

China's Military Presence in Africa: Implications for Africa's Woobling Peace

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Abstract: *This paper surveys the military aspect of the age-long interaction between China and Africa, and how it impacts the peace of Africa. Issues that border on China-Africa relations have no doubt gained currency in academic discourses centering mainly on trade, and economic related factors. But the military dimensions of the relationship, especially China's military involvement in Africa are passing with minimal scholarly attention, yet needing examination. Within the general ambit of China's expanding engagement in Africa, this paper discusses the military factor. It historically contextualizes China-African military links, and argues that China's continued arms sales to Africa's problem areas, cynical military relations and support to rogue and blood-thirst regimes, and her double-dealing peacekeeping roles in Africa, do not help the peace condition of Africa's wobbling states*

Keywords: *Sino-African Relation, Arms Sales, Military Presence, Africa's Peace, Conflict*

Introduction

The Chinese approach to foreign relations is officially termed "noninterference in domestic affairs". But Beijing's recent military involvements in Africa and the handling of the conflict situation in places like Sudan shows that China is learning the limitations of noninterference. Because of strategic interests, China is enmeshed in cutting deals with

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bad governments and providing them with arms." Arms sales and military relationships help China gain important African allies in the United Nations—including Sudan, Zimbabwe, and Nigeria—for its political goals, including preventing Taiwanese independence and diverting attention from its own human rights record. To meet its oil and mineral needs, Beijing has consistently delivered arms to pariah states in Africa especially the conflict-torn zones which have come under western sanctions and United Nations' embargo, in their attempt to address the horrendous massacre and genocidal killings that have characterized the politics of those areas. Severally, China has been implicated in the proliferation of arms in Africa which either provoke conflicts or exacerbate the existing ones (Tongkeh, 2009, Alden, 2005, Taylor 2005, *SAVEDARFUR*, 2007). Many Chinese firms were accused of smuggling illegal arms: Chinese AK-47, machine guns and rocket propelled grenade launchers into Liberia, Sierra-Leone and Ivory Coast where rebels and mercenaries were involved in civil wars. These arms gain faster inroads owing to their relatively cheap costs. China sold 55million dollars worth of arms to Sudan between 2003 and 2006, flouting United Nations arms embargo (Shinn, 2008). It was with Chinese assistance that the Sudanese government built an arms factory in Khartoum at the heat of the war years in Sudan. When Zimbabwe came under western sanctions, its president Robert Mugabe turned east to China for military assistance. Faced with E U and U S embargo, Mugabe in 2004 bought fighter aircraft and military vehicles from China. The depth of the dubious military transactions between China and Mugabe was unveiled in the scandal involving a Chinese ship- An Yue Jiang, carrying weapons destined for Zimbabwe, but were stopped in South Africa in April 2008 (Brautigam, 2009). As China expands its engagement throughout Africa, it increasingly finds itself involved in African internal affairs militarily. This involvement takes essentially three forms: Chinese arms sales which make their way into conflict zones, Chinese participation in UN Peacekeeping operations, Chinese responses to the case of kidnapping of Chinese nationals or attacks on Chinese facilities. On what the Chinese military roles in Africa truly portend, and how it impacts on the peace of the continent, opinions tend to differ. Some argue

that through its military deals with Africa, that China offers security alternative to the west for African states, and that through its deployment of peacekeeping troops to Africa's boiling areas, China's military presence in Africa has impacted positively on the continent (Shinn, 2009, Kurlantzick 2009). On the contrary, this paper argues that with arms originating from China into Africa's troubled zones, and in defiance to the United Nations embargo, Chinese determination to militarily protect its economic interests in Africa at the expense of millions of lives of helpless Africans who either suffer death or are internally displaced, conflicts in Africa have been exacerbated. This unarguably has remained a negative impact on the much needed but lacked peace of Africa.

Historicizing China's Military Presence in Africa in the Pre-Independence Era

China's military relations with Africa stretches back to 1950s when China gave its support to revolutionary and independence movements in Africa. The Asian-African Conference at Bandung, Indonesia was seminal in the Sino-African relationship (Larkin 1971). The conference agenda captured the vexing issues of colonialism, imperialism and the hegemonic position of the Western powers. What the participating nations had in common was their shared history and perception of white dominance by the West (Foster et al, 2009; Looy, 2006). Thus, the conference was significant in spurring anti-imperialist and anti-colonial struggle of the colonially subjugated and imperialistically plundered African and Asian people. The conference marked the start of definite interest by the Peoples Republic of China in the overall African affairs and its anti-colonial struggle in particular. Beginning from this conference, China began gradually, its military involvement in the continent of Africa. From 1957 until Algerian independence, China supplied the Algeria's National Liberation Front, FLN, with military weapons and training in Angola's fight against the French colonial power. China offered to send 280,000 volunteers to Egypt during the Suez crisis (Taylor 2006). Owing to the

deteriorated relationship between China and the West (Chiefly USA) on one hand, and the Soviet Union on the other hand, China saw disruption and promotion of unrest in Africa as central to China's policy of frustrating the ambitions of the United States and the Soviet Union. It is on record that Chinese military instructors made Ghana a base for training guerrilla fighters in 1964, and that Rhodesian freedom fighters received training in China (Chuka 2010). Taylor (2006) contains that from Rhodesia, ZANU fighters were taken to China for military training. A pocketbook found on the body of a guerrilla fighter killed in Sinoia skirmish, showed that he had been a pupil at Nanjing's Military College in 1965. Eduardo Mondlane's Mozambique Liberation Front, FRELIMO, fighters received free weapons from China and adopted Chinese tactics of guerrilla warfare. Shinn (2008), records that from the early 1960s FRELIMO began sending delegations to China. Within the framework of the Organization for African Unity, OAU, China equally coordinated its military training for liberation groups struggling for freedom from colonial subjugation. It provided the organization's liberation committee with 75% of all the military aid it received externally between 1971 and 1972 (Shinn 2008, Taylor 2006). China trained and supplied arms to a number of losing opposition and revolutionary groups in Africa. It gave early and initial support to the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola, MPLA. But as Angola strengthened its ties with the Soviet Union, China shifted its military assistance in the late 1960s to the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola, UNITA. Jonas Savimbi, UNITA's leader reportedly received military training in China (Rotberg 2008). Not many years after, China in a dramatic shift, had its support focused on the National Front for the Liberation of Angola, FNLA, and its leader, Holden Roberto. By the early 70s, China had its 112 military instructors deployed to Zaire, to train the FNLA. It was notable that China ignored its rhetoric on noninterference, and got involved in Africa militarily

China's Recent Military Presence in Africa

China's recent military involvement in Africa takes essentially the forms of selling of Chinese arms, construction

of small arms factory in a number of African states, participation in UN peacekeeping operations, and defense of Chinese oil investments and Chinese personnel who often come under heavy attacks in Africa's conflict zones. China is a major supplier of small arms and light weapons to Africa. As noted by Alden (2007), military cooperation and growth of arms sales are parts and aspects of China's relations with African governments, especially those under threat owing to civil war, insurgency or even domestic opposition but which are barred from obtaining weapons from traditional western sources. Chinese AK-47 assault rifles are common in national armies as well as among armed rebel groups such as those in eastern Congo. They also appeared in Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, and in Chad and Darfur in the Sudan. China's arms sales to Africa stood at \$ 1.3billion in 2003 (Alden 2007). From 2000 to 2003 China delivered about 13% of all arms to sub-Saharan Africa, the second highest provider after Russia. From 2004 to 2007, China's percentage increased to almost 18%, featuring the delivery of artillery pieces, armored cars, minor surface combatants, supersonic combat aircraft and other aircrafts (Grimmett 2008). While Chinese supplies may not be the highest, Chinese weaponry has nevertheless proved to be significant in some Africa's bloodiest conflicts, where decades of civil wars have provided a welcome market for foreign arms merchants. The classic contemporary example of China's weapon-exporting policy in Africa is China's involvement in Sudan's long war. In Sudan Beijing pursued a policy that was entirely based on economic interest, and have supplied the Sudanese government with fighter aircraft and an assortment of weaponry (Taylor 2006, Shinn 2009, Alden 2007, and Brown & Sriam 2008). The Chinese have set up three small arms factories in Sudan that produce light weapons for use in the region as well as in Uganda.

Beginning from 2000, Mugabe's Zimbabwe was faced with a series of punitive measures by the Western countries. Faced with increased international isolation and economic crisis reaching epic proportions, president Mugabe in 2005 announced a new "Look East" policy, turning its back to the West, and facing the East "from where the sun rises" (Brautigam 2009). Despite the country's dangerous turmoil,

and instability, China supplied Zimbabwe with about \$ 28million in arms between 2005 and 2007 (SIPRI, 2010). Aside selling of light weapons, China built a weapons factory for Zimbabwe (Meidan 2006). In 2005 China sold to Zimbabwe, 6 jets for its air force. This was soon followed by 12 jet fighters and 100 military vehicles, valued at about \$ 240million (Brown and Sriram 2008). China supplied tanks, artillery, armored vehicles, antiaircraft batteries, riot control gear and radio-jamming equipments (Eisenman 2008). Just after Zimbabwe's disputed March 2008 election, a Chinese freighter, An Yue Jiang, was returned to China after unions in South Africa and neighbouring countries refused to offload the cargo. Four of the thirty-six containers contained ammunition and rocket-propelled grenades intended for trans-shipment to Zimbabwe (Brautigam 2009). It was later reported that in that same year, that tones of that same ammunition were flown into Zimbabwe from the Democratic Republic of Congo. The Nigerian government's frustration with US congressional interference in the delivery of patrol boats for the troubled Niger Delta contributed to its decision to switch to Chinese military equipment. China granted Nigeria \$ 1million in 2001 to upgrade its military facilities. A \$ 251million contract was negotiated between Nigeria and China to purchase twelve F-7M Airguard multipurpose combat aircraft and three FT-7NI dual-seat fighter trainer aircraft (Chau 2007). The deal included twenty three PL-9 short-range air-to-air missiles, unguided rockets, and bombs for antitank and runway denial missions, and training twelve Nigerian pilots in China. Ghana received the sum of \$ 1.7million from China in 2007 for the upgrading of its defense and military equipment. Earlier to this, the two countries inaugurated a combined military-police barracks at Burma Camp in Accra, financed by a \$ 3.8million interest free loan. China sells aircraft to Egypt and Kenya (Hellstrom 2009). Light strike aircraft such as the K-8 and the JF-17 multi-role combat aircraft have been sold to Algeria, Botswana, and Morocco (Grimmett 2008).

To sale or buy arms is not however by itself condemnable given especially the nature and order of international politics and practice (Morgenthau 1948, Waltz 2001). By supplying

African governments with military equipment, China will be helping to strengthen the military capacities of its key allies in Africa, and expand its influence in oil-producing countries. The prospects for significant revenue earnings from arms sales to Africa are relatively small (Hellstrom 2009). Such sales is viewed as one sure means of enhancing China's status as an international political power, and increasing its ability to obtain access to significant natural resources, especially oil (Smith 2008, Wendell 2009, Dijk 2009). What however makes Chinese arms deals with Africa to come under serious criticism is its practice of flouting and breaching United Nations arms embargo, and supplying to belligerent groups, thereby worsening the already bad peace conditions of those areas into where such weapons are exported.

The past decade saw widespread changes in China's foreign defense policy. The 2006 White Paper, *China's National Defense in 2006*, charges the People's Liberation Army (PLA) with "implementing the military strategy of active defense"—a term that has grown to provide justification for use of military force outside the PRC's borders. For the first time, the paper outlines the PLA's responsibilities to: Take the initiative to prevent and defuse crises and deter conflicts and wars, take part in international security cooperation, strengthen strategic coordination and consultation with major powers and neighboring countries, and conduct bilateral or multilateral joint military exercises and play an active part in maintaining global and regional peace and stability (Parenti 2009). Bolstered by the change in policy, China began to send her troops to UN peacekeeping operations in Africa. Chinese peacekeepers are deployed to United Nations peacekeeping operations worldwide, but their presence in Africa is striking. Of roughly 2,000 peacekeepers China has deployed around the world, on overage during the first nine months in 2008, 77 percent were in Africa. China is by far the largest contributor to Africa peacekeeping among the Security Council's permanent members, with 63 percent of total p-5 contributions to the continent (Qiang and Tian 2009). China's participation in the United Nations peacekeeping regime and composition of its deployments allow Beijing to develop and nurture its national interests,

maintain friendly relations with recipient governments, and at the same time project the image of a responsible stakeholder on the international stage. Sudan is a case in point. China has consistently opposed efforts within the Security Council to pressure or punish Khartoum, and in fact China has been among the large suppliers of weapons to the Sudanese government. Yet at the same time, it has deployed personnel to both United Nations Mission in Southern Sudan, and the hybrid African Union-UN Mission in Darfur (*SaveDarfur 2007*).

The composition of Chinese deployments is generally on the softer side of such military interventions. Of the total number of Chinese personnel contributed to missions around the globe, 5 percent are military observers, 14 percent are police, and 81 percent are troops (Parenti 2009). In Africa, the troop's component of China's contribution is even higher, at 91 percent. Troops carry out a variety of tasks and functions. In addition to combat units tasked with defending UN installations and personnel as well as local civilians in immediate danger, this component includes enabling units such as engineers, logistics staff, and medical personnel. Unlike the contingents of police and military observers which are composed of a mixture of personnel from all contributing countries, troops are deployed in their organic home units, which leave the contributing countries with substantial influence on their deployment whereabouts and, though rare, the ability to utilize those troops for projects other than those mandated by the mission (Levy 2009).

In Africa, the vast majority of China's peacekeeping troops fall within the category of enabling units. China's contribution to United Nations Mission in Darfur (UNAMID), consisted of a 315 member engineering contingent dispatched to help with the construction of camps, roads and bridges. Well diggers and relevant equipment was also sent by China to Darfur region to solve the problem of water shortage facing the hybrid African Union-United Nations force. Similarly in Southern Sudan, China contributed to UN Mission in Sudan 460 engineers, transport experts, and medical personnel. In all, according to the vice director of the

Peacekeeping Affairs office of China's Ministry of National Defense, Wei Yanwei, Chinese peacekeepers worldwide have built or repaired more than 200 bridges and 7, 500 kilometers of roads, airports, and water supply infrastructures, and they have treated nearly 50,000 local patients (*Buisness Day* 2004). The pattern is similar in Liberia where China's 530 peacekeeping troops consist of engineering, transportation, and medical staff. Of the approximately 200 Chinese peacekeepers in the Democratic Republic of Congo, 175 were engineers and 40 medical personnel who provided applauded medical support in Central Africa

While these various enabling units are tasked mainly with supporting the mission and its peacekeepers' needs, records show that in the process, many facilities, items of infrastructure, and services that benefit local populations are also being constructed and rehabilitated (Levy 2009, Harland 2004). In this aspect of peacekeeping, the soft security portion of nation building and reconstruction, the greatest opportunity lies for using soft power to promote China's wider national interests. Significantly, China's largest peacekeeping contributions in Africa are also where it has made large investments in natural resources, and where good government-to-government relations will ultimately resound to its economic interest.

Peace Implication of Chinese Military Roles in Africa

Peace is a prominent, core feature in China's official presentation of its purpose in international affairs and Africa. The importance of peace and resolving conflict is regularly invoked by Beijing, but this is not significant in China's engagement with Africa. China's Africa policy (2006), for example devotes just one paragraph to this area (Large 2008). Likewise the humanitarian and peace assistance China has provided, mostly in kind, is minor in comparison to its investments in Africa. Chinese government has not proactively sought to involve itself in Africa's peace processes, rather it has affirmed the primary responsibility of the international community and engaged as and when its interests have been threatened. Chinese companies in places

are reinforcing pre-existing resource-related conflict dynamics in Africa. For example, China's recent entry into the Nigerian oil sector has involved Chinese companies becoming caught up in conflict between the Nigerian state and militias, with China supplying fighter jets, missiles and training (Alden 2007). As such, the already wobbling peace condition of the continent has been negatively impacted upon by China's foray into Africa.

To meet its oil and mineral needs, Beijing has consistently delivered arms to pariah states in Africa especially the conflict-torn zones which have come under western sanctions and United Nations' embargo, in their attempt to address the horrendous massacre and genocidal killings that have characterized the politics of those areas. Severally, China has been implicated in the proliferation of arms in Africa which either provoke conflicts or exacerbate the existing ones (Tongkeh, 2009, Alden, 2005, Taylor 2005, *SaveDarfur*, 2007). Many Chinese firms were accused of smuggling illegal arms: Chinese AK-47, machine guns and rocket propelled grenade launchers into Liberia, Sierra-Leone and Ivory Coast where rebels and mercenaries were involved in civil wars. These arms gain faster inroads owing to their relatively cheap costs. China can thus be held responsible (alongside with others) for the death and destruction that Africa's various wars have visited upon the people of the continent. Such military involvement in ongoing civil wars and conflict situations in Africa is not conducive for peace in Africa. There is a very real danger that Beijing's supposed 'non-interference' stance merely masks the bottom line: the chase for profits and oil (Taylor, 2006). This has been carried on with nonchalance towards Africa's political stability and peace. As Ian Taylor noted, "unmoved by ...concerns and without fear of political consequences, Chinese government seems willing to fuel a small-arms race in sub-Saharan Africa to generate additional revenues for the PLA" It is a common knowledge that China employed military means to protect her economic interests in Sudan and elsewhere in Africa, thereby contributing to a steady degeneration of the already tenuous security and humanitarian situations in the continent. At the instance of attack on its oil installations in Kordofan, a Sudanese region neighbouring Darfur, Chinese

government reportedly deployed about 400 soldiers in civilian clothing, to protect its economic investment against the assault of the rebels (Gertz and Rowan 2004, Dijk 2009, Shinn 2008). This was the first time China directly got involved militarily in Africa's troubling domestic politics. While under attack in Ethiopia by the Ogaden Liberation Front, China was not to stand and watch its oil explorers die. Beijing's decision was to start defending and protecting its workers with armed guards (Puska 2008). In the Niger Delta in Nigeria, Chinese employees of Chinese oil companies have also been attacked. China concludes that such events make it difficult for China to maintain its non-interference stance (Dijk 2009). Hence China considered military presence in certain Africa countries, thereby becoming a part of Africa's exacerbating conflict situation rather than being a solution.

In Zimbabwe, oppressive rule has been sustained owing to some extent, China's substantial military support to president Robert Mugabe. It is on record that Mugabe raped democracy in Zimbabwe, sanctioned brutal gang violence against opposition parties, condoned the kidnapping and torture of human rights activists, and encouraged a chaotic land redistribution that delivered many farms into the hands of politicians who coveted them, rather than the landless poor. This tenuous power-sharing arrangement provoked violence in the country. Attempts by human rights activists and the international community to redress and halt this abuse was frustrated by Chinese continued military support to the dictator. With assured weaponry and military supply from China, the brutality inflicted by the supporters of Robert Mugabe and the ZANU-PF was to continue (Brautigam 2009, Dijk 2009). Despite the country's dangerous turmoil and instability, China supplied Zimbabwe with millions of dollars worth of arms. This supply was intended for Mugabe's more lethal crackdown on his political opposition. It is widely believed that China's military support and supplies prolonged Zimbabwe's crisis.

Darfur reveals the hollowness of the post-Holocaust promise of "never again". In Darfur for nearly three years, the Sudanese government together with militia proxies

committed widespread, systematic violence against the region's black African population. The violence was massive and often executed in broad daylight. Arab perpetrators displaced more than two million black Africans and claimed the lives of more than two hundred thousand civilians (Scott 2006). But what has been the role of China in this drama? China has played a direct role in selling arms to Sudan and in developing its weapons industry. Chinese arms sales rose twenty five fold within the Sudan's war years (*SaveDarfur* 2007). Much of this occurred in spite of United Nations Security Council's arm embargo. In spite of China's denials, evidences point to her indictment. Shell casings collected from various sites in Darfur suggest that most of the ammunition used by parties to the conflict in Darfur is manufactured in China (United Nations 2006). China has a huge investment in Sudanese economy, the oil sector in particular (Brautigam 2009, Dijk 2009, Rotberg 2008). China is the leading developer of Sudanese oil industry and major purchaser of Sudanese oil. Though Beijing regularly justify China's economic involvement in Sudan as being key to that country's development, but it is obvious that in the context of rising imperative for peace and multilateral efforts to halt the blood-thirsty Khartoum regime, the concentration of wealth and weapons among the Sudan's ruling elite by Chinese investment and arms deals, unconditionally feeds conflict. As the Sudanese erstwhile Deputy Central Bank governor, Elijah Aleng said, "When you exploit oil resources and nothing goes to the population, then you are financing the war against them with resources and that is negative" (*Sunday Tribune* 2007). With the help of its Muslim Janjaweed militia groups and the blessing of Bashir, the Sudanese Air Force has used Chinese-given weapons against defenseless villagers in Darfur (Scott 2006, Puska, 2007). There have been also persistent claims by independent aid groups that Sudanese government troops and rebels have used Chinese oil company airstrips to conduct bombing raids on villages and hospitals. The pilots of the Fatan A5 jets used in massacres against unarmed civilians in Darfur, were trained by China (Bonincontro 2010).

It was for sure, during China's presidency of the United Nations Security Council that Resolution 1769 was

passed, contributing as it appeared, to the peace of that highly disturbed part of Africa. But reports indicate that owing to her accruing economic gains from the sales of arms, China worked behind the scenes to significantly weaken the terms of the resolution (*SaveDarfur* 2007, Stakelbeck 2006). Working with Sudan, China succeeded in deleting language that would have set the stage for mandatory Security Council's targeted sanctions were Sudan to fail to cooperate in implementing the Resolution. The hybrid force's mandate to "seize and dispose" weapons found in Darfur in contravention of the arms embargo was diluted in the final text. The force was permitted merely to "monitor them" (*Small Arms Survey* 2007). China's prolonged reluctance to endorse United Nations entrance into Sudan, to halt the carnage and horrendous killings of thousands of especially children and women, was based on her deeply entrenched economic gains arising from exportation of military arms and oil exploration, but neatly cloaked under the noninterference rhetoric. The Chinese officials and media claimed that the "root causes of the Darfur conflict were poverty and lack of development" (Stakelbeck 2006: 4). Even if we admit the twin factors of poverty and lack of development as causal factors in the Darfur conflict, we ask: will a continued military support and supply of weapons to the already boiling Sudan vitiate or exacerbate the internecine situation? Denying any logic in the China's noninterference ploy, Stakebeck (2006: 4) concluded that "China's Sudan policy is manipulative and opportunistic..." Ignoring the displacement of an estimated 2 million Sudanese villagers and the murder of 180, 000 others for its economic gain, China worked to have it both ways. While it sold lethal military weapons to the government of Bashir, and protected it from UN sanctions, it gave humanitarian aid to the estranged Darfur. At best the resultant effect is that the peace that is a desideratum became rather distanced as the north and south civil war in Darfur became perpetuated. In like manner, while Ethiopia and Eritrea were towards war, Chinese corporations transferred a substantial share of 1 billion US dollars in weapons to both countries between 1998 and 2000 (Taylor 2005). Rather than dousing the conflict in Rwanda, China's arm deals with the belligerent groups worsened the already bad peace and security condition of that country. In 1995, a

Chinese ship carrying 152 tones of ammunition and light weapons was refused permission to unload in Tanzania. The cargo was destined for the Tutsi-dominated army of Burundi, and Tanzania was concerned that ethnic conflict there would be exacerbated by the arms shipment (Williams and Taylor 2005). China's delivery of these weapons goes with the tact of the final destinations being mislabeled and the weapons disguised as agricultural equipment (ODI, 1998). By these, China can be held responsible for impacting negatively on Africa's wobbling peace.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, Chinese arms exporters furnished Laurent Kabila with arms in 1997, and had been supplying the vexed and troubled Kinshasa with weapons. Sierra-Leone's brutal civil war was fuelled by extensive shipments of Chinese arms. Taylor (2005) notes that China has been Sierra-Leone's main arms supplier and stepped up shipments when the civil war began. Chinese arms deals in Sierra-Leone repeatedly broke United Nations sanctions and substantially helped to damage the country's aspiration for peace and development. One has to question the coherence and credibility of Chinese peacekeeping efforts in Africa when China otherwise pursues strategies which contribute to the eruption and prolongation of violent conflicts in the continent. For example, while China was an important troop-contributing country to the United Nations Mission in Liberia, its economic interests helped Charles Taylor to maintain himself in power. China imported almost half of Liberia's timber in 2000, and thus provided Taylor with considerable wherewithal (Tull, 2006). It was only in 2003 that China, an important buyer of Liberian timber brought itself to reluctantly nod through United Nations sanctions against Liberia which it had previously opposed on the devious grounds of "increased unemployment" in Liberia (Johnston 2004: 447)

The popular notion that China's peacekeeping involvement in Africa represents her interest in Africa's peace is at best abstract. Large (2008:37) argue rightly that "China's attitude to conflict resolution in Africa reflects contrasting policy priorities and economic interests". The importance of peace and resolving conflict is regularly

invoked by Beijing, but this is not a significant aspect of Chinese engagement in Africa. The instances where China has actively and substantially responded to conflict resolution and mediation efforts in Africa are few. It has not proactively sought to involve itself in peace process, rather it has affirmed the primary responsibility of the international community, and engaged as and when its personal interests have been threatened. And when it gets involved, the Chinese government operates only a secondary support role. While the Chinese contributions to peacekeeping and anti-piracy may be said to be positive for Africa, its arms sales have had negative implications for Africa's peace.

Chinese arms sales to Africa fuels arm race. Chinese specialists in heavy military equipment were reportedly sent to Equatorial Guinea to provide training for equipments that the country do not even have (Taylor 2005). This was presumably in order to sell such weapons to Equatorial Guinea for oil reasons. For about three months, Chinese trainers worked with the local army, yet Equatorial Guinea has no such heavy weapons. The import of this was that given the climbing oil prices and its accruing financial profits Beijing stepped in to offer Equatorial Guinea military weapons and training for the protection of its oil wells from Nigeria, and Cameroon. The possible resultant effect of such moves is the fuelling of "some sort of arms race in the Gulf of Guinea" (Williams and Taylor 2005:96). In 2004, China sold military weapons to Zimbabwe worth \$ 40million (Brooks & Shin 2006). This included 12 Chinese-made FC-1 fighter aircraft and 100 military vehicles. The FC-1 is a multipurpose fighter, targeted to serve as a challenge to the JAS-39 Gripen multipurpose fighters purchased by South Africa from Sweden (Shinn 2008). This transaction caused considerable apprehension in South Africa, and led to international concerns about a regional arms race.

The eastern DRC constitutes one of the longest-running conflicts in Africa, with attendant murderous killings. Accounts are numerous that Chinese small arms have contributed to the killing. Amnesty International reported that Chinese AK-47s were common among soldiers, militia and armed groups operating in the Kivu Provinces

and the Ituri District of the DRC where the weapons have been used to commit atrocities (Holslag 2007). China's act of continued arms sales to Africa's problem areas, cynical military relations and support to rogue and blood-thirst regimes, and her double-dealing peacekeeping roles in Africa, do not help the peace condition of Africa's wobbling states. It rather furnishes and escalates conflicts. As these conflicts surge, the lacked but much needed development in Africa is further distanced. Incontestably, conflicts have the capacity to severely constrain development endeavours by destroying infrastructure, interrupting the production process and diverting resources away from productive uses (Chuka 2008). Sudanese erstwhile finance minister had to admit that up to 70% of Sudan's oil generated wealth in the inter war years was devoted to weapon acquisition and war execution (Gentleman, 2006). The obvious resultant effect of this is that even in the post conflict period, the state becomes emasculated of its provisioning power. There is a consensus among conflict theorists (Ali 2006, Azar 1994) that there is an indubitable causal linkage between underdevelopment and conflict. The feeling of frustration arising from the state's failure to provide basic needs for its people produces aggressive citizens who resort to aggression and conflict. Through this process, violence has assumed a circling phenomenon in Africa.

Conclusion

From the early years of contact with Africa, China has manifested military involvements in Africa. This has been in the areas of military training and assistance, arms sales, anti-piracy and peacekeeping operations. In as much as the peacekeeping efforts may have engaged China in a positive way in Africa's conflict zones, but continued arm sales in a manner that exacerbate African conflicts, China certainly cannot be helping the much needed peace in Africa. China was opposed to sanctions against Sudan and Zimbabwe and instead continued its controversial military arms sales to them for its economic gain, ignoring the tenuous security situations in those countries. Sale of arms may not by itself be cynical given the nature and order of international politics and practice. What however makes Chinese arms deals with Africa to come under serious criticism is its practice of

flouting and breaching United Nations arms embargo, and supplying to belligerent groups, thereby worsening the already bad peace conditions of those areas where such weapons are exported. Through so many communiqué, China has consistently put Washington on the notice that it would not tolerate any United States' insensitivity to China's interests by demanding an end to US arm sales to Taiwan. Knowing the danger and threat continued sale of arms portends to her peace and aspiration for a harmonious China, one will wonder why China will not extend such understanding in her relations with Africa.

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