

Sino-Sudanese Relations: The Implication of China's 'Africa Strategy' on Conflict and Economic Decline in Sudan, 1989-2019

Razan Elshazali

The 'rise of China' in Africa is presented as a major threat, both to Western interests and to Africa itself. It is a widespread concern that China 'traps' African nations into unfair commitments, and that China's heavy investments on the continent actually hinder Africa's development. This paper argues that China's relationship with Sudan under Omar al-Bashir's dictatorship (1989-2019) hindered long-term economic development (specifically sustained GDP growth), focusing on how China's economic, military and diplomatic engagement exacerbated internal conflict and bolstered the regime. By focusing on peace as a necessary pillar of economic development, the paper traces how China's relations with Sudan aggravated decades of conflict, notably in Darfur and South Sudan.

Yet, the narrative of China as an irresponsible, self-interested actor is misguided, evident in the maturation of its 'subtle' diplomacy. There was not one distinct 'Africa strategy', rather, China's course of action changed over time, as it became more committed to securing peace in Sudan. This underreported role as a facilitator and negotiator of peace is often dismissed, despite the gains China made at the time. This is coupled with the large-scale infrastructure projects which ultimately did increase productive capacity in the short run, despite benefits being disproportionately enjoyed by elites in Khartoum. By deconstructing the negative portrayal of China as an ill-intentioned actor, we are also drawn to question the paternalistic representation of African governments as oblivious, passive and naïve. Both views stem from Eurocentric understandings of where knowledge and expertise must be located within global power hierarchies. Thus, it is more meaningful to understand China's relationship with Sudan as a means for the Sudanese government to secure its own interests by gaining access to Chinese funds and support. By considering peace and conflict, we find that, although China did contribute to short term economic growth through its infrastructure projects, this was outweighed by the negative economic consequences of its resource extraction in Sudan, and by the diplomatic and military aid it lent to al-Bashir to pursue blood wars.

INTRODUCTION

China's growing engagement with Africa has been subject to much scrutiny, and the 'rise of China' has been presented as a major threat, both to Western interests and to Africa itself. Chinese foreign policy is heavily guided by the tenets of non-interference and respect for sovereignty, which has proven alarming due to the 'widespread governance concerns' (Carmody 2016, 26) linked with China's aiding of authoritarian governments. China's economic endeavours in Africa have similarly been presented a concern, with the broad view that China 'traps' African nations into debts for political leverage (Martina and Brunnstrom 2022). On the other hand, Chinese and African sources depict China's investments as mutually beneficial, contributing to prosperity through infrastructure and FDI. Thus, there is a dichotomy between these two representations of China on the continent.

This paper argues that China's relationship with Sudan under Omar al-Bashir's dictatorship (1989-2019) hindered long-term economic development (specifically sustained GDP growth), focusing on how China's economic, military and diplomatic engagement exacerbated internal conflict and bolstered the regime. The al-Bashir regime was detrimental to economic development; the period saw GDP growth fall from 7% to -2.7% (World Bank 2021), as well as bloody wars and ethnic conflicts, including the Darfur genocide and the secession of South Sudan. The Chinese government, as well as a range of Chinese companies, were seminal to the 'changing peace and conflict dynamics' of the time (Saferworld 2012, 16) and were important

stakeholders in the policies pursued by al-Bashir. China was influential in the changing 'trajectories' (Large 2009, 613) of conflict and armed violence through its economic interests in Sudan, military cooperation and diplomatic policy, which ultimately contributed to and prolonged economic decline in the country.

By focusing on one nation in depth, we can understand the complexities and nuances of what is misrepresented as China's single, homogenous 'Africa strategy'. The reality is far from this, as there does not exist a set roadmap for China's engagement with Africa; rather, we find that China's relations and economic impacts differ from one country to another. China's involvement in Africa is context-specific; thus, considering one case study in depth, evaluating the advantages and drawbacks to that involvement, is insightful. These insights can be extended and compared with other nations in Africa while avoiding the dangerous assumption that Africa is a monolithic entity.

This paper focuses on Sino-Sudanese relations, and their economic implications, for a number of key reasons. Firstly, China and Sudan enjoy a historical and philosophical partnership grounded in a shared sense of anti-imperialism, as symbolised by the figure of 'Chinese Gordon'. This political rhetoric is a 'unique, special relationship' (Large 2009, 613), as General Gordon served the British Empire in both China and Sudan, where he was eventually killed by Mahdist rebels. The shared history of anti-imperial struggle is highly salient, and frequently referenced and commemorated by both nations. Secondly, focusing on Sudan presents us with unique insight, as the country during our period of study was almost entirely economically isolated from the Western world, leaving China as the main and uncontested beneficiary of the government. Sudan was placed on the US list of State Sponsors of Terrorism in 1993, followed by sanctions in 1997 (US Department of State 2021). This allows us to draw out the effects of China more narrowly, as it operated largely uncontested by the US as the largest economic partner in Sudan. Lastly, the link between China and Sudan's dictatorship gained media notoriety particularly with the 2008 Olympics, during the height of the Darfur Genocide, in which we saw international pressure on China to stop aiding al-Bashir.

The structure of the paper is as follows, providing a historical analysis of China's involvement. We will firstly explore China's direct contributions to instability, through its oil investments, in which self-interest for oil revenues dictated the ethnic cleansing and displacement of thousands of individuals. Subsequently, the focus will be on examining the military, diplomatic and economic strategies that China employed to shield and bolster el-Bashir's regime. By doing so, China enabled the regime to persist in its war tactics, perpetuate genocide, and siphon funds away from crucial public services.

Next, we will deconstruct the narrative of China as an irresponsible, self-interested actor by highlighting two ways in which China attempted to promote economic growth in Sudan. Firstly, the maturation of their sovereignty policy in Sudan will be examined; over time, China shifted to a peacekeeping commitment, pressuring the Sudanese government to end its wars. Secondly, China's large-scale infrastructure projects in Sudan will be analysed, revealing their positive contribution to the potential future growth of Sudan. Furthermore, the economic impacts of conflict and instability in Sudan, and China's role therein, will be discussed. Finally, we will address the significance of dispelling the Western portrayal of China as a threat to Africa and the paternalistic perspective that portrays Africa as being naive and lacking the ability to manage its own affairs. The international system is in itself a formalised Orientalist system (Qadeer 1981), through which developmental discourse privileges the perspective of the West. This is seen through discussions on Sino-African relations with the use of terminology such as 'trapped', which connotes the child-like, naïve qualities of African nations at the hands of China. Thus, Western paternalism is a contemporary manifestation and continuation of the colonial West's civilising mission; to 'save' Global South nations from themselves, to guide them according to western norms of right and wrong.

CHINA AND SUDAN RELATIONS

Firstly, we will explore two distinct ways in which China hindered economic development in Sudan. We will discuss how its direct oil extraction exacerbated conflict dynamics, by

displacing local communities and fuelling inequalities. We will then consider the ways in which China aided the regime militarily, diplomatically and economically allowing the regime to escalate its wars with little repercussions of international law.

The US imposed sanctions of 1997 and 2007 pressured Western nations into ending their operations in Sudan, due to the regime's cited human rights abuses in Darfur, alleged support for Osama Bin Laden and involvement in terror activities in East Africa. Grounded in its sovereignty-based political framework, China's 'no strings or interference' policy was highly attractive to al-Bashir, which contrasted the 'confrontational pressure politics' of the West (Large 2009, 615). China was 'insulated' from this political pressure, and thus continued its engagement with Sudan, acting as a 'commercial, military and diplomatic beneficiary of Western sanctions in Sudan' (Natsios 2012, 63).

Oil was at the heart of China's relations with Sudan, and Chinese investments in this sector made it an important stakeholder in the internal affairs of the Sudanese government (Large 2009, 615). China's activities in this sector date back to the early 1990s, and in 1996 it bought 40% of the Greater Nile Petroleum Operating Company (Human Rights Watch 2003). These investments embedded China in a web of 'enduring violent internal instability' (Large 2009, 610), which in turn made China a politically significant domestic actor. This foregrounds our argument that China has hindered Sudan's long-term economic growth, as China's pragmatic drive to extract oil and protect its material interests hindered long term economic development in two ways: firstly, through the direct socioeconomic impacts of this extraction on local communities, and secondly through bolstering al-Bashir's regime.

OIL: THE EFFECTS OF CHINA'S DIRECT RESOURCE EXTRACTION IN SUDAN

China's investments in oil and its direct resource extraction hinder long-term economic development by displacing and destroying local communities, concentrating wealth in the core and exacerbating inequality. This contributes to internal conflict, as we see that Chinese oil investments were cited by rebel groups in Darfur and South Sudan as sources of major discontent, which made China part of the central government's desire to politically consolidate the peripheries through brute force. This was crucial to 'sharpening' the existing discourse of marginalisation employed by Darfurian and South Sudanese rebels against the government in Khartoum (Large 2009, 618). Rebels saw China as inextricably linked with the violence of the state, which 'brutality architected' the displacement and ethnic cleansing of thousands (Large 2009, 618).

This is evidenced by the series of conflicts that arose due to Chinese oil operations and the attacks they faced. These companies seized land, destroyed property, intensified land disputes, 'despoiled the environment and failed to provide jobs' to the local community (Carmody 2016, 32). Locals targeted these oil operations, such as the abduction of 9 Chinese workers in Southern Kordofan in 2008, near oil-rich Abyei. The 'lack of local benefits' (Large 2009, 618) from oil revenues and underdevelopment were major arguments made by the militias, which shows the deep involvement of China in the cited reasons for conflict, underscoring the negative economic and social impact of China's dealings in Sudan.

Similarly, the division of oil revenues was a large contributing factor in the Sudanese Civil War. Efforts to control oil-rich areas were coupled with extreme armed conflict, hence the fierce criticism of oil companies (from the US and the West, but also from China, India and Malaysia) for their role in oil exploration and armed violence in Sudan. While Western companies were pressured into withdrawal, China remained in operation in Sudan. It continued operating in areas which were brutally 'cleared of civilians and rebels' (Saferworld 2012, 29). This shows China's complacency in facilitating armed violence against marginalised groups in the country, particularly in Darfur and South Sudan, which was a major contributing factor to internal conflict and the breakup of the country. Through its resource extraction, China exacerbated existing tensions between the central government and periphery, oil-rich parts of the country, contributing to civil war. As put by a local activist, 'when the government ethnically cleansed people to clear oil passages, Chinese companies would come later. This was done for Chinese interests' (Saferworld 2012, 31).

Overall, China became party to the armed violence of the central government through its oil operations, which was seminal to the marginalisation of local communities. China was perceived by local actors as negatively contributing to the dynamics of conflict, and these grievances suggest that instability would have been less likely if China had not aligned itself with the regime's brute force. The lack of local benefits and underdevelopment of periphery regions in Sudan due to Chinese-led oil investments shows the divisive impact of China's economic engagements, and how it is difficult to separate 'economic and political activity' from one another (Natsios 2012, 61).

CHINA'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT

Secondly, China hindered long-term economic development in Sudan by bolstering the authoritarian regime, providing al-Bashir with the a) military, b) diplomatic and c) economic support necessary to consolidate his power. Without China's support, it is unlikely that he would have been able to do so amidst international sanctions. China often went against these sanctions and leveraged its position in the UN Security Council to enable al-Bashir to bypass the punitive measures of the UNSC's mandate, thus exacerbating conflict.

MILITARY

China has been heavily criticised for its role in providing arms and military equipment to al-Bashir, which were used in Darfur against civilian populations. It directly violated UN arms embargoes (Sudan Tribune 2008) by transferring weapons to non-state actors such as the Janjaweed, who carried out ethnic cleansing in Darfur. China sold over US\$55 million worth of small arms to Khartoum during the height of the abuses in Darfur, supplied almost 90% of Sudan's small arms each year, helped construct 3 ammunition factories in Khartoum and provided US\$100 million worth of Shenyang and F7 fighter jets (Saferworld 2012, 21). These military resources were coupled with training from the Chinese military; this material and moral cooperation between China and Sudan magnified the scope of war, as well multiplying the casualties and collateral damage. The arms provided by China allowed the Sudanese forces to pursue larger targets, escalating war and intensifying conflict (Carmody 2016, 32), thus hindering the economy.

DIPLOMATIC

China was also instrumental in lending al-Bashir the diplomatic support needed to shield his regime from the resolutions of the UN Security Council. China 'leveraged its position in the UNSC' to impede the council's efforts to stop the Sudanese regime's human rights abuses (Natsios 2012, 61). While China had the potential to contribute meaningfully to negotiations in the UN, it threatened to use its veto to ensure resolutions attacking al-Basahr were dismissed or amended. China consistently abstained from resolutions regarding Darfur, such as the ICC Resolution in 2005. Thus, China's diplomatic policy 'diluted' genuine intervention from occurring, such as a proposed oil embargo (Saferworld 2012, 17), which ultimately made China an obstacle to humanitarian intervention in Sudan. It is likely that China's oil interests contributed to its diplomatic orientation, to protect its heavy material investments. Overall, China's position in the UNSC largely hindered the peace process and diluted any effective action from being taken to end the conflict. This prolonged al-Bashir's regime, and allowed him to continue without the threat of repercussion.

ECONOMIC

China also provided the Sudanese government with the financial ability to purchase large amounts of firearms, despite existing evidence that they were being used to displace local populations for 'oil exploration and production and later to commit atrocities in Darfur' (Saferworld 2012, 1). Over 60% of oil revenues from China were used on military spending, and China also facilitated 'easy financing' for firearms (New America Foundation 2008). Overall, China's military, diplomatic and economic policies shielded and empowered the regime in Sudan, exacerbating the intensity, scope and prolonging of conflict by resisting international

pressures on al-Bashir, which was disastrous for economic growth.

PEACE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

In brief, China's direct resource extraction, and its military, diplomatic and economic support of the regime have hindered economic development in Sudan; conflict, civil war and instability have been exacerbated. Now, the particular economic implications of the above will be discussed, drawing on existing theory on the effect of war on economic development. China's shielding of the government prolonged intense internal conflict, such as the genocide in Darfur. It also prolonged the economic mismanagement of the regime and the diversion of funds from crucial public services to military goals.

War can be seen as a reversal of development (Strauss-Kahn 2009), as the consequences of violent conflict on economic growth are negative for a variety of reasons. Violent conflict exacerbates poverty, destroys infrastructure, and harms financial and human capital through death and fleeing outside of the country. In addition, it channels resources towards armaments, which weakens institutions and public sectors through reduced funding. In terms of growth rate, one year of conflict can reduce growth by 2.5%, and as wars average at 7 years, economies can shrink by 15% due to war (Strauss Kahn 2009). By that same token, peace, which can be briefly defined as a 'socio-political environment without violence, conflict and war' (Santhirasegaram 2008, 808) promotes economic development. The literature on peace and economic growth is rich (see cross-country review in Santhirasegaram 2008), and it concludes that both are closely intertwined, mutually reinforcing one another; peaceful conditions generate economic growth, and economic growth provides the stability needed to reduce the risk of violent conflict.

Let us now consider Sudan, and how China's involvement hindered economic growth. Decades of conflict under al-Bashir were disastrous for economic growth, and it is evident that economic crisis was a large factor in the unrest which saw his overthrow in 2019. Statistics on the holistic economic impact of the regime are not yet available, however, we can examine the effects of one specific conflict to illustrate this point. The conflict in Darfur alone cost \$90 billion from 2003 to 2017; this sum accounts for the destruction of villages and infrastructure, inhibited economic growth and the 'loss of lifetime earnings for the war victims plus costs of peacekeeping operations' (Vision of Humanity 2014). There have been over 300,000 casualties, 3 million displacements and thousands of villages torched in the conflict, as well as millions of dollars in crops and livestock destroyed. While the conflict in Darfur was the largest, the regime also pursued armed violence in the war with South Sudan, unrest in the East, and elsewhere. Thus, we can assume that the overall, holistic economic cost of all conflict on Sudan is much higher. China's arm in the Darfur genocide, as well as in empowering the regime, thus harmed the economy through prolonging and escalating conflict.

In addition to the direct economic consequence of destruction, the regime's prioritisation of war in the national budget had adverse consequences on the public sector. Sudan spent 'far more lavishly on guns than on butter' (Vision of Humanity 2014), with estimates that the government spent over 70% of its budget on security and the military, compared with only about 1% on health and 2.3% on education (Dabanga Sudan 2016). Overall, the cost of war was 'an unaffordable drain on Sudan's resources' (Vision of Humanity 2014). Thus, China's role in facilitating the conflicts in Sudan, and the exacerbation of instability, is highly significant in contributing to the economic crisis which Sudan faced due to heavy military spending and destruction.

CHINESE PEACEKEEPING AND INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS

This part of the paper will consider how certain events caused an alteration in China's approach to al-Bashir, and how China's 'subtle' diplomacy actually contributed considerably to a facilitation of peace. China's role in this is often underreported and dismissed, as it operated in a manner distinct from traditional Western pressure politics. Arguably China attempted, to some extent, to contribute to bringing about peace in Sudan, as well as economic development through large-scale infrastructure projects for future growth. While the dominant portrayal

of China is as an exceptional threat that contravenes Western norms, in reality China's policy in Sudan matured and shifted over time in response to the internal challenges it faced.

It can be seen that major domestic events in the late 2000s led to an observable shift in China's foreign policy with Sudan; The 'PR disaster' of the 2008 Olympics and the immense international pressure on China, the previously mentioned attacks on Chinese oil workers, and the growing threat of internal coups in Sudan (Natsios 2012, 64). These prompted higher political engagement by China, which can arguably be seen as a 'transcendence' and maturation of its sovereignty principle (Large 2009, 620). China began to 'influence without interfering', by pushing a 'gentle diplomacy' directive (Large 2009, 619); this took the form of close consultations behind closed doors with political elites and al-Bashir himself, in order to persuade him to end the conflict. This is significant to our question, as it allows us to evaluate whether China as passively supported Sudan as is often argued by Western media, looking at the commitments China made to peace, and in turn economic development.

PEACEKEEPING

By focusing on the change in China's approach to peace, we can see that China began to encourage settling the conflict in Darfur from 2004 onwards (Gaafar Karrar Ahmed 2010: 6). The most noteworthy example of China's commitment to peace is evident through the deployment of Chinese troops as UN peacekeepers in Darfur, which al-Bashir initially deeply opposed. It is likely that it was a phone call from China's Hu Jintao, at the encouragement of President Bush, which persuaded al-Bashir to accept the peacekeeping operation (Natsios 2012, 66). It was the largest peacekeeping force in history, with 25,000 troops sent to the area. This example is also significant in highlighting that, contrary to popular belief, China and Western powers can cooperate in trying to achieve the shared aim of resolving conflict, and that Chinese goals can indeed align with those of the international community.

Another shift from the existing norms of Chinese policy can be seen through the public criticism by Chinese government officials of the regime in Sudan. This materialised in Jintao's 'Four-Point Principle on Solving Darfur', which was committed to improving the situation in Darfur (China Org 2007). These examples show that China is not as complacent as often made out to be – through 'reasserting their position' in relation to al-Bashir and resisting his wishes (Large 2009, 620), it made attempts to restore peace and stability, minimising the effect of economic crisis.

Ultimately, however, we cannot overemphasise the difference in China-Sudan relations over time. Despite international pressure on China, it did not 'decisively transgress' (Saferworld 2012, 21) the limits of what it potentially could have done to promote peace and economic development in Sudan. The maturation in China's policy can also be seen as self-contradictory; while China played a large role in initially fuelling violence and in aiding the regime to carry out its wars, it also began to diplomatically support the peace process when it became apparent violence would risk its investments. This contradiction is most strikingly illustrated through the fact that Chinese peacekeepers were being attacked by Darfur rebels wielding Chinese firearms. This shows that their contributions to peace were arguably too little, too late, as the initial role it played in undermining peace evolved dangerously. While China contributed by providing personnel to keep peace and engage in positive efforts such as demining, it paradoxically maintained an incautious arms policy which exacerbated conflict.

INFRASTRUCTURE

While China's investments in Sudan, and Africa as a whole, are regarded with deep suspicion, the accounts by Chinese and Sudanese stakeholders are highly encouraging, highlighting the positive effects of investments and the benefits of trade on economic development in Sudan. This Sino-Sudanese school of development finds that infrastructure projects are key to securing sustainable economic growth by benefiting from the potential power and water resources generated by dams. 'Headline infrastructure projects' (Natsios 2012, 66), such as the Merowe Dam, have been built and led by the Chinese government and commercial agencies. This US\$1.5 billion project provides water for irrigation and has doubled the supply

of electricity in Sudan. The dam is the largest hydropower project by dimensions in all of Africa, and is necessary for the growing population of Sudan, and the growing demand for electricity as the population urbanises (Saferworld 2012, 23). Chinese sources also highlight their effort to encourage social development and combatting poverty. The China Foundation of Poverty Alleviation provides US\$9.3 million to build and maintain medical facilities in Sudan (Saferworld 2012, 24), and other initiatives range from the donation of school buildings to the building of cross-country routes (Belt and Road Research Platform 2021). We see a philanthropic dimension to China's dealings in Sudan, built on the rhetoric of their philosophical partnership.

However, there have also been criticisms of the approach taken by China regarding infrastructure, and the impacts they have on conflict dynamics in Sudan. While the Merowe Dam benefits the population through irrigation and electricity, the construction displaced 60,000 people from the area and there was violent suppression of resistance (University of East Anglia 2015). Similarly, there was violent conflict with the construction of a dam in Kajbar in 2007, with 4 casualties and tens of injuries (International Rivers 2011). It is necessary to consider how these infrastructure projects can simultaneously improve economic development through their immediate benefits, while also bearing negative impacts on local communities through intensification of armed conflict and government suppression. In addition, infrastructure is similarly embedded with discourse of core-periphery inequalities, as government corruption meant that revenues were concentrated in the hands of the few, with local communities, especially in Darfur and the South, not reaping the rewards of these profits.

Overall, China's peacekeeping efforts and huge investments in infrastructure have fostered a duality of interpretations, which shows that assessments of economic development are not as straightforward as assumed. While both examples contribute, at least in some way, to a commitment to peace and providing economic benefits to Sudan, they also expose concerning economic outcomes. It is therefore worthwhile to argue that Chinese investments benefit Sudan in the short term, through increased productive capacity and access to resources such as electricity, yet the benefits of this are disproportionately felt by existing elites.

REPRESENTATIONS OF CHINA AND AFRICA

To conclude, we will briefly discuss the prevailing assumptions and constructions of China and Africa. While China is represented as a threat with 'malicious intent', Africa is regarded through a Western paternalist lens as naïve, susceptible to being 'fooled' by China (Yang 2021). These paternalistic attitudes are harmful and have material consequences for Africa. They shape the global system, and intervention policies, as Western nations and institutions occupy a 'saviour' role which relies on the apparent incompetence of Global South nations. Paternalistic language contains 'elements of domination', as the international system aims to 'solve' the problems in Africa, without knowing or caring about the viewpoint of Africans; most intervention occurs without consent, 'against the will of intended beneficiaries' (Barnett 2012). Thus, it is important to discuss how representations of Africans as naïve are both harmfully patronising and consequential for international governance.

While China does engage with authoritarian regimes and there are legitimate reasons to criticise its dealings in Africa, this criticism often stems from a Eurocentric view of global politics. Presenting China as a threat means that many of the positive contributions it makes in Africa go unnoticed or are interrogated with suspicion. Details of China's funding and mediating of the Sudanese Civil War with IGAD, cooperation with Western envoys in the peace process, and efforts to pressure the Sudanese government through 'subtle' diplomacy are 'not at all nearly as reported on' as the support of China for al-Bashir (Verjee 2016). It is important to recognise that this can be a common narrative which overlooks the nuances and maturation of China's policy in Sudan. By understanding this complexity, we can see how China both improves and hinders economic development in Sudan, as a single project can be understood in a variety of ways. They have multiple impacts which need to be considered alongside other socioeconomic factors, such as how Arab Sudanese people in Khartoum and political elites may benefit more from China's investments in the country, while these same

projects displace and ethnically cleanse those in Darfur and the South. We can also see that China's policies have had unintended negative consequences, as highlighted by the paradox of Chinese peacekeepers being attacked by Chinese firearms.

In addition, the narrative framing China and the West as irreconcilable enemies is dangerous, as it presents both countries as having unaligned values. This is not the case, as both countries have worked together to secure peace, such as Bush and Jintao directly. Interestingly, China's 'soft' diplomatic pressure arguably complements and functions in accordance with the aims of Western civil society. Where Western troops are 'untrusted', Chinese troops continued peacekeeping in difficult conditions (Verjee 2016). This shows that there is a role for China in securing peace in spaces which the West is unsuited to fill. Overall, China is a complex actor which at times pursued self-defeating policies, contributing both to conflict and peace.

This is coupled with widespread Western paternalism when engaging with Africa, specifically the passing of judgement on Africa's 'liberty of action, as justified by referring to the welfare of the coerced' (Igbogbo 2020, 9). The view that China hinders economic development in Africa is often tackled from this angle, as African nations are referred to as being 'trapped' by China's economic diplomacy, and Africans are constructed as passive actors who do not know where their best interest lies. The language used in the media often is highly patronising, suggesting that African leaders are 'worryingly' oblivious to China's supposed agenda, or that they are not competent enough to fully understand the terms of contracts they sign (Josephs 2023). These literary examples from Western media are a continuation of imperial era civilising missions, through which Western state discourse is privileged vis a vis the Global South. Through this paternalistic language, African nations are infantilised and represented as needing Western guidance and protection. Thus, through arguing that China hinders economic development in Sudan, we must acknowledge the agency of the government; China did not march into the country and exploit it, but rather the process of resource extraction and intensifying instability can be seen as part of the Sudanese government's exercise of its agency. The regime sought to secure its own interests, and its relations with China were the result of negotiations, deliberations, and choice.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, while China did contribute to some form of economic development in Sudan through its investments, infrastructure and attempts to secure peace in the country, the consequence of its resource extraction and support for al-Bashir's regime ultimately enabled an economic crisis which Sudan is yet to recover from.

China hindered the long-term economic development of Sudan in two distinct yet related ways. Firstly, through its resource extraction and oil operations, China played a large role in the displacement and destruction of local communities to make way for various projects. This exacerbated existing tensions and conflict, as any dissent was met with the brute coercive force of the state. Secondly, China's support of al-Bashir's regime contributed to the prolonging and intensification of violent conflict, as well as to the government's funnelling of revenues to continue its wars. By providing the regime with firearms and training, alongside diplomatically shielding the country from accountability and sanctions, China lengthened and increased the scope of the war, and convoluted attempts to secure peace at the UNSC. In addition, China enabled the regime to bypass international sanctions, providing them with the financial tools and support necessary to survive.

While we see an evolution and maturation in China's policy over time, through a commitment to mediating the peace process, these efforts were undermined by China's other endeavours. China's initial complacency in Sudan's abuses and military support undercut its peacekeeping operations, as China's firearm policy frustrated their approach to peace and made it harder to negotiate. The peacekeeping effort *could* be seen as retrospectively beneficial to aiding economic development by securing peace, however, the damage and destruction of war in Darfur and South Sudan had already occurred on a large scale. Similarly, while China's infrastructure projects have significantly economically benefited Sudan, such as expanding

the productive capacity of the oil sector, the development of irrigation infrastructure and the generation of electricity, these efforts similarly did not sustain any sustainable form of growth or widespread benefits. These projects were linked to the concentrated wealth of the elites and the displacement of local populations, which itself had negative economic effects and intensified the conflict. The cost of Sudan's war has been catastrophic, and even 4 years after toppling al-Bashir's regime, the country is still dealing with the consequences socioeconomically.

By focusing on Sudan, it becomes evident that aspects of this experience can be compared with China's engagement elsewhere in Africa. By considering violent conflict, we can see that Chinese investments and resource extraction have been linked to outbreaks of conflict in other African nations, such as Zambia (Carmody 2016, 33). Sino-Zambian relations have also come under heavy scrutiny, as China's 'non-interference' policy 'exacerbated authoritarian tendencies' by providing no strings finance to the regime (Matfess 2018). Zambia is the 3rd largest recipient of Chinese investments in Africa, a fact which has generated discontent among anti-government Zambian groups, as these transactions with China were shrouded by the regime. There was also growing anti-China sentiment among the masses, who resented the unsafe working conditions within Chinese factors, and the alleged influx of Chinese nationals who were stealing jobs (Jalloh and Wan 2019). Zambia is an important source of copper, and the extraction of this resource by Chinese mining companies has triggered several pay riots in the past, many of which have led to shootings and assassinations (Reuters 2010; BBC 2012). This contentious political atmosphere saw a series of mass protests erupt following elections in 2016, exacerbated by the ongoing debt crisis. Zambians took to the streets against what they saw to be the undermining of the country's sovereignty by 'selling' state-owned companies to China, and the redirection of funds into the hands of government elites. This period also saw extreme government repression of riots, similar to the state violence seen in Sudan.

Thus, similar to the Sudanese case, Chinese investments in Zambia exacerbate existing patterns of corruption and government repression. China's 'no strings' financial policies bolster authoritarian leaders and fuel riots and resentment due to resource extraction. While the Zambian context features other dimensions, particularly in regard to Sudan's more pronounced core-periphery, ethnic divisions, there are similarities in their experience with Chinese resource extraction and state corruption. Thus, this study of Sudan provides a coherent, chronological account of the ways in which China can exacerbate cycles of violence by bolstering authoritarian regimes, which can be drawn upon to examine the economic effect of violence growth elsewhere in nations with heavy Chinese investments. China's foreign policy was guided by notions of mutual benefit and non-interference, and the economic implications of this can be extended to situate China's interaction with other African countries within existing political processes.

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