

China's African Safari: Contemporary Relations with the Continent

Catherina H. Hall-Martin

About this paper

This study briefly looks at the contemporary foreign relations between China and African states, focusing on natural and mineral resources. It reviews how China protects these countries, using the concept of state sovereignty, from international castigation with regard to human rights abuses, in order to maintain diplomatic relations and access to natural resources. The study contributes towards understanding China's intentions in Africa and the impact this relationship is having in the international political arena.

Catherina H. Hall-Martin is a Research Assistant in the Conflict, Security and Development Group.

The **Conflict, Security and Development Group** is a leading international resource for research, analysis, training and expert policy advice on issues at the intersection of security and development. CSDG was established at King's College London in 1999 with the aim of bridging the academic and policy communities. Its core mandate is to deepen understanding about the development challenges confronting societies in Africa, Asia and Latin America, and to help translate this knowledge into practical agendas for change at local, national, regional and international levels.

CSDG's **Africa Peace and Security** programme seeks to enhance understanding of the dynamics of conflict and insecurity on the continent and to support local, national and regional responses to its development and security challenges.

Conflict, Security and Development Group
School of Social Science and Public Policy
King's College London
Strand, London
WC2R 2LS, UK

Tel: +44(0)20 7848 1984
Fax: +44(0)20 7848 2748
www.securityanddevelopment.org

CSDG Papers

Number 29 ■ October 2010

China's African Safari: Contemporary Relations with the Continent

Catherina H. Hall-Martin

Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction	3
Chapter 2: Driving forces of China's involvement in Africa	5
Chapter 3: Sustainable development or developmental Trojan horse?	7
Understanding the China-Africa relationship	8
A new partnership	9
Chapter 4: Beijing's human rights diplomacy	11
Diplomatic manoeuvring	12
The responsibility to protect	13
Chapter 5: Zimbabwe and Sudan: Looking east	15
Zimbabwe: China's hand in Africa's empty breadbasket?	16
Sudan's paradox of plenty	18
Arms for oil	19
Chapter 6: Conclusion	21
References	24

Chapter 1

Introduction

This study briefly looks at the contemporary foreign relations between China and African states, focusing on natural and mineral resources. It reviews how China protects these countries, using the concept of state sovereignty, from international castigation with regard to human rights abuses, in order to maintain diplomatic relations and access to natural resources. The study contributes towards understanding China's intentions in Africa and the impact this relationship is having in the international political arena. Since the end of the Cold War, China has developed a reinvigorated interest in the African continent, touting itself as Africa's leading development partner. Foreign relations between the China and the continent are based on the premise of mutual development, co-operation and natural resources. China's links with Africa are distinctive. Ranging from proving aid and foreign investment to developing infrastructure, China's model of development, also known as the 'Beijing Consensus', could offer a positive alternative to that of the Western so-called 'Washington Consensus'. A decidedly neo-liberal approach to development, including free market capitalism and structural adjustment programmes, has pitted the Western 'regulatory state' against the Eastern 'developmental state'. However, opinions with regard to this relationship run the entire gamut. Much has been written in the past year about China's stance on controversial issues such as its attempts to shore up the crumbling Zimbabwe regime, the ongoing violence in Darfur and its lack of support for the International Criminal Court (ICC) indictment of President Omar al-Bashir of Sudan. A competition between the primacies of state sovereignty versus human rights is evident in China's dealings with Zimbabwe and Sudan. Is it possible to protect human rights without violating sovereignty? As the case studies examined in this paper show, when sovereignty is given precedence, as it is by China, human rights will suffer.

Launching an inquiry into the nature of relations between China and Africa could shed more light on the positive and negative aspects of this relationship.

The paper first provides a broad overview of the diplomatic relations between China and the continent, but questions the potentially unbalanced and exploitative nature of the relationship and the capacity this has to harm Africa's developmental trajectory. For example, the bilateral relations between China, on the one hand, and Sudan and Zimbabwe, on the other, appear to be driven by China's demand for natural resources over-riding any concerns for human rights. Looking at how the relationship was re-established in the late 1980s, the paper illustrates how contemporary China-Africa relations are founded on the rhetoric of mutual development and disenchantment with the West. Although focusing on natural resources, the paper investigates Beijing's human rights diplomacy. The case studies illustrate the shortcomings in the international commitment to the 'responsibility to protect',¹ as state sovereignty maintains pre-eminence above human rights in both Sudan and Zimbabwe. Disquiet around China's dominating presence in Africa has been raised consistently in the international arena with regard to the use of its veto power on action against Sudan and Zimbabwe, its questionable human rights record, and its sale of arms on the continent, each briefly analysed.

¹ Responsibility to protect (R2P) is a recently established international norm, formulated in an attempt to address the international communities' inability to prevent genocide and human rights abuses, among other things. According to this norm, the international community can use appropriate diplomatic and humanitarian means to assist in the protection of populations and resort to collective action should peaceful means prove ineffective. See International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect (2009).

Chapter 2

Driving forces of China's involvement in Africa

Framed within an understanding of 'non-interference', contemporary Chinese relations with African states revolve around mutual development. More often than not, this development is reliant on the extraction of valuable natural resources in Africa and their shipment to China, as is demonstrated by the case studies. The Forum on China-Africa Co-operation (FOCAC)² guides China's political involvement in Africa. FOCAC has also provided Beijing with a platform to become a major humanitarian actor on the continent. For instance, on this basis, since 2000 China has waived up to USD 1.3 billion in debt to over 30 African nations, trained teachers and nurses, and provided thousands of Africans with scholarships.³

Scholarly literature identifies China's main spheres of interest in Africa to be diplomatic and economic. Diplomatically, China sees Africa as a vital ally in international forums such as the United Nations.⁴ Due to the weight of numbers that African states carry, their support is key, for example, in sustaining China's 'One China policy' countering Taiwan's diplomatic inroads on the continent, and promoting South-South co-operation and unity in order to provide a counter-balance to US hegemony. China's economic strategy is threefold: firstly, Africa provides a market for low-cost Chinese goods; secondly, Africa's vast reserves of raw materials can fuel China's economic growth; and, thirdly, Africa is a crucial source of oil for China's energy security.⁵

Diplomatically, China provides support to African states within international forums such as the United Nations.⁶ According to Giry, 'China is

² Established in 2000 under the auspices of the Chinese government.

³ Naidu (2007), 287.

⁴ Van der Wath (2004), 74; Eisenman (2007), 34.

⁵ Beri (2007), 297-302.

⁶ Taylor (2004), 83; Van der Wath (2004), 75.

trying to buy the hearts and minds of African leaders' as part of its broader strategy to acquire allies in developing countries so as to augment its soft power internationally.⁷ It has been rightly argued that ideology and governance in Africa are unimportant to Beijing with regard to its Africa policy and that in essence the relationship is founded on increasing economic interaction, which has bolstered Africa's position in the global economy.⁸ Concomitantly, Beijing will continue to court Africa in order to secure an ever-expanding market for its goods, as well as to maintain access to its energy sources.

⁷ Giry (2004), 22.

⁸ Cornelissen & Taylor (2000), 615-28.

Chapter 3

Sustainable development or developmental Trojan horse?

There are many beneficial aspects to the China-Africa relationship, particularly in terms of the economic development experienced by large parts of the continent since Chinese involvement commenced. African economies have benefitted from Chinese investments, most notably when coupled with technology and skills transfers.⁹ As noted by a Nigerian official, 'the Western world is never prepared to transfer technology – but the Chinese do, [and] while China's technology may not be as sophisticated as some Western governments', it is better to have Chinese technology than to have none at all'.¹⁰ Accordingly, China's involvement in Africa can be seen in a positive light. As Shelton postulates, China may well 'be a true partner in Africa's hoped-for 21st century economic renaissance', due to the Chinese 'understanding of Africa's ongoing struggle for economic growth, social stability and peace'.¹¹

However, one could argue that there is an unbalanced and exploitative nature to the relationship and that it could in fact be detrimental to African economies in the long run. Some of the factors that may contribute to this include China's policy of importing the majority of its labour from China for projects in Africa instead of drawing from the pool of African labour; overexploitation of African countries' natural resources; and low foreign direct investment when compared to repatriated Chinese profits.¹² Although the concerns seem well founded, it would be incorrect to assume that African nations are helpless victims in the face of the Chinese juggernaut, although undertakings entered into between the two parties are likely to serve the interests of a small African elite. China's relations with both Zimbabwe and Sudan illustrate this situation.

⁹ Alden (2005), 6.

¹⁰ *Financial Times*, 'Friend or Forager?', 23 February 2006.

¹¹ Shelton (2001), 119.

¹² *Dakar Times*, 'China-Africa Partnership Is Unbalanced African Experts Say', 13 May 2009.

In Zimbabwe, problems are centred on President Mugabe's land redistribution policies, rigged elections and political oppression. In Sudan, civil conflict has been ongoing in the oil-producing regions, as well as Darfur. The common denominator in both these cases is proving to be the question of land, i.e. control of the natural resources present above and within it and the question of to whom the benefits flow. In both cases, there is an autocratic regime maintaining control and cultivating a partnership with China, with benefits flowing primarily away from the general population.

Currently, both these African regimes are considered to be international pariah states characterised by gross human rights violations. China trades heavily in arms to both states, protected by claims of sovereignty. China became the largest exporter of arms to Sudan just prior to the onset of the Darfur conflagration. This relationship remains unchanged.¹³ According to Human Rights First, between 2003 and 2006 China sold in excess of USD 55 million worth of arms to Sudan. The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) arms embargo (Resolutions 1556 and 1591) on weapons to Darfur is binding on China and Sudan, yet China provides 90 per cent of all arms imported by Sudan. This makes China complicit in the abuses being perpetrated on civilians in the Sudanese oil fields and Darfur.¹⁴ In 2008 South African dock workers refused to unload a shipment of Chinese arms bound for Zimbabwe during the unstable election period in the latter country.

Understanding the China-Africa relationship

On a policy level, Cornelissen and Taylor argue that China's involvement in Africa is largely self-serving and that its policy rhetoric is contradictory, as is illustrated by China's sudden 're-identification with the South' after a honeymoon period of relations with the Northern countries in the 1980s.¹⁵ The central tenets of China's engagement with the African continent are non-interference and respect for state sovereignty. Other than expecting support for its 'One China policy' to counter recognition of Taiwan, China attaches limited political conditionalities to its involvement on the continent. This has led to widespread criticism of the country's perceived part in fuelling conflicts on the continent by selling arms to volatile regions, which perpetuates an unstable environment.¹⁶ This could possibly be seen as Western paranoia at the substantial influence that China is increasingly wielding in Africa, which had until recently

¹³ Large (2007), 5.

¹⁴ Human Rights First (2008), 3.

¹⁵ Cornelissen & Taylor (2000), 619.

¹⁶ Taylor (2004), 98-99.

been considered the West's own backyard. China has been very effective in its engagement with Africa. This efficacy is due partly to China's insistence on non-interference and unconditional support. China would appear to offer more accessible means of acquiring funding and technical expertise, whereas relations with the West are dependent on conditionalities such as good governance and 'revenue transparency'.¹⁷

Taylor proposes that contemporary relations in terms of human rights between China and Africa should be viewed against the milieu surrounding the Tiananmen Square incident in June 1989. The early 1980s saw a decline in the level of interactions between China and Africa.¹⁸ However, the Tiananmen Square incident caused China to rediscover valuable allies among its African counterparts in the light of heavy criticism from the West of China's poor human rights record. Numerous African leaders were quick to offer support to Beijing.¹⁹ Phillip Snow attributes this to a common self-image among Chinese and African elites of having suffered under Western imperialism, giving them a deep-seated suspicion of criticism of their regimes based on 'Western-centric' norms of liberal democracy and human rights.²⁰ Indeed, Beijing suggested that dominant Western nations were pursuing 'power politics in the name of "human rights, freedom and democracy"'.²¹ In return, China manages to 'piggy-back on the Third World's weight of numbers to escape international censure'.²² China's posture of non-interference in the affairs of other sovereign states is a fundamental aspect of its foreign relations.²³ Naturally, this bodes well for those African leaders keen to direct attention away from their own undemocratic practices, as will be illustrated in the cases of Sudan and Zimbabwe, both of which have rich deposits of natural resources.

A new partnership

The rhetoric is one of mutual development, co-operation and disenchantment with Western dominance among the South-South partners. This strategic partnership is aimed at common development, supported by technical assistance from China, particularly in the areas of health, agriculture and education. China

¹⁷ In an attempt to curb corruption within international oil industries, Transparency International promotes 'revenue transparency' in order to track payments made to governments of resource-rich countries.

¹⁸ Taylor (1998), 443.

¹⁹ Taylor (2006), 939.

²⁰ Snow (1995), 285.

²¹ Xinhua, 12 March 1990, <<http://www.xinhuanet.com/english>>.

²² Kim (1994), 137.

²³ Cornelissen & Taylor (2000), 618.

has successfully fused African interests with its own by endorsing itself as the leader of developing nations.²⁴

China has recently become Africa's third-largest trading partner after the United States and the European Union.²⁵ At the core of these developing trade relations are natural resources. If these are managed correctly, numerous African states could have lucrative economic prospects. Africa produces, among other commodities, 48 per cent of the world's platinum, 29 per cent of its gold and 46 per cent of its chromium.²⁶ With massive demand for these resources coming from rapidly growing economies, including India and, more importantly, China, the prospects should be positive.²⁷

Between 2000 and 2010 China had the stated objective of doubling its gross domestic product (GDP) by maintaining an average annual growth rate of 7-8 per cent. The rate was as high as 11.9 per cent in 2007. This economic capacity is being put towards finding sources of raw materials to feed China's domestic demand.²⁸ These raw materials are, of course, found in abundance in Africa, which is rich in iron ore, platinum, copper and oil, to name a few. China is investing heavily not only in infrastructure and the extractive industry, but to a lesser extent also in human capital. The terms of China's official development assistance (ODA) take the form of grants, preferential loans and technical assistance, with an emphasis on training for Africans in Chinese institutions and the advancement of agricultural technology. ODA predominantly focuses on hospitals, schools and government buildings.²⁹ The last official reports, available for 2002, show that China provided USD 1.8 billion in ODA to African states.³⁰ The Export-Import Bank of China is also able to provide significant lines of credit below market rates in order to fund infrastructure projects in cash-strapped countries that are then able to use raw materials as collateral.³¹

Thus, it stands to reason that although China is regularly criticized for its insistence on remaining removed from the internal affairs of the nations with which it has relations, perhaps, economically at least, some of these nations stand to benefit. The difficulty arises in ensuring that these benefits are not limited to the elite, but that all citizens reap the rewards.

²⁴ Y. Ye, 'China, South Africa Consolidate Ties for Developing World's Benefit', Xinhua, 20 June 2006, <<http://www.xinhuanet.com/english>>.

²⁵ Taylor (2008), p. 63.

²⁶ J. Mannion, 'Africa's Natural Resources Are a Potential Gold Mine', *The Independent*, 1 July 2006.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Harris (2004), 62.

²⁹ Wan (2005), 8-10.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ ICG (2008), 13.

Chapter 4

Beijing's human rights diplomacy

This paper examines China's foreign relations with Zimbabwe and Sudan through the prism of natural resources in Africa. However, any discussion on Chinese activities in resource extraction on the African continent is incomplete without considering the issue of human rights. This is because these two countries with which China does business are theatres of human rights abuses and political crisis.

According to Schmitz and Sikkink, human rights are 'a set of principled ideas about treatment to which all individuals are entitled by virtue of being human'.³² However, as illustrated by the case studies, China's circumspect treatment of these universal values may serve to maintain instability. China focuses on 'collective development as the key human right' above civil and political rights.³³ This approach is, of course, not limited to Africa, although it is very attractive to autocratic African leaders looking to consolidate power.

China's approach to human rights could be interpreted as culturally relativist and thus maintains the position that each country can interpret the norms according to its own 'national' way. This is illustrative of China's involvement in the Sudan and Zimbabwe. State sovereignty is of primary importance and normative issues are potentially destabilizing. In effect, China vigorously opposes the politicization of human rights and its involvement in a sovereign state on the basis of these rights is contrary to its policy of non-interference. As Seymore suggests, 'China's leaders see human rights as an

³² Schmitz & Sikkink (2002), 517.

³³ Taylor (2007).

instrument used selectively by foreigners to pursue ... foreign policy objectives'.³⁴

But there is a certain lack of logic in China's approach to the norms of human rights and sovereignty. As stated previously, Chinese discourse focuses on development as the principal human right, in conflict with the more liberal Western interpretations of the concept. The problem arises when China's dealing with African states such as Sudan and Zimbabwe clashes with liberal Western norms while simultaneously (and as a direct consequence of China's involvement) undermining the development of these state as African elites fight to maintain power and build up their personal wealth, often to the detriment of wider development. As Taylor (2007) illustrates, not only does Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe ignore Western conceptions of human rights, but simultaneously 'subverts Zimbabweans' social and economic rights', according to the Chinese interpretation of human rights.³⁵

Diplomatic manoeuvring

China is currently the darling of many an African leader and elite. Arguments against Chinese involvement in Africa, however, highlight important contradictions that may eventually undermine the relationship between China and the continent. For example, China's trade in arms is argued to sustain Africa's volatility, as illustrated in the case of Sudan. Furthermore, one can expect that supporting despotic regimes will maintain elitist politics, the lack of transparency in natural resource income and the absence of good governance. It is China's dealings with the more unsavoury leaders of African states such as Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe and Sudan's Omar al-Bashir that is raising the most concern due to bad governance and human rights abuses in these countries.

China appears to accept the normative values espoused by the international organizations of which it is a member, yet is attempting to become the new dominant power in Africa via the inroads made with its policies of non-interference and thus challenge the international status quo. As Freedman further illustrates, '[China] expects to be treated with respect ... but does not present itself as a candidate for global primacy' and points to China's 'unsentimental' approach to the 'pursuit of vital interests' as indicative of its emergence from a world largely dominated by Western powers and its 'keen sense of international hierarchy'.³⁶ This can be seen as illustrative of China's approach to its dealings with African nations and its lack of regard for

³⁴ Seymore (1998), 234.

³⁵ Taylor (2007).

³⁶ Freedman (2004), 29.

international norms such as human rights. However, Gill and Reilly have a more positive view and believe that China offers Africa a constructive and responsible alternative to the West. It is the Chinese gambit that Africa is on the cusp of a political and economic renaissance and, as such, China wants to be an integral part of this transformation.³⁷

The responsibility to protect

The 20th century witnessed a change in the way war was waged, and civilians became the predominant victims. This situation prompted a shift in how these conflicts are approached in terms of intervention and the protection of human rights. The civilian, not the state, assumes priority. The concept of the 'responsibility to protect' (R2P) was first introduced in 2001 and questions the point at which sovereignty must yield to the protection of civilians. Although recognizing the responsibility of the government above all to protect its population, this 'responsibility shifts to the international community when the state is unable or unwilling to protect'.³⁸ In other words, the 'principle of non-intervention yields to the responsibility to protect'.³⁹

In the 2005 outcome document adopted by the World Summit, the UN General Assembly stated:

Each individual State has the responsibility to protect its populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity. This responsibility entails the prevention of such crimes, including their incitement, through appropriate and necessary means. We accept that responsibility and will act in accordance with it.⁴⁰

China's actions in Sudan and Zimbabwe call into question the commitment of the international community and, indeed, African states to adhere to this principle. More often than not, the political will to act is absent, resulting in mere rhetoric. Zimbabwe and Sudan undeniably qualify for action under R2P. However, intervention can only be sanctioned by the UNSC, and thus action can be prevented by a veto from any of the permanent members, of which China is one. China's obstruction is often in opposition to its developmentalist policies. With regard to Zimbabwe, it has repeatedly prevented

³⁷ Gill & Reilly (2007), 38.

³⁸ International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect (2009).

³⁹ ICISS (2001), 11.

⁴⁰ UNGA (2005), para. 138.

sanctions and an arms embargo, calling instead for the internal resolution of the country's problems.⁴¹

There seems to be a certain level of convergence on the subject of human rights and state sovereignty between the case study governments and China. Respect for sovereignty dominates any discussion on human rights in both Sudan and Zimbabwe, bolstered by China's continued investments. However, China's policy of non-interference is allegedly harming Africa's democratic development by supporting autocratic regimes such as Zimbabwe and Sudan. Observers are concerned about Chinese industries 'undermining Western efforts to spread democracy and prosperity'.⁴²

It has been noted already that China's involvement in Sudan and Zimbabwe is becoming increasingly controversial. On the one hand, Beijing has integrated itself extensively into the international (read Western) political arena by joining organizations such as the World Trade Organization and maintaining a seat on the UNSC. On the other, it consistently shirks its responsibilities toward international standards of human rights and democracy by maintaining vested interests in the abovementioned African countries. Beijing views these principles, often including environmental responsibility, as espoused by a green West, as 'a tool of neo-imperialism'.⁴³ Despite the ceaseless posturing of the Chinese as the anti-imperialist leader of the developing world, it needs to be wary of its actions that lend themselves to the portrayal of China as a new colonialist and its drive for natural resources as a new 'Scramble for Africa'.

According to an Amnesty International report, China often barter arms for raw materials in order to sustain its rapidly growing economy, an activity extending throughout Africa. The report claims that Chinese arms are directly implicated in human rights abuses and sustaining conflict.⁴⁴ UN investigators have confirmed that the majority of weapons used in the Darfur conflict are of Chinese origin.⁴⁵

⁴¹ D. Nasaw & M. Rice-Oxley, 'China and Russia Veto Zimbabwe Sanctions', *Guardian*, 11 July 2008, <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/jul/11/unitednations.zimbabwe>>.

⁴² *The Economist*, 'The New Colonialists', 15 March 2008.

⁴³ Taylor (2005).

⁴⁴ Amnesty International (2007), 7.

⁴⁵ *USA Today*, 'Group: China Supplies Most Small Arms to Sudan', 13 March 2008. <http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2008-03-13-china-sudan_N.htm>.

Chapter 5

Zimbabwe and Sudan: Looking east

China is a country in the throes of rapid economic expansion with a huge population diversifying in its food demands. As such, Zimbabwe could be a useful partner and source of food imports once its agricultural sector stabilizes. However the main interest will undoubtedly be in Zimbabwe's mineral wealth for the foreseeable future. On the other side of the spectrum, Sudan is one of China's leading sources of crude oil. In its drive to secure energy supplies and thus stabilize its energy security, China has become deeply entrenched in Sudan, a country from which Western nations have largely disengaged and on which they have imposed a suite of sanctions due to continued government abuses against the civilian population. Economic sanctions have also been in place in Zimbabwe since early 2003 and have recently been extended by the United States due to the continued political instability under the newly formed unity government.

In the cases of both Zimbabwe and Sudan, China has repeatedly protected the regimes from sanctions and criticism, using its position on the UNSC to seemingly advance its own interests. In both cases, human rights abuses are prevalent and China's policy of 'non-interference' has been prominent in prescribing its relations with the regimes.⁴⁶ As mentioned, contemporary relations between China and the African continent have come under increasing scrutiny. A study of Chinese relations with African countries in terms of natural resources and human rights would be incomplete without looking in slightly more detail at Sudan and Zimbabwe, arguably two of the more controversial of China's African allies.

⁴⁶ Shichor (2005), 2-5.

Zimbabwe: China's hand in Africa's empty breadbasket?

Zimbabwe is an African country benefitting from China's lucrative African safari. President Mugabe's regime has been effectively ostracised by the international community due to its controversial economic, political and human rights policies. Apart from its economic woes, it has attained political notoriety, with the ruling ZANU-PF party standing accused of political oppression and human rights abuses. With the newly appointed power-sharing government, it is hoped the political impasse might finally be at an end. Nevertheless, China remains as one of its few supporters and a source of aid and investment. China has been involved in Zimbabwe since the 1970s when it was ZANU-PF's main supporter in the struggle for independence.⁴⁷ These liberation ties have arguably evolved into a 'developmental partnership'. No longer a relationship based solely on political support, China and Zimbabwe have entered into an economic relationship based on aid and natural resources.

By 2005 Chinese investments in Zimbabwe were estimated at USD 600 million, with a further USD 600 million pledged at the 2005 Afro-Asia summit.⁴⁸ Zimbabwe holds the world's second-largest platinum reserves, greatly enhancing China's interest in the country.⁴⁹ This interest also includes infrastructure, tourism, trade and agriculture. In 2006, China injected US\$ 200 million into Zimbabwe's farming, manufacturing and mining industries.⁵⁰ China's support did not diminish during the ensuing political and economic crisis.

By June 2008 inflation was in excess of 231 million per cent, although it could have been much higher with excessive money supplies feeding hyperinflation. The economic crisis is further exacerbated by an unemployment rate of 80 per cent and a severe shortage of basic foodstuffs.⁵¹

Once considered the breadbasket of Southern Africa, Zimbabwe has been hamstrung by political instability, economic implosion and crippling inflation. The state-instigated 'fast track' land redistribution policy was characterized by farm invasions. Although land acquisition was initially tempered by a 'willing seller-willing buyer' approach, constitutional constraints on the process were

⁴⁷ Youde (2007), 8.

⁴⁸ Karumbidza (2007), 92.

⁴⁹ M. Wines, 'Zimbabwe's Future: Made in China', *International Herald Tribune*, 24 July 2005, <<http://www.iht.com/articles/2005/07/24/news/zimbabwe.php>>.

⁵⁰ *People's Daily Online*, 'Zimbabwe Eager to Strengthen Economic Ties with China', 28 September 2006, <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200609/28/eng20060928_307027.html>.

⁵¹ *BBC News Online*, 'Zimbabwe Inflation Rockets Higher', 19 August 2008, <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business>>.

removed during the 1990s, with resettlement land often used as a patronage resource.⁵² Kriger highlights two characteristics inherent in post-independence Zimbabwe that resulted in the removal of the abovementioned constraints, culminating in large-scale expropriation, firstly, limited legal and constitutional constraints on the ruling party's exercise of power, and secondly, 'a pattern of economic decision-making to preserve or augment the ruling party's access to state resources for patronage'.⁵³

This meant that the government could manipulate the buyer-seller trajectory to its advantage and use redistributed land for patronage instead of the intended resettlement of the local population. The deteriorating political, social and economic situation has seen millions of Zimbabweans flooding neighbouring countries in search of employment and food after large-scale agricultural production came to a grinding halt. This has not only resulted in regional instability, but also a growing risk of food insecurity.

As mentioned, Zimbabwe is being largely ostracised by the international community, for a variety of reasons stemming from problematic governance practices. For example, during the recent crisis, Mugabe's regime was controlling food aid distribution to the detriment of opposition supporters. Many African governments have called for an end to the Western-imposed sanctions, on the basis that they are impeding the progress of the unity government and are disproportionately affecting the average citizen. From within Zimbabwe, the sanctions are being blamed for the economic crisis. However, it is not only Western governments that support the maintenance of targeted sanctions. African intellectuals and trade unions, most notably the South African-based Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu), are voicing their support. This was illustrated in Cosatu's refusal to unload a Chinese cargo of arms bound for Zimbabwe.⁵⁴

Consequently, most international aid has ceased to flow to Zimbabwe. This has encouraged it to seek support from alternative sources, notably China.⁵⁵

Among the economic manifestations of the China-Zimbabwe partnership is a significant revenue stream from China. An example of this is that China has become the largest importer of Zimbabwean tobacco.⁵⁶ In return, China has gained access to various mineral concessions. Estimated to be worth in excess of USD 500 billion, Zimbabwe is thought to have the second-largest platinum

⁵² Kriger (2007), 63-71.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Mamdani (2008).

⁵⁵ Youde (2007), 9-10.

⁵⁶ Townsend & Copson (2005), 15.

deposits in the world.⁵⁷ Zimbabwe provides China with secure access to important raw materials to maintain its booming economic growth, while more than half of Zimbabwe's export revenue is generated through mining, which has become the only viable industry remaining after the collapse of agriculture. Although Sino-Zimbabwean ties do allow China access to Zimbabwe's natural resources, they are not as strategically significant as Sudan, because they do not contribute to China's energy security. However, no sustainable development will come to Zimbabwe until the political impasse comes to an end and the power-sharing government stabilises. It is arguably in terms of these political matters that China's diplomacy and international stature can contribute significantly. Protecting the Mugabe regime merely cultivates an unstable investment environment and sustains human rights abuses, which is problematic for China's attempts to burnish its international standing.

Sudan's paradox of plenty

Sudan has been mired in civil war since independence, with the most recent conflagration erupting in Darfur in 2003. The root cause of these conflicts is considered to be control over oil in the south and diminishing natural resources in Darfur.⁵⁸ Sudan is considered to be a prime example of another African country caught in the 'resource trap'. Proven and estimated oil reserves, as well as natural gas, have the potential to bring development and economic growth to this country, which has instead been mired in decades of conflict. In reality, it is this natural resource wealth that has been key in driving the conflict. Sudan is a country rich in resources and poor in governance, as illustrated in its human rights abuses, and it has evolved into the archetypal African rentier state. The Sudanese government is not dependent on extracting taxes from the population in order to sustain itself. As a result, it is also not in need of popular recognition, i.e. support by the masses, and instead becomes what Smith terms a 'distributive state', concerned with the distribution of oil rents to favoured recipients.⁵⁹ Consequently, a powerful ally such as China is proving vital for its economic survival and to provide protection against international sanctions. One of the defining characteristics of China's relations with African nations, Sudan being a prime example, is its policy of 'business is business'. On this note, China has an investment in excess of USD 6 billion in the country, predominantly in the oil sector, initiated in 1994.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Engdahl (2008).

⁵⁸ Ateem (2007), 11.

⁵⁹ Smith (2004), 233.

⁶⁰ UNCTAD & UNDP (2007), 56.

The protracted conflict in Sudan has been marked by gross human rights abuses. This appears to have been primarily driven by the Khartoum government's view that the Southern Nuer and Dinka tribes are a threat to the development of the oil fields. The most blatant abuse evident in the conflicts in Sudan has been the forced removal of tribes from oil-rich areas in an attempt by the Khartoum government to establish a *cordon sanitaire* for international oil firms.⁶¹ Indeed, population displacement in Sudan's 'resource war' is not merely an outcome, but an objective.⁶²

Arms for oil

In a 2001 study, Ross concluded that developing oil-exporting states have a tendency to invest in repressive measures in order to counter social discontent. He identifies a strong correlation between military spending and oil wealth and links this to the probability of authoritarianism.⁶³ Ross calculates a 1.6 per cent increase in military spending for oil-dependent states for every 5 per cent increase in oil dependence.⁶⁴ The study of Sudan seems to support Ross's analysis, as outlined above. This is especially significant in a country with poverty levels of 60-70 per cent in Northern Sudan and 90 per cent in Southern Sudan.⁶⁵ Revenue accruing to Sudan through oil sales to China has allowed Khartoum (with Chinese assistance) to develop its own arms-manufacturing capacity since 2000. Based at the MCM military manufacturing complex on the Khartoum-Medani highway, production focuses on small arms and light weapons.⁶⁶

The increase in oil revenue export earnings has resulted in a commensurate increase in military spending.⁶⁷ A large percentage of these arms are imported from China. Although the trade in Chinese arms globally is estimated to be in excess of USD 1 billion, the industry is opaque at best.⁶⁸ China is one of the few large arms-exporting nations not signatory to any international agreements on trade in arms to unstable nations. In addition, it does not publish

⁶¹ Rone (2003), 504.

⁶² Johnson (2003), 155.

⁶³ Ross (2001), 349-51.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ UNDP (2006).

⁶⁶ Alden (2007), 62.

⁶⁷ Human Rights First (2008).

⁶⁸ T. Deen, 'How to Curb China's Arms Trade', *Asia Times*, 14 June 2006, <<http://www.atimes.com/atimes/China/HF14Ad01.html>>.

information on its arms trade and does not submit information to the UN Register on Conventional Arms.⁶⁹

China and Sudan are partnered in a macabre synergy. The funds procured through the sale of its oil to China allow Khartoum to return the favour in the form of its arms purchases.⁷⁰ Indeed, it is believed that it is China's ready supply of arms that has served to maintain its position in the Sudanese oil industry, even though Beijing vehemently denies their use in the various conflicts ongoing in Sudan.⁷¹

Sudan is caught in a resource-driven trap of underdevelopment, bad governance and human rights abuses. In its drive to secure the source of oil, Beijing has steadfastly maintained its policy of non-interference and respect for state sovereignty. This has continued regardless of human rights abuses and the issuance of a warrant by the ICC for the arrest of President Bashir on genocide charges. However, China is beginning to recognize the shortcomings of operating in a perennial theatre of conflict. For a country attempting to burnish its international reputation as a leader among developing nations, Beijing can ill afford the mounting international criticism and accusations of complicity in human rights abuses.

In furtherance to this, one instrument of Chinese influence in Africa has largely gone unnoticed in critical analysis of Chinese engagement on the continent: the increased commitment of People's Liberation Army troops to UN peacekeeping missions on the continent. In 2006, China had more peacekeeping troops deployed in UN security and stability operations than the four other permanent members of the UN Security Council combined. The majority of these troops are deployed in Africa.⁷² In Darfur specifically, China has assumed a more positive position illustrated by its success in convincing Khartoum to allow a hybrid peacekeeping force, consisting of African Union (AU) and UN troops, into Darfur and has offered military engineers to assist.⁷³ In its quiet diplomacy behind the scenes, China has donated USD 11 million in aid to the crippled Darfur region and a further USD 1.8 million to the original AU peacekeeping mission.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ *Asian Tribune*, 'Why China Blocks Sanctions on Iran, China, Burma', 13 June 2006.

⁷⁰ Human Rights First (2008), 11.

⁷¹ Byman & Cliff (1999).

⁷² Pham (2007).

⁷³ Downs (2008), 132.

⁷⁴ Wenping (2007), 35.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

This study has briefly investigated the foreign relations between China and Africa within the context of the former's dealings with Sudan and Zimbabwe. Although focused on natural resources as the crux of this relationship, it has also looked at the negative effects these relations have had on human rights issues in the two case study countries. In both cases, the absence of solid domestic political infrastructure strips away the need for political accountability to the population. Coupled with China's policy of non-interference in the domestic affairs of another sovereign state, the effects are wide ranging. The study has indicated that due partly to Chinese investment, Africa's GDP has increased, although Chinese support for autocratic regimes such as those led by Presidents Mugabe and Bashir in Zimbabwe and Sudan, respectively, has inadvertently propagated human rights abuses.

But Africa could be on the cusp of a new wave of development based on its land resources, following on the back of massive Chinese investments in natural resource exports and infrastructural development.

Africa is blessed with limitless possibilities and huge natural resources, but it has been burdened by years of instability and internal conflict. It is these endless conflicts that inhibit the continent from developing economically and politically and utilizing its full wealth of resources for the benefit of its people. Although it is commonly accepted that not all civil wars are founded on specific grievances, there is increasing occurrence of resource-based conflicts where the availability of natural resources and their exploitation sustain conflict.

At present, little has been achieved in limiting the occurrence of war in resource-rich areas, nor has the voracity of actors such as China been sufficiently stemmed. Chinese engagement provides both opportunities and challenges and, like any powerful state, its incentives are generally self-serving. This engagement

runs the entire gamut from positive, i.e. infrastructure built and GDP raised, and potentially positive spillover if Africa is capable of harnessing the relationship, to negative, i.e. human rights abuses and decreasing democratic standards.

However, it is important to maintain perspective on China's role on the continent and the negative consequences for human rights. Ultimately, China behaves in a way that maximises its self-interest. This is no different than any other Western power active on the continent or elsewhere. In the same vein, one must highlight the role played by African elites in the perpetuation of human rights abuses. In doing this, it becomes evident that the root of the problem lies with the nature of African politics. China merely exploits this to its advantage, exacerbating the problems inherent in neo-patrimonial politics in Africa. But it is imperative to recognize that China's African expansion is as much a statement of its growing prominence and ability to throw its economic weight around as it is an attempt to combat its own internal vulnerabilities in terms of dwindling energy and food supplies. Regardless, this could be a pivotal point in Africa's developmental path if African leaders are able to cast the relationship in terms that bring benefit to the continent. A decidedly African approach to the relationship needs to be developed in order to optimise the potential long-term economic benefits of this window of opportunity. As mentioned, China's involvements in Africa are not occurring in a vacuum, nor are African states incapable of harnessing the relationship to reap the advantages.

The disquiet surrounding China's dominating presence in Africa has been raised consistently in the international arena with regard to the use of its veto power on action against Sudan and Zimbabwe, its questionable human rights record, and its arms trade, which has arguably prolonged the various conflicts on the continent. The concern is whether Beijing's African safari is exacerbating these factors of state weakness in terms of human rights abuses and more general lack of good governance and is likely to be more a liability than an asset. According to Taylor, China's posture on human rights resonates with African elites who prosper at the expense of their people. China's lack of criticism of the Zimbabwean and Sudanese regimes has helped forge a sense of solidarity between them, united against perceived Western imperialism.⁷⁵ There is a lack of coherence in China's attempts to be a constructive member of the international society (i.e. one that respects human rights), 'as this bumps up against resource diplomacy that supports autocratic and abusive governments in several corners of the world'.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Taylor (2004), 90.

⁷⁶ Heginbotham (2007), 190.

This can be seen as illustrative of China's approach to its dealings with African nations and its lack of regard for international norms such as human rights. However, Gill and Reilly have a more positive view and believe China offers Africa a constructive and responsible alternative to the West. Although China regularly shields Sudan from criticism, it is gradually moving from blatant obstruction of international censures to a more nuanced involvement. The aim is to find equilibrium between meeting its energy security needs and promoting itself as a responsible power.⁷⁷

Both the case studies are weak states that exploit the international recognition afforded through the principle of sovereignty. Consequently, regime security is of the utmost importance, as is maintaining extensive clientelist networks. As is illustrated in this study, in order to achieve this, these two states have entered into a mutually beneficial relationship with Beijing to stave off threats to their ruling regimes.⁷⁸ Ultimately, the responsibility of Chinese engagement in Sudan and Zimbabwe should shift to Africa itself, based on terms favourable to African development. What Africa needs, which China could provide, is a hand up, rather than a handout.

⁷⁷ ICG (2008), 21.

⁷⁸ Reno (2001), 198, 296.

References

- Alden, C., 2005. 'Leveraging the Dragon: Toward "An Africa that Can Say No"'. *eAfrica*, 3 February.
- —, 2007. *China in Africa*. Zed Books, London.
- Amnesty International, 2007. *Sudan: Arms Continuing to Fuel Serious Human Rights Violations in Darfur*. Report. 8 May.
<<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AFR54/019/2007/en/c29fa387-d396-11dd-a329-2f46302a8cc6/afr540192007en.pdf>>.
- Ateem, E. S. M., 2007. 'The Root Causes of Conflict in Sudan and the Making of the Darfur Tragedy'. Presentation to Wilton Park conference on Conflict Prevention and Development Cooperation in Africa: A Policy Workshop.
- Beri, R., 2007. 'China's Rising Profile in Africa'. *China Report* 43(3), 297-308.
- Byman, D. and R. Cliff, 1999. 'China's Arms Sales: Motivations and Implications'. Rand Corporation Monograph. <<http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs>>.
- Cornelissen, S. and Ian Taylor, 2000. 'The Political Economy of China and Japan's Relationship with Africa: A Comparative Perspective'. *Pacific Review* 13(4), 615-33.
- Downs, E. S., 2008. 'Business Interest Groups in Chinese Politics: The Case of the Oil Companies'. In *China's Changing Political Landscape: Prospects for Democracy*, ed. C. Li. Brookings Institution Press, Washington, DC.
- Eisenmann, J., 2007. 'China's Post-Cold War Strategy in Africa: Examining Beijing's Methods and Objectives'. In *China and the Developing World: Beijing's Strategy for the Twenty First Century*, ed. J. Eisenman, E. Heginbotham and D. Mitchell. M. E. Sharpe, New York.

- Engdahl, F. W., 2008. 'Anglo-American and Chinese Interests Clash over Zimbabwe's Strategic Mineral Wealth'. *Global Research*.
<<http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=9707>>.
- Freedman, L., 2004. 'China as a Global Strategic Actor'. In *Does China Matter? A Reassessment: Essays in Memory of Gerald Segal*, ed. B. Buzan and R. Foot. Routledge, London.
- Gill, B. and J. Reilly, 2007. 'The Tenuous Hold of China Inc. in Africa'. *Washington Quarterly* 30(3), 37-52.
- Giry, S., 2004. 'China's Africa strategy: Out of Beijing'. *New Republic*, 15 November, 19-23.
- Harris, S., 2004. 'China in the Global Economy'. In *Does China Matter? A Reassessment: Essays in Memory of Gerald Segal*, ed. B. Buzan and R. Foot. Routledge, London.
- Heginbotham, E., 2007. 'Evaluating China's Strategy towards the Developing World'. In *China and the Developing World: Beijing's Strategy for the Twenty First Century*, ed. J. Eisenman, E. Heginbotham and D. Mitchell. M. E. Sharp, New York.
- Human Rights First, 2008. 'China's Arms Sales to Sudan: Fact Sheet'. 2 August. <<http://www.humanrightsfirst.org>>.
- ICG (International Crisis Group), 2008. *China's Thirst for Oil*. ICG Asia Report no. 153. International Crisis Group Press, Brussels.
- ICISS (International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty), 2001. *The Responsibility to Protect*. International Development Research Centre, Ottawa.
- International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect, 2009. 'An Introduction to R2P'. <<http://www.responsibilitytoprotect.org/index.php/pages/2>>.
- Johnson, Douglas H., 2003. *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil War*. James Currey, Oxford.
- Karumbidza, J. B., 2007. 'Win-Win Economic Cooperation: Can China save Zimbabwe's Economy?' In *African Perspectives on China in Africa*, ed. F. Manji and S. Marks. Cape Town, Fahamu.
- Kim, S., ed., 1994. *China and the World: Chinese Foreign Relations in the Post-Cold War Era*. Westview, Boulder.
- Kruger, N., 2007. 'Liberation from Constitutional Constraints: Land Reform in Zimbabwe'. *SAIS Review* 42(2), 63-76.

- Large, D., 2007. 'Arms, Oil and Darfur: The Evolution of Relations between China and Sudan'. Sudan Issue Brief no. 7. Small Arms Survey, Geneva.
<http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/files/portal/spotlight/sudan/sudan_publications.html>.
- Mamdani, M., 2008. 'Lessons from Zimbabwe'. *London Review of Books*.
<http://www.lrb.co.uk/v30/n23/mamd01_.html>.
- Naidu, S., 2007. 'The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC): What Does the Future Hold?' *China Report* 43(3), 283-96.
- Pham, J. P., 2007. 'Panda's in the Heart of Darkness: Chinese Peacekeepers in Africa'. *World Defence Review*,
<<http://worlddefensereview.com/pham102507.shtml>>.
- Reno, W., 2001. 'How Sovereignty Matters: International Markets and the Political Economy of Local Politics in Weak States'. In *Intervention and Transnationalism in Africa: Global-Local Networks of Power*, ed. T. Callaghy, R. Kassimir and R. Lotham. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Rone, J., 2003. *Sudan, Oil and Human Rights*. Human Rights Watch, New York.
- Ross, M. L., 2001. 'Does Oil Hinder Democracy?' *World Politics* 53(3), 325-61.
- Schmitz, H. P. and K. Sikkink, 2002. 'International Human Rights'. In *Handbook of International Relations*, ed. B. A. Simons, W. B. Carlsnaes and T. Risse. Sage, London.
- Seymore, J. D., 1998. 'Human Rights in Chinese Foreign Relations'. In *China and the World: Chinese Foreign Policy Faces the New Millennium*, ed. S. S. Kim. Westview, Boulder.
- Shelton, G., 2001. 'China and Africa: Building an Economic Partnership'. *South African Journal of International Affairs* 8(2), 111-19.
- Smith, B., 2004. 'Oil Wealth and Regime Survival in the Developing World, 1960-1999'. *American Journal of Political Science* 48(2), 232-46.
- Snow, P., 1995. 'China and Africa: Consensus and Camouflage'. In *Chinese Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice*, ed. T. Robinson and D. Shambough. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Taylor, I., 1998. 'China's Foreign Policy Towards Africa in the 1990s'. *Journal of Modern African Studies* 36(3), 443-60.
- —, 2004. 'The "All-weather Friend"? Sino-African Interaction in the Twenty-first Century'. In *Africa in International Politics External Involvement on the Continent*, ed. Ian Taylor and Paul Williams. Routledge, London.

- —, 2005. 'Beijing's Arms and Oil Interests in Africa'. *China Brief* 5(21), 5-7.
- —, 2006. 'China's Oil Diplomacy in Africa'. *International Affairs* 82(5), 937-59.
- —, 2007. 'China and Africa: The Real Barriers to Win-Win'. *Foreign Policy in Focus*. <<http://www.fpif.org/fpiftxt/4067>>.
- —, 2008. 'Sino-African Relations and the Problem of Human Rights'. *African Affairs* 107(426), 63-87.
- Townsend, J. and R. W. Copson, 2005. *Zimbabwe: Current Issues*. Congressional Research Service report. Library of Congress, Washington, DC.
- UNCTAD and UNDP (UN Conference on Trade and Development and UN Development Programme), 2007. *Asian Foreign Direct Investment in Africa: Towards a New Era of Cooperation among Developing Nations*. UNCTAD/UNDP, New York.
- UNDP (United Nations Development Programme), 2006. 'Achieving the MDGs and Reducing Human Poverty'. <http://www.sd.undp.org/focus_poverty_reduction.htm>.
- UNGA (UN General Assembly). 2005. 2005 World Summit Outcome, 60th Session, A/RES/60/1.
- Van der Wath, K., 2004. 'Enter the Dragon: China's Strategic Importance and Potential for African Business'. *Convergence* 5(4), 72-75.
- Wan, M., 2005. 'Democracy and Human Rights in Chinese Foreign Policy Motivation and Behavior'. In *China Rising: Power and Motivation in Chinese Foreign Policy*, ed. Y. Deng and F. Wang. Rowman & Littlefield, Oxford.
- Wenping, H., 2007. 'The Balancing Act of China's Africa Policy'. *China Security* 3(3), 23-40.
- Youde, J. R., 2007. 'Why Look East? Zimbabwean Foreign Policy and China'. *Africa Today* 53(3), 3-19.