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## **Darfur - China's Economic and Diplomatic Policy Pays Off**

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Realising that its almost unqualified support for Sudan was hurting its image, China balanced its thirst for oil versus international obligations and in the process, convinced Sudan to accept UN peacekeepers on its soil.

China has quietly changed its Darfur policy from a laid-back approach to a behind-the-scenes diplomacy.

Before the passing of UN Security Council Resolution 1769 authorising the \$2 billion (Sh130 billion) a year, 26,000-strong United Nations-African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID), China arranged low-key meetings with Sudan to discuss the deployment.

For a country that has been Sudan's staunchest diplomatic protector, largest trading partner and a leading investor, the shift is crucial.

Beijing has asserted its role and position as a world power by mediating the Darfur crisis. Significantly, this is China's first time in its 35 years at UN Security Council to convince a sovereign country to accept a UN peace keeping force in its territory.

With the Olympics in Beijing next year already attracting more international scrutiny of Chinese affairs, Beijing is styling up and doesn't want to be associated with a repressive regime.

China's influence in Khartoum is second to none and could be decisive in resolving the four-year Darfur conflict which has killed an estimated 200,000 to 400,000 people, displacing 2.5 million others in camps strewn across Darfur if not as refugees in Chad.

While it has played a crucial role in getting Khartoum to agree on deployment of UNAMID, China should now pressure President al-Bashir and the rebel groups to begin a political process that will see all parties sign and respect a new comprehensive peace agreement.

The People's Republic's evidently strong alliance with Sudan is driven by its oil interests. Chinese Petroleum companies have been operating in the country since the departure of western oil majors in the mid-1990s.

In the process, Beijing has deftly filled the diplomatic and economic vacuum, treating the al Bashir regime as a strategic stepping stone to not only the oil fields in South Sudan and Darfur, but also in Chad and Central African Republic.

The 2007 United Nations Commodity Trade Statistics Database (UNCOMTRADE) records that China represents as much as 64 per cent of Khartoum's trade volume.

Between 1999 and 2006, oil exports to China increased from 266,126 tons to more than 6.5 million tons. A report to European Parliament on China's energy policy in sub-Saharan Africa notes that in 2005 and 2006, China imported 47 per cent of Sudan's total oil production.

China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC), the largest foreign investor so far in Sudan channeled more than \$4 billion (Sh264 billion) into the country. It is also the main shareholder in the Greater Nile Petroleum Company (GNPOC), Sudan's national oil company.

Accordingly, CNPC has acquired several oil exploitation concessions with a near monopoly over a vast oil block in Darfur.

Apart from oil, Chinese companies are doing business in other areas. The Petroleum and Natural Gas Exploration and Development Corporation has implemented a polypropylene exploitation project in Khartoum. Half of the shares in the Khartoum Chemical Industry Company are owned by Beijing which wholly owns the Sudanese Petrochemical Trade Project.

With \$149 (Sh10 billion) million loan of China's Central Bank, Harbin Power Company constructed the Qarre I hydropower station, about 50 kilometres north of Khartoum which it also manages. Jointly with Qarre II, it will produce 330 megawatts. With an 85 per cent shareholding, the Chinese energy giant also participated in the construction of the 300 megawatt Kajbar Dam.

A 315-men multi-functional engineering unit from China is expected to be deployed in Darfur in early October 2007.

To its credit, China has balanced its economic interests, international pressure and insecurity to protect its interests in Darfur and the entire region. Thus, its role in Darfur and readiness not invoke the sovereignty card and "it is only business" attitude should be seen in the light of protecting its economic interests.

China's foreign policy to Africa has evolved over the years. During the Cold War, Beijing supported groups that fought alleged Western imperialists.

When it assumed membership of the UN Security Council in 1971, China opposed all peacekeeping operations in Africa. After the Cold War, this position was replaced with a more moderate approach that viewed Africa's conflicts as born of structural violence, and hence deserving to be resolved as such. While supporting the UN peace keeping missions, it did so on condition of a well defined and restricted mandate of maintaining sovereignty.

Non controversial peacekeeping operations - Somalia (UNSOM I), Mozambique (ONUMUZ), Rwanda (UNAMIR) and Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) got its green light. When the Security Council decided to dispatch troops in Liberia (UNMIL) in 2003, China even offered to contribute to this mission.

Since then, Beijing gradually increased the number of blue helmets to 1,800 in 2007. China's financial support to peacekeeping by the UN and regional organisations, such as the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), has also increased significantly.

However, China has kept off missions it has perceived as infringing on the host country's sovereignty. It vehemently opposed the European-driven Operation Turquoise in Rwanda; when Washington gave up its impartiality and called for broadened mandate of UNSOM and when France demanded an increase of the troop levels of the UN operation in Ivory Coast in 2004.

It is noteworthy that Beijing did not veto these interventions, but abstained and stayed away from the implementation.

China has been accused of complicity in Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, and Zimbabwe conflicts. In 2001, an expert panel of the UN Security Council pointed at the indirect involvement of Chinese companies in the exploitation of forests in eastern Congo. In 2002, the International Non-governmental organisation, Global Witness, accused China of sponsoring violence in Liberia by purchasing hard wood from various warlords.

In 2002, the Zimbabwean government started a brutal crackdown of political opponents. While the Western Countries applied sanctions on the government, Beijing developed strong partnership with President Robert Mugabe, selling him arms and supporting him economically.

In 2004, at the height of the bloodshed in Congolese Province of Ituri, Beijing shipped firearms to Uganda, a key party in Eastern Congo.

Darfur suffered the same fate when it exploded in February 2003 due to violence perpetuated by a mixture of Government forces, state-sponsored militias and Darfur rebels.

However, China could not afford to stay detached for long due to its close financial ties with Bashir's government.

China never opposed the deployment of UN troops but it consistently called for involvement and consent of Khartoum, even as the Sudanese government was party to the conflict was pushed to a corner when the conflict spilled over to the region.

Beijing had restored diplomatic ties with Chad in August 2006 and signed oil deals with it in early 2007 amid fears that the Darfur violence would trickle to southern Sudan, where also it has oil interests.

Lastly, China feared that a fully fledged UN intervention would hamper its economic prospects with other regional countries. Thus, with economic interests in Libya, Ethiopia and Sudan, regional security not only in Horn of Africa but also in central Africa is vital to Beijing.

Faced with an imminent boycott of 2008 Beijing Olympics, the resultant economic loss and bad publicity, China has played both the political and diplomatic cards leading to the adoption of Resolution 1769 authorising UNAMID.

While it abstained from voting Resolution 1706, which allowed deployment of 17,000 UN peace keepers, unless President Bashir agreed, Beijing didn't oppose a clause that UNMIS should play a role in the preparations for and conduct of the 2010 referendum. Knowing China's opposition to Taiwan's sovereignty, this is remarkable since South Sudan might become autonomous.

When Resolution 1706 failed, China was back in the driver's seat. It continued massaging Khartoum and at the same time pressing al Bashir to take a decisive action in Darfur.

Buoyed by the fact that time was running out with increased international pressure, China had to urgently appease Khartoum for the sake of its economic interests while stabilising Darfur at the same time.

The idea was to persuade Khartoum from enticing other investors. In December 2005 and January 2006, India approved various aid packages to Sudan. In return, President Bashir gave them more oil concessions and praised the Asia-African relationship.

Early 2006, Malaysia's oil giant Petronas embarked on an oil project in Sudan while Russia set up a business relationship with Khartoum. These movements made the Chinese, in May 2006, to conclude new financial and military deals with Khartoum.

Economic interests overrode justice when it came to voting on the list of individuals to be taken to the International Criminal Court (ICC). Beijing preferred them to be tried by Sudan local courts.

It also objected to the imposing of an arms embargo on militias operating in Darfur. In drafting resolution 1556 on the arms embargo, China agreed on the need to disarm the Janjaweed factions, but opposed restrictions that would affect the regular armed forces. The same argument was presented during the discussion of the proposal for the inclusion of a comprehensive arms ban in resolution 1591.

In April 2007, Beijing refused to approve a new report of the Expert Panel to the Sanctions Committee. This document described Khartoum's violation of the prohibiting of the transfer of arms to Darfur and recommended the tightening of the arms embargo imposed by the Security Council and further restrictions on activities involving illicit weapons, regardless of who was responsible.

Economic curbs as well crashed into Chinese resistance. Beijing has sold helicopter gunships, transport helicopters and military trucks to Sudan, which have been used in recent attacks on civilians in Darfur.

Late 2006 was a busy year for Beijing when it dangled a carrot minus the stick. During the High Level Consultation on the Situation in Darfur in Addis Ababa on 16 November 2006, China intervened to obtain the acceptance of the hybrid force.

Wang Guangya, China's ambassador to the UN was reported to have told Khartoum Foreign Minister Lam Akol that there was no hidden agenda in the effort to introduce a stronger peacekeeping force.

Prior to this meeting, several high-ranking Chinese officials had already discussed the different options when President Omar al-Bashir arrived in Beijing for the Forum on the China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) Summit. His Chinese counterpart, Hu Jintao, publicly appealed to Khartoum to find an appropriate settlement, maintain stability, and constantly improve the humanitarian conditions in the region.

This statement was sustained during President Hu's visit to Sudan in early February 2007 that Annan's hybrid plan had to be respected. This marked the first time China was actively persuading a sovereign government to assent the deployment of blue helmets in its territory.

Forced to reconcile its business agenda with peace and security in Africa, Chinese President Hu Jintao, has promised to partly fund UNAMID. It is imperative that on June 15, 2006, the Chinese government granted AMIS \$3.5 million (Sh231 million) in budgetary support and humanitarian emergency aid. From the sum, \$2.5m (Sh165 million) was to be allocated to assisting refugees and \$1m (Sh66 million) for budgetary support of the African Union's Peace and Security Council.

While welcoming passing of the Darfur resolution, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Liu Jianchao said it was an "important step to promote the process of resolving the Darfur issue."

China is thus pursuing a two-pronged strategy that entails a balanced combination of political processes and the peacekeeping mission to promote a complete settlement to the Darfur conflict. And, together with the international community, China should immediately put pressure on Khartoum and the rebel groups not to renege on the peace agreements.

China's efforts in Darfur however are very state-centric, leaving out the rebels and other regional actors, which is why the chairman of the Sudan Liberation Movement, Abdelwahid al-Nur, has accused China of underwriting Khartoum's killings in Darfur.

According to al Nur, China's partiality in the conflict creates a very dangerous situation for her investments in Sudan and all over Africa in the long run.

Definitely China's intervention in Darfur has succeeded, for the Asian power has secured its economic interests in Sudan while taking the credit for getting Khartoum to accept the UN peacekeepers.

Worldwide, China was praised for its "constructive policy." It not only gained moral credibility among African countries but also strengthened its position in multilateral forums like UN, Arab League and AU.

China's diplomatic success notwithstanding, the insecurity in Darfur has forced humanitarian agencies to scale back their activities drastically. Consensus on the way out of the mire seems to be coalescing around first, diplomatic pressure on Khartoum to rein in the militias, halt its proxy war against its neighbours and cease aerial bombardment of civilians in villages, IDP camps within Darfur and refugee camps in Chad.

The second important factor in the search for a consensus is the removal of any diplomatic and resource-related barriers to the deployment of UNAMID force to protect civilians and sustained dialogue within and between the various parties to the Darfur conflict as the best solution.

Thirdly, Africa and its external partners - including China - have to stabilise the region and create conditions for a return of the displaced and more promising political negotiations.

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