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CHINESE DIPLOMACY IN AFRICAN CONFLICTS: AN ANALYSIS OF PEACEBUILDING WITH CHINESE CHARACTERISTICS

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A pragmatic analysis of China's involvement in conflict resolution across Africa and other global regions highlights its motives to the safeguarding of national interests. Wong and colleagues identify key national interests, stressing the promotion of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as a pivotal area [5, c. 131]. Additionally, safeguarding the well-being of the Chinese community and their assets in Africa emerges as another crucial facet of China's strategic concerns [1; 2; 4].

Scholars characterize China's approach to mediating conflicts in Africa as "constructive intervention" [5]. This strategy involves facilitating peace negotiations, engaging in consultations through diverse channels, and fostering consensus among conflicting parties. Wong et al. delineate three key elements of this approach: leveraging the influence of the United

Nations or regional organizations, coordinating political positions through bilateral diplomacy, and actively involving Chinese companies in reconstructing conflict zones to address humanitarian crises [5, p. 134].

Holslag offers an insightful perspective, framing China's response to African conflicts and coups as a pragmatic adaptation. Unlike overt intervention, which is perceived as costly and dubious, China opts for restraint, conflict avoidance, and the cultivation of resilience as more economical strategies [2].

Large evaluates China's stance on peace in Sudan as adaptive and incremental, emphasizing the protection of investments and political priorities. Despite prioritizing its interests, China assumes a secondary role in peacebuilding, driven by concerns over the imposition of Western liberal values through UN peacekeeping efforts [3, p. 188].

China's involvement in Sudan took a significant turn with the appointment of a special representative for Sudanese affairs in 2007. This move allowed China to actively participate in the negotiation process and assert its position on international platforms. Throughout the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement for Sudanese conflict resolution, China aligned itself closely with Khartoum, resisting external pressures on the regime [3].

Chinese interests in Sudan extended beyond oil production, encompassing the supply of weapons to the Khartoum government. While initially helping maintain control, this partnership led to negative perceptions in South Sudan. Despite being viewed as a party to the conflict, Beijing dismissed South Sudan's pro-independence fighters as irrelevant until their actions impacted oil operations. Beijing advocated for a "peace, unification, and development" stance, promoting a one-Sudan-two-systems regime. Negotiations with South Sudan included guarantees of Chinese ownership rights to oil assets in exchange for not obstructing its independence recognition at the UN [1].

During the South Sudan civil war, the Chinese Special Representative actively engaged in brokering a ceasefire, applying "unprecedented public pressure" on the conflicting parties [1, p. 188]. China leveraged restrictions on arms exports as a significant means of exerting additional influence on the warring factions. Although the Chinese-mediated truce proved short-lived, Beijing justified its intervention by emphasizing the imperative to support Sudan's economic development and safeguard its citizens and national interests from external threats. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi asserted that China's mediation aimed not at unilateral benefits but at achieving a win-win solution for all parties involved in the conflict [1, p. 192].

In the case of the Libyan conflict, China departed from its traditional stance of non-intervention and support for the legitimacy of the incumbent government. China endorsed UN sanctions against members of the Gaddafi family and swiftly established contacts with the rebels, responding to the escalating conflict and the international recognition of the transitional government of Libya. Hodzi underscores a "transformational effect" on China, with its policies becoming ambivalent and employing tough rhetoric to mask internal inconsistencies in response to the realization that its interests were jeopardized by internal conflicts in Africa [1, p. 132].

Before the Tuareg uprising in Mali in 2013, China typically remained indifferent, citing respect for a nation's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Hodzi suggests that the volatile political landscape of African countries led China to abstain from taking sides until actors abused relations with Beijing [1, p. 152]. The threat to Chinese civilians and interests in Mali prompted a shift in China's position, expressed in a depersonalized call for effective measures to guarantee security and legitimate rights and interests of Chinese institutions and citizens there [1, p. 154].

While verbally supporting ECOWAS intervention in Mali, China refrained from practical action, fearing a repeat of the Libyan scenario and potential regional destabilization. Eventually, China supported the UN Security Council's expanded mandate for the stabilization mission, contributing 500 combatant troops to Mali. Wong and others highlight idealistic motives in Chinese scientists' assessments of their country's conflict resolution approach, emphasizing the benefits of practicing the concept of "harmonious peace" for world peace and stability [5].

Additionally, Chinese efforts in conflict resolution serve idealistic goals, such as promoting the concept of "developmental peace" to enhance its positive global image and demonstrate a non-interventionist approach to international relations. Protecting its citizens and assets also carries domestic political significance, reinforcing domestic expectations for a self-confident China's restoration to a high international status, viewed as a sign of great power respect [4, p. 598]. Sorensen's surveys indicate a shift in Chinese academic perspectives towards supporting "legitimate intervention of a great power," influenced by growing military power and nationalist sentiments used by authorities to mobilize Chinese society. Beijing's passivity and reactive approach in certain cases are attributed to the absence of strategic or commercial interests and the internal nationalist drive regarding specific conflicts [4, p. 610].

Based on the observed evidence, several conclusions can be drawn concerning China's approach to peacebuilding in Africa:

1. Tactical nature: China's peacekeeping policy in Africa appears primarily tactical, lacking a comprehensive long-term strategy.

2. Conservative approach with flexibility: the approach exhibits a conservative stance by aligning with officially recognized authorities in African countries. However, it also demonstrates a degree of flexibility, adapting to changing conditions on the ground.

3. Resource securitization and infrastructure Support: China's national interests in Africa revolve around securing resource supplies and ownership of valuable assets. The emphasis extends to supporting infrastructure projects, notably within the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), rather than a focus on promoting China's own values.

4. Developmental peace as a supportive concept: the concept of "developmental peace" plays a supporting role in China's peacekeeping endeavors. It is not treated as an independent value but is rather subordinated to other tasks and actions. Although not officially recognized, it functions as a construct formulated by scholars.

Looking forward, there is potential for modifications in China's peacekeeping policy in Africa. As China increasingly emphasizes soft power instruments, future adjustments may involve the promotion of new political initiatives such as the "Global Security Initiative," "Global Development Initiative," and "Global Initiative of Civilizations." This shift suggests a growing alignment with broader global objectives beyond immediate tactical considerations, reflecting an evolving and dynamic approach to peacekeeping on the continent.

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