Sudan, the hollow state: what challenges to Chinese policy?
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Abstract
This paper offers a unique case study of China’s engagement in Sudan contextualised within Sudan’s particular political economy as a post-colonial state. My analysis rises from a broadly political-economy framework, contextualising the Sudanese state interaction with Chinese capital in the form of oil revenue; and explores why this has been problematic in terms of Chinese sovereign non-interference. My analysis incorporates aspects of post-colonial political theory in order to fully recognise the state form of Sudan; arising from this post-colonial understanding are territorial and resource conflicts, Darfur and South Sudan, explored in chapters two and three.

I argue that these contradictions have led to both theoretical and actual challenges to China’s sovereign non-interference, as represented by the cases of Darfur and South Sudan. The state-capital intersections in South Sudan and Darfur, each seen as functions of the unique Sudanese state form, have forced changes in China’s foreign diplomacy.

Darfur has challenged Chinese non-interference as it relates to China’s international diplomacy, forcing a transition in diplomatic engagement between China and Sudan. More recently, China’s progressive engagement with the new nation of South Sudan contradicts the principles underpinning Chinese sovereignty policy.

I propose both that China has been a driver for the development of conflict in these two cases, and that these conflicts have driven China itself to rethink those aspects of its policy which are so problematic in Sudan- non-interference and sovereignty. The result has been the creation of an uncertain economic and political future for Sudan and South Sudan; while China’s role within these two sovereign states remains in question.

Key words: China; Sudan; South Sudan; Darfur
1. Introduction

1.1. Literature review

An abundance of literature exists on the subject of China in Africa, and China in Sudan, that cannot be fully explored here. I will therefore limit this review to the literature which directly relates to the topics explored in the following chapters.

Much literature covering China’s involvement in Africa explores the political economy of Sub-Saharan African states (Alden 2007; Ampah 2008; Brautigam 2008; Kaplinsky et al. 2010). The exploration of African states’ interaction with Chinese capital has given rise to varying political economy frameworks, such as Carmody’s “cruciform sovereignty” (2009), Breslin’s ‘Coxian’ framework (2007), Tull’s three state types (2006); and Power and Mohan’s comprehensive geo-political overviews (2008; 2010).

Much literature covers China’s oil diplomacy and its effect on governance in Africa, particularly the confluence of resource diplomacy with patronage politics often present in resource-rich African countries (Edoho 2011; Houser 2008; Jakobson and Daojing 2006; Klare and Volman 2006; Obi 2010; Taylor 2007a; Taylor 2009).

These overviews do not implicitly recognise, however, the African post-colonial state context; and none of these frameworks provide a full analysis of Sudan, although Sino-Sudanese relations are often referenced as a proxy for China’s entire engagement in Africa (Power and Mohan 2010).

Sudan is, as Large has argued, a defining case in China’s changing relations with Africa, and a key illustration of transition and convergence in China’s international politics (2008a). Sudan is seen as the geopolitical territory where Beijing faces the challenge of accommodating its established and ideological policy with the complexity of African politics (Large 2008a; Large 2009). While Sino-Sudanese relations have attracted much criticism and global reportage, in general Sudan has yet to receive the in-depth treatment its significance deserves (Large 2009).

(2008) have provided critiques of Chinese investment; Obiorah describes Sudan as casting “a disturbing light on Chinese engagement in Africa” (2007:47). Hilsum (2008) and Large (2008a,b,c; 2009) have also provided considered critiques of China’s non-interference in Sudan.

Transition in Chinese policy relating to Darfur has been covered by a number of authors as a significant case study of Beijing’s reconciliation of short term gains with long term interests within Sudan (Cheng 2011; Holslag 2008; Jakobson 2007; Large 2008; Stahl 2011). This case is viewed as evidence of an emerging multilateral awareness on behalf of China, and as a limited ‘breakdown’ of Beijing’s non-interference policy (Ampah 2008; Holslag 2008; Holslag 2011a; Large 2009; Power and Mohan 2010).

South Sudan, as a new nation and new political context, has yet to receive much attention within academic work, although Large (2008; 2011), and the International Crisis Group (ICG 2012) have both given useful analyses.

What is missing from the literature, then, is a unification of the exploration of Chinese policy in Sudan with a clear understanding of the challenges posed to it by Sudan’s particular political economy; as well as the inclusion of South Sudan as a new political context. I aim to fill these gaps with my own analysis as described below.

1.2. Aims

In this paper, I explore how Sudan’s unique state form poses multiple contradictions to Chinese foreign policy and diplomacy, as underpinned by sovereign non-interference.

I will construct Sudanese history as the manifestation of the quintessential post-colonial state form. I then show the oil industry in Sudan as a manifestation of this hollow state form, and highlight Chinese engagement as problematic within this context by providing an overview of the contradictions of Chinese sovereign non-interference posed by the Sudanese state.

I argue that the contextual history of both Darfur and South Sudan illustrates that they can be best understood as functions of Sudan’s particular state form; while their circumstances have posed unique challenges to Chinese policy and diplomacy.

I position my analysis to avoid basing it within an uncritical narrative of either Western or Eastern interactions with Africa, which many analyses have been prone to (Power and Mohan
2008: 26). At the same time, I offer this analysis of China in Sudan while avoiding the use of Sudan as a singular proxy for characterising China in Africa. I contend that Sudan’s political economy makes it a unique case, as is every African state with which China engages (Alden 2007: 126).

My approach, situated in this post-colonial context, enables transparent analysis of multiple and concurrent types of contradiction to Chinese sovereign non-interference; makes transition in Chinese policy more visible; and constitutes a unique framework for the analysis of China’s role in Sudan.

2. Chapter One: Sudan’s post-colonial political economy

2.1. Framework

As Guthrie argues, “economic institutions and practices are deeply embedded in political, cultural, and social systems” and it is impossible to analyse either without the other (2006: 10). While economic and political analyses separately have much to offer, a combined analysis offers more context (Ajakaije and Kaplinsky 2009: 483). We cannot understand the African state without recognising its structural determinations, particularly the powerful, residual effects of colonialism. This can be resolved through awareness of the context of Sudan as an individual, post-colonial state (Breslin 2007: 24; Cheru 2002).

I avoid the “normalisation of the European state as the benchmark for analysis” in China Africa relations through acknowledging the particular context of Sudan (Power and Mohan 2010: 5). This acknowledgement is predicated on Sudan’s particular state configuration—a legacy of colonialism (Cheru 2002).

The resultant framework, following Power and Mohan’s (2008), begins by bringing together a broad-based “political economy with certain insights from post-colonial theory”—a “post-colonial political economy” analysis (24). I explore the intersection between state and capital in the context of China’s oil diplomacy in Sudan, which has forced changes in China’s foreign policy and diplomacy. Concurrently, I explore how this state-capital intersection has exposed ‘intrinsic’ contradictions in Chinese conceptions of the non-interference and sovereignty policies evoked within the Sudanese geopolitical space.
As part of my analysis, I also consider ideology and racial and religious divisions within Sudan— the Arab-non-Arab and Muslim-non-Muslim divides between North and South, and the ‘Islamicisation’ of Sudan (Jok 2007). However, while these considerations factor into my analysis of Sudanese marginalisation and resultant conflicts, I argue that ethnic tensions are ultimately intertwined with the legacy of colonialism and the formation of the post-colonial state in Sudan (Dagne 2011). Neither can the presence of oil in Sudan, in aiding what many have termed a ‘resource curse’, be scrutinised without what Obi has termed a political economy “which lays bare…the subordination of [Africa] to elites embedded in global capitalist relations” (2010). In this case, Sudanese elites have embedded capital relations with China into their own foreign and domestic policies, effectively incorporating China as both partner in resource extraction and as defensive shield against foreign criticism.

2.2. Limitations of analysis

The vast scale of the subject dictates that this work cannot examine the full spectrum of Sino-Sudanese relations. Nor do I cover the political economy of China itself- a huge topic. Rather, I focus on the intersection of Chinese state actors (both state-owned oil corporations and political actors such as diplomats) in the context of the Sudanese oil industry and Sudan’s state foreign policy, presided over by the Sudanese political elite (chiefly synonymous here with the ruling National Congress Party- the NCP) and antagonised by Sudan’s peripheral actors- rebel groups and separatists such as the Justice and Liberation Movement, or the Sudan People’s Liberation Army.

In chapter three, I cover the currently evolving relations between Khartoum, Juba and Beijing with the caveat that my analysis is unavoidably time bound, ending in August 2012.

2.3. Sudan- the quintessential post-colonial state?

In Africa, we can understand the post-colonial state to be an incomplete state form as understood by Weberian state norms (Robinson 2007; Taylor 2007a: 22). The legacy of colonisation is such that African states, formed by colonists as instruments of resource extraction, were forcibly imposed on the landscape and populace without accompanying legal or administrative institutions, checks and balances, or state apparatus (Taylor 2007a: 22). Neither democracy nor accountability were built in to colonial governments as they were focussed on capital export and patronage; colonial policy necessitated centralised decision
making imposed on artificial geographic states—which usually excluded minority groups (Cheru 2002).

This exclusion was exacerbated by patrician behaviour and ethnic tensions often encouraged by ‘divide and rule’ policies, leading to ultimate control of political and economic power primarily in hands of one ethnic group (Bayart et al. 1999; Cheru 2002).

Post-independence, state-led development in Africa meant governance inevitably followed the original colonial capture of the state. Independent governments typically did not dismantle colonial government structure, leaving in place central planning designed to fill state coffers rather than govern (Aké 1995; Cheru 2002).

Instead of a state accountable to its populace, post-independence left Africans with “an intrinsically unstable personalised system of domination” (Taylor 2007b: 141). Power was dependent on the capture of the state, and corruption, fuelled by resource extraction, ensured the entrenchment of the ruling elite, encouraging rent-seeking behaviour (Cheru 2002; Dowden 2007: 49; Taylor 2007b: 141). Fundamental tensions resulted between autocratic states and disenfranchised populace—the periphery—leading to cycles of conflict and further marginalisation (Aké 1995; Bayart et al. 1999).

This argument is not to portray Africa as an essentialist “site of primordial instability” (Harrison 2004: 17). Rather, I contend that state formation in Africa has been violent, inconsistent, and incomplete, due to the nature of the colonial state, and the state forms emerging since then have been unique. These resulting states are what we must acknowledge and understand to fully analyse China's role and future within Africa.

We can see this process clearly in Sudan’s state development post-independence. While acknowledging the limitations of “periodising” events throughout Sudanese history (Barnett and AbdelKarim 1988: 7), it is the case that Sudan’s current state, and Chinese involvement, cannot be understood without taking into account the “role of successive Sudanese states in producing regional underdevelopment and racial and cultural antagonism” (Johnson 2011: 2).

Indeed, this state development process in Sudan, in both the colonial and post-colonial period, has been the most consistent influence on “economic, political, and ultimately social relations” within the nation (Johnson 2011: 2). Sudan’s political conflicts and resource extraction economy, and racial and religious divides (Muslim and non-Muslim, Arab and non-Arab), can be best analysed as part of this interrelated narrative (Jok 2007: 27).
2.4. Sudan’s colonial past

Although Sudan’s past is “replete with independent, successive state formations” throughout its territory (Jok 2007: 39), the process of encompassing the territories as a single national state began with the Ottoman Empire’s occupation and control of the northern territories in 1821 and was completed during British colonial rule from 1898 to independence in 1956 (Johnson 2011; Jok 2007: 52). During the Ottoman Empire’s rule, Sudan “was a country in name only”- marked by a deep divide between northern and southern regions, with the south considered “a field from which slaves were harvested” (Jok 2007: 52). The south was never administered effectively by a central government, nor did it benefit from state services.

Under Anglo-Egyptian rule, this division continued. “The seeds of current challenges to [Sudan’s] territorial integrity…were nurtured by colonial policies” wavering between attempts to govern Sudan as a single nation and the south as a separate polity (Jok 2007: 52). During this period, Sudan’s development and governance were designed to serve the requirements of colonists, as I shall further explore in the following chapters (Barnett 1988: 3).

2.5. Independence - division between elite and periphery

Sudan became a self-governing nation state in 1956 (Jok 2007: 39). The coming of independence in Sudan “was a product of negotiations between an educated elite and the colonial authorities” which did not, for the most part, involve the already marginalised peripheral populations outside Khartoum (Jok 2007: 117). The structure of the independent Sudanese state, therefore, was decided without reference to their needs or wishes.

Consequently, following colonial division, a privileged Arab elite based in Khartoum took control of social and political power, and thus of the state, for its own ends, focussing on its own needs for accumulation and consumption (Barnett 1988: 3). Ethnic and cultural discrimination by ruling elite in Khartoum for those Sudanese living on the periphery historically established the pattern of governance by awlad al-bahar, constituting territorial control and governance reaching out only a few hundred miles from the capital, and a diminishing influence of central state control outside Khartoum (Collins 2005: 151).

Since independence, political and economic power has been almost entirely concentrated in the hands of Northerners (Bechtold 1991: 26). The vast majority of governmental and political positions are held by just three Northern tribes making up about 5% of the total
population (Flint and de Waal 2005: 18). Development funding intended for the South was often funnelled to Khartoum (Jok 2007); and the state provided minimal services to the peripheries such as Darfur and the Southern regions (Johnson 2011; Jok 2007).

2.6. Conflict in Sudan

Racial and religious divides- at times quite arbitrary- in concert with peripheral marginalisation catalysed a succession of civil wars between the North and South. At the same time, Sudan’s governance has waivered between parliamentary democracy and military rule, both of which maintained an “authoritarian-cum-predatory state-building pattern which nullified any prospect for democratic state-building”- rather, in Sudan, war-making became a substitute for state-making (Salih 2007: 36).

Sudan’s chequered history of civilian parliamentary rule came to an end in 1989 with the military coup of the ruling party- then the National Islamic Front, now the National Congress Party (Large 2009: 614; Voll 1991: viii). The National Congress Party (NCP) cemented Khartoum’s dominance through authoritarian rule, coupled with a discourse of militant Islam and Arab racial supremacy (Jok 2007). Since its inception, the NCP has repeatedly answered civilian discontent with state sanctioned violence, leading to protracted armed conflicts (Large 2009: 614). I will explore Sudanese conflict more fully in the following chapters as it relates to Darfur and Southern Sudan.

2.7. Sudanese oil- enabling a hollow state?

Khartoum’s supremacy was strengthened by the commencement of oil extraction in 1999 (Jok 2007: 188). Oil has been fundamental in influencing political developments in Sudan, notably during the breakdown of the 1972 peace accord between North and South, and paradoxically the impetus behind the signing of an eventual peace accord between them (Hussein 2007: 54; Large 2008c: 3). Oil has been central to the entrenchment of the ruling elite in Khartoum and the worsening division between centre and periphery, leading an already conflict-prone nation to further strife (Jok 2007: 185).

Jok argues that Sudan’s oil industry is essentially a network of state and business focussed on promoting Northern dominance through the extraction of Southern-located oil reserves (2007: 187). We can see here the strengthening of a hollow state apparatus, which has no accountability to its citizenry, through the control of national resources and the state’s...
insertion into a global capitalist economy which funds extraction (Carmody 2009: 355; Jok 2007: 187). The result is the sale of oil by the state for its own benefit to the exclusion of the Sudanese populace, which has led to cycles of state-peripheral conflict perpetuating human rights abuses too numerous to catalogue here, but which include civilian displacement, mass rape, and (contentiously) even genocide (Amnesty International 2007; Human Rights First 2008; Jok 2007: 192). The continued conflicts between North, South, and Darfur, and oil production, are all interrelated problems (Jok 2007: 185); again, a theme which will be explored in the following chapters.

With petro-dollars as income, the Sudanese state is “free of the obligation to care for its citizens” – representing the disconnect between legitimate and illegitimate power evident in the post-colonial state narrative (Jok 2007: 187). The result has been the financing of the Sudanese state by foreign, often Chinese, oil firms, in order to remove the insurgencies of the periphery, who are thought to threaten secure oil production which gives the state its power (Jok 2007: 187). Oil has, in this way, both strengthened Sudanese sovereignty by funding the state, while also destabilising it through encouraging rebellion in pursuit of a share of oil revenue (Carmody 2009: 358).

Sudan, then, can be understood as perhaps the purest form of Harvey’s capitalistic accumulative state- as the “state armed with police [military] powers and a monopoly over the means of violence”, backed up not with constitutional power, but with actual violence and forced capital accumulation by dispossession (Harvey 2003: 89).

Coerced dispossession of civilian populations, the commoditisation and privatisation of oil, the suppression of rights, and the creation of exclusive enclave extraction economies where oil exists- is all backed by state sanctioned violence (Harvey 2003: 145). It is within this context that I explore Sino-Sudanese engagement.

2.8. Sino-Sudanese relations in context

Chinese relations with Sudan have a long history- country to country contact may have been as early as AD 441 (Anshan 2007: 6). The modern state of the People’s Republic of China has had formal diplomatic ties with Sudan since 1959, and has maintained good relations with successive Sudanese parliamentary and military governments since then (Large 2008c: 2; Zambelis 2011). However, oil has been central to the intensification of Chinese-Sudanese relations- China’s entry into the Sudanese oil sector came in the wake of a long history of
efforts to develop an oil export industry in Sudan (Large 2008c: 3). By far the most significant and consequential area where China impacts Sudan is its involvement in Sudan’s oil industry; and it is strategic imperatives revolving around oil interests that have chiefly shaped China’s policy towards Sudan, particularly with regards to sovereignty and non-interference (Large; 2007; Zambelis 2011).

China’s shift to a liberalised market economy has led to unparalleled and rapid economic growth over the last three decades (Zhang 2000: 118). This has created massive demand for energy resources to fuel growth (Deng 2012: 157; Jakobson 2009: 404; Jiang 2009; Power and Mohan 2008: 27; Saferworld 2011: viii). Driven by oil, China’s position in Sudan developed from a comparatively minor role to becoming Sudan’s most important external trade partner (Large 2009: 614; Zambelis 2011).

China’s rapidly developing, state-owned oil companies—mainly the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) have played a central role in the development of Sudan’s oil industries (Holslag 2008: 72; Zambelis 2011; Zhang 2004: 196). CNPC is the largest shareholder in the two biggest oil consortiums in Sudan, Petrodar and the Greater Nile Petroleum Operating Company (GNPOC) (Dagne 2011: 29; Large 2008a: 7; Taylor 2007a: 17). Chinese companies were also responsible for building most of Sudan’s oil infrastructure, including cross-country pipelines, marine terminals, and road and rail (Erasmus 2011). As of 2011 China was Sudan’s largest export partner, with a share of 68% of Sudan’s exports; and as of 2012, China is the largest purchaser of Sudanese oil (Bariyo 2012; CIA World Factbook 2012).

Concurrently, the political configuration of bilateral investment agreements and diplomatic links, directed by Chinese leaders and the Sudanese elite, has cemented economic investment, in which oil looks set to remain central (Large 2008c: 6; Large 2009: 614). Chinese engagement has involved a mixture of personal relationships between key leaders, party to party communication, and military cooperation with arms supplies, based on the respect for Sudan’s territorial integrity and state sovereignty (Large 2009: 614). Paradoxically, the preference of the NCP for relations based on respect for non-interference has also been responsible for the domestic conflict that has been such a source of global political controversy for Beijing arising from its steadfast support of Khartoum (Large 2009: 617).

Ultimately, China’s position in Sudan today has been shaped by the nature of Sudan’s foreign relations during the 1990s and the destructive wars in Darfur and Southern Sudan, with which
Beijing has had deepening involvement (Large 2008c: 3). Chinese engagement in the cases of Darfur and South Sudan will be covered in more detail in the following chapters.

2.9. Chinese sovereign non-interference in Sudan

Central to the Chinese engagement with Sudan is the guarantee of the Sudanese state’s freedom from interference by outside actors (Jakobson 2007; Stahl 2011: 154; Tull 2006). China’s own experience with partial colonisation led to the establishment of non-interference as a mainstay of Beijing’s foreign policy, as elucidated first in the 1950s ‘Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence’ (Anshan 2007: 6; Guijin 2004; People’s Daily 2006; Stahl 2011: 154; Suolao 2007: 13). Domestic political affairs are seen as the “exclusive concern of national governments” which must be respected by other states (Saferworld 2011: ii).

Non-interference is coupled with a strong notion of state sovereignty, based on territorial integrity and unity, in opposition to terrorism and separatism (Contessi 2010: 328; Evans and Steinberg 2007; Stahl 2011: 153; Zambelis 2011). Scarred by its own experience of foreign domination, and driven by domestic experience of separatist movements and territorial disputes within Chinese territory, China’s sovereignty policy adheres to strict Westphalian norms of state form (Contessi 2010: 338).

These stances are echoed in China’s 2006 Africa policy, where the Communist Party of China (CPC) declared its strong relations with Africa “on the basis of the principles of…mutual respect and non-interference in each others’ internal affairs” as well as China’s “stand for mutual support on major issues concerning state sovereignty, territorial integrity, national dignity and human rights” (CPC 2006).

These are policy stances which have provided African leaders – such as the NCP- with a “respite” from conditional foreign aid (Zambelis 2011), suiting African polities who wish for funds without accompanying scrutiny, as is the case with Sudan (Taylor 2007b: 144).

In the case of Darfur, for instance, the Chinese ambassador to Sudan, Deng Shaoqin, openly stated in 2006 that Beijing was “opposed to any intervention by the United Nations in the internal affairs of Sudan under the pretext of human rights violations” (Taylor 2007b: 143). Furthermore, Deputy Foreign Minister Zhou Wenzhong was quoted as saying in 2005, “Business is business. We try to separate politics from business ... I think the internal situation in the Sudan is an internal affair” (Taylor 2007b: 143).
There is strong convergence between Chinese norms on governance and much African practice (Taylor 2007b: 144). Chinese economic and political support comes without conditions on transparent democracy or accountability, which might undermine regime security in authoritarian regimes such as Sudan; and Beijing’s stance on non-interference and sovereignty gives the Sudanese state the prerogative to utilise Chinese funding as it wishes without repercussions. This convergence of Chinese non-interference with Sudanese state policy has aroused controversy and criticism worldwide (Sautman and Hairong 2007: 76; Taylor 2007b: 143).

2.10. Chinese investment in Sudan- challenging non-interference?

Many have argued that Chinese non-interference is essentially a justification for supporting authoritarian or corrupt regimes (Hilsum 2008). Large (2008a) argues that non-interference, as manifested in practice in Sudan, is to pursue business as a form of applied politics. The notion that non-interference allows for ‘business, not politics’, is a formula bearing artificially neat connotations of separate domains which are not present in Sudan (98). While there is much to be said on the positive aspects of non-interference, for example the absence of patronising conditionality inherent to much Western aid (Dowden 2007: 50), ultimately, Chinese support “could offer African politicians increasing leeway in [preserving] their own power” rather than encouraging broader development as in the case of Sudan (Taylor 2007b: 144). In the Sudanese context, Chinese non-interference and guarantee of sovereignty means that the values and interests of the privileged exclusively decide domestic conduct (Carmody and Taylor 2010: 510).

This is particularly visible in the case of Sudan’s oil industry, where Chinese proclamations of non-interference do not comfortably square with the nature of Chinese involvement (Large 2011). China’s heavy involvement in Sudan’s oil sector was influential in solidifying the NCP’s interests- that is, the interests of the aforementioned political elite at the heart of the post-colonial state, by increasing the revenues available to them “in historically unprecedented terms” (Large 2008a: 98). The impact of Chinese investment in oil in Sudan has been to intensify a resource extraction political economy while further concentrating wealth in the hands of the elite at the expense of the periphery, as will be explored further in the following chapters (Power and Mohan 2010: 19). Ultimately, there is a huge gap between Chinese rhetoric of sovereign non-interference and the resultant strengthening of a political
and ethnic elite, particularly where that elite sponsors conflict (Large 2008a: 104; Saferworld 2011: ii).

Apart from governance and human rights issues, Beijing’s arms export policies and their involvement in Sudan’s civil conflicts have been particularly criticised, with Amnesty International presenting evidence that China transferred military, security and police equipment to government forces in Sudan, which were subsequently used in persistent and systematic violations of human rights (Amnesty International 2007). China has also been criticised within Sudanese civil society for its “blind eye policies” in favour of the NCP’s repressive rule in return for massive reward in the form of Sudanese oil (El-Tigani 2006).

Carmody’s somewhat cynical inference- that Chinese arms sales may be viewed in part as an insurance policy for their investment in Sudan (2009: 357) - exposes an additional contradiction inhering to China’s sovereign non-interference. China’s emphasis on state sovereignty within its oil diplomacy in Africa is also “thorny because these states are not the type of sovereign states typically understood by external policymakers”, as I explore below (Taylor 2007b: 22).

2.11. The Sudanese state form- an intrinsic challenge to sovereignty?

Sudan’s state form itself challenges China’s conceptions of sovereignty. Whilst Sudan’s central government is diplomatically operative in international politics, there is a strong divergence between the legal status of sovereignty and its “empirical” political manifestations (Large 2009: 602).

As Power and Mohan argue, Chinese policy responds to local political conditions, but Chinese doctrines of respect for sovereignty and non-interference are implicitly based on the assumption of a ‘traditional’ state form (2010: 12). In Sudan, this is debatable (Tull 2006). As explored above, Sudan is an example of a state which possesses juridical statehood, but has only a tenuous empirical claim to such status; it lacks both the institutional features and territorial control of the traditional Weberian state, including the ability (and inclination) to meet basic socio-economic needs of its citizenry and ensure national security (Taylor 2007a: 22).

As will be further explored below, while the central state in Khartoum has concentrated political power and wealth, it has also suffered from an underlying weakness of central rule,
meaning that it cannot maintain control over its full territory. The Sudanese state has frequently, and chronically, lost territorial control of its peripheries, and the central state itself has been too weak to prevent chronic armed conflict, posing a danger both to Chinese operations and to regional instability. The Darfur conflict, for example, has had adverse effects on both Chinese oil workers; and subsequent refugee flows have destabilised the neighbouring Chad and Central African Republic (Carmody 2009; Kleine-Ahlbrandt and Small 2007b).

Furthermore, at no time since independence has the central government of Sudan successfully and fully governed or administrated its periphery, thus contravening the conception of a strong sovereign central state as espoused in both Western thought and Chinese policy (Zambelis 2011). Officials from Khartoum’s central government have occupied the periphery with scattered symbolic posts, such as garrisons or governing offices in the countryside, but at no time have they rigorously administered, governed, nor effectively controlled these areas (Collins 2005: 151).

Lastly, as Holslag points out, pledging to safeguard the sovereignty of the state becomes meaningless where national governments themselves agitate unrest, violence and crimes against humanity (2008a: 74). As will be further elucidated below, the Sudanese government has unquestionably been a state which has, for most of its independence, waged war against its own people (Salih 2007).

There is a marked incongruence, therefore, between state sovereignty and non-interference as juridical-political phenomena, and the reality of contested authority amidst protracted armed conflict; enclaved, militarised oil extraction; and the weak territorial and border control of Khartoum (Large 2009: 622; Taylor 2007a: 22).

In this chapter, I have contextualised Sudan, and Chinese involvement therein, as a formation arising from the particular post-colonial state formation of Sudan. I have also catalogued various contradictions arising intrinsically within Chinese policies of sovereignty and non-interference from this particular context. It is evident that, while China’s doctrines of non-interference and sovereignty have made China an attractive partner for many African states, it is becoming a struggle for Beijing to accommodate these policies with deepening Chinese involvement, especially when dealing with weak or unstable states such as Sudan (Jakobson 2009; Taylor 2007a: 21).
Signs of transition in Chinese policy are apparent (Stahl 2011: 152), in part due to these uniquely Sudanese challenges to Chinese policy. In the following chapters, I will examine the cases of Darfur and South Sudan as functions of Sudan’s post-colonial state form, and posit the transitions within Chinese policy in these cases as arising from that same state formation.

3. Chapter Two: Darfur- a limited transition in non-interference?

“The arid region of Darfur is one of the focal points where diverging Chinese interests merge into an awkward and often confusing learning process”

(Holslag 2008: 71)

Darfur exigently tested China’s diplomatic agility (Holslag 2008: 83). It compelled Beijing to compromise between traditional norms, resting on the importance of non-intervention in sovereign states, and accommodation of pressure to resolve Darfur, while contending with local instability and insecurity driven by the conflict (Holslag 2008: 71). For Beijing, Darfur has proved to be a defining experience, although limits to evolution in Chinese policy and diplomacy should not be overlooked (Large 2008c: 8).

The Darfur conflict can only be understood through the prism of Sudan’s colonial and post-colonial history (Jok 2007: 116). I will therefore analyse Darfur as a function of the Sudanese post-colonial state before exploring Chinese policy, engagement, and transition.

3.1. Darfur - a function of the post-colonial state?

Darfur, an area approximately the size of France, is situated in western Sudan (Collins 2005: 149). Before the union of the Sudanese state, Darfur existed as a sultanate, established in 1650, whose foundations rested on state formation dominated by the Fur, an indigenous ethnic group (Collins 2005: 150; Johnson 2011: 139; Jok 2007: 121). Darfur’s territory, however, comprises both nomadic Arab pastoralists and settled African agriculturalists, including the Fur (Jok 2007: 121; Meredith 2005: 598).

In 1916, Darfur was annexed by the British and incorporated into Anglo-Egyptian Sudan (Collins 2005: 150; Jok 2007: 121). Similarly to the rest of the Sudanese periphery, and characteristically of British indirect colonial rule, Darfur was governed sparingly with a few British officials and a selected core of local chiefs (Jok 2007: 124). The central colonial state
dismantled traditional ruling structures to better control Darfur, and demarcated the territory according to supposed ethnic groups, solidifying previously more fluid lines between ethnicities (Jok 2007: 124).

During the colonial period, Darfur lived on the margins of the Sudanese state, excluded from political participation and with limited access to services (Jok 2007: 122). Darfur remained a stagnant subsistence economy, never benefiting from colonial development or governance (Collins 2005: 149; Johnson 2011: 139).

At independence in 1956, this situation continued; with the additional complication that anxiety over Arab-biased centric rule meant various ethnic groups began to “assert their primacy”, leading to destabilisation (Jok 2007: 122). The central government, which had already dismantled many traditional polities which would historically manage conflict, saw an opportunity to divide and rule, and pitted ethnic groups against one another, encouraging further instability (Jok 2007: 123).

Darfur suffered repeated droughts throughout the 20th century, resulting in water scarcity. Denied funds or resources from the central state with which to redress the scarcities, its own conflict mediation methods proved inadequate to cope in the face of resource conflicts, resulting in repeated clashes between settled agriculturalists and nomadic Arabs (Dagne 2011: 23; Johnson 2011: 139; Jok 2007: 124). Droughts worsened in severity in the mid 1980s, and with weakened traditional conflict management structures unable to cope with the pressure, large conflicts broke out in 1984-5 (Jok 2007: 125; Meredith 2005: 598). These clashes were worsened by the influx of small arms as a result of civil unrest in neighbouring Chad (Collins 2005: 152; Jok 2007: 122).

Khartoum favoured Arab groups, whom they armed against non-Arab Darfurians, increasing resentment and severely escalating the violence (Collins 2005: 152; Flint and de Waal 2005: 59; Meredith 2005: 598). This process intensified under the rule of the NCP (Jok 2007: 133); and Darfur’s situation worsened throughout the 1990s, resulting in civilian displacement and regional insecurity (Jok 2007: 126).

In 2003, full conflict burgeoned when separatist groups, including the Justice and Equality Movement and the Sudan Liberation Army, demanded greater political representation in the central government and a place in the ongoing North-South peace process (Flint and de Waal 2005: 76; Jok 2007: 126; Meredith 2005: 599). Under the pretext of counterinsurgency,
Khartoum responded by arming the Arab militia force, the Janjaweed, and unleashing them against Darfurians, intending to drive out non-Arab populations (Dagne 2011: 27; Flint and de Waal 2005: 101; Jok 2007: 127; Meredith 2005: 599). The Janjaweed looted, burned, and decimated villages throughout the region; and Khartoum, using Chinese arms (Amnesty International 2007; Human Rights First 2008), air bombed Darfurian targets indiscriminately (Meredith 2005: 599).

Despite mounting evidence of state sponsored terrorism, ethnic cleansing, and soaring casualties in Darfur, Khartoum denied a connection with the Janjaweed and minimised word of the situation in Darfur throughout 2003, while obstructing all efforts at intervention (Flint and de Waal 2005: 37; Jok 2007: 127; Meredith 2005: 599).

In 2004, Darfur was described by the UN and prominent diplomats worldwide as the world’s worst humanitarian crisis at that time (Jok 2007: 115). The government sponsored mass killings, ethnic cleansing, and forced displacement had made 2.5 million Darfurians entirely reliant on aid to survive, and a 2007 UN estimate of total casualties tallied over 200,000 (Jok 2007: 115; Watts 2007).

Fearful of jeopardising the peace accord in the south, international response was slow to action (Dagne 2011: 25). The UN Security Council (UNSC), as I will address below, acted to neutralise the violence and push for peace and humanitarian access (Flint and de Waal 2005: 127). In 2011, after years of negotiations, a framework for peace in Darfur was endorsed, although many factions disputed their lack of inclusion (Dagne 2011: 28).

Darfur as explored here, then, can be seen as a function of the Sudanese post-colonial state. While taking into account factors such as geography or environmental factors (Anshan 2007: 8; Carmody 2009: 357), the fundamental drivers of conflict in Darfur remain the dearth of resources and political leadership from the central government of Sudan, who have consistently adopted a policy of peripheral neglect in favour of self enrichment (Collins 2005: 151).

The conflict in Darfur was a culmination of long standing grievances stretching back to colonial times, highlighting Darfuri marginalisation in terms of wealth sharing, development, basic services and political representation (Jok 2007: 130). Racial and religious antagonism in Darfur can be also understood as a function of the post-colonial state in Sudan, as the heritage of colonial divisions and as part and parcel of the ‘periphery vs. centre’ ‘and
divide and rule’ polities characterising post-colonial societies (Jok 2007: 155). As Salih argues, Darfur exemplifies state building failure, the accumulation of a long history of encroachment by predatory centralised states, whether colonial or national (2007: 35).

3.2. Chinese involvement in Darfur- exposing intrinsic contradictions of non-interference?

As mentioned, the most important factor through which China’s role in Sudan has contradicted tenable claims to non-interference has been its involvement in oil development, and in particular how this form of capital has driven and exacerbated the Darfur conflict (Large 2008a: 96). Since its inception in 1999, oil development in Sudan has been inextricably connected with armed conflict. Oil development was militarised, influenced conflict patterns on the ground, and exacerbated civilian suffering throughout Sudan, especially in Darfur (Large 2008a: 96). As argued above, the oil industry in Sudan has enabled the central government to maintain peripheral marginalisation through the capture and utilisation of oil revenue accumulated through Chinese oil companies (Jakobson 2009: 419). However, China’s role in the Sudanese oil industry has particularly impacted the Darfurian conflict, in two key ways.

Firstly, conditions contributing to the conflict in Darfur were “undoubtedly highlighted by the importance of actual oil money after 1999” which contributed to the grievances of rebels and the real economic and political marginalisation suffered in Darfur (Large 2008c: 7). Secondly, capital flowing to the central government from the largely Chinese funded oil industry directly financed the war making activities of the predatory Sudanese state against the populace of Darfur (Salih 2007: 36). Arms bought by Khartoum using oil money included 350 battle tanks, 25 light tanks, reconnaissance vehicles, troop carriers, and self-propelled artillery, 44 combat planes, and 28 attack helicopters (Jok 2007: 191).

Chinese arms were proven to have been used in Darfur despite Chinese endorsement of a 2005 UNSC arms embargo on the area, and despite the Sudanese government’s persistent violations of the embargo (Carmody and Taylor 2010: 496; Jakobson 2009: 419; Saferworld 2011: iv; Taylor 2007b: 143). For example, reports in 2007 and 2008 uncovered evidence of hundreds of Chinese military trucks and fighter planes used in attacks against Darfurians (Dagne 2011: 30; Taylor 2007b: 143). Despite Chinese protestations, China was widely
condemned for arms sales to Khartoum (Jakobson 2009: 419; Sudan Tribune 2007; Taylor 2007b: 143).

Given the particular circumstances of Sudan as a state, and the status of the Sudanese periphery, Chinese contributions to Sudanese arms industries could “in no sense be considered devoid of political implications” (Large 2008a: 98). Indeed, Chinese arms sales directly worsened conflict and insecurity, and led to numerous violations of human rights- as defined by Beijing as well as international humanitarian law (Jakobson 2009: 419; Saferworld 2011: iv; Taylor 2008).

Beijing repeatedly relied on non-interference to justify its opposition to UNSC sanctions and interventions, whilst failing to link its oil investments and arms sales in Sudan to the atrocities, instead highlighting its humanitarian contributions (Chan 2007: 47; Jakobson 2009: 419; Suolo 2007; Wenping 2007: 29). This disconnect reveals clear contradictions in China’s non-interference rhetoric.

Just as Chinese non-interference policy aggravated the Darfurian conflict; so the conflict itself drove changes in Chinese policy, as I will argue below.

3.3. Forcing China’s hand: A limited diplomatic transition?

From the beginning of the crisis, China’s support for Khartoum involved a combination of protection and political help through high level meetings between Chinese and Sudanese government officials and China’s abstention on the resolutions of the UNSC, of which it is a permanent member (Large 2008c: 8). At the same time, China’s role was marked by contradictions between its formal guiding principles and the impact of these as interwoven into wartime Sudanese politics (Large 2008a: 98).

From 2004, Chinese opposition to UNSC resolutions tabling an external force for Darfur comprises clear and explicit reiterations of the need to respect the principles of national sovereignty and non-interference (Contessi 2010: 331). Throughout 2004-5, China softened the emphasis of successive UNSC resolutions by abstention, arguing that “Sudan has shown sincerity in attempting to resolve the situation in Darfur” (Saferworld 2011: iii). Chinese spokesmen argued that a “political solution is needed” to the problem; and that “the Sudanese government bears primary responsibility to resolve Darfur”- framing it as a solely domestic problem (UNSC 2004).
From 2006, however, Chinese diplomats took a more active role in trying to persuade Khartoum to cooperate with efforts to stop the violence in Darfur (Evans and Steinberg 2007; Jakobson 2009: 424; Large 2008c: 8). China maintained and publically adhered to the formal boundaries of its approach, whilst deploying its own form of private influence politics on the NCP (Large 2009: 619; Taylor and Carmody 2010: 497).

Chinese diplomacy became more visibly engaged, both through public statements about the need for ceasefire, individual diplomatic visits to Sudan and Darfur to pressure for resolution, and through attempts to broker a compromise deal in peace negotiations (Holslag 2008: 80; Kleine-Ahlbrandt and Small 2007b; Large 2008c: 99; McDoom 2007). The May 2007 appointment of a new special ambassador for Darfur, Liu Guijin, appeared to be part of China’s efforts to redress the damage to its image and contribute to attempted solutions (Large 2008c: 99).

Chinese representatives also became more willing to express more public, if guarded, criticism of the NCP’s handling of Darfur, to the point of featuring prescriptive recommendations for addressing the Darfur conflict (Carmody and Taylor 2010: 497; Xu 2007: 33). One key example is Jintao’s 2007 ‘Four Principles’ for resolving Darfur, noting the imperative to improve the situation in Darfur and the living conditions of the population (Large 2009: 619; Xinhua 2007a). While these Principles are underlined by state sovereignty, Jintao’s language acknowledges the necessity of improvement of civilian living conditions, illustrating an evolution of official discourse beyond solely state directed dialogue (Large 2008c: 10). As Large has argued, this might be taken as a limited transcendence of the state sovereignty doctrine underpinning China’s approach (Large 2009: 619). Some have called this discourse a turning point indicating the unravelling of China’s Sudanese diplomacy (Evans and Steinberg 2007; Kleine-Ahlbrandt and Small 2007b).

In August 2006, Chinese UNSC representatives enthusiastically approved a UN force, although abstained from voting on the mandate, Resolution 1706, stipulating the lack of consent from Khartoum (Contessi 2010: 331). At this point, China advocated the creation of ‘high level dialogue’ with Sudan in order to create consent, while maintaining that consent could not be forced (Dagne 2011: 17; Holslag 2008: 76; UNSC 2006). While happy to diplomatically pressure Khartoum, China still advocated a political solution to the crisis (Watts 2007). Although a UN mission was authorised, it failed to deploy due to the lack of Sudanese consent.
In July 2007, Khartoum consented to the deployment of UNAMID, a hybrid UN-AU force of 20,000 soldiers— including 300 Chinese peacekeepers – to Darfur (Holslag 2008 p80; Large 2008c: 10; Stahl 2011: 162; Watts 2007; Xinhua 2007b). Khartoum’s consent was in part due to China’s influence behind the scenes, a fact emphasised by Chinese diplomats and commentators (African Arguments 2008; Evans and Steinberg 2007; Large 2008c: 99).

Throughout 2008 and 2009, Chinese representatives at the UNSC displayed greater concordance with the rest of the Security Council (Contessi 2010). At the passing of UNSCR 1841, China was included in unanimous calls for all actors involved in Darfur to cease military action, a call echoed in UNSCR 1881 (UNSC 2008; 2009). China also accepted successive extensions of UN security force mandates, acknowledging the need for a “vigorous approach” to peacekeeping (UNSC 2010). China also assented to the clause that the pre-existing United Nations Mission in Sudan, which supported the North-South peace process, should play a role in the preparations for a 2010 referendum that would determine whether Darfur should be an autonomous region. This was a remarkable achievement given China’s traditional resistance to secession (Holslag 2008: 76).

In 2012, China voted in approval of UNSCR 2035, which expanded the mandate of the expert monitoring panel in Sudan. Upon its unanimous passing, the UNSC stipulated regret that “actors affiliated with the Government of Sudan…continued to perpetrate violence against civilians in Darfur”, meaning China’s vote in approval here formally acknowledged the dimension of state-sponsored violence in the Darfur conflict; further illustrating a shift in diplomacy from 2004 (UNSC 2012a).

China’s diplomatic transition in Darfur has been hailed as a “swan song” for non-intervention (Zambelis 2011); a “quiet revolution in Chinese attitudes” (Kleine-Ahlbrandt and Small 2007b); a “display of resolve” (Cody 2007); a “remaking” of international sovereign non-interference (Lee et al. 2012); and as part of an fundamental reassessment of Chinese foreign policy marking China’s transition to a responsible major power (Cheng 2011).

3.4. How has Sudan’s state form driven Chinese engagement over Darfur?

Further Chinese entanglement with Sudanese domestic political economy is evident here, despite the doctrine of non-interference- in the exploration of what drove Chinese transition (Stahl 2011: 159). Beijing’s handling of Darfur was driven by a pragmatic understanding of both its investments and its underlying ideology of non-intervention and the stress on the
territorial sovereignty of Sudan (Large 2008c: 8). China’s actions can be best understood as necessary adaptation to a combination of pressures arising intrinsically from Sudan, and a number of extrinsic, outside pressures.

3.4.1. Sudanese politics as driver
As posited in chapter one, Sudanese politics were central to the perpetuation of Darfurian conflict - chiefly in the understanding of Darfur as "violent relation between the central governing apparatus and its peripheries as well as the regional dynamics featuring a proxy war between Khartoum and Ndjamena" (Large 2008b). Sudanese politics, however, also incorporated and confronted Chinese principles in particular ways.

Instrumental in China’s reactive policy engagement over Darfur was the NCP’s political strategy- namely, its inclination towards defensive diplomatic manoeuvring and resistance to the peace process and humanitarian intervention (Collins 2005: 161; Large 2009: 619). As mentioned in chapter one, the evolution of the NCP- its support for international terrorism, extreme authoritarianism, and savage domestic repression, had effectively isolated it from diplomatic relations with much of the world, leaving China as one of few key partners (Meredith 2005: 591). In the case of Darfur, Sudanese foreign policy effectively incorporated China as a key external sponsor with regards to international intervention in Darfur (Collins 2005: 161; Large 2009: 619).

This compelled China to act as Sudan’s key international patron, making Beijing essential to the NCP’s foreign relations as both defender and mediator – above and beyond the role of other countries such as India or Malaysia with significant investments in Sudan (Large 2008a: 99). The core leadership of the NCP, centred on Bashir, would not have been able to pursue its goals in the absence of Chinese support, both domestic and international.

In this way, the confluence of Sudanese politics and Chinese non-interference, the very principles that facilitated China’s entry into Sudan “came to constrain Beijing in the face of an uncooperative NCP…that [damaged] China’s international reputation”, forcing diplomacy to diverge from policy (Large 2009: 619).

3.4.2. Security as driver
Another example of a driver which has both been distorted by and itself affected Chinese interaction with Sudan is national and regional security. Conflict in Sudan, driven by the
marginalisation of the periphery in Darfur, has contributed to the destabilisation of Chinese oil development (Stahl 2011: 160).

As Holslag states, China’s economic ambitions have been repeatedly “spoiled by Sudan’s gloomy security climate” (2008a: 74). From 2004 onwards, escalating violence in Darfur put Chinese oil operations at risk (Holslag 2008: 74). Chinese oil workers have been directly threatened by separatist groups, and many oil wells are in conflict prone areas (Holslag 2008). In 2004, two Chinese workers were abducted from western Sudan by rebels (China Daily 2004; Holslag 2008). In 2008, nine Chinese CNPC workers were abducted in Southern Kordofan, and five were subsequently killed by forces under a commander claiming affiliation with the Darfuri Justice and Equality Movement, citing as the reason the exclusion of local populations from oil wealth (Large 2009: 618). Many non governmental actors in Sudan- including the Darfuri Justice and Equality Movement- declared China their enemy (Large 2008b: 6).

This threat to economic security, driven by the particular circumstances of the Sudanese state form, provided a strong self-interested reason for Beijing to promote conflict resolution in Sudan through more active political engagement (Large 2009: 619).

3.4.3. External pressures- the added incentive for transition?
Chinese transition was also driven by external pressures, including international outrage over atrocities in Darfur which reached a crescendo in 2007 (Jakobson 2009: 420). China’s leaders have repeatedly portrayed China as a responsible world power, and international criticism presented strong self-interested reasons for Beijing to act (Jakobson 2009: 412; Large 2008a: 99; Obiorah 2010: 52; Stahl 2011: 159).

However, the impact should not be overstated; the trend toward deeper engagement on Sudan in China’s diplomacy was discernable before the 2008 Beijing Olympics were connected to Sino-Sudanese relations through the ‘genocide Olympics’ campaign, although it undoubtedly acted as a catalyst (Contessi 2010: 329; Large 2008c: 99). Other outside drivers were the restoration of Beijing’s diplomatic ties with neighbouring Chad, who pressed for action to prevent Darfuri refugee flows crossing its borders (Holslag 2008: 74); and the continuing and inevitable Chinese integration with international institutions and norms, which a number of authors have explored (Hess 2010; Liu 2012; Stahl 2011; Wu 2009).
3.5. Reluctant change- what limitations to transition?

Darfur certainly exposed tension between China’s traditional emphasis on non-interference with the necessity of “constructive engagement” in Sudanese politics (Holslag 2008). While shifts in Chinese policy are clearly visible, however, there should be no illusions as to their limitations (Kleine-Ahlbrandt and Small 2007a).

Where China did play a part in achieving key UNSC resolutions- for example, 1769- it consistently attempted to shape the resolutions “in a manner that responded to Khartoum’s concerns” (Large 2008c: 10). At all times China’s engagement was anchored by an insistence on Khartoum’s sovereignty and consent to intervention, effectively limiting the ability of the UNSC to legitimately impose enforcement for peace (Contessi 2010: 339; Holslag 2011a: 9).

At the same time, Beijing deepened and centralised its engagement with Sudan’s industry and political elite (Large 2008a; Power and Mohan 2010: 19; Taylor 2007b: 143). China expanded economic relations with Sudan throughout the crisis; and despite evidence of ad hoc diplomatic pressure on Sudanese politicians, China never threatened Sudan with economic repercussions over Darfur (Carmody and Taylor 2010: 503; Holslag 2008: 83). Beijing repeatedly insisted against sanctions for the Sudanese political elite, while selling them arms (Holslag 2011a: 9; Holslag 2008: 81; Large 2008c: 10).

To the international community, China presented itself as an active mediator and a responsible power, seizing on Khartoum’s accessions as evidence of the success of Chinese diplomacy on the issue; ultimately, however, China remained reluctant to exert pressure (Holslag 2011a: 9; 2008a: 93). Chinese diplomatic pressure emerged on a chiefly ad hoc and personal basis, rather than as a formal transition in foreign policy, as some have argued (Holslag 2008: 80; Large 2008b: 5; Saferworld 2011: iii).

4. Chapter Three: Engaging with the periphery- China and South Sudan

4.1. Southern Sudan: The state’s periphery?

Since independence, Southern Sudan has suffered from geographic and political isolation from the central state. Sudan was made a nation according to artificial borders drawn by colonists, incorporating North and South into one legal nation yet dividing North from South, Arab from African, and Muslim from non-Muslim (Kron 2011; Meredith 2005: 344; Rose
2012). Similarly to Darfur, Southern Sudan can be understood as the periphery in relation to the Sudanese central state, denied a share in wealth, development, or political power (Collins 2005: 137).

Since 1841, its history has been one of war. Successive colonists- first Turkish, then British- incorporated the Southern region into the state Sudanese state as a pool for slave labour and conscription without providing governance or administration (Collins 2005: 138; Johnson 2011: 4). A religio-economic divide was imposed between North and South, whereby Muslims received the benefits of colonialism while passing the losses on to non-Arabs; until independence, travel between North and South was prohibited (Johnson 2011: 5). In essence, the South had been incorporated into the state of Sudan “only as the state’s exploitable hinterland” (Johnson 2011: 6). Sudanese states which followed built on this model; and a fundamental division between North and South was established.

The coercive power of the state, established in the ideas of legitimate power and governance of successive Sudanic state formations, re-emerged with force towards its hinterland, the South, post-independence (Johnson 2011: 7). These ideas found expression in exclusionary politics, and were justified by a narrow interpretation of race, religion and ethnicity in Sudan (Jok 2007: 9).

The Arab North benefited from political prestige, a monopoly on power, and economic superiority, at the expense of the non-Arab South. Projects were consistently allocated to the majority-Arab North, or diverted from the South- for example, plans for a fruit canning factory in Wau, Melut sugar factory in Upper Nile, and a Tonj twine making factory were scrapped in favour of Northern locations (Jok 2007: 9). At independence, out of 800 civil service posts, only six were afforded to Southerners, leading to resentment and discontent (Meredith 2005: 345). Limited funds and resources to the South resulted in chronic unemployment (Johnson 2011: 27; Jok 2007: 9; Meredith 2005: 356). While ‘catch-up’ programmes were implemented in the South after 1947, these came “too little, too late” (Collins 2005: 202).

The two successive civil wars, spanning decades since independence and claiming millions of lives, were “a direct reaction to the process of decolonisation that had sought to replace British colonialism with Arab nationalism” as well as the result of a long history of slave trading and minimal political inclusion (Jok: 2007: 53). While religious and racial divides, as well as Islamic nationalism, played a part in catalysing the conflict, to assess the civil war as
only religious or racial is to overlook the conflict’s rooting in Southern exclusion from economic and social development (Bechtold 1991: 24; Jok 2007: 115; Meredith 2005: 345).

From 1955-1972, and again from 1983-2005, central governments waged a proxy war against Southerners, exploiting tribal rivalries to keep the region weak, torching villages, and planting land mines (Collins 2005: 188; Johnson 2011: 25; Meredith 2005: 360;). In 1989, a coup by the National Islamic Front (NIF), opposing the notion of a secular state, marked the beginning of NIF- now NCP- rule in Sudan, which continues to the present day under the leadership of Omar al Bashir (Meredith 2005: 588). The NCP pursued the war on Southern rebel groups- largest of whom being the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA)- with ever greater ruthlessness in their campaign to Islamicise Sudan and eradicate the uprising in the South (Johnson 2011: 62; Meredith 2005: 593).

Crucially, the South, although desperately impoverished, possesses the majority of Sudan’s oil reserves; the NCP were determined to develop Sudan’s oil potential despite the security risks posed by the war, and drove out Nuer and Dinka civilian populations from oil areas (Meredith 2005: 594). China’s funding of oil industry development, then, directly impacted Sudanese people in these areas. The Chinese facilitated oil boom fuelled Khartoum’s oil economy, paid for its armaments, and consequently enabled forced displacement, social devastation, and gross human rights violations in the South (Askouri 2007: 77; ICG 2012: 2).

Despite Sudanese oil being situated in the South, refineries were built only in the North (Meredith 2005: 356). In 1997 the Sudanese Greater Nile Petroleum Operating Company was incorporated (under majority ownership of China’s CNPC) in order to undertake exploration of Nile oilfields in Sudan; oil began pumping in 1999 (Meredith 2005: 595). By 2001, oil revenue comprised 40% of Khartoum’s total revenue, and government military spending was up 96%, with the central government utilising oil funds to put down Southern rebellion (Meredith 2005: 595).

As in Darfur, there is “no doubt that oil has added to the historic misery of Southern Sudan” (Collins 2005: 139); in this case, however, oil has a more direct geographic relationship to Southern Sudan -the process of oil development was inseparable from patterns of conflict and civilian displacement in Southern Sudan (Large 2009: 618).
4.2. Southern Sudan: from separatism to statehood

In 2005, following a “combination of military stalemate, a potential oil bonanza, and growing international pressure for peace” Sudan’s Second Civil War ended (Woodward 2011: 7). The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was signed between the NCP and the Sudanese People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM), the political arm of the SPLA (African Arguments 2008). The CPA granted Southern Sudan the right to political self determination and scheduled a referendum on the full political independence of the South (Dagne 2011: 21; Large 2009: 620). This allowed the South to govern itself as a region, effectively operating as a “quasi-independent state” administered from Juba under the political authority of the SPLM (Large 2009: 622; Woodward 2011: 8).

In 2011, Southern Sudan overwhelmingly voted for secession from Sudan and became an independent nation state, the Republic of South Sudan - referred to here as South Sudan (Erasmus 2011; Kron 2011).

4.3. Secession - marking a change in China’s approach?

The NCP had long defined and controlled China’s relations with the South (Large 2011). While Sino-Sudanese relations have largely been viewed through the “narrow prism privileging formal interactions between northern central state and corporate elites” (Large 2011), Chinese engagement with the South is an example of how Sudan’s particular political economy- in this case, newly independent former rebels combined with oil wealth- affects a change in Chinese foreign engagement (Large 2011).

China’s relations with South Sudan have undergone a visible evolution. China’s deep economic involvement in the now bifurcated Sudanese oil industry presents a strong incentive for its transition from supporting the unity of Sudan to recognising the new Republic of South Sudan. Beijing has successfully hedged its bets by working fully within the ‘one Sudan, two systems’ framework created by the CPA, and later by accepting the new nation state of South Sudan (ICG 2012: 3; Large 2009: 622; Large 2011).

However, China had begun this engagement by acting in accordance to its principled adherence to sovereignty, and a rejection of separatism. As previously stated, China’s engagement with Sudan had previously been predicated on the central principle of state sovereignty, in opposition to separatism or terrorism (Large 2009: 620). As Large argues,
sovereignty, like non-interference, is a reciprocal principle which projects China’s conception of its own domestic polities onto foreign territory (Large 2009: 620). This can be seen in the “One China” principle defining Taiwan, Tibet, and Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region as part of the People’s Republic of China (Zambelis 2011).

In the controversy surrounding humanitarian intervention in Darfur, for example, China’s steadfast support for a hard conception of Sudan’s sovereignty gave practical meaning to the sovereignty-based political framework of its Africa policy (Large 2009: 620). Underpinning Beijing’s concern at a mandated external UN force was a strong belief in the proper, legitimate role of the central state in maintaining order and avoiding political and territorial fragmentation, and above all in evading the prospect of “regime change from without” (Large 2009: 620).

In accordance with this philosophy, China originally opposed the South’s separatism and potential secession (Erasmus 2011). As late as 2008, China gave Khartoum a $3m grant to aid North-South unity (Sudan Tribune 2008). Yet the pragmatism of both Beijing and Juba meant that both the governments were ‘open for business’ after the CPA passed in January 2005 (Large 2009: 620; Sudan Tribune 2008).

In 2005, Beijing formally recognised the separate Government of Southern Sudan that the CPA had created, based in Juba (Large 2011). A progressive strengthening of relations between Juba and Beijing unfolded after this year, with Beijing accelerating its courtship in Juba and establishing formal diplomatic relations with the Government of Southern Sudan, headed by the SPLM (Dagne 2011: 5; ICG 2012: 3; Large 2009: 623).

The first official contact between Beijing and the SPLM was in March 2005, to discuss potential economic cooperation (Large 2009: 623). Subsequent high profile meetings continued throughout 2006-7, linking Chinese leaders such as Hu Jintao with Salva Kiir, head of the SPLA and then President of Southern Sudan. In 2007, Kiir visited China, assuring Beijing that its oil investments were secure not only in terms of the provisions of the CPA, but also in terms of a possible secession after 2011, illustrating China’s forward-looking approach to Southern Sudan at this time (Large 2008c: 13).

Diplomatic visits were complemented by Chinese offers of aid to Southern Sudan (Bayoumy 2012). A number of projects, from hydropower to road construction, were initiated (Large 2008c: 13). In early April 2009, the Chinese Consul General in Juba donated a grant of
$100,000 to the Government of Southern Sudan (Large 2009: 623). Chinese businesses-construction, engineering, and catering, also expanded within the region (Large 2009: 623).

Party-to-party cooperation, between the Chinese Communist Party and the SPLM, also expanded during this period (Large 2009: 623). The Chinese consulate in Juba was inaugurated in 2008, formalising political ties between China and Southern Sudan (Large 2009: 623).

As Southern Sudan prepared for its 2011 self-determination referendum, China recognised the increasing inevitability of independence, allowing for a pragmatic evolution of its stance on sovereignty and separatism (ICG 2012: 3). Despite China’s former opposition to secession (ICG 2012: 2), it welcomed the results of the 2011 referendum in which South Sudanese voted for full independence, with Beijing’s foreign office declaring the results a step toward peace and stability in Sudan (People’s Daily 2011; Times Live 2011). Oil contracts originally signed with Khartoum were brought in line with new political realities, as the terms pertained now to resources belonging to the independent South (ICG 2012: 21).

Beijing formally recognised the independence of the nation of South Sudan immediately in July 2011 in its eagerness to establish full diplomatic relations with the new state (Zambelis 2011). Since then, balancing “new friends in Juba with old friends in Khartoum” has proven difficult, as we will see (ICG 2012: i).

I have outlined above Beijing’s recognition of the altered political architecture in Sudan, and its rapid reorientation and momentum toward the normalisation of ties with Southern Sudan between 2005 and the present (Large 2008a: 102).

Yet just as Darfur demonstrates the limits of formal non-interference, Chinese reorientation away from engaging solely with Khartoum reflects the constraints of adherence to the strict state sovereignty approach which had previously served China in Sudan (Large 2009: 623; Stahl 2011: 157). Implications arising from China’s engagement with South Sudan are explored below.

4.4. Engagement with a former enemy- what implications for Chinese sovereignty?

Chinese engagement with Southern Sudan, and later South Sudan, marks a surprising divergence from the traditional Chinese resistance to secession, which I have defined as a key aspect of the sovereignty doctrine (Holslag 2008: 76). South Sudan, after all, emerged from a
rebel movement—anathema to the Chinese conception of statehood, and in contradiction to China’s position on the ‘three evils’ of terrorism, separatism, and extremism (Stahl 2011: 162; Zambelis 2011).

This engagement is all the more notable considering that it consists of the reconciliation of two former enemies (Large 2009: 618). Just as Darfurian separatist groups regarded China’s role as inseparable from Khartoum, China’s historical support for Khartoum had made Beijing an enemy of the South (Erasmus 2011; Heavens 2007; ICG 2012; Large 2008c: 13). In 2004, during CPA negotiations in Kenya, a common refrain was that “the Chinese were not welcome” due to both their military and political support of Khartoum and their profiteering from Southern-owned oil (Large 2011).

During the civil war, CNPC facilities were used as bases from which to expel Southern Sudanese populations from oil fields, and since then oil facilities have been subject to regular attacks from militia groups in conflict with the government (Power and Mohan 2008: 35; Stahl 2011: 160; Taylor 2007a: 17). Insurgents were well aware that Khartoum used Chinese funds directly to finance ethnic cleansing of non-Muslim insurgents and civilians in the South.

These occurrences, combined with frustrations at the lack of Southern dividend from oil development, led to widespread grievances among South Sudanese with Chinese oil companies (Large 2009: 624). As El Tigani argues, for many years, “[oil] revenues have been used by China to support the repressive rule of Sudan with virtually no economic or social development projects in the South” (2006).

Yet despite decades of vocal and material support for Khartoum as it fought Southern secessionist movements, and in contradiction with its sovereignty doctrine, Beijing ultimately supported the 2011 referendum and recognised South Sudan as an independent nation (Large 2011; Zambelis 2011). The CPA, in altering the political architecture of Sudan, compelled China to alter its orientation to the North, and adjust its stated principles by acknowledging the validity of Southern secession. As Large argues, this process exemplifies an unprecedented “momentum toward the ‘normalisation’ of ties” with Southern Sudan, wherein Beijing has essentially overlooked the Southern state’s genesis from separatism (Large 2008a: 102).
4.5. Manoeuvring to maintain neutrality? China’s current position

Post-peace, relations between the two Sudans have been strained, with disagreements over division of oil revenues and border demarcation ongoing as of writing, and continued conflicts in Nuba and Abyei, as well as disagreements over populaces’ citizenship statuses (Dagne 2011: 18; Gettleman 2012; ICG 2012; Johnson 2011: 170). These events have compromised Chinese diplomacy and often posed uncomfortable challenges for China’s sovereignty doctrine as it relates to Chinese neutrality.

In January 2012, South Sudan cut off all oil production in protest at Khartoum’s proposed oil transit fees (Gettleman 2012; ICG 2012: i). China, with majority holdings in GNPC which operates chiefly in South Sudanese regions, was forced into an increasingly uncomfortable position. Eventually, the crisis was resolved without direct intervention from Beijing, although China was forced to intercede with both Khartoum and Juba. The interplay between the parallel pressures of Juba and Khartoum adds another dimension to China’s complex role in South Sudan (ICG 2012: 21).

China’s role as yet is unsettled; in early 2012, the Chinese head of the Sudanese Petrodar oil conglomerate was expelled from South Sudan for paying Sudanese oil transit fees with South Sudanese money, underscoring ongoing tension in China’s bridging of the two nations (Bariyo 2012; ICG 2012: 31). In early 2012, reflecting continued grave security risks for China, tens of Chinese workers in Sudan were kidnapped by rebels in the border state of Kordofan, with one worker killed by anti-government rebels claiming affiliation with the SPLM (Lague 2012; Xinhua 2012b).

As of August 2012, Sudan and South Sudan had reached an agreement on oil sharing, although relations remain unstable and border demarcations remain to be agreed on (BBC 2012; Reuters 2012; Tadesse and el Deeb 2012). There is evidence that China is now playing the role of mediator between the two states, in addition to the UN and the African Union, in continued negotiations (Gettleman 2012; Hackel 2012; Shengnan 2012; Xinhua 2012a). This begs the question of how the Chinese sovereignty approach will be reconciled with two nations disputing claimed sovereign territories- another dichotomy within the sovereignty doctrine (Large 2008a: 13). In 2011 China declared itself unwilling to become involved in the Sudanese dispute over Abyei region, exemplifying the hands-off approach taken so far by Beijing (Large 2011).
With characteristic pragmatism, Beijing has succeeded so far in developing and maintaining political and economic relations with both Juba and Khartoum through a delicate balancing act (Nuxoll 2012). The extent to which this balance will prove durable enough to withstand a return to open conflict is questionable (Holslag 2011a: 10; Large 2008a: 13). China has a strong economic interest in ensuring relations between the two states remain cordial enough to facilitate oil export; yet interfering to aid either side would expose its sovereignty doctrine as hypocritical (Barchoz 2012).

Realising this, the extent to which Beijing is inclined to play a more engaged role in protecting peace by influencing either Khartoum or Juba is questionable (Large 2009: 625). Yet developments within the UNSC indicate that China, at least, is unafraid to add its voice to condemnation of both Khartoum and Juba. In May 2012, the UNSC unanimously, with unexpected approbation from China, approved Resolution 2046. This resolution threatened economic and diplomatic measures against both Sudan and South Sudan if further border violence occurred (Kimenyi 2012: 9). This is a startling divergence from China’s repeated, firm opposition to sanctions in the case of Darfur.

Outside this formal setting, however, China has remained conservatively neutral, forging a delicate balance between engagement and absence. During the oil shutdown crisis of early 2012, China appealed for restraint and dialogue between Juba and Khartoum rather than weigh in on behalf of either side. China’s ambassador to Juba, Li Zhiguo, argued that external inputs were counterproductive, and that China would not intervene with proposals or suggestions, “because the issue is an internal affair of the two brothers of Sudan” (ICG 2012: 26). China encouraged parties to work with the African Union proposal, despite both sides’ attempts to leverage China’s interests (ICG 2012).

Beijing’s readiness to employ influence so far has appeared to be overestimated by both Khartoum and Juba; senior diplomats and other observers reportedly expressed disappointment in the “relatively shallow character of the engagement” (ICG 2012: 26). Yet within the scheme of its African experience, Chinese relations with South Sudan mark an interesting departure -even where they remain broadly consistent with legally sanctioned political arrangements (Large 2008a: 13).
4.6. The future

South Sudan itself still faces grave political, economic and developmental challenges, with some of the worst global social indicators, a fragmented government, militarised society, limited governance capacity, huge numbers of refugees, and widespread corruption (Associated Press 2012; House of Commons 2012). Given the continued instability along the shared border and within the rest of Sudan’s marginalised peripheries, China’s new “expedition in the South” and its balancing of relations between the two Sudans will remain challenging to Beijing’s foreign policy (ICG 2012: i). China’s role in an independent South Sudan likewise seems significant above and beyond its quest for oil (Large 2011). The geographic situation of oil in the South, oil infrastructure in the North, and China’s presence, create a triangulation of mandatory, if uneasy, relations between the three counties (Erasmus 2011; Rose 2012).

5. Conclusion

I have argued here that the intersection between Chinese policy in Sudan, championing sovereign non-interference, and the political economy of the Sudanese post-colonial state, has resulted in a number of challenges and contradictions to Chinese rhetoric, as exemplified by the cases of Darfur and South Sudan.

5.1. Chapter One

I argued that an adequate analysis of China's actions in Sudan must consider the nature of Sudanese politics, conditioned by colonialism, which has been exacerbated by China's involvement even as China has become more intertwined with Sudanese politics. Considering this, my proposed framework constitutes a post-colonial state analysis embedded within a broadly political economy approach, following the approach taken by Power and Mohan (2008).

I then summarised the post-colonial state theory as it applies to Sudan. Sudan’s state formation process entirely follows the formation of the quintessential post-colonial state in Africa, whereby power structures and divisions post-independence follow the colonial capture of the state. This power structure in Sudan has led to polarisation between the elite and the periphery, and been exacerbated and intensified by the discovery of oil, a commodity inseparably tied to patterns of civilian displacement and the war making of the state. The
Sudanese oil industry can be understood here as an enclaved fraction of capital exploited by both China and the hollow Sudanese state. Within this context I analysed the political and economic engagement of China with Sudan, which is predicated on the notions of sovereign non-interference.

These two interlinked policy principles have been a mainstay in Chinese foreign policy for decades, but they have come to be controversial within China’s engagement with African states, and especially Sudan, despite the fact that they are not unique to this country. China’s role in Sudan has contradicted tenable claims to non-interference chiefly through its involvement in oil development. Chinese oil revenue allowed for the enrichment of a narrow elite rather than manifesting a developmental state; while its non-interference allowed the central state to arm itself with Chinese weapons and make war against its people.

Additionally, I argued, Sudan’s state formation intrinsically contradicts Chinese notions of state sovereignty; while Khartoum may have legal and diplomatic state positioning, it does not consistently control nor properly administer national territory, as evident by the chronic civil conflict since independence. Thus, Chinese commitment to the rhetoric of state sovereignty is a contradiction within Sudan.

5.2. Chapter Two

I began by exploring the history of Darfur as a function of the post colonial Sudanese state. Darfur from the beginning was subjugated and isolated by the central state- both by successive colonists and then after independence. The economic and political marginalisation from the central state, combined with drought and resource scarcity in Darfur, led to conflict. The central state proceeded to arm the Janjaweed against Darfurian civilians leading to ethnic cleansing, state sponsored terrorism, and mass casualties. Despite evidence of state involvement Khartoum refused external intervention.

Darfur represents a case where Chinese funds cannot, in any sense, be considered to abide by non-interference in its strictest form; funds were appropriated by the central government in order to repress its populace, both through economic marginalisation and by the purchase of arms with which to utterly subdue the Darfurian people.

As the crisis worsened, China’s foreign policy over Darfur was prominently brought into question by China’s persuasion of the NCP in accepting UNAMID (the African Union-
United Nations Hybrid operation in Darfur). This, I argued, can be seen as a reaction to the complex challenges posed by Darfur to Chinese non-interference policy and as a limited transcendence of the non-interference doctrine.

Chinese involvement with the politics of armed conflict in Darfur has meant that the policy of non-interference has not merely been strained but also actively contradicted in a number of ways arising both from Sudan’s internal political economy, and external pressures. Concurrently, Darfur has internationalised China’s relations with Sudan in a manner that has rendered its regional involvement a defining episode in its wider foreign relations. Yet China’s transition was limited and there is little evidence that it will happen elsewhere.

5.3. Chapter Three

Like Darfur, I argued that Southern Sudan has been economically and politically denied the governance, resources, and administration of the central state; its evolution illustrates that the central state subverted its development through marginalisation from economic, social, and political participation in Sudan. Southern Sudan as a region was incorporated into the Sudanese state only as a source of slave labour and military conscription. After independence, the South’s subjugation continued, and a deep divide between the Muslim North and Christian/Animist South emerged; the South was denied funding and political representation.

The South has been ravaged by two civil wars since independence as a result of chronic marginalisation. These conflicts and the South’s marginalisation were both intensified by the discovery of oil. Khartoum used oil revenue to put down rebellion while civilians in Southern oil regions were subject to forced displacement. Oil, then, has been inseparable from the historic misery and subjugation of Southern Sudan.

Since 2005, when the CPA was signed between North and South Sudan, China has engaged progressively with the South, its former enemy and the former periphery. Despite China’s strong policy emphasis on state sovereignty, China successfully engaged with Juba diplomatically, politically, and economically, as South Sudan moved from self-governing autonomous region in 2005 to a full nation state in 2011. This engagement comprises a contradiction of China’s policy on sovereignty, which emphasises the ‘three evils’ of terrorism, separatism, and extremism. Yet in both Juba and Beijing, pragmatism won over principle.
The current situation remains unstable, and China’s role as yet is unresolved. The security situation for China remains volatile, and Chinese oil workers have been kidnapped and murdered as recently as 2012. Recent disputes over borders and oil transit fees have pressured Beijing to take a more active role, although as of yet China has resisted acting as more than a neutral mediator. Sudan, South Sudan and China are locked together by oil and geography; in the future, it is likely that China’s role will remain central to this trio of states, although as with Darfur, evidence of transition over the sovereignty doctrine is sparse.

5.4. What future for Sino-Sudanese relations?

While China’s engagement in Sudan predated the acceleration of its wider African engagement, it provides an illustration of the importance of politics in conditioning China’s experience over time, and China’s role in Sudan looks set to remain both important and inescapable (Large 2009: 626).

Criticism heaped on China for its role in Sudan is somewhat misdirected in that its policies are not particular to Sudan, nor Africa (Taylor 2007b: 145). It is the nature of states and polities within Africa itself that causes the confluence of Chinese policy and investment to be harmful to development. As Taylor argues, we must, rather, appreciate and critique the character of African states, for it is these that will dictate the impact of Chinese investment (2007: 145). African history suggests that this form of engagement will continue- where such riches exist in corrupt states, incoming capital will continue to concentrate resource ownership and enrich rentier elites (Askouri 2007: 82; Large 2008b; Power and Mohan 2008: 36; Tull 2006: 475).

China, then, may be simply offering new markets for African commodities without reshaping the continent’s place in the international division of labour or enabling long term growth (Dowden 2007: 51; Edoho 2011; Mohan and Power 2009). Despite this, China does offer African countries potential leverage when dealing with donors or trade partners- so called ‘triangulation’- which may improve their political force regionally and internationally (Mohan and Power 2008). Sudan and South Sudan respectively face staggering economic and social problems that might be remedied by Chinese investment; but without a change in governance this is unlikely (Carmody 2009; Tull 2006; Voll 1991: ix).

Nevertheless, the evolving nature of China’s interests and commitments in South Sudan will “make it increasingly difficult for Beijing to adhere to policies formulated on purely
ideological premises” (Zambelis 2011). China may be undergoing a reassessment of the extent to which non-interference is the best way to defend its interests (Holslag 2011a: 12). Certainly, China’s engagement over Darfur indicated a reactive or flexible diplomacy rather than a defined strategy, although this appears a unique case (Holslag 2011a: 9; Large 2008b: 6; Large 2008c: 8).

Many argue that the Chinese non-interference policy is untenable in its present form, particularly as China continues to deepen its engagement in Africa (Jakobson 2007; Jakobson 2009: 422; Power and Mohan 2010: 18). Likewise, China now seems to be moving away from a strict interpretation of sovereignty, particularly in the area of security and peacekeeping, as a result of pragmatic adaption to African politics (Kleine-Ahlbrandt and Small 2008: 38; Stahl 2011: 157). The 2011 revolution in Libya illustrated that China will continue to find African security a threat to its economic operations; and thus a strong incentive towards keeping peace (Chin 2011).

As Beijing has strong economic motives to keep the peace in Sudan and South Sudan, and strong political motives to be seen as a responsible world power, then we may yet see further change in Chinese policy in Sudan; Beijing has often shown that “strategic expediency trumps principle and rhetoric” (Zambelis 2011). However, the extent to which this will translate to actual influence on Sudanese governance is debatable (African Arguments 2008; Dowden 2007: 51; Jakobson 2009: 420; Large 2008b: 2; Large 2008c; Thompkins 2008).

China, of course, is not the only economic partner of Sudan nor of South Sudan- India and Malaysia have stakes in Sudan, and Japan and Kenya, among many others, have expressed interest in South Sudan’s oil reserves. Nevertheless, China's position as key economic partner renders its influence in both Sudans significant; and Chinese resource diplomacy combined with political pressure has in fact been a moderating force on Khartoum’s worst excesses (Large 2008b: 4; Taylor and Carmody 2010: 496).

Outside Sudan, however, there is little evidence of a sea-change. Given China’s recent position on a draft resolution by the UNSC on the Arab League’s proposed peace plan for Syria, citing the need to respect Syrian “sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity”, it seems unlikely that Sudan alone is evidence for a major shift in China’s sovereign non-interference (UNSC 2012b). As we can deduce from Holslag’s recent research examining China’s reactions to African coups (2011b), China continues to accept instability as the price
of business in Africa; nor has Beijing wavered from doing business with deeply illiberal regimes.

China has endeavoured to navigate uncharted political waters in Sudan, which looks set to continue given Sudan’s territorial and political instability (Large 2008a: 105). Ultimately, however, China has displayed a conservative restraint combined with a pragmatic mercantilist strategy; Beijing adapts to African political realities, without attempting to shape them (Holslag 2011b; Power and Mohan 2010).

References


