the total value of RMB 80 million in April and August 2014.⁷ Even though large state-owned enterprises, such as CNPC, lobbied the Chinese Government to strengthen the protection of its interests in South Sudan, the government did not respond positively. This would appear to indicate a significant change in China's approach from solely focusing on the energy sector to the comprehensive development of South Sudan.

It is important to note that China acknowledged the relevance of conflict dynamics during its early engagement with South Sudan. China lobbied all parties in South Sudan to resolve their conflict in the interests of the new nation, and focus constructively on collaboration and development. For example, when meeting President Salva Kiir Mayardit on 22 April 2012, Chinese President Hu Jintao said that China supported South Sudanese "efforts in developing its economy, improving people's livelihood, safeguarding stability and entering the international community", and hoped that "South Sudan and Sudan would adhere to a peaceful path based on the fundamental interests of both people and the overall situation of regional peace".⁸ From the Chinese perspective, in order to achieve national development, the whole of South Sudan needed to join together and build a culture of collaboration – not of confrontation.

China's engagement in South Sudan's civil war

Development-first approaches and the attempt to build a culture of collaboration failed. China began to respond more quickly and proactively to the outbreak of crises after the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and the corresponding formation of autonomous government in South Sudan in 2005. This was a reaction to its experience with the Darfur crisis and learning more about short-term, reactive conflict resolution and elements of longer-term structural conflict prevention. However, after the outbreak of civil war at the end of 2013, it became clear that a lack of policies, strategies and operational experience on conflict sensitivity and conflict

⁵"UN Disappointed China not Arrest Sudanese President, US Content with China," Ifeng.com, 2 July 2011, http://news.ifeng.com/world/detail_2011_07/02/7394697_0.shtml, 21-11-2012.

⁶ <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/africa/horn-of-africa/sudan/186-chinas-new-courtship-in-south-sudan>

⁷"Chinese Government to Provide 50 million RMB Material Assistance to South Sudan," Embassy of the People's Republic of China in South Sudan, April 18, 2014, <http://ss.chineseembassy.org/chn/sbwl/t1148179.htm>;

"Ambassador Ma Qiang and Foreign Minister Benjamin Signed Agreement of Chinese Humanitarian Assistance to South Sudan," Embassy of the People's Republic of China in South Sudan, August 18, 2014,

<http://ss.chineseembassy.org/chn/sbwl/t1183517.htm>

⁸ "Hu Jintao Holds Talks with South Sudanese President Salva Kiir Mayardit," Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, April 24, 2012, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjlb_663304/zzjg_663340/xybfs_663590/gjlb_663594/sousu_663756/ssaa_663760/t926468.shtml.

prevention more broadly caused difficulties for China's presence in South Sudan.

China's involvement in the mediation of South Sudan's current civil war remains predominantly at the governmental level. Just days after the outbreak of civil war, on 24 December 2013, the Chinese Vice Foreign Minister, Zhang Ming, met with diplomatic envoys to China from member states of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), where they exchanged views on recent developments in South Sudan. Alongside this effort, the key player, China's Special Representative Ambassador Zhong Jianhua, started shuttle diplomacy between South Sudan, Sudan, Uganda, Ethiopia, the UK, the US, IGAD, and the African Union (AU), among others, in order to promote a peaceful solution to the conflict. As a continuation of such efforts, Ambassador Zhong has visited South Sudan many times since the end of 2013, meeting with both governmental and rebel groups in parallel.

The most significant development in China's engagement in the South Sudanese civil war is that the Chinese government has had contact with both the GoSS and rebel groups at the same time. Engaging with both a state party and rebel groups is unusual for China as it would seem to run contrary to its 'non-interference' policy. In addition to Ambassador Zhong's visits to South Sudan, in July 2014, the Chinese government invited the South Sudanese Vice President and Deputy Chairman of the SPLM, James Wani Igga, to visit China in order to discuss the crisis. During the meeting, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang explained that China "hopes South Sudan realise[s] national reconciliation, security and stability at an early date", and "[we are] ready to continue to play a constructive role in promoting South Sudan and Sudan to achieve peace and development."⁹

Two months later, in September 2014, the Chinese government invited the Chairman of the External Relations Committee of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-in-Opposition, Dr Dhieu Mathok Diing Wol, to visit China. Many high-level officials within China's foreign policy team met with Dr Dhieu and expressed similar expectations of an early, comprehensive, and proper settlement to the South Sudanese civil war.

It is also significant to note that China did not stop its development projects in South Sudan. In fact, China has continuously strengthened its economic support, hoping to lay down good foundations for post-civil war reconstruction. For example, China and South Sudan signed two agreements in November 2014, agreeing that 97 per cent of South Sudanese exports to China

would enjoy a zero tariff.¹⁰ Furthermore, despite high associated risks, in December 2014 it was announced there were plans to start work on the Juba-Terekeka-Ramciel-Yirol-Rumbek Road. Of course, the civil war has had a significantly negative impact on South Sudanese oil production; however, similar to the oil production shutdown in 2012, this has not significantly affected bilateral economic cooperation. This once again indicates that China's policy priorities in South Sudan have evolved significantly.

China's approach to conflict resolution in South Sudan

China lacks experience in conflict resolution. However, as explained above, Sudan and South Sudan both presented opportunities for China to 'learn through doing'. Through its recent engagement in South Sudan, China's approach to conflict resolution has established some basic principles, which may be termed 'the 3 Nos'.

Firstly, there should be no stopping of development efforts, regardless of on-going conflict. Under the guidance of the development-first approach, China did not terminate its development support for South Sudan. In fact, as highlighted above, China initiated new projects in the country. While China is fully aware of former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan's statement, "No security without development, and no development without security", China will not abandon its development approach as a result of the outbreak of conflict. Rather, China believes that development engagement can lay down a concrete foundation for post-conflict reconstruction and the establishment of long-term solutions that address the root cause of conflict, such as a lack of development. It is important, however, to ensure that such engagement is always conflict sensitive.

The second 'no' relates to China's insistence on no securitisation of development policy.¹¹ After the outbreak of civil war in December 2013, China was seen to prioritise conflict resolution in its response to the crisis - a result, in large part, of an awareness of the shortcomings within the development-first approach. As a result, China now pays more attention

¹⁰ "Ambassador Ma Qiang Represented Chinese Government to Sign Two Agreements with South Sudanese Government," Embassy of the People's Republic of China in South Sudan, November 16, 2014, <http://ss.chineseembassy.org/chn/sbw/t1212743.htm>.

¹¹ 'Securitisation of development policy' refers to the increased focus on conflict and security within the development agenda and the growing ties between development initiatives and security and military operations. This has given rise to concerns that these initiatives are increasingly directed at meeting short-term military and political gains rather than addressing the needs of the local communities in which the development initiatives are implemented. See also L. Buur, S. Jensen, and F. Stepputat, "The Security-Development Nexus," in L. Buur, S. Jensen, and F. Stepputat eds., *The Security-Development Nexus: Expressions of Sovereignty and Securitization in Southern Africa*, Uppsala: HSRC Press, 2007, p. 10; Stefan Ganzle, *Coping with the "Security-Development Nexus": The European Community's Instrument for Stability-Rational and Potential*, DIE Studies, No. 47, Bonn, 2009, p. 14.

⁹ "Li Keqiang Meets with Vice President James Wani Igga of South Sudan," Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, July 1, 2014, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/xybfs_663590/gjlb_663594/sousu_663756/ssaa_663760/t1171075.shtml.

to conflict resolution, mediation and security alongside development. China believes that South Sudan needs to develop a new balance in the development–security nexus that pursues a holistic approach to end civil war and realise development. This, in part, explains why China has increased its engagement in conflict resolution but yet resisted pressures from the business sector to shift the focus from development to security. In this way, China attempts not to lose sight of development in the face of security challenges.

The third ‘no’ relates to no interference and no unilateral action. Non-interference is an established foreign policy principle of China’s; the dilemma here is how to actively participate in conflict resolution while not interfering with South Sudanese domestic affairs. China adopted a multilateral approach to overcome this dilemma: instead of engaging in public, unilateral action with the conflict parties, China has chosen to support and work with regional bodies, such as IGAD and AU Peace and Security Council, in order to engage in the mediation of South Sudan’s conflict. China is now considerably more confident in engaging with such multilateral frameworks, largely because China is not being negatively associated with the conflict, as it had been during the Darfur crisis. China recently held a consultation with IGAD and the conflict parties in South Sudan on 12 January 2015, in Khartoum.¹² In addition, the Chinese government’s proposal for the Initiative of China-Africa Cooperative Partnership for Peace and Security in 2012 at the 5th Forum on China-Africa Cooperation in Beijing served to formalise China’s links with African institutions. Under this initiative, China sent infantry troops to Mali for the first time in April 2013 and committed a further 700 infantry troops to South Sudan as part of the UN Mission in South Sudan in late 2014. Furthermore, under this initiative, China has supported IGAD, both financially and politically, to play a key role in mediating the South Sudanese civil war.

Challenges of China’s approach

Although China is moving forward relatively quickly in terms of developing its role in short-term, reactive conflict resolution, it has not engaged to the same extent in longer-term, structural conflict prevention, beyond implementing a general approach that prioritises economic development as the principal tool for ensuring stability in the long term. China’s evolving approach in relation to South Sudan’s civil war mainly relates to reducing armed violence – but not the prevention of conflict at a more structural level. Firstly, although China has shifted its focus to conflict resolution as well as post-conflict reconstruction, China has not developed conflict early warning capacity in South Sudan. As a result, after flooding

South Sudan with investment following independence, Chinese companies with operations in South Sudan and the Chinese government were surprised by the outbreak of the civil war. Secondly, while engaging in the South Sudan crisis, China’s engagement has been mostly a response to a three-fold pressure: the civil war itself and its direct consequences; calls from the international community and regional states for China to play a greater role in responding to the conflict; and calls from interest groups within China for greater protection of Chinese nationals and the country’s overseas interests in South Sudan. Finally, although China sees its continued support for South Sudanese economic development as important in addressing the root causes of conflict, such activities are perhaps undermined by China’s engagement in multilateral platforms whose collective efforts have focused on short-term solutions for the civil war, but arguably with too many political considerations to necessarily benefit any mid-to-long term solution. China currently has no comprehensive thinking at a strategic level about how to balance short, mid, and long-term solutions.

Thus, there is a need for China to develop a comprehensive overseas stability strategy that engages in both long-term, upstream conflict prevention, as well as the existing approaches of reactive conflict resolution.

Recommendations for China

In order to achieve such a comprehensive overseas stability strategy, China should first develop conflict early warning systems in the conflict-affected states it engages in, and South Sudan in particular. With a growing presence worldwide, China now has greater potential to build such early warning systems and to participate in existing local and international early warning and response systems, such as IGAD’s Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism. The Chinese businesses operating in conflict-affected states and scholars and observers focusing on these states can partner with China’s governmental agencies to build early warning systems. Such a partnership could potentially contribute towards easing pressures from various interest groups by involving such groups in relevant decision-making processes.

Second, China should institutionalise its learning and the ad hoc measures developed during the past decade in Sudan and South Sudan in terms of conflict resolution and prevention. Despite rarely engaging in conflict prevention, China developed a unique approach of dealing with conflict through a balanced security-development nexus. However, these mechanisms remain ad hoc in nature and have not, to date, been institutionalised. Furthermore, China should think about how to add elements of conflict prevention into this formula in order to make the development-first approach more conflict sensitive during times of relative peace.

¹² “China Supports IGAD’s Mediation Efforts on South Sudan,” FOCAC Website, January 13, 2015, <http://www.focac.org/eng/zxxx/t1227659.htm>.

Third, China may need to revisit its development-first approach in relation to conflict-affected countries, particularly with regards to conflict sensitivity. Clearly China cannot be blamed for the South Sudanese civil war, but connections have been drawn by some observers due to China's investment in the country, China's historic links with the two Sudans and, more recently, China's arms sales to South Sudan. Regardless of the accuracy of these accusations, China should increase the conflict sensitivity of its engagement because of its status as a global political actor and one of the permanent members on the UN Security Council. It is undoubtedly better to act to prevent an unstable context moving into full-scale crisis, and conflict sensitivity is the key to doing so.

Understanding conflict sensitivity

Conflicts can revolve around competition for power and resources. By introducing new resources into this sort of environment, external aid and investment inevitably has an impact on the local political economy. This may challenge and change existing power relations, and affect dynamics of peace and conflict. Over the past ten years an increasing number of international agencies have recognised this risk, and have tried to adopt a more 'conflict-sensitive' approach. This entails:

- understanding the context you operate in, especially the conflict dynamics
- understanding the nature of your engagement and how this affects the conflict context, and vice-versa
- acting on this understanding to avoid reinforcing conflict dynamics and to capitalise on opportunities to support peace.

Finally, China should develop an independent approach to conflict resolution and prevention. As we have observed, most countries involved in the South Sudanese civil war, acting with or without conflict prevention toolkits, have failed to differing extents. All stakeholders should learn from each other and develop a comprehensive, holistic, and localised approach to both conflict resolution and prevention. For China, such an approach means achieving a balance among local, international, and Chinese interests; between security and development; between non-intervention and active engagement; and between bilateral and multilateral channels.

How to build China's capacity for conflict prevention

The road to sustainable peace in South Sudan ultimately lies with the South Sudanese leadership and population. Efforts by external actors to support conflict prevention and peacebuilding have, to date, largely failed. China's approach to addressing the crisis has both comparative advantages and

disadvantages. Learning from this, and looking to the future, China should attach more importance to building its capacity in conflict prevention and integrating this within its conflict resolution efforts.

There are two crucial ways for China to build its capacity for conflict prevention. Firstly, China must develop a clear framework or strategy as at present, it has no clear guidance for its conflict prevention efforts. Two traditional Chinese foreign policy principles make this difficult. One, China follows a non-interference principle that prevents moral judgement about the domestic affairs of other countries. Two, China follows an equity principle that means all countries – big or small, rich or poor, in conflict or at peace – should be treated in the same way, regardless of whether they are in conflict or at peace. There is therefore no place for the terms 'conflict-affected states', 'fragile states' or 'failed states' in China's foreign policy. These two principles bring China the advantage of not having to stop investment and development efforts as a result of conflict. However, in order to build capacity for conflict prevention, China first needs to reframe or at least readjust its guiding foreign policy principles, so that it can introduce new concepts that allow for conflict prevention and conflict resolution, while at the same time maintaining the principles of neutrality and equity.

Secondly, more technical or operational innovation is required to develop the mechanisms and skills required for conflict prevention efforts. Although China should develop its philosophy and strategy independently, the mechanisms and skills can be developed using existing practices through international cooperation.

Given that many developed countries have built their strategies, mechanisms, and skills in relation to early warning, crisis response, and conflict prevention, there is great scope for cooperation and mutual learning that could help China's capacity building in these areas. It is here that we can identify the policy entry point for China-UK cooperation in relation to foreign policy and conflict issues.

The UK has established its Building Stability Overseas Strategy¹³ and built systematic organs for operating such a strategy. The system proved useful in responding to the South Sudan crisis. For example, through utilising the Troika mechanism (a formal grouping of the UK, USA, and Norway), the UK was able to increase pressure on the GoSS following the outbreak of the crisis in a consistent and coordinated approach that maximised its leverage. It would be useful for the UK to exchange institutional learning and experience with China on how to build integrated

¹³ Building Stability Overseas Strategy, July 2011, https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/32960/bsos-july-11.pdf ;

Saferworld, Building Stability Overseas Strategy: The Way Forward, November 2012

<http://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/view-resource/705-building-stability-overseas-strategy-the-way-forward>

mechanisms, how to maintain policy coherence within different agencies, how to develop special skills in early warning and upstream conflict prevention, and how to develop partnerships in the field of conflict prevention. This should also include a frank analysis of the UK/Troika approach in relation to the South Sudan crisis.

It is important to note that such an exchange should be a mutual learning process. While the UK may be further along than China in developing these systems, its policies and practices are by no means perfect. For example, civil society is currently voicing concern over the potential securitisation of the UK's conflict prevention efforts. China may offer an interesting balance in this regard.

Conclusion

China's engagement with South Sudan, from pre to post-independence, demonstrates that its approach to crisis response has evolved. However, it is still imperative for China to expand its engagement from short-term, reactive conflict resolution to also include early warning and longer-term, structural conflict prevention. This is an immediate challenge in the South Sudan context but also a longer-term challenge for China to apply these lessons more broadly in its overseas engagement within other conflict-affected contexts. Greater cooperation between China and the UK would provide an opportunity for both states to reflect on their successes and challenges to date in South Sudan and to seek opportunities to collaborate in this context and more broadly.

Through research and ongoing dialogue, the UK-China Conflict Prevention Working Group will continue to explore and develop a greater understanding of how China and the UK can better cooperate in the field of conflict prevention. These proposals will be outlined in a policy recommendations report that will be shared with a range of key UK and Chinese policy actors in 2016.

The views represented here are those of the authors. They do not necessarily represent the opinions and views of Saferworld.

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