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# China-Africa Relations and the Global Village: Diplomatic Perspective

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What I'd like to do is run very, very quickly through our analysis of the reasons for China's interest in Africa, Africans' interest in China, and some of the concerns both we and the Africans share with China's approach. But then I want to focus on how we engage China on African issues, how we manage the practical aspects of diplomacy with a rising power on the continent.

To begin with what the military call the "BLUF", or bottom line up front, it is this: China has real interests in Africa, so it is normal that China would be involved in Africa. That's not surprising. That's not frightening. That's reality. The challenge for the U.S. is how to manage our relationship with China not as a new player in Africa, because it is not, but as a more active and potentially influential player.

As this conference attests, the topic of China in Africa has been a hot one for the past several years. And China's involvement in the continent has increased. Notably, in November 2006 the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation in Beijing drew 43 heads of state and representatives from 5 other African nations'—more than normally attend an African Union summit! In February 2007, Chinese President Hu toured Africa—his third such trip in as many years. Yet, as President Bush remarked during his visit to Africa, China's involvement in Africa shouldn't be seen as a "zero-sum game" characterized primarily as a competition with the United States. The challenge is to encourage China to become involved in Africa in a way that supports international norms and demonstrates that China is operating in the international system as a responsible stakeholder.

## **Chinese Interests in Africa**

Why is China more involved in Africa? There are three interests primarily driving China: access to resources, access to markets, and pursuit of diplomatic allies.

As you have surely heard over the past two days, China's rapid growth has led to a voracious appetite for the commodities that feed industrial and manufacturing production. Africa is a key source of these commodities. Africa now supplies some 30 percent of China's oil imports, with Angola its lead supplier. The Chinese are the largest foreign investors in Sudan. China imported over \$1.9 billion worth of goods from Sudan in 2006. Most of this was crude oil. And there are many other examples of resources [imported] from Africa—from Gabonese timber to Zimbabwean platinum.

Sub-Saharan [Africa] also represents a market of some 800 million people, with recent average GDP [Gross Domestic Product] growth of more than 6 percent annually. China's trade with sub-Saharan Africa has increased ten-fold over the past decade. Based on current trends, China will become sub-Saharan Africa's largest trading partner in 2011.

Finally, China has an interest in cultivating diplomatic allies among sub-Saharan Africa's 48 countries. China wants to reduce the number of countries with diplomatic relations with Taiwan. (Five African nations currently recognize Taiwan, with Chad switching to recognize Beijing in August 2006.) More broadly, China sees sub-Saharan Africa as a significant pool of support in the UN [United Nations] and

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other international bodies. After all, in 1971 it was African votes that seated Beijing and ousted Taipei in the United Nations.

### **China's Appeal in Africa**

China appeals to Africa as well. China offers a market for African goods, albeit mostly from extractive industries. Overall, Asia accounts for 27% of Africa's exports.

China's aid programs are attractive to Africans in some ways. China offers aid to African governments with no strings attached. China funds visible and much-needed infrastructure projects—railroads, bridges, dams—at a time when Western governments have largely shifted away from this form of development assistance. (I should point out, however, that the United States is getting back into the infrastructure game through the Millennium Challenge Corporation, some of whose compacts emphasize infrastructure.) China shows little compunction to work with African governments that have poor records on governance, transparency, and respect for human rights, a key distinction when compared to U.S. and Western criteria for development assistance. China enjoys a dual status, as both a rising power and a developing country; some Africans believe the Chinese better understand their development challenges.

Finally, China is also active in security assistance programs. This includes not only military sales and transfers but also Chinese support for UN peacekeeping operations [PKOs]. The Chinese have contributed 1300 peacekeepers to PKOs across Africa.

### **Challenges to Africa-China Collaboration**

Of course both we and many Africans share some concerns about the nature of China's involvement. There is concern that China is dumping low-priced goods in Africa, undercutting the development of local industries and causing trade to be lopsided. This has been evident in the attitude of South African trade unions eager to protect manufacturing jobs at home. There is concern that, while China supports infrastructure projects across Africa, there is little technology transfer or local job creation. Such projects typically employ workers imported from China. Chinese projects often pay lax attention to environmental and worker rights standards. Chinese investments and labor practices became an issue in Zambia's Presidential election in fall 2006, with a prominent opposition official voicing strong criticism. Finally, there is concern that China's general unwillingness to coordinate its aid programs with other donors also reduces the overall benefits of multilateral initiatives. In Congo, announcement of a loan of \$5 billion to \$9 billion provoked concern not because of Chinese involvement but because of lack of transparency regarding the terms of the loan and because no effort was made to consult with the IMF [International Monetary Fund] or other donors on the implications of the loan for Congo's participation in the Highly Indebted Poor Country [HIPC] initiative.

The willingness of China to look the other way in dealing with non-democratic regimes with poor human rights records increasingly puts China at odds not just with Western donors but also with the African consensus that these are important matters. The African Union Charter and the New Partnership for African Development emphasize good governance; Africans consider democracy, economic transparency, and respect for human rights necessary for sustainable development.

### **The U.S. Approach**

The U.S. approach to China in Africa and elsewhere is to engage China in dialogue at a variety of levels as part of a long term effort to influence Chinese behavior to conform to that of a responsible stakeholder.

First, in the field, through our embassies, we meet regularly with Chinese diplomats, compare notes on developments in the host country, and share analysis. We actively look for areas of program cooperation,

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including health and agriculture projects. I think our relationship with Chinese diplomats is steadily expanding. My own, admittedly anecdotal experience, is that the Chinese are sending a new generation of increasingly high quality diplomatic personnel to Africa. They have regional expertise, excellent language skills, and a much greater openness to contact and exchange with other missions than I saw even ten years ago.

Second, on specific, high-profile issues, we of course engage in in-depth policy discussion with the Chinese through our capitals, through the UN Security Council, and through many other contacts. Sudan is a good example of such an effort. It has been the subject of frequent discussion in the Security Council. China was helpful in supporting the November 2006 agreement brokered by then Secretary General Kofi Annan in which Khartoum agreed to accept a hybrid African Union–United Nations peacekeeping force. China voted for the resolution creating this force and has committed to contribute a 300-person engineering contingent, of which about 100 have arrived. As part of our engagement with China on Sudan, former U.S. Special Envoy Andrew Natsios traveled twice to Beijing and consulted regularly with his Chinese colleagues. New Special Envoy Richard Williamson met with Chinese Special Envoy for Africa in Khartoum in February. So we’re engaging the Chinese through multiple points. And we think this patient pressure is producing results, along with efforts by U.S. lawmakers and NGOs [Non-Governmental Organizations] to highlight the need for China to use its influence with Khartoum.

Finally, at the strategic level, we step back periodically to meet with the Chinese to identify areas of shared interest and coordinate our efforts. We do this in a framework of regular dialogues, the most important of which are the State Department led “Senior Dialogue”, which focuses on political and security issues, and the U.S. Treasury led “Strategic Economic Dialogue”, which deals with bilateral and global economic issues.

Overall, the U.S. and China have a developing relationship with regard to Africa. As part of our “Senior Dialogue” with the Chinese, Assistant Secretary for African Affairs Jendayi Frazer traveled to Beijing in November 2005 to meet with her Chinese counterparts and discuss Africa; and she met with them again in March 2007 in Washington. In September, Ambassador Ruth Davis, the Chief of Staff of the Bureau of African Affairs, traveled to China for a series high-level meetings and public appearances aimed at explaining U.S.-Africa relations. We expect such an ongoing, high-level, long-term engagement with the Chinese to continue. The next meeting of the Senior Dialogue on Africa is scheduled for later this spring in Beijing.

The Chinese think long-term, and we should expect it to take time to build a relationship of trust with them on African issues. The United States treats China as a serious player, among many others, in Africa. We encourage China to work with us and other countries in a common effort to build and strengthen the global system and promote peace and prosperity. We urge China to take responsibility in the global system commensurate with China’s rising profile and influence.

China is a rising strategic power throughout the world. China’s outlook and interests are increasingly global—and this includes Africa. The Chinese, among many others, will continue to be important actors on the continent.

I want to reiterate President Bush’s comment that China’s presence in Africa is not a zero-sum game for the United States. We see opportunities to collaborate with China in Africa in the areas of: agriculture, infrastructure development, healthcare, and security affairs.

We are urging China to engage cooperatively with international donors for a rules-based approach to aid that: strengthens institutions, promotes good governance, and ensures transparency.

If appropriately coordinated with other major players on the continent, we believe China can play a positive role as a responsible stakeholder in Africa.