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Back to the Future: Understanding China's Return to Africa and its Implications for U.S. Policy

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Since the mid-1970s, China (PRC) has experienced a period of unprecedented economic growth. However, the Chinese Communist Party's hold on power is now predicated upon maintaining their country's development trajectory, which requires increasing amounts of natural resources, particularly fossil fuels. To secure access to these raw materials, China has begun to deepen its engagement in parts of the world where Washington has enjoyed a near monopoly on influence since the end of the Cold War. Nowhere is this truer than in Africa, where China has pursued an array of new relationships, some of which directly challenge U.S. interests. This article reviews China's historical relationship with Africa, accounts for its new investments on the continent, and assesses what the implications of China's renewed interest in Africa are for U.S. policy.

Introduction

By liberalizing the economy and opening to the West, China (PRC) embarked on a period of unimaginable economic expansion beginning in the mid-1970s. The Chinese economy has grown by an annual average of more than 9 percent since the Deng era, and Chinese per capita income nearly quadrupled over the past fifteen years. However, maintaining this

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incredible level of economic growth requires Beijing's leadership to procure increasing amounts of natural resources. To secure access to these raw materials despite tight commodities markets, China has begun to forge new partnerships in parts of the world where Washington's influence has been largely unchallenged in recent years. This is especially true in Africa, whose strategic importance is becoming increasingly apparent to the United States, China, and other interested parties.

The United States currently obtains 15 percent of its oil imports from Africa, and the continent could supply America with as much energy as the Middle East over the next decade (Council on Foreign Relations 2006). The National Intelligence Council predicts that one in four barrels of oil imported to the United States within the next ten years will be from Africa – the same percentage of oil that China currently obtains from African suppliers (Bajpaee 2005). Both the United States and China have also shown increased interest in Africa's vast supplies of other natural resources. Given this scenario, Africa's energy and mineral reserves could be among the early geo-strategic battlegrounds for growing U.S.-China competition.

The United States considers Africa an important stage in the "global war on terror" as well. In hindsight, terrorist bombings at U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998 were harbingers of the September 11, 2001 attacks. Recognizing the attractiveness of corrupt failed states to terrorist groups, the United States has enhanced its military presence on the continent, particularly in the Horn of Africa. Washington has also begun to take more seriously the threats that regional conflicts and the HIV/AIDS crisis pose to global security, and has actively recruited African partners to help remedy these chronic problems.

However, the Chinese have increasingly offered themselves as an alternative to American influence on the continent, promising trade, aid, and diplomatic support with none of the demands the United States imposes with regard to good governance and market liberalization. As a result, the United States sees China as an obstacle to its vision of a developed, liberal, democratic Africa, increasing the likelihood that Washington and Beijing will battle for influence on the continent in the coming years. However, before addressing this concern, it is important to examine China's motivation for returning to Africa and evaluate the extent of China's renewed presence on the continent. After outlining how China's priorities on the continent may clash with U.S. interests, as exemplified by case studies on Sudan, Nigeria, and Angola, this article will conclude with recommendations designed to minimize the probability of confrontation resulting from

Africa's emerging role in U.S.-China relations.

China's History in Africa: From Ideological Solidarity to Increasing Trade

Understanding China's relationships with its new African partners demands an understanding of the PRC's history on the continent and its sense of shared identity with less-developed African states. China's modern relationship with Africa began at the Bandung Conference, which was held in Indonesia in April 1955. The conference included twenty-nine Asian and African states that collectively represented over half the global population and shared a common sense of exclusion from the bipolar world of the Cold War era. The Bandung Conference produced a set of non-interventionist foreign policy principles that China would soon adopt as its own.[1] The Bandung Conference also laid the foundation for the establishment of the Non-Aligned Movement in 1961, which introduced the world to a group of nations nominally independent of both the United States and the Soviet Union.[2] These countries resisted the superpowers' efforts to recruit them to their respective blocs, fearing they would be used as vehicles to fight proxy wars. Proclaiming their neutrality in the Cold War competition, the Non-Aligned countries' objectives were economic development, greater cultural cooperation and an end to colonialism.

To make good on the commitments of the Bandung Conference, China supported an array of African liberation campaigns to reduce the legitimacy of U.S. and Soviet influence in the developing world. While the Chinese leadership was initially uncertain whether to support all anti-colonial movements or communist groups only, China came to throw its weight behind rebel groups of both categories. This included groups like the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA) that were opposed by other communists. Beijing saw support for anti-Soviet fighters as a way to keep China's neighbor to the north occupied, and therefore less likely to engage in direct confrontation with China itself.

While China subsequently withdrew from the Non-Aligned Movement, it nevertheless remained engaged in Africa through the early 1970s, hoping to serve as an alternative influence to the Cold War powers within the developing world. China also hoped to restrain other developing countries from recognizing Taiwan (ROC) as the legitimate representative of China.[3] To achieve these goals, mainland China built large-scale infrastructure projects for several African countries, many of which the West had previously refused to support, including soccer stadiums, government ministries, and railways.

China's engagement in Africa certainly helped Beijing achieve its goals, including UN recognition of the PRC as the legitimate representative of the Chinese people. However, as Mao Zedong's health declined, so too did the international appeal of the Chairman's revolutionary ideology. The eventual rise of Deng led China to retreat from Africa and focus on its own internal development.

In the decades since China's withdrawal, Asia's and Africa's economic trajectories have sharply diverged. The success of Deng's reforms to the Chinese economy allowed China to go from being a recipient of foreign aid to establishing itself as a donor nation. However, as President Hu Jintao remarked during a 2004 visit to Gabon, the Chinese people have not forgotten "that it was due to the strong support of the vast number of developing countries, those in Africa included, that China successfully regained its lawful seat in the United Nations in 1971" (Hill 2004).

Now more than fifty years after the Bandung Conference, China has returned to Africa with significantly more capacity than it had in the last days of the colonial era. Aided by decades of economic growth, China has lifted millions of its own citizens out of poverty and become a "beacon of global development" in the eyes of President Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria and other African leaders (Bezlova 2005). Beijing approached the Bandung Conference's fiftieth anniversary meeting as an opportunity to reinforce the idea that China is a leader of what was once called the "Third World" and to make it clear that the country is keen to support other non-Western emerging states through aid, investment, technical assistance, and diplomatic support. This process of reengagement has begun in earnest in Africa. However, while Beijing continues to stress the importance of diplomatic solidarity between developing nations as a counterweight to the industrialized West, it is economic interests – not ideology – that has propelled China's latest activity in Africa.[4]

Unburdened by a legacy of colonial impositions, Africa has welcomed Chinese investment, particularly in places like Sierra Leone, where China sees little competition and the opportunity to turn big risks into significant rewards. In 2005, a Chinese construction company agreed to build a $200 million resort hotel in Freetown, Sierra Leone's war-torn capital. This deal is in addition to Chinese renovations to other major hotels and the country's largest football stadium, which the Chinese originally build in the 1970s. Chinese firms have also built the country's new parliament building, its military headquarters, and several additional government buildings. Sierra Leone's leaders find Beijing an appealing business partner because they do not require the extensive government reviews and progress reports demanded by Western investors and multilateral donors. As Sahr Johnny, Sierra Leone's ambassador to Beijing, remarked, "We like Chinese investment because we have one meeting, we discuss what they want to do, and then they just do it. There are no benchmarks and preconditions, no environmental impact assessment. If a G8 country had offered to rebuild the [soccer] stadium, we'd still be having meetings about it" (Hilsum 2005).

Sierra Leone is not alone in its attraction to China's decisive brand of investing. A wide-range of resource-wealthy African states have found China's largely non-interventionist business deals very compelling, leading to a massive increase in Chinese investment on the continent and higher levels of China-Africa trade in recent years.

China's Renewed Investment in Africa

To continue China's economic expansion despite tight markets in key commodities, particularly oil, Beijing has decided to invest in African states rich with natural resources, including petroleum, minerals, timber, and other essential products. As *The Financial Times* recently observed, Africa offers China "a continent three times its own size, less populated than itself and stocked with many of the raw materials it needs. Crude oil from Angola, platinum from Zimbabwe, copper from Zambia, tropical timber from Congo-Brazzaville, iron ore from South Africa: all are on China's shopping list" (Financial Times 2006a).

China's interest in Africa's raw materials resulted in trade growth of 700 percent during the 1990s. With the establishment of the China-Africa Cooperation Forum in 2000, trade increased even further, quadrupling since the dawn of the twenty-first century. By 2005, annual China-Africa trade reached $40 billion (Financial Times 2006a). While the volume of trade between Africa and the United States also increased during this period, from $26.9 billion in 1999 to more than $80 billion in 2005, it has not been growing as fast as China-Africa trade, which has grown by an average rate of 50 percent annually since 2002. Given the large numbers of Africans in need of inexpensive basic goods, it is not surprising that China surpassed the United States in exports to Africa beginning in 2003 (Copson 2006). China's foreign direct investment (FDI) of more than $900 million places it ahead of former colonial powers like the United Kingdom and behind only the United States and France (Pan 2006). According to Beijing, more than 600 Chinese-funded companies have been established in Africa in the last ten years.

Nevertheless, because China's economic growth over the past thirty years has produced a massive spike in the country's energy needs, China's priority investments remain in the extractive industries, as exemplified by the case studies to follow. From 1995-2003, China was responsible for 68 percent of global growth in oil demand (Lampton 2005). By 2003, China had become the world's second-largest energy consumer, and the third-largest importer of oil (behind the United States and Japan.) China now buys half its daily oil consumption abroad, importing twice the amount it did just five years ago, largely to meet surging transport sector demand. Increasing auto ownership is a key part of Beijing's strategy to ensure middle-class acquiescence to continued party rule, and the number of small cars in China increased by 400 percent between 1980 and 1990.[5] The Chinese government projects that car ownership will increase seven-fold over the next fifteen years, virtually guaranteeing that the country's oil demand will continue to grow at an average rate of at least seven percent a year (as it has for the last fifteen years).[6]

China has pursued an array of strategies to ensure its energy supply will continue to meet domestic demand, including acquiring stakes in foreign oil reserves and winning influence over oil-producing states by sweetening deals with aid, market access, technical assistance and weapons sales. While China occasionally engages in joint exploration projects, the PRC generally prefers to invest in proven oil fields by purchasing "equity oil." Despite recent reforms, Mao's traditional emphasis on "self-reliance" leads the CCP to distrust global market mechanisms, so China's state-run oil companies frequently enter production-sharing contracts with host countries instead of buying oil on the open market. Under the terms of such agreements, Chinese companies pay host governments to extract oil, and the firm and the host share the output. Beijing's equity oil advocates consider equity oil less expensive and more secure than buying oil on the international market. They point to African states like Sudan as prime examples of China's ability to ensure a diversified supply by buying a share in foreign oil stocks.[7] Supporters contend that equity oil eliminates price risk because it enables Beijing to predict how much oil it will receive and at what cost over the life of a given field.[8]

While China has certainly turned to traditional oil producers in the Persian Gulf, it is, like all the major powers, leery of becoming too reliant on the Middle East. Beijing has thus pursued new relationships with oil-rich African trading partners, several of which Washington would prefer to isolate. China sees African oil producers, including those under U.S. economic sanctions, as excellent business collaborators given that the Chinese National Petroleum Company (CNPC) does not possess the financial or legal sophistication necessary to compete with the large Western conglomerates. As a result, the Chinese have sought markets where they possess a competitive advantage owing to tensions between the exporting country and the Western powers over human rights or undemocratic governance, neither of which factor into China's negotiating calculus (Jaffe and Medlock 2005, 278). As China's deputy foreign minister, Zhou Wenzhong, famously told *The New York Times*, "Business is business. We try to separate politics from business."

Critics of China's perspective contend that China is an amoral actor and thus unwilling to scrutinize the affairs of others any more than they would invite foreign scrutiny of their own "internal" issues like Taiwan, Xinjiang, or Tibet. Though the United States and its allies might be willing to ignore China's violation of sanctions for the sake of larger commercial interests, the Western powers are less likely to ignore the quid pro quo that appears built into some of China's oil deals. In exchange for acreage, China uses its position on the UN Security Council to block action against its oil suppliers.

China's motivation for penetrating Africa's energy markets is clear. Africa possesses 8 percent of the world's known petroleum reserves, with 70 percent of Africa's oil production focused in West Africa's Gulf of Guinea, which extends from the Ivory Coast to Angola. While the region's 60 billion barrels of proven reserves are small when compared to the Persian Gulf's, they are critical to maintaining a stable and diversified international supply. The region also has the potential to be a major natural gas exporter. China's new allies thus include Nigeria, Angola, and Sudan, the last of which possesses large quantities of light sweet crude that is easier for Chinese refineries to process than the heavier, sour crude available elsewhere.

China is also active in Africa's smaller oil-exporting countries. China imports more than 1 million tons of crude oil from Congo-Brazzaville, accounting for 1.5 percent of Chinese oil imports. China is the third-largest importer of oil from Equatorial Guinea after the United States and Spain. Total-Gabon and Sinopec, the Chinese petrochemical firm, also signed an agreement in 2004 to supply China with 1 million tons of crude oil a year, making China the third-largest consumer of Gabonese crude after the United States and France. The Zhongyuan Exploration Bureau, a Chinese petroleum company, is even drilling in the remote Gambella Basin in Western Ethiopia (Sorbara 2006).

In addition to China's highly publicized efforts to obtain equity oil stakes, China has been investing heavily in Africa's vast reserves of key minerals and timber. China is the world's largest consumer of copper and has invested $170 million in the Zambian copper sector.[9] The Chambezi copper mine, which China purchased in 1999, is the largest Chinese mining operation in Africa. China is also increasingly involved in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where it has invested in cobalt, copper, and coltan, which is used in cell phones and has high value-by-weight, making it a lootable asset that has helped finance the country's roving militias in recent years. China has invested further south as well. Between 2002 and 2003 Chinese steel and iron ore imports from South Africa rose by 173 percent and imports of non-ferrous metals rose 123 percent. Beijing also has interest in Zimbabwe's mineral and precious metal deposits, worth an estimated $500 billion and its platinum reserves, which are the second largest in the world.

Finally, China is one of Africa's primary markets for timber. After the deadly 1998 Yangtze River floods, China imposed domestic logging restrictions, so Chinese firms have looked abroad for supplies. Over the past eight years, Chinese timber imports from African nations, particularly Liberia and Gabon have surged, providing new life to the continent's timber trade. Over 60 percent of Gabon's timber production is purchased by China. China also purchases a large percentage of Equatorial Guinea's timber (Sorbara 2006).

While China has invested almost everywhere it has been able to gain access to Africa's natural resources, the scope of China's involvement in Sudan, Nigeria, and Angola powerfully illustrates Beijing's unique ability to bring "the total package" to bear in its relations with African states. In these three cases, China has provided its client states with technology, financial resources, and diplomatic relief from international pressures (Council on Foreign Relations 2006). It is thus worth examining these relationships in further detail.

Sudan

Uncertainty about the government's war with the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA) in the south caused the Western presence in Sudan to dwindle from the mid-1980s onward. U.S. policy makers grew more alarmed when it became known that Khartoum had ties to terrorist groups, including al-Qaeda and Osama bin Laden, who lived in the country under government protection until 1996. Concerns over these issues resulted in growing pressure for Western companies to withdraw from the Sudanese oil market. Although Chevron had invested $1 billion in exploration that confirmed more than 1 billion barrels of proven reserves, the company sold its shares back to the Sudanese government in 1989. Canada's Talisman Energy also entered the Sudanese oil arena, but subsequently withdrew because of pressure from U.S. and Canadian advocacy groups. With the major Western players exiting Sudan, China and other Asian countries quickly filled the vacuum left behind. In 1996, the CNPC bought a 40 percent stake in a consortium planning to develop Sudan's Heglig and Unity oil fields.[10] The CNPC also holds a significant stake in the Melut Basin, as well as the largest oil concessions in Darfur, where continuing violence and international political pressure has scared away other investors.

China has helped build the infrastructure necessary for Sudan's emerging oil industry. In 1998, the CNPC contributed to the construction of a 930-mile-long pipeline from the Heglig and Unity fields to the Red Sea. Using Chinese laborers, the CNPC also built a refinery near Khartoum. Another Chinese firm is building a pipeline from the Melut Basin to Port Sudan, where China's Petroleum Engineering Construction Group is building a $215 million export tanker terminal. China has also helped Sudan construct electric substations and transmission lines, underwritten a $325 million water system, and financed the Kajbar Dam, a $345 million pipeline that will channel water from the Nile to Port Sudan.

As China's investment in Sudan's oil industry has grown, so too has military cooperation between the two countries. Khartoum is reputed to have spent as much as 80 percent of the revenue generated by Sudan's oil fields on fighting wars with the country's peripheral regions, including Darfur. Unsurprisingly, the National Congress Party has frequently turned to China for its weapons needs. China has provided the Sudanese government with Chinese-made tanks, bombers, anti-aircraft guns, helicopters, machine guns, rocket-propelled grenades, and ammunition, all of which were used in the country's long-running civil war (Goodman 2004). After 1980, China became a major supplier of antipersonnel and antitank mines, and Sudan has proven a key market for these products as well given its constant state of war. China also helped establish three weapons factories in Sudan, including one that assembles T-55 tanks. Finally, China sold Khartoum $100 million worth of Shenyang fighter planes.[11]

Chinese foreign direct investment in Sudan now stands at more than $4 billion, making it Sudan's largest source of external financial support. Chinese citizens have flocked to the country to get a piece of the action. The number of Chinese registered in Sudan now exceeds 25,000, largely because China's efforts in Sudan have proved very profitable. Beijing has doubled Sudan's daily production to around 500,000 barrels per day and greatly expanded the country's proven reserves, which experts now estimate at more than five billion barrels.[12]

China now receives 7 percent of its oil imports from Sudan, and is thus willing to extend increased diplomatic protection to Khartoum to keep the oil flowing. When the United States and others tried to impose targeted sanctions against Sudanese officials responsible for the state-sponsored genocide in Darfur in 2004, China watered down several Security Council resolutions and then abstained on those votes, allowing Khartoum a free hand to continue its slaughter. This led one wry Sudanese official to comment that China's role in Sudan is important "not only on an economic level but also on a political level" (Financial Times 2006a).

Despite these concerns, there is reason to hope that China and the Western powers will perceive a shared interest in helping Sudan achieve a stable peace, as both sides want to keep Sudan's oil flowing into the international market. While peace could bring increased competition for Sudanese oil, China realizes that it may experience increased international pressure to withdraw its support for Khartoum if conflict continues in Darfur. China has tried to deflect attention from its support for the Sudanese government by contributing peacekeepers to the United Nations force (UNMIS) in place to monitor the CPA agreement, but it remains uncertain whether the UN's presence will ever be extended into Darfur so long as Khartoum has Beijing's backing in New York.

Nigeria

While China has invested most in Sudan, it has recently targeted the Nigerian oil market as well. Nigeria is the continent's largest oil producer and the eleventh-largest producer in the world. It is also a leading supplier to the United States. The country currently produces two and a half million barrels per day, and has proven reserves of some 35.2 billion barrels, with hopes to expand that to 40 billion barrels by 2010 (Pan 2006). Nigeria's economy is heavily dependent on oil revenues, which account for nearly 80 percent of government revenues. Despite its incredible oil wealth, more than 70 percent of the population lives in poverty. Though Nigeria has earned $300 billion in oil revenues over the past twenty-five years, per capita income remains below $1 per day due to a history of corrupt governance. It is estimated that 70,000 to 300,000 barrels of oil are stolen in Nigeria each day. Even at the low end of this estimate, this would generate more than $1.5 billion every year at current prices. The fact that oil wealth has not enriched more of the country has led to increasingly frequent attacks on Nigeria's oil infrastructure. To combat further loss of oil to criminal networks, Nigeria and the United States signed a security agreement to patrol the Delta jointly in December 2005. However, Washington's uncertainty about President Obasanjo's continued rule, the government's human rights abuses, and the country's endemic corruption delayed the program's implementation. Seeing the diplomatic breakdown as an opportunity to improve its relationship with the Nigerian government and fearing that, without security assistance, Nigeria's oil fields could go off-line, China stepped in and supplied the necessary patrol boats.

While there is little evidence that the Delta militias possess a coherent political agenda or pose a serious threat to Nigeria's long-term security, the attacks continue. However, China is not one to be scared away by a little instability. China and Nigeria signed an $800 million agreement in July 2005 that dictates Chinese purchase of 30,000 barrels a day for five years. The deal also included a license for the Chinese to operate four of Nigeria's oil blocs as part of an incentive to build a hydropower station. In January 2006, the China National Offshore Oil Corporation paid $2.3 billion for a 45 percent stake in the Akpo oil field, its largest overseas acquisition, which has reserves of 600 million barrels and potential for an extra 500 million. China has also taken over a money-losing privatized refinery that no Western firm would have considered purchasing. However, China saw it as a chance to make a goodwill gesture that will ingratiate Beijing to Nigeria's elite.

China's engagement with Abuja is not limited to oil investments. Overall trade has rapidly increased from $384 million in 1998 to approximately three billion in 2005. In 2005, Nigeria earned over $500 million from non-oil product exports to China. The Nigerian government also recently signed a two billion memorandum of understanding with Guangdong Xinguang International Group, a Chinese government-owned company, to enhance Nigeria's rail network. The deal includes provisions for a fast rail system between Lagos and Abuja and a light rail system between Nigeria's airports and downtown Abuja. China and Nigeria have also discussed possible Chinese investments in power stations, housing projects, agriculture, medical equipment, and medicine factories. In total, China is reportedly considering $7 billion in investments in Nigeria (Sorbara 2006). Given the extent of these plans, it is understandable why a senior Nigerian foreign affairs official would be thankful for China's interest in Nigeria: "The perception is that China is catching up with the level of engagement that Western governments have. Being a developing country, they understand us better. They are also prepared to put more on the table. For instance, the western world is never prepared to transfer technology - but the Chinese do. It is our view that, while China's technology may not be as sophisticated as some western governments, it is better to have Chinese technology than none at all" (Financial Times 2006b).

While the United States and China would benefit by cooperating to ensure Nigeria's continued stability, and thus regular oil production, such cooperation has yet to materialize. Continued competition for influence between the two countries is likely to have a negative effect on Nigeria's governance and could push Nigeria over the threshold into instability.

Angola

Angola, sub-Saharan Africa's second-largest oil producer, has the unsavory distinction of being one of the few countries that can match Nigeria's record on corruption. Angola is recognized each year by Transparency International as one the world's most corrupt governments (Transparency International 2005). Global Witness estimates that between 1997 and 2001, $8.45 billion of public money was unaccounted for in Angola. The country remains without a formal monitoring agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Nevertheless, Angola's 25 billion barrels of proven crude reserves make it an attractive target for China. Angola currently pumps 1.6 million barrels per day (bpd), and improvements to the country's infrastructure should increase output to at least two million bpd by 2010.

In 2004, China's state-owned Export-Import Bank approved a $2 billion line of credit to Angola (at 1.5 percent interest over 17 years.) The soft loan, which stipulates that 70 percent of the associated contracts must go to Chinese firms, is being used to rebuild Angola's infrastructure, which was ruined by the twenty-seven-year civil war that ended in 2002 (Donnelly 2006). For example, the Chinese are refurbishing the Benguela Railway for $300 to $500 million. Chinese firms have also won contracts to refurbish two other rail lines, government buildings, and a new airport in Luanda. China's assistance has been welcomed by President Jose Eduardo dos Santos' government, which has proven unwilling to bow to pressures to introduce more transparency to the country's oil industry. With oil prices high, China's $2 billion loan and interest from India and Brazil in similar loans, Angola is unlikely to reengage with the IMF anytime soon.

During a three-day visit to Angola in February 2005, Chinese Vice Premier Zeng Peiyan signed a long-term contract for the supply of oil to the China National Petrochemical Corporation (Sinopec), as well as agreements on oil exploration and the construction of a refinery. This deal is in addition to the CNPC's existing ownership of an Angolan oil block that entitles China to 100,000 barrels per day. Angola now accounts for

13 percent of China's crude oil imports, and China is the second-largest consumer of Angolan crude after the United States. However, Western companies are still Angola's largest investors overall. ChevronTexaco and ExxonMobil each produce about 500,000 bpd, and BP and Total both have major projects expected to come on-stream soon.

While there is little chance that Angola will completely turn away from the West in the near term, the Angola-China relationship must be closely monitored, and not only in the oil sector. Overall bilateral trade between the two countries reached $6.95 billion in 2005, an increase of 41.6 percent from the previous year. China has signed agreements to enhance Angola's telephone network, to rebuild Angola's roads, bridges, hospitals and to provide fishing trawlers, trucks and agricultural inputs. Chinese firms operating in Angola, such as Sinosteel, the China National Overseas Engineering Corporation, and Sinopec have even taken it upon themselves to form a Chinese Chamber of Commerce in Luanda to enhance relations with Angola.

Different Perspectives on China's Role in Africa

It is important to recognize that there are differing perspectives on China's new role in Africa, all of which must be reconciled to further Africa's development and ensure continued good relations between the United States and China.

Beijing's motives for engaging with Africa are clear: China's growing industries demand new energy and raw material suppliers, its exporters need new markets, and its diplomats require support in international organizations. However, it is less certain how the United States should view China's emerging role on the continent. Moreover, is it in the best interest of African citizenries to continue welcoming Chinese investment? Will closer relations with Beijing help spur African development? With China's myriad economic and diplomatic interests in Africa established, it is important to consider different views of China's new role on the continent in the hope of finding answers to these important questions, beginning with how China views its own strategic maneuvering. This section subsequently evaluates China's role from the perspective of African governments and the United States.

China's Perspective

Although France, the United Kingdom, and the United States still account for 70 percent of foreign direct investment in Africa, China expects the West's influence on the continent to continue to erode in the coming years.

Despite some shortsighted policies that may eventually backfire because they undermine transparency and good governance initiatives, China thinks of itself as establishing a long-term relationship with its African partners. China's state-owned companies, whose individual investments do not have to be profitable if they serve national objectives, enable China to make investments that cannot be supported from a cost-benefit perspective, giving them certain advantages over Western firms. China is willing to suffer occasional losses amidst its broader effort to build relationships with pivotal African states with large reserves of natural resources, as in the case of the privatized Nigerian refinery discussed above.

For now the Chinese have convinced African leaders that they are sincerely interested in building "relationships" (Goering 2006). However, to fend off growing criticism that China is a predatory influence that is only interested in extracting Africa's resources for its own good, China will need to emphasize its commitment to do more for Africa than strip it of its resource wealth. The Chinese government's released a white paper in January 2006 that lays out its broader diplomatic intentions toward the continent in an effort to do just that. As the white paper alludes, China has pursued a series of diplomatic initiatives aimed at increasing China's soft power on the continent. These measures include sending teams of Chinese doctors to assist with African health problems, expanding student exchange programs, and increasing participation in international peacekeeping operations in Africa.

Since the 1960s, China has helped forty-seven African nations develop their health services. China deployed its first medical team in 1964 at the invitation of the Algerian government. Since then, China has sent over 15,000 doctors and treated roughly 180 million African patients. Chinese medical schools and physicians also train African doctors. In China's view, medical cooperation builds goodwill between Africans and the Chinese.

More students are also traveling between China and Africa, due in part to the increased visa restrictions imposed on international students seeking to visit the United States after September 11, 2001. In 2003, 1,793 African students studied in China, representing one-third of total foreign students that year. China now plans to train some 10,000 Africans per year, including many future African leaders who once might have trained in the West. Beijing also seeks to establish "Confucius Institutes," devoted to China studies and Chinese language training at Africa's leading universities (Eisenman and Kurlantzick 2006).

Finally, China has committed to slowly increase its participation in UN peacekeeping operations in Africa, to both build goodwill and protect its own investments. As of November 2006, China contributed nearly 1,300 peacekeepers to seven UN missions across Africa, including those in Sudan and Liberia (Pan 2006).

China's position paper on Africa supplements other efforts to illustrate Africa's strategic importance to China. Chinese rhetoric stresses that African states are historic and natural allies given shared self-perceptions as developing countries. China underscores Africa's importance by making it the foreign minister's first trip every year. China routinely suggests that it is a leader in the developing world, and many African elites are interested in learning more about China's modernization, hoping the Chinese experience may offer lessons that can be applied to their own countries' development. China is equally committed to promoting its development strategy as a model for African countries, and Beijing's authoritarian tendencies appeal to African dictators keen to extend their rule. African leaders are also attracted to working with Beijing (rather than the West), as the Chinese do not condition their diplomatic allegiance on governance or human rights norms. However, China's support for African states comes with a caveat. To receive Chinese assistance, African states must pledge to uphold the one-China policy.

In addition to its resource wealth, China is attracted to Africa because it represents an opportunity to deepen Taiwan's diplomatic isolation.[13] As China's White Paper on Africa made clear, the one-China principle is the political foundation for the development of China's relations with African countries. Using access to its huge internal markets, debt relief, and sales of military weaponry as sweeteners, China extorts public statements from African leaders in support of mainland China's position in its ongoing dispute with Taiwan (French 1996). In the 1990s, Taiwan successfully used a combination of financial incentives and savvy diplomacy to establish formal relations with several African countries at Beijing's expense.[14] However, Beijing has bought back some of these relationships, and today all but six of Africa's fifty-three nations – Burkina Faso, Chad, the Gambia, Malawi, Sao Tome and Principe, and Swaziland – maintain relations with Beijing.[15]

While six small African countries may seem insignificant, these six actually represent about a quarter of Taipei's formal diplomatic partners. China hopes the recently formed China-Africa Cooperation Forum (CACF) will help it win over the few remaining African states that recognize Taiwan. The first China-Africa Forum took place in Beijing in 2000. It established a mechanism for promoting diplomatic relations, trade, and investment between China and African countries. A second forum, held in Addis Ababa in December 2003, was attended by Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan and 400 businesspersons from Africa. At the fourth CACF Senior Officials Meeting in August 2005, which was attended by delegations from forty-six African countries and observers from six African regional organizations, China proposed upgrading the third CACF ministerial meeting in 2006 to a summit meeting involving the heads of state from China and Africa (Brookes and Shin 2006). This proposal was welcomed by all participants, and the subsequent summit was generally considered a success. A bevy of new commitments were signed and billions in new aid was pledged, all but ensuring Beijing's goal of a deepening relationship with the continent.[16]

"Africa's" Perspective

As the late Polish journalist Ryszard Kapuscinski observed, "Only with the greatest simplification, for the sake of convenience, can we say 'Africa.' In reality, except as a geographical appellation, Africa does not exist" (Kapuscinski 2001). Each of Africa's fifty-three states are characterized by specific circumstances, each worthy of careful analysis. Generalizing for a continent with such diverse histories, peoples, and cultures often proves a fool's errand. However, there can be little doubt that China has had a positive overall effect on African economies in the short run. Africa's terms of trade have never been better. High commodity prices driven by Chinese demand, particularly for oil, have buoyed Africa's economy, which achieved 5 percent real GDP growth continent-wide for the past two years and is expected to approach 6 percent growth in 2007. Many Africans view China as more responsive to their needs than Western donors, and Beijing's willingness to address long-ignored infrastructural needs by building roads, bridges, dams, and power stations has been greatly appreciated. While some local industries have been harmed, most Africans are grateful for increased access to China's inexpensive consumer products. Though these items are often of lower quality, and are frequently counterfeit, they are nonetheless better suited to African salaries than their European and American substitutes.

While China's impact on African economies has been positive overall, African perceptions of China are not uniformly optimistic. Negative consequences of China's growing engagement with the continent are obvious enough as well. Cheap Chinese goods are flooding African markets and displacing local vendors. The main area of concern is textile imports, which were liberalized at the end of the Multi-Fiber Arrangement (MFA)—an agreement that allowed countries to place quotas on clothing and textile imports from 1974 through the end of 2004. Under the MFA, the United States had quotas on China and provided Africa with special market access through the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). Textiles were one of the fastest growing exports under AGOA, particularly in countries like Lesotho, Swaziland, Ghana, Uganda, and Kenya. However, when the MFA expired in January 2005, Chinese exports to the United States soared, displacing less-competitive African exporters. More than ten clothing factories in Lesotho closed in 2005, and at least 10,000 employees lost their jobs. South Africa's clothing exports to the United States similarly declined, from $26 million in the first quarter of 2004 to $12 million for the first quarter of 2005 (Lyman 2005). Chinese exports of textiles to South Africa grew from 40 percent of clothing imports to 80 percent by the end of 2004. This has contributed to a spike in South African unemployment. South Africa's trade union federation, COSATU, is now mobilizing resistance to Chinese imports, calling for a return to restrictions and urging retailers to stock 75 percent locally produced goods. When COSATU staged an anniversary celebration in December 2005, participants symbolically took off their red union T-shirts in disgust when word spread that they were made in China (Financial Times 2006a).

The impact of Chinese imports has been no less damaging in West African states like Nigeria and Ghana. However, while China has been generous with regard to aid, debt forgiveness, and investment, Beijing has been equally firm in defending its right to market access. China's Economic and Commercial Counselor in South Africa has warned Africans that "unfair and discriminative restrictions will never be accepted" (Lyman 2005).

With regard to the one-China policy, most African countries approach the issue opportunistically. African states are able to play Beijing and Taipei off each other and leverage their diplomatic recognition into significant aid packages. Many African nations see affirmation of Beijing's position as a costless part of their diplomatic relations with China that pays considerable dividends.[17] Unlike Taipei, which stresses democratization in accord with its own identity, mainland China does not push human rights on its African partners, and this is has made Beijing a partner to some of Africa's worst regimes, which the United States disdains.

America's Perspective

According to the United States, China and Africa cooperation ensures that human rights concerns do not take a place atop the international agenda. This has been especially true at the United Nations, where China and its African partners consistently weakened the UN Commission on Human Rights. China has been able to count on virtually every African nation on the Commission, including many with horrific human rights records such as Sudan, Eritrea, Zimbabwe, Sierra Leone and Congo, to back their non-interventionist positions. As Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao has made clear, China does not intend to change its policy of non-interference on human rights issues any time soon. In a December 2003 speech, Premier Wen euphemistically described China's position as follows: "As a permanent member of the UN Security Council, China will always stand side by side with developing countries in Africa and other parts of the world, and support their legitimate requests and reasonable propositions."[18]

While Beijing likely believes it is only natural to seek out resources and new partnerships in accord with China's emerging role in the post-Cold War world, the United States is hesitant to accept China's growing influence in the developing world. Washington sees China's separation of business interests from political concerns as an unhelpful obstacle to African democratization. U.S. officials regularly insinuate that China's unwillingness to criticize its African allies' human rights records and corrupt governance undermines important development initiatives on the continent. China is widely seen as underwriting rogue regimes like the Mugabe government in Zimbabwe and Omar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir's National Islamic Front (NIF) in Sudan. China has also protected both of these states on the UN Security Council. By providing an alternative source of economic and diplomatic support, China gives African tyrants increased bargaining power, enabling them to refuse Western-imposed reforms. While China's efforts to gain favor with African leaders may help spur short-term growth, Washington remains unconvinced that China's influence will have a positive impact on Africa's long-term development.

The U.S. government is also alarmed by China's role as one of Africa's primary arms dealers. While China has not reported any arms sales to the UN Register of Conventional Arms since 1996, the PRC has been a major weapons supplier to Africa for decades. Between 1955 and 1977, China sold $142 million worth of military equipment to Africa as a way of showing support for the continent's anti-colonial struggles. The volume of sales has only increased as China's technological expertise has grown (Pan 2006). The Congressional Research Service reports China's arms sales to Africa made up 10 percent of all conventional arms transfers to the continent between 1996 and 2003, and increasing numbers of weapons are included as partial Chinese payment for resource rights (Grimmett 2003). For example, during the border war between Ethiopia and Eritrea, which lasted from 1998 to 2000, China sold a billion dollars in weaponry to each side despite an international arms embargo. Though the West condemns this kind of activity, characterizing it as unbecoming of an aspiring "responsible stakeholder" in the international system, it appears that China is content to continue trading weapons and rhetorical support in exchange for the inside track on exploiting mineral wealth in pariah states like Zimbabwe and Sudan.

While the United States is certainly aware of China's increasing presence in Africa, it is less apparent whether addressing the consequences of China's new role in Africa is a priority for U.S. policy makers. While the George W. Bush government was initially expected to take a harder line with Beijing, the administration was quickly distracted by other matters and has shown little disposition to stray from the hedged integration strategy that has defined U.S. relations with China since the Nixon administration. Many senior U.S. officials are currently too preoccupied with Iraq and the "global war on terror" to consider China's growing role in the developing world. When it comes to U.S.-China relations, the focus remains on Taiwan, China's currency fixing, intellectual property rights, and the country's internal human rights problems. While these are all potential diplomatic flashpoints, it is critical that the U.S. government keep an eye on the larger strategic game shaping up, which focuses on winning energy and natural resource markets in the developing world.

Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

No concern in U.S.-China relations is more critical for future peace and stability than managing the growing competition for energy that will define the twenty-first century, and Africa is at the center of that competition. Given China's economic leverage, its increasing militarization, and its use of energy deals to curry favor in various corners of the globe, the United States must measure its strategy for dealing with China's rise and determine relevant contingency plans should the relationship deteriorate. However, the United States should not reflexively categorize China as a threat, in Africa or elsewhere. China's current rise is in a transitional period during which hard and fast characterizations will not apply. In contrast to the U.S.-Soviet relationship, the United States and China depend on each other for economic prosperity, they do not suggest ideological alternatives, and there is no reason their rivalry cannot enrich both countries. Though the Pentagon and some members of Congress are bound to suggest confrontational policies that treat China as an adversary immediately, these suggestions should be politely ignored.

For now, outright conflict over natural resources, in Africa or elsewhere, does not appear likely. China will probably only support its African allies up to the water's edge. When push comes to shove, China is likely to capitulate to Western pressure to maintain a patina of legitimacy on its claim to being a "responsible stakeholder" in the international system. But if China's "comprehensive national power" should continue to grow, it may become less inclined to make these sorts of sacrifices.

The fact that Beijing is willing to pay more than market price to tie up oil and other natural resources for the sake of its long-term interests is a more immediate concern. This practice drives up the cost of doing business for the United States, and this issue must be addressed via increased energy cooperation between the two sides. If this does not occur, increased competition could cripple existing international security mechanisms, including the UN Security Council, and produce a global proxy-competition similar to that of the Cold War. This would pose a severe threat to global stability and impede the ambitions of both countries.

To avoid this outcome, America needs to respond to China's growing energy demand with the same vigor it answered Sputnik. The United States should launch a national campaign to develop alternative fuel sources, significantly increase federal fuel efficiency standards and offer tax incentives for public-private partnerships that foster innovation in energy technology. The United States and other members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) should also strive to draw China into the multilateral institutions that serve as a bulwark against potential instability in the oil markets, including the International Energy Agency (IEA). Washington and its allies must coordinate policy and engage China in joint stockpiling in order to mitigate the risk of hoarding in times of supply uncertainty.[19] Finally, the United States should advocate that China expand its public transport system in order to slow rising personal auto usage and provide technical assistance to help China become more energy efficient. Expending energy more rationally would limit pollution and reduce Beijing's need to form relationships with pariah regimes. Supply would effectively increase, and both the United States and China would pay less for oil.

Unfortunately, just because cooperation would be mutually beneficial does not necessarily make it probable given the stakes involved. Until a viable alternative energy source emerges, the country that best controls global petroleum supplies will likely prove the leader of the international system. If both sides think they have opportunity for dominance, it is hard to imagine either country accepting partnership over hegemony. This bodes poorly for the Sino-American relationship and does not inspire confidence in the continued relevance of the UN and other collective security instruments.

While the United States waits to determine whether China is a status quo power or not, Washington should play up its continuing contributions to Africa's long-term health and well-being, including the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), which is bringing much-needed AIDS treatment to twelve focus countries in Africa, and the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA), which channels aid to African countries that demonstrate good governance and open economies. However, if the United States were serious about regaining African allegiances, it would push for the liberalization of agricultural markets within the current global trade round, which could have a dynamic effect on African economies. While many of China's projects in Africa employ more Chinese than Africans, and Chinese exports have a hollowing-out effect on local African industries, removing U.S. subsidies on agricultural products could have a powerful bottom-up effect on African societies, far exceeding anything the Chinese could offer. Nevertheless, it is important for both the United States and China to cooperate on energy matters and to coordinate their involvement in Africa in order to benefit from the continent's resources while simultaneously enhancing this increasingly important continent's long- term development prospects.

Notes

[1]These principles include mutual respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful co-existence. These ideas are repeated explicitly in the recent Africa policy paper released by the Chinese government.

[2]It is important to acknowledge that in reality, many of the "non-aligned" countries did indeed have allegiances to either the United States or the Soviets. However, after Stalin's death and the subsequent rise of Khrushchev, early signs of the Sino-Soviet split began to emerge. By 1963, after the Cuban missile crisis and Russia's support of India in its war with China, Beijing and Moscow were no longer cooperating.

[3]The PRC's recognition competition with Taiwan (ROC) dates back to the Chinese Civil War. Between 1949 and 1991 both Taipei and Beijing claimed to be the sole legal authority of all of China, and both viewed diplomatic recognition as an endorsement of their claim's legitimacy. However, with the end of the Cold War and China's rapid economic growth, Beijing has more actively pursued its goal of reunification with Taiwan and has tried to enhance its relationships in Africa to garner support in case the Taiwan issue should arise before an international body.

[4]This solidarity is expressed by the Group of 77 and other mechanisms that are beyond the scope of this paper.

[5]The number of buses tripled and the number of motorcycles increased seventeen-fold over the same period.

[6]There is great uncertainty in this figure as it depends on several unpredictable variables, including China's continued growth trajectory; the country's ability to develop urban mass transit systems, and the possible development of new technologies in the transport sector, be it fuel cells, coal-to-liquids, hybrid technology, or something else yet unforeseen. Regardless, should the status quo persist, growing fuel demand is likely to prove a very serious policy obstacle for the Chinese leadership.

[7]The Chinese leadership's attempt to ensure what they believe is increased protection against a possible OPEC shock by securing oil resources at the wellhead has no doubt angered rival importers.

[8]Despite the claims of its advocates, the acquisition of equity positions does not necessarily enhance energy security, nor does it necessarily make financial sense. Whether it is cheaper than oil purchased on open markets depends on whether Chinese companies negotiate a beneficial deal with host countries. This has rarely been the case. The inexperienced Chinese national energy companies have a record of overpaying for their equity stakes. Furthermore, equity oil cannot protect against oil shocks, as the financial gain achieved through equity stakes will do little to soften the blow of a large spike in price. Similarly, in a time of crisis, China may not be able to rely on access to its equity stakes, which suppliers generally ship through across U.S.-protected sea lanes.

[9]China even intervened in the recent Zambian election. The Chinese ambassador in Lusaka said Beijing might cut relations with the country if Zambians elected Michael Sata, an opposition candidate that had referred to Taiwan as a sovereign state.

[10]This consortium, which also includes Malaysia and India, is known as the Greater Nile Petroleum Operating Company (GNPOC).

[11]According to the Council on Foreign Relations, the helicopter gunships reportedly used to terrorize civilians in Darfur come from China.

[12]For complete information on Sudan's petroleum production, see the Energy Information Administration website: http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/international/oilreserves.html.

[13]For example, Beijing would like to ensure Taiwan (ROC) does not obtain observer status at the World Health Organization, which mainland China would see as a slippery slope toward international recognition of the ROC's as an independent identity.

[14]For example, Senegal, a long time ally of Beijing, switched sides in 2005 despite

thirty years of previous cooperation with the PRC. Taipei's financial resources also wooed the Gambia and Niger. Taipei gave the Gambia roughly $35 million in assistance and helped Niger pay civil service salaries.

[15]Liberia also recently switched camps with the end of the government of Charles Taylor. Despite twenty years of relations with the ROC, China's promise to deploy peacekeepers and offer financial assistance in the aftermath of that country's civil war was too tempting to resist.

[16]The CACF mirrors Taiwan's efforts to boost cooperation with Africa through the Africa-Taiwan Economic Forum, which offers Taipei's African supporters access to the island's technological expertise. However, it is important to acknowledge that China is now sharing technology with its African partners as well. In May 2004, for example, Shanghai hosted the Conference on Scaling up Poverty Reduction. Over 1,000 delegates attended the two-day event, co-sponsored by the World Bank and the Chinese government, which featured keynote speeches by Premier Wen Jiabao, World Bank President James Wolfensohn and Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni. By presenting Shanghai as a symbol of its development, China enhanced its prestige in the eyes of many conference participants.

[17]Some African nations have even taken the initiative in supporting Beijing, as Ethiopia's parliament did in 2005 when it approved a resolution supporting the mainland's Anti-Secession Law.

[18]Because of such assurances, UN member states recently voted to reform the Human Rights Commission, which is now called the UN Human Rights Council. However, questions remain concerning how committed the new body will be to protecting those who suffer from torture, political violence, and other abuses. While some long-time abusers (and China allies) like Sudan and Zimbabwe have not stood for election, perhaps fearing the additional scrutiny candidates to the 47-member panel now must endure, it remains unclear whether the new Council will continue to protect China and its oppressive colleagues in Africa from international criticism.

[22]The United States should also assist the PRC in fully modernizing its national energy strategy, including the fulfillment of Chinese plans for a strategic petroleum reserve, which IEA membership requires. The United States might also consider lobbying for WTO regulations that standardize trade rules in oil and depoliticize the global hunt for energy as well.

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