



## China's Next Security Strategy for Africa

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## China's next security strategy for Africa

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*Abstract.* This paper contends that China's economic interests in Africa face a dual security challenge. On the one hand the amount of non-traditional violence in Africa is increasing. On the other, China has to deal with uncertainty about the future strategic intentions of other powers. The combination of these two threats could lead China to embark on a more strident and unilateral security policy. However, a study of its current practises shows that it increasingly tends to resort to collective action. Despite the fact that China's interest in Africa is growing, alongside its own military capacities and diplomatic assertiveness, it is found that a cooperative security policy is also China's only realistic option for the future. *Topics:* security cooperation, energy security, military diplomacy. *JEL codes:* F52 and F54.

### 1. Introduction

The deeper China ventures into the resource-abundant African continent, the more it stumbles upon various security challenges. It is obvious that the People's Republic is set to become Africa's most prominent economic partner. It is also unmistakable that it is swiftly gaining diplomatic leverage. What is less clear, however, is how it will respond to the perils that lie ahead. Throughout history, most external powers for whom Africa's mineral wealth became indispensable to their industrial growth, backed up their economic forays with a projection of military might, be it aimed at suppressing local resistance in their dominions or fending off their realms from imperialist competitors. The dispatching of troops in Africa derived from the desire to reduce vulnerability while not having to rely on others.<sup>1</sup> Now that China has

arrived at a stage of economic development which requires endless supplies of African raw materials and it has also started to develop the capacity to infiltrate in all corners of the globe, the extrapolation of history predicts that distrust and uncertainty will inevitably lead the People's Liberation Army (PLA) to Africa in droves. In application of the self-help paradigm, China is expected to deal with security challenges autonomously, keeping other powers at bay. This paper starts with an overview of recent security challenges and the ways in which China has been adapting its security policy until now. Subsequently it discusses what China's options are for the future and to what extent unilateral military action in Africa is feasible. Finally it assesses what the implications are for the EU.

### 2. Security challenges

There are several sources of uncertainty compromising China's aspirations in Africa. To start with, Chinese mining activities often fall prey to endemic instability and violence in economic partner states. Since 2004, several Chinese companies have ended up in the frontline of internal conflicts. In 2004, rebels abducted Chinese workers who were dispatched in southern Sudan.<sup>2</sup> In April 2006, a separatist movement detonated a car bomb in the South of Nigeria and warned that investors from China would be "treated as thieves" and could expect new attacks on oil workers, storage facilities, bridges, offices and other oil industry targets. A spokesperson for the militant Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) condemned China for taking a 2.2 billion USD stake in oil fields in delta.<sup>3</sup> In July that year, violent protests erupted at the Chinese-owned Chambisi copper mine in Zambia, leading to five deadly casualties and severe material damage. In November, Sudanese rebels launched three short attacks on Chinese oil facilities and briefly seized the Abu Jabra oil field close to Darfur.<sup>4</sup> In

January 2007, five Chinese telecom workers were kidnapped by Nigerian gunmen in the oil city Port Harcourt in Southern Nigeria. Two weeks afterwards, another nine Chinese oil workers went missing after being attacked by an armed group in Bayelsa state, Nigeria.<sup>5</sup> A month later, four assailants raided a Chinese stone materials plant in Kenya and killed one Chinese employee.<sup>6</sup> In April, nine Chinese and 65 Ethiopian oil engineers were killed during an assault on an oil exploration site operated by SINOPEC's Zhongyuan Petroleum Exploration Bureau in the Ogaden region of Ethiopia. The Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), an ethnic Somali group, also kidnapped seven Chinese men who it later released. The ONLF has repeatedly warned foreign oil companies to leave the region bordering Somalia. In 2008, the Chinese government organized the evacuation of 212 compatriots from Chad to Cameroon after clashes in the capital N'Djamena. In the seas around Africa another risk looms. Chinese trawlers have been poached repeatedly when approaching the Horn of Africa. Between 2000 and 2006, seven incidents with Somalian pirates were reported.

Violence also threatens economic interests indirectly. Mindful of Deng Xiaoping's proverb, "safeguarding world peace to ensure domestic development", Beijing is investing an increasing amount of effort into branding itself a responsible actor on the international scene.<sup>7</sup> "The multi-field, multi-level and multi-channel co-operation within the international community has become the realistic choice," Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing wrote in 2005, "the vigorous pursuit of peace, development and co-operation by the people of all countries has formed a tide of history [...] China's diplomacy has made bold headway, serving domestic development and contributing to world peace and common development."<sup>8</sup> Mayhem in the Sudanese Province of Darfur, however, cast some doubt on these ambitions.<sup>9</sup> China was not only criticized for supporting Khartoum in committing war crimes, but Darfur also put Beijing in a bind between two diverging aspects of its

new diplomatic standards. On the one hand, there is the traditional emphasis on sovereignty and non-interference, principles that have proved to be lucrative in carving out economic deals in Sudan and elsewhere in Africa.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, there is the principle of constructive engagement as described by Minister Li, essential to maintain good relations with other countries and to participate in multilateral organisations. In Sudan, China's traditional policy of non-interference collided with the expectation of other African states that it would contribute to the stabilization of Darfur. Domestic violence reduces China's diplomatic manoeuvrability and its ability to maintain the policy of non-interference which has facilitated business with many states.

China's position became even more awkward when violence in Sudan started to spill over into Chad. After the establishment of diplomatic ties with Chad in 2006 and the consequent oil deals with this country, the government in N'Djamena made it clear to Beijing that the infiltration of rebels from Darfur into its own territory had to stop. During his visit to Beijing in April 2007, the Chadian Minister of Foreign Affairs urged the People's Republic to pressurize Khartoum into ending its support of the Chadian armed opposition. After the siege on N'Djamena at the beginning of 2008, Chad's envoy to the UN stated that "China was a friendly country to both the Sudan and Chad" and he expressed the hope that "China would bring to bear more pressure on the Sudan to stop the process of destabilization in Chad. After all, the Sudan was trying to overthrow the legitimate Government of Chad, in order to settle the conflict in Darfur. It was, therefore, in the interest of China to pressure the Sudanese."<sup>11</sup> When Li Zhaoxing visited the Central African Republic, President Francois Bozize joined Chad's appeal for exerting more pressure on Sudan. In April 2006, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs was asked by the Ethiopian government to take a more active stance on the crisis in Somalia, implying that China should

condone the Ethiopian intervention in Somalia to drive out the Union of Islamic Courts.

Finally, China is concerned about the increasing military presence of other powers.<sup>12</sup> Between 2000 and 2006, the US increased the number of its troops in Africa from 220 to nearly 1,000. The establishment of a new Africa Command (AFRICOM), announced when Chinese President Hu Jintao was completing a tour of the region in 2006, raised eyebrows in Beijing. Although the Chinese government did not officially comment, state-controlled media reported that the American initiative stood for “Cold War balancing” and that this move was “rejected by African countries”.<sup>13</sup> An official at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs interpreted the establishment of AFRICOM mainly in the context of the war against terrorism, but also recognized that “for the Americans military diplomacy is a way to counterbalance China and to maintain a strategic edge”.<sup>14</sup> Lin Zhiyuan, the deputy director of the Academy of Military Sciences went further: “AFRICOM will surely facilitate coordinating or overseeing US military actions in African for an effective control of the whole of Africa,” he wrote, “the US has enhanced its military infiltration in Africa in recent years, with its military aid to the continent doubling and its weaponry sale skyrocketing continuously.”<sup>15</sup> Chinese officials also tend to believe that, in the case of Sudan and Zimbabwe, Washington is not really concerned with human rights, but that it seizes on this argument to constrain China and to eventually effectuate a regime state at the expense of China’s influence.<sup>16</sup>

India is also expanding its military prowess. Along the East African coast it has inked defence agreements with countries such as Kenya, Madagascar and Mozambique. It has initiated joint training programmes with Kenya, Mozambique, Tanzania and South Africa. Its naval dominance in the strategic maritime shipping lanes around Africa in particular makes Chinese security analysts worry about the safety of supply. Delhi has convinced island states such as Madagascar,

Mauritius and the Seychelles to cooperate on maritime surveillance and intelligence gathering. Its fleet in the Indian Ocean is turning into one of the most powerful naval forces of the region, including new state-of-the-art aircraft carriers, nuclear submarines and other surface combatants.<sup>17</sup> The vulnerability of China’s shipping lines to Africa has worried several Chinese scholars. “As one of the emerging powers in the world, India is now catching up with their involvement in Africa,” a Chinese expert asserts, “The maritime build-up of India along the African shores is one of these endeavours taken by India. The purposes are multi-fold: economically for market and resources, politically for international influence and support for possible permanent membership in the UN Security Council, and it may also involve competing with China for influence in Africa.”<sup>18</sup> Another scholar, Zhang Yuncheng, claims that “if some accident occurs or if the strait is blocked by foreign powers, China will experience a tremendous energy security problem.” This assessment is also shared by Zhu Fenggang, who points to the possibility of sea denial as a coercive measure against China.

Instability and geopolitical rivalry loom large over China’s future supply of natural resources. Most of its energy deposits are located in the swamp of violence that surrounds Sudan or in the Gulf of Guinea where the United States continues to step up its influence. In the east, India has just started to convert the Indian Ocean into an Indian lake. The most urgent need is the protection of Chinese citizens and companies whenever they fall prey to instability. The long-term risk is that local tensions and conflicts will entice external powers to interfere and to exploit this instability to gain clout at the People’s Republic’s expense. It is this double security challenge that Chinese experts and policy makers have started to discuss.

### 3. Rising to the challenge: China's current security policy for Africa

In response to the incidents of the last four years, China has taken up the problem of non-traditional security threats at several occasions. Its initial reaction is to work with local governments. "China will cooperate closely with immigration departments of African countries in tackling the problem of illegal migration, improve exchange of immigration control information and set up an unimpeded and efficient channel for intelligence and information exchange," China's 2006 Africa Policy stated. "In order to enhance the ability of both sides to address non-traditional security threats, it is necessary to increase intelligence exchange, explore more effective ways and means for closer cooperation in combating terrorism, small arms smuggling, drug trafficking, transnational economic crimes, etc."<sup>19</sup> Beijing has instructed its embassies in Africa to keep a close watch on local security. The swift and successful evacuation of Chinese citizens from Chad also demonstrated that it has developed operational scenarios to deal with emergencies. The Chinese government has also started issuing travel advice. In Sudan and Kenya, state-owned companies receive protection from local armed forces to ward off assaults by rebels. Beijing has inked an agreement with South Africa to prevent the Chinese diaspora from turning into a target for armed gangs.<sup>20</sup>

Such measures might help Chinese citizens and companies to evade some of the risks, but they do not offer any guarantee for safeguarding its economic activities if the situation keeps deteriorating. In the case of Sudan, China learned the hard way that prodding instable governments can ricochet right back. If problems start to occur at a regional level, supporting states might prove even riskier. Nor does such a narrow security response address China's uncertainty about the military presence of nations. Hence, at the end of the day the dilemma comes back to the realistic supposition of self-help. Is the People's

Republic currently trying to safeguard its interests by building up its own military presence in Africa?

Bilateral military exchanges are a first indicator to test whether this assumption holds true. According to figures of the Chinese government, interactions with other armed forces expanded significantly with 174 high-level visits in 2001 to over 210 in 2006. However, this upward trend was not maintained in Africa, where such bilateral exchanges have remained stable at an annual average of 26. Beijing has established a permanent military dialogue only with South Africa. Interviews with European diplomats in 10 randomly chosen African countries also tell us that the number of accredited military officers in Chinese embassies, i.e. military attachés and their support staff, have barely or not expanded at all in the last few years. In fact, only in 15 countries are Chinese military attachés dispatched on a permanent basis.<sup>21</sup> Hence, China's military diplomacy in Africa remains modest, and it certainly has not kept up with the impressive number of trade officials posted in African countries to strengthen economic ties in the last few years.

Military aid is another indicator. Granting military hardware to partner countries can serve various objectives. In a context of competition it helps to thwart defence cooperation with other states or to prevent other powers' attempts to alter the regional military balance. Defence aid might help a privileged political partner useful to safeguard economic interests. Whereas these three objectives are motivated by security issues and long-term economic interests, defence aid may well be the result of short-sighted shopkeeper aspirations. There is no evidence that China's military aid aims at counterbalancing other powers, such as the United States. Apart from Sudan and Zimbabwe, most countries to have received Chinese aid in the last few years are also supplied by Washington. Moreover, in 2007 Beijing temporarily froze the supply of heavy arms to Khartoum after pressure from the

Country	Year	Value	Description
Angola	2004	6	Building training centre elite unit
Angola	2006	100	Upgrade military communications
Cameroon	2006	?	Donation of uniforms
CAR	2007	0.8	Donation of computers to headquarters
DRC	2005	0.5	Donation of uniforms to armed police
Ghana	2004	1.7	Building new headquarters
Ghana	2006	3.8	Renovation Ministry of Defence
Guinea-Bis.	2007	12	Loan for the construction of hospital
Liberia	2005	0.6	Donation material and logistics
Mozambique	2007	0.9	Donation of equipment
Mozambique	2007	1.5	Donation of light vehicles and uniforms
Nigeria	2006	3	Donation of uniforms and dinkies
Senegal	2007	2	Donation of ambulances and counter-mine
Sierra Leone	2006	1.2	Donation of small patrol boats
Sudan	2005	?	Donation of uniforms and radios
Tunisia	2006	?	Health care support
Uganda	2001	1	Donation of military trucks
Zimbabwe	2005	4	Donation of trucks and medical equipment
Zimbabwe	2006	1.5	Donation of machines

Table 1. China's military aid to African countries (In USD, 2004-2007: not exhaustive). Various sources.

West.<sup>22</sup> When Nigeria's Vice-President Atiky Abubakar publicly announced that his country would henceforth turn to China instead of the United States for arms, Beijing's response was reluctant, and no major supplies ensued in the following two years. China's military aid programmes cannot be considered to benefit its forays into the mining industry. Between 2004 and 2006, resource-rich Nigeria, for instance, received only half the value of the Chinese military aid provided to Ghana or Uganda. In this period it furnished more military assistance to Angola than to Sudan, even though the security challenges in the latter

were much more severe than in the former. Although violence in Somalia threatened China's oil exploration activities in both Ethiopia and Kenya, China only made a commitment to Kenya to help the country in the protection of its border. In conclusion, China does provide military aid, but this does not seem to be driven by a coherent strategy to protect its security interests.

Finally, self-help would imply the deployment of troops whenever China's stakes are at risk, to train friendly armed forces or to face challengers head-on. Yet, such presence is negligible. China has no bases in Africa like the United States or France, nor does it train African soldiers to deal with hostility perceived by China as a threat to its national interests. In Sudan and Zimbabwe, Cameroon and Gabon, China has dispatched teams of three to ten instructors, but these are assisting in the maintenance of equipment, rather than providing training for specific combat activities. In Zambia and Algeria, such cooperation also exists but it is limited to medical aid. Whereas all major powers have been deploying naval vessels to combat piracy or to keep the maritime supply lines in the waters surrounding Africa open, the Chinese Navy (PLAN) rarely shows its flag. In 2000, China sent its newest Luhai-class guided missile destroyer and a supply ship to Tanzania and South Africa. A 2002 naval ship visit by a fleet composed of a guided missile destroyer, the Qingdao, and a supply ship, the Taicang, called on Egypt, thereby crossing the Suez Chanel.<sup>23</sup> However, these voyages were a gesture of courtesy rather than a reaction to specific security challenges. They were limited in time and no actions were taken against pirates or poachers. No ships were deployed in the energy-rich Gulf of Guinea.

Instead of balancing and dealing with security threats unilaterally, China resorts to bandwagoning. Whereas in the 1980s and early 1990s, Beijing bluntly opposed moves by the international community to interfere with African security issues, nowadays it tends to join them. Beijing is increasingly recognizing the United Nation's role

in appeasing the numerous conflicts and safeguarding the sovereignty of frail states.. In the 1990s China began supporting UN missions deployed to implement peace agreements in which all rivalling parties had been included, on the condition of a well-defined and restricted mandate. Traditional *peacekeeping* operations such as those in Somalia (UNSOM I), Mozambique (ONUMUZ), Rwanda (UNAMIR) and Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) were all given the go-ahead. When the Security Council decided to dispatch troops in Liberia (UNMIL) in 2003, China offered to contribute to this mission, and from then on it gradually stepped up the number of its blue helmets to 1,300 in 2007.

At the same time, however, failed states and national governments that had actively participated in atrocities challenged this efficacy of traditional UN operations. China's primacy of sovereignty, implying at least the state's consent, collided with the willingness of other players to intervene more aggressively under a Chapter VII mandate. Beijing loudly opposed the move by European countries to push for Operation Turquoise in Rwanda, Washington's call to broaden the UNSOM's mandate, or France's demand for a troop increase in the 2004 UN operation in Ivory Coast. Despite its strong concerns China did not veto these interventions, but rather abstained and stayed aloof of their implementation. Sudan was the first instance where China actively lobbied an African government to allow a UN mission on its soil. Via active brokering and indirect pressure it succeeded in neutralizing the incompatibility between its economic interests and the principle of non-interference on the one hand, and Western appeals for intervening in Darfur and the need for long-term stability on the other.

That Beijing recognizes the importance of collective security became even more apparent in 2006, when China was the first to ask the UN Security Council for a peacekeeping mission in Somalia. In June that year, at a UN Security Council meeting in Addis Ababa, China's Permanent Representative to the UN Wang Guangya scolded other diplomats for neglecting Somalia and urged them to support the

deployment of peacekeepers. "I was reluctant to take on this role," said Wang, explaining that African governments had been pushing China to raise the issue in the Council, "but there was a lack of interest by the other major powers." Initially, the proposal was only tentatively received by Britain and the United States, but after various talks in New York, Beijing and Washington jointly sponsored a resolution for the deployment of a UN Mission. In 2007, in early consultations with France, China supported a French draft resolution on Chad, involving the dispatching of mainly European peacekeepers under Chapter VII. It was significant that China greenlighted the "close liaising" with the Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID), whereas before it had objected to the development of links between UNAMID and other UN missions. "Our support for the resolution on Chad shows that we are prepared to cooperate to tackle security issues at a regional level and that our awareness on the increasing complexity of violent conflicts in Africa grows", a Chinese diplomat explained.

China is also turning to African regional organisations to collaborate on security issues.<sup>24</sup> In the China-Africa Action Plan, approved in November 2006, Beijing vowed "to support Africa in the areas of logistics", as well as "to continue its active participation in the peacekeeping operations and de-mining process in Africa and provide, within the limits of its capabilities, financial and material assistance as well as relevant training to the Peace and Security Council of the African Union".<sup>25</sup> In June 2006, the Chinese government granted the African Union's Mission in Sudan (AMIS) 3.5 million USD in budgetary support and humanitarian emergency aid. Earlier, it provided financial and technical support to the Association for West African States (ECOWAS).

Slowly but surely, China is also showing itself ready to participate in international efforts to prevent small arms and natural resources contributing to conflicts. In 2002 for instance, Beijing revised its Regulation on Control of Military Products Export and published the

Military Products Export Control List that supplies several guidelines for the export of military products. In the same year, it inked the Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, which committed the People's Republic to control the manufacturing, marking, import and export of firearms, and to confiscate and destroy all illicit firearms.<sup>26</sup> In 2005, the government launched a national information management system for the production, possession and trade of light arms, and it introduced a system to monitor end-users of Chinese-made weapons to prevent the arms from finding their way to 'sensitive regions' around the world via third parties.<sup>27</sup> In 2006, China supported a draft UN resolution on the illicit trade of small arms and light weapons, in contrast to the United States who disapproved.<sup>28</sup> In 2002, China joined the Kimberley Process, a joint-government, international diamond industry and civil society initiative to stem the flow of conflict diamonds, mainly originating from Africa.<sup>29</sup> In 2005, it allowed a voluntary peer review under this scheme.<sup>30</sup> Although these efforts hold many flaws, they seem to prove that China wishes to do more than just put boots on the ground.

Despite the strategic importance of Africa, China does not attempt to safeguard its stronghold by unilaterally projecting military power. Its military diplomacy in Africa remains limited compared to defence exchanges in other regions, and if it does develop bilateral cooperation programmes, these are more likely to play a part in China's diplomatic charm offensive than to address threats to China's interests. Instead of using a military presence to counter-balance other powers such as the United States, the People's Republic tends to join collective security efforts within the framework of the UN and African regional organisations. Over the past few years this bandwagoning has evolved from passive support to active cooperation. Moreover, Beijing has softened its traditional devotion to non-interference. While maintaining the primacy of sovereignty, it has shown itself increasingly prepared to support interventions whenever regional stability is at stake.

Whereas China has become a revisionist power in terms of economic aspirations, particularly when trying to expand its influence in Africa's primary sector, it is acting like a status-quo power in terms of security objectives. There are several explanations for this stance. To start with, China only recently embarked on its economic safari through the African continent. Whereas in the past two decades China concentrated on curbing the diplomatic position of Taiwan, the 'economization' of its Africa policy only began in the late 1990s. Hence, the security challenges it is facing now are a recent phenomenon and resolutions to these challenges are just starting to be explored. China is going through the early stage of re-securitization of its Africa strategy, and bandwagoning can be considered the easiest immediate response. Secondly, and related to this point, China has not yet developed the means to back up its own security policy with military power. This is a matter of budgetary constraints: building up an independent and sustained military presence is a costly affair and would, at this stage, overstretch the PLA for whom Asia remains the primary terrain of action. In addition, the PLA does not dispose of enough logistical capacity to buttress sustained region-wide deployment. Therefore, its long-range airlift and sea lift capacity, as well as its intelligence and command facilities are not up to the task. Thirdly, the Chinese government wants to avoid the People's Republic being perceived as a strong power. In the initial stage of the economic charm offensive, it tried to pursue a business-as-usual approach, maintaining a low profile and steering well clear off politics. This is no longer possible now that it stands at the forefront of Africa's political scene and it is altering the economic balance of influence. Since Beijing is aware of the clash between its weak and strong identity, it is reluctant to bolster an independent military capacity, as this might reduce its diplomatic manoeuvrability, increase resistance in Africa - just as Washington is experiencing now -, and raise suspicion in the West and elsewhere. Yet, as interests, perceptions and capacities are susceptible to change, the

question remains whether China will stay on this track of cooperative security.

#### 4. China future security strategy for Africa

China's interests in Africa have been changing continuously in the past decades and will undoubtedly keep evolving in the coming years. The conception of its future security policy in this region will, of course, depend on the importance of Africa as a supplier of natural resources. Africa currently supplies about 30 percent of China's oil imports. Beijing and its African partners announced that they are set to increase bilateral trade to 100 billion USD by 2010. Most of this growth will come from the trade in raw commodities. In the last few years, Chinese companies have laid the foundations for a substantial increase of production in all kinds of resource industries. Exploration in the Gulf of Guinea, Angola and the Horn of Africa might result in a surge of oil exports to China of more than 80 percent in the next ten years. Chinese companies are just starting to tap the large mines that were recently acquired in Gabon, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Namibia and many other countries. Given the fact that other emerging markets such as India and Brazil will shift the use of their raw materials from export to domestic consumption, the economic relevance of Africa for China cannot be underestimated.

It will have to be seen how necessary it is to back up these Chinese economic ventures with more security measures. The incidents described in the first section, the persistent instability in many states, as well as the weak position of several amicable political leaders will undoubtedly lift up Africa further in Beijing's foreign security agenda and require a more determined response. Consequently, the question arises whether it is in China's interest to do this independently or in synergy with others. Short-term costs of unilateral action certainly

exceed those of collective action, but long-term uncertainty about the intentions of other players such as the United States and India might in turn prevail on cost-effectiveness. If Washington or Delhi decide to change course and to contain China's expanding influence in Africa by means of counter-balancing and sea denial, the repercussions for the People's Republic will be dramatic. The nervousness of the security community in these two countries and their growing military footprint in Africa is not going unnoticed in China, and it highlights the necessity to build the capacity to deal with crises independently.

China's diplomatic identity will also inform policy decisions to move towards a more active and autonomous security strategy. It is dawning on Beijing that the comfortable cloak of frailty it has presented to the world no longer fits. African partners do not attach much value to China's diplomatic schizophrenia and the complex image of an economic giant, political dwarf and military worm it projects. When mayhem erupts, China nearly automatically ends up in the frontline, finding itself persecuted by African governments asking it to use its leverage. The cases of Chad and Somalia have not been the only ones. South Africa has accosted China about the problem of illegal immigrants from Zimbabwe.<sup>31</sup> Central Africa has carefully taken up the violent incursions from Sudan.<sup>32</sup> The African Union has summoned China several times to play a more active role in promoting security. Moreover, individual countries might even be compelled to draw closer to China in order to reduce their own reliance on the EU and US for maintaining security. Nigeria's announcement that it would call on China instead of the US for military support already hints at this direction. Hence, the relevance of keeping a low military profile is diminishing. On the other hand, China's self-perception is going through a transition too. The *Century of Humiliation* has been left far behind and is making way for confidence and assertiveness. Chinese leaders have seized on the success of their neighbourhood diplomacy that resulted in fewer frictions and more influence. The People's Republic has drawn confidence from the successful launch of major new defence systems. As China sees its diplomatic leverage expanding geographically from the

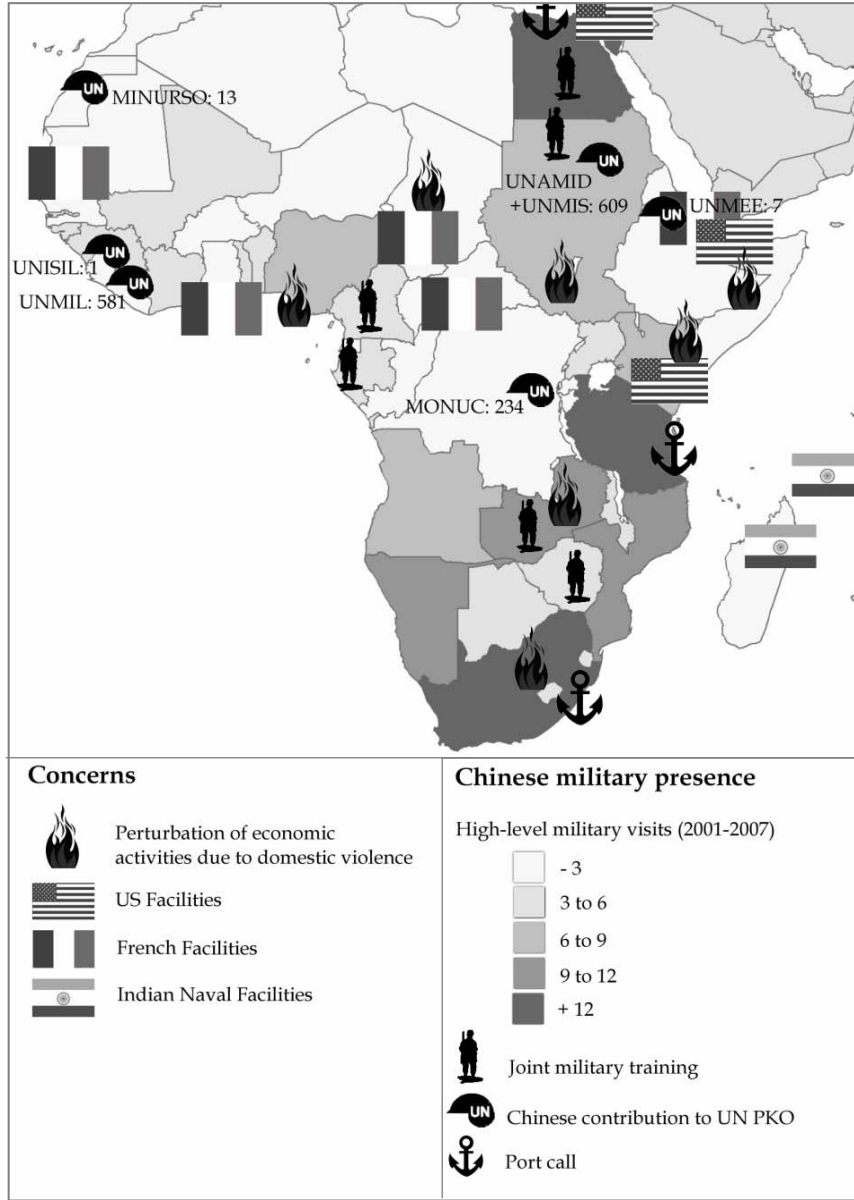


Figure 1. China's security map of Africa. Various sources.

Strait of Formosa, via the Asian region to the rest of the developing world, its assertiveness in dealing with security issues is likely to follow suit.

Finally, there is the factor of capacity. China is gearing its military for a larger international deployment. Its large immobile Army components are gradually being converted into highly specialized and flexible units. Simultaneously, the PLA has been launching various new systems that should enhance its capacity to lift these troops. In 2007, the Chinese government approved the development of large passenger jets, including military transport variants similar to the American C-17 Globemaster. Beijing has also ordered to beef up naval transport capacity. In 2006, the hull of a first T-071 was laid. This landing platform dock has areach that goes way beyond Taiwan and is aimed at providing sea-based support to launch operations on land, to send humanitarian aid, and to assist in evacuations and disaster management. These vessels will be supported by a new generation of large replenishment ships and could be escorted by various types of advanced frigates and destroyers. In absolute terms, China is stepping up its ability to pursue a more confident and independent security policy in Africa.

Will all this military vigour suffice to deal with the antagonistic response it is likely to provoke in other powers? Probably not. If China decides to go solo and to resort to a more aggressive security policy in Africa, it is improbable that it will be able to overcome military countermoves by India and the United States. As I explained elsewhere, it will be difficult to safeguard maritime trade with Africa if India uses its naval dominance in the Indian Ocean to counter-balance China. The sheer geographical divide between the People's Republic and the African continent will make it extremely hard to back military activities if the United States or India opposes them. Contrarily to the revolutionary phase of 1950s and 1960s when trade and economic interests only had a small part to play, China's increasing reliance on

Africa renders it highly vulnerable to sea denial operations or a *guerre de course*. The fragile Cold War balance between the United States and the Soviet Union that allowed Mao to trouble America's interests in Africa without having to fear political or economic reprisals can no longer be capitalized upon. These days China has much to lose if it provokes Washington or Delhi.

## 5. Conclusion and recommendations for the EU

There are several reasons to assume that China will abandon its bandwagoning strategy in Africa in the future. The persistence of the double security challenge, combined with the growing strategic importance of Africa, as well as China's growing military might and diplomatic assertiveness, could lead to a more strident and unilateral security policy. However, for the long haul, the geo-economics in question, specifically the vulnerability of its long supply lines, will prevent China from resorting to a kind of gunboat diplomacy that many powers pursued before. Despite changing interests, perceptions and means, China is and will remain to a large extent dependent on the good-will and collaboration of other players to safeguard its economic strongholds in Africa. As long as its social stability relies on the supply of Africa's natural riches, China will thus have to stick to the path of security cooperation. In fact, it will be the main stakeholder in terms of peace, social stability, good governance and equitable development in its African partner countries. Beijing's only option is to avoid future frictions with other powers by avoiding to be drawn into power plays and by easing and preventing regional and domestic hostility. Like no other external power, it is in China's interest to turn regional actors into flexible and widely supported organisations, claiming strategic ownership of conflict management by doing so.

For the European Union this adds impetus to moves to engage China. Although competition with China for influence in Africa might entice the EU to revise the conditional component of its Africa policy, it is in its own interests to maintain its standards on good governance, financial transparency, human rights, regional cooperation and sustainable development. At this stage it should work more actively and efficiently with the People's Republic to contribute to these objectives. The EU's leverage is flawed in many respects, but should not be underestimated. Given its colonial past, its moral remit is limited, but this is no reason to deny the actual importance of its standards. It lacks coherence, but it is in the common interest of all member states that play a role in Africa to maintain a certain degree of influence and to avoid great power rivalries erupting in this region. Its economic policy gives rise to lots of frustration among African partners, for instance with the EPAs and obdurate trade barriers. Yet, the EU will remain Africa's largest trading partner for at least a couple of years; it is still the largest aid donor, and it has taken some modest steps to accede to African demands to make its market more open. Militarily, it plays an inferior role in UNPK, but European peacekeeping missions in the DRC and Chad, as well as their potential contribution in terms of logistics, show that the EU still has a role to play. If it succeeds in fostering more coherence in its Africa policy and actively plays up the security interdependence with China, nothing prevents stronger security cooperation.

Yet, the EU should also be aware that it is not the focal point in China's Africa strategy. This position is taken up by the US, the African countries themselves and China's future economic challengers like India and Brazil. In the first place, the EU should therefore facilitate confidence building and avoid being seen as ganging up with Washington to counter-balance China. In many ways, the US is as much a competitor for the EU as it is for the People's Republic. The EU could support regional African forums to develop its capacity to have

multilateral exchanges with all its old and new partners. It could also encourage expert exchanges in a broader setting than the traditional trilateral meetings. Simultaneously, the EU should preventively draw in countries like India and Brazil. Instead of developing a Sino-centric Africa policy, it is of utmost importance to take the very complex nature of Africa's global significance into account.

The EU should continue to insist that China build on a comprehensive and cooperative security policy that includes standards on sustainable economic and political development. Instead of the EU merely imposing those, China should also have ownership and therefore the EU needs to build a consensus on these principles from the bottom up. Chinese experts and officials could be encouraged to further explore their own stakes in goals like transparency and good governance, and therefore to interact with European counterparts from a position of equality. More and more conferences that specifically address these issues should be organized, and they ought to be better coordinated at the EU level.

At the military level, the EU, China and Africa could work together to establish joint programmes aiming at the training of African peacekeepers, allowing for demobilization and disarmament in post-conflict situations. Military exchanges with EU Military Staff (EUMS) could be considered in order to enhance cooperation in planning and coordination. European military experts could also contribute to the training of Chinese peacekeepers in the China Peacekeeping Police Training Centre in Langfang and the new Peacekeeping Training Centre in Beijing. As China is poised at the mere beginning of its new partnership with Africa, the EU and the People's Republic could capitalize on this issue by turning it into one of the key pillars of their enhanced cooperation.

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