

China-Africa Political and Security Relations: An Analysis of Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) Documents

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Abstract— *There has been a tremendous growth in China-Africa relations in the last twenty years. As part of this growth political and security links between them have also grown. In the security sphere statements issued by FOCAC have consistently called for greater African representation in the UN Security Council. During the last two decades or so China's substantive involvements in African security have been through UN and AU peacekeeping operations and the multinational anti-piracy effort off Somalia in the Gulf of Aden. Using Shinn and Eisenman's Optimist-Pessimist dual framework this paper will analyze contemporary China-Africa political and security relations with a particular focus on documents produced by the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). It will employ an interpretive methodology to analyze FOCAC documents. This analysis will both substantiate and problematize the Optimist and Pessimist perspectives that make up the framework. It identifies zero-sum thinking as a weakness common to key postulates of both the perspectives. In the Optimist perspective China provides Africa with a political counterweight to the West. In the Pessimist perspective the strengthening of China-Africa relations constitutes an unwelcome challenge to the West in Africa. In both cases the gain of one party results in a loss for another party. In the first case Africa's gain results in a loss for the West, and in the second case China's gain results in a loss for the West. In order to rectify this weakness this paper calls for greater non-zero sum thinking in responding to the growing China-Africa relationship aimed at realizing joint gains for all parties. It argues that the cooperation between China and Africa is not aimed at challenging the contemporary world order led by the West but rather at improving their position within it.*

Keywords— *China, Africa, FOCAC*

I. INTRODUCTION

In the past two decades or so, China-Africa relations have grown by leaps and bounds. The growth of China-Africa political and security relations has been a part of this very important development in contemporary international

relations. Shinn and Eisenman (2012, pp. 10-14) identify two schools of thought on contemporary China-Africa relations, which they label as Optimist and Pessimist. Optimists see China as a force for development and progress in Africa providing valuable economic opportunities and a welcome political counterweight to the West. On the other hand Pessimists see China's strengthening ties with Africa as an unwelcome challenge both to the position of the United States (US) and the West in Africa, and to the post-'Cold War' world order led by the US and the West. They foresee the emergence of a resistance to China's presence in Africa from among the Africans themselves. Using the Optimist-Pessimist dual framework identified by Shinn and Eisenman this paper will analyze the primary documents on China-Africa relations produced by FOCAC, supplementing this analysis where appropriate by referring to secondary sources. It will use this analysis to assess the validity of both the Optimist and Pessimist perspectives and point out the need to look beyond them. Nevertheless, at the outset it must be emphasized that this paper is greatly indebted to Shinn and Eisenman's (2012) landmark study on China-Africa relations as will be evident from the frequent references to it here. The paper will focus on the political and security dimensions of the contemporary China-Africa relationship.

II. POLITICAL RELATIONS

In the aftermath of the conclusion of the 'Cold War' and East-West competition there was a decline in both Western and Eastern (i.e. the former Soviet Union and its erstwhile East European allies) interest in Africa because they ceased to be rivals vying for influence there. This offered China the chance to fill the void and start coming back to Africa in a big way, beginning in the early 1990s. Another important event occurring at this time with an impact on China-Africa political relations was the Tiananmen Square crackdown of 1989. While many Western governments were critical of China's actions at Tiananmen, a number of African countries such as Namibia, Burkina Faso, Botswana and the North African countries either supported or did not oppose China on this issue, bringing China and these countries closer together at a time when the former's relations with the

West had deteriorated. From June 1989 to June 1992 China's then Foreign Minister Qian Qichen visited seventeen Sub-Saharan African countries and the then Vice Premier Wu Xueqian visited another three. During the same period China extended invitations to sixteen Sub-Saharan African heads of state or government and twenty three African senior officials to visit China. Yet another important event that took place at this time was Taiwan's official repudiation in 1991 of its claim to represent all of China, which led to fears in Beijing that Taiwan could follow this up with a declaration of independence. As a result Beijing stepped up its efforts to prevent Taiwan from gaining diplomatic recognition on the African continent (Shinn & Eisenman 2012, pp. 45-46).

During a visit to Africa in 1992 by China's President at that time Yang Shangkun, the following principles were enunciated as the basis of China's Africa policy:

- Support for African sovereignty, national independence and economic development;
- Opposition to foreign intervention;
- Respect for different political systems and development paths;
- Support for African unity, cooperation and the Organization of African Unity (OAU); and
- Belief that African states should participate actively in the international arena as equal members (Shinn & Eisenman 2012, pp. 46-47).

At a speech made in 1996 at the OAU - which became the African Union (AU) in 2002 - in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, China's then President Jiang Zemin set out a five-point proposal for far reaching cooperation with Africa in the twenty first century as follows:

1. To foster a sincere friendship and become each other's "all weather friend";
2. To treat each other as equals, respect each other's sovereignty and refrain from interfering in each other's internal affairs;
3. To seek common development on the basis of mutual benefit;
4. To increase consultation and cooperation in international affairs; and
5. To look into the future and create a more splendid world (Shinn & Eisenman 2012, p. 47).

The above mentioned two statements prefigure China's African Policy white paper produced in 2006 and indicate an attempt on China's part to make common cause with African countries, both as relatively young modern states adhering to traditional norms of sovereignty and as developing countries. Shinn and Eisenman (2012, p. 48) have seen the burgeoning China-Africa relationship of the

1990s in the context of China's promotion of the multipolarization of the American dominated unipolar post-'Cold War' world order. Such an interpretation of the contemporary China-Africa relationship supports the Pessimist school of thought which sees in it a challenge to the position of the United States in Africa.

The Beijing Declaration of the first Ministerial Meeting of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) held in October 2000 states that,

the establishment of a just and equitable new international political and economic order is indispensable for the democratization of international relations and for the effective participation of developing countries in the international process of decision-making (FOCAC 2000a).

The emphasis placed in this statement on a 'new international political and economic order' and the 'democratization of international relations' substantiates to an extent the Pessimist fear regarding a challenge to the post-'Cold War' unipolar world order with the United States as the sole super power and by extension to the position of the United States in Africa as well. However, it also states that the developed North and the developing South '...should strengthen their dialogue and cooperation on the basis of equality'. This latter part of the statement hints at the possibility of China-US collaboration in Africa. As part of the follow-up actions of the first Ministerial Meeting of FOCAC, between 2000 and 2003, Chinese leaders visited Africa on twenty occasions and more than thirty African leaders visited China (FOCAC 2004a).

The Addis Ababa Action Plan (2004-2006) issued at the end of the second Ministerial Meeting of FOCAC held at Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in December 2003 notes the diversification of consultation mechanisms and dialogue channels between China and Africa through the establishment of two joint committees, one on economic cooperation and trade and the other on science and technology. It describes the setting up of these committees as laying a 'sound political foundation' for the implementation of the follow-up activities of FOCAC (FOCAC 2003). Following this second Ministerial Meeting as part of its follow-up activities through the first half of 2004 China's former President Hu Jintao visited Egypt, Gabon and Algeria, former Vice President Zeng Qinghong visited Tunisia, Togo, Benin and South Africa, and the Presidents of Mozambique, Madagascar, Tanzania, Uganda, Mali and Namibia visited China (FOCAC 2004b). This flurry of visits in the first half of 2004 alone is ample

testimony to the strengthening of the China-Africa political relationship initiated by FOCAC.

The first Summit and third Ministerial Meeting of FOCAC was held at Beijing in November 2006 with the participation of 48 African countries. The Declaration of this Summit announced the launching of a Strategic Partnership between China and Africa based on political equality and mutual trust, aiming to achieve economic cooperation beneficial to both parties. It states that,

the establishment of a new type of strategic partnership is both the shared desire and independent choice of China and Africa, serves our common interests, and will help enhance solidarity, mutual support and assistance and unity of the developing countries and contribute to durable peace and harmonious development in the world (FOCAC 2006b).

While, throughout the Declaration of this Summit China continues to make common cause with Africa as developing countries, it also notes the increasing interdependence of the world and states that 'different civilizations and modes of development should draw on each other's experience, promote each other and co-exist in harmony', and calls for the enhancement of North-South dialogue, which indicates that FOCAC is not envisioned as a form of cooperation that aims to displace the developed Northern (i.e. Western) countries from Africa. The Beijing Action Plan (2007-2009) issued at the end of this Summit announced the decision of China and the African countries to regularly hold a political consultation involving their foreign ministers on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) annual meeting following every FOCAC Ministerial Meeting. This document also mentions the agreement on China's part to assist the AU to build a new convention centre in Addis Ababa symbolizing Chinese support for African unity and integration. It also states the intention of China and the African countries to explore ways of cooperation with third parties (FOCAC 2006c). This indicates that FOCAC is not meant to be an exclusive China-Africa bloc.

Subsequent to the third Ministerial Meeting and First Summit, as part of its follow-up activities in 2007 Hu Jintao, China's then President, Wu Bangguo, then Chairman of the Standing Committee of China's National People's Congress (NPC), Jia Qinglin, then Chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), and Li Zhaoxing, China's the Foreign Minister, visited a total of 20 African countries. In the same year three Presidents, three Speakers of Parliament, two Vice Presidents, two Prime

Ministers and nine Foreign Ministers from Africa visited China. In September of 2007, pursuant to the Beijing Action Plan (2007-2009), China and Africa held their first foreign minister's political consultation on the sidelines of the UNGA annual meeting in New York. During 2008 Li Changchun, a then Member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC), and Yang Jiechi, China's then Foreign Minister, visited four African countries each, while three Presidents, one Speaker of Parliament, one Vice President and one Foreign Minister from Africa visited China (FOCAC 2008).

The fourth Ministerial Meeting of FOCAC was held at Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt in November 2009. The Declaration of Sharm El Sheikh issued at the end of this meeting dwells at length on the implications of the global financial crisis that began in 2008 for Africa. It calls on the international community, the developed countries in particular, to try and minimize the impact of the crisis on Africa by fulfilling their commitments on aid and debt relief, promoting investment, continuing to open-up their markets, and assisting the developing African countries to promote economic growth and sustainable development (FOCAC 2009a). The Sharm El Sheikh Action Plan (2010-2012) notes the launching of a Strategic Dialogue Mechanism for the exchange of views on China-Africa relations as well as other issues of relevance. Between 2009 and 2012 Wu Bangguo, then Chairman of the Standing Committee of China's NPC, Jia Qinglin, then Chairman of the CPPCC, Li Changchun, then Member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the CPC, Zhou Yongkang, a then member of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the CPC as well as the Secretary of the Central Political and Legislative Commission, and then Vice President Xi Jinping all visited Africa. In the same period 32 Heads of State and Government, 17 Vice Presidents or Deputy Prime Ministers, and 10 Speakers of Parliament from Africa visited China. In September 2010 the Foreign Ministers of China and Africa held the second political consultation on the sidelines of the UNGA annual meeting in New York. In January 2012 Chairman Jia Qinglin became the first Chinese leader to attend an AU Summit on which occasion the new convention centre built with China's assistance was dedicated (FOCAC 2009b; FOCAC 2012a). The emergence of the political consultation among the Foreign Ministers of China and Africa on the sidelines of the UNGA annual meeting as a regular event can strengthen their collective bargaining position at the UN. While this outcome appears to lend some credibility to the fear implied by the Pessimist view that China's contemporary relations with Africa are aimed at challenging the US-led world order, it need not

be seen in those terms. When considered in the light of references made in earlier statements to global interdependence and North-South dialogue this move can be interpreted as an effort to improve the bargaining strength of the developing world within that world order.

The fifth Ministerial Meeting of FOCAC was held at Beijing, China in July 2012. While the Beijing Declaration of this meeting notes the improving position of developing countries in the world balance of power, it also calls on countries around the world to work together to recover from the global financial crisis (FOCAC 2012b). At first glance the reference to the improving power position of developing countries appears to support the worries implied in the Pessimist view. However if one looks carefully at the practical manifestations of this tendency such as the Group of 20 major economies (G20ME), Group of 20 developing nations (G20DN) and the Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa (BRICS) grouping one can put across a slightly different argument. The G20ME is essentially an expansion of the Group of Eight (G8) developed economies to include some of the largest developing countries in order to make it more representative of the world economy. The G20DN is a caucus within the global trade negotiations under the World Trade Organization (WTO), the successor to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). Even the acronym BRIC, for Brazil, Russia, India and China, which was later expanded to BRICS was coined in 2001 by Jim O'Neill, global economist at Goldman Sachs at the time. Since then of course BRICS has acquired a life of its own. The point being made here is that while all these newly emergent groupings involving developing countries are increasing their power in world affairs, they should not be seen as an outright challenge to the prevailing US-led world order because they are clearly operating very much within it. In this context, when taken together with the call for countries around the world to work together to recover from the global financial crisis contained in the declaration of the fifth FOCAC Ministerial Meeting, the inherent weakness of the Pessimist view become obvious.

III. SECURITY RELATIONS

Turning to the security relationship one of its most important features is FOCAC's repeated call for greater African representation in the UN Security Council in almost all of its declarations. The two most important substantive Chinese involvements in African security are peacekeeping operations of the UN and AU, and the anti-piracy effort off-Somalia. In the 1990s small numbers of Chinese peacekeepers took part in UN operations in Western Sahara (from 1991), Mozambique (1993-1994), Liberia (1993-97), and Sierra Leone (1998-99). Starting in

2000 China sent ten observers to the UN mission along the Ethiopia-Eritrea border. Till this point China's involvement in peacekeeping operations in Africa was on a low scale. However by 2003 the scale of China's contributions to peacekeeping operations was taken to a higher level with the deployment of a 175-member engineering company and a 43-member medical unit to the DRC. Soon thereafter it deployed a 275-member engineering company, 240-member transportation company and a 43-member field hospital to Liberia (Shinn & Eisenman 2012, pp. 183-184). By mid-2012 China had close to 1500 peacekeepers deployed in seven missions in Africa (FOCAC 2012a; Schneidman & Erickson 2012). By way of comparison by mid-2011 the US had only 28 personnel committed to UN peacekeeping operations in Africa. In this context Shinn and Eisenman (2012, p. 187) have quoted US Marine Colonel Philippe Rogers as follows,

[China's] effort is outpacing Washington's efforts dedicated to operations in Africa by a considerable margin. Conceivably, the United States will one day turn to the Chinese military for help and expertise in missions in Africa.

While the first part of Col. Rogers' statement reflects the Pessimist view that China is replacing the US in Africa, the second part hints at the possibility of China-US security cooperation in the continent. This latter line of thought is also pursued by Schneidman and Erickson (2012) when they point out the possibility of US-China-Africa trilateral cooperation in peacekeeping efforts in the context of the Obama Administration's 'US Strategy toward Sub-Saharan Africa' enunciated in June 2012 one of the pillars of which is to "advance peace and security".

With regard to naval operations to counter Somalia-based piracy in which China began participating in January 2009 at the invitation of the Somali government, the People's Liberation Army- Navy (PLA-N) has continuously maintained on a rotational basis a small fleet of two destroyers/ frigates and a supply ship committed to the effort with each fleet being replaced by another fleet from China every 4-6 months or so. As pointed out by Christoffersen (2009, pp. 9-19) during this anti-piracy effort while China's forces at first operated independent of the UN-approved and US-led Combined Task Force 151 (CTF 151) there was continuous dialogue between China and the US at the tactical level with American and Chinese naval officers communicating through unclassified emails in their Yahoo accounts. During the US-China Defence Policy Coordination Talks in February 2009, the head of the US delegation and then Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defence for Asia and Pacific Security Affairs, David Sedney, praised the PLA-N's

contribution in the Gulf of Aden, stating that 'the work they've done has been highly professional, it's been highly effective, and it's been very well coordinated with the United States and other navies that are working there' (Christoffersen 2009, p. 14). She goes on to argue that in November 2009 as a result of the hijacking of the Chinese ship *De Xin Hai* by Somali pirates and the inability of the Chinese to deal with the situation by themselves, the US-China operational-level tactical cooperation evolved to something close to sharing of strategies. This again problematizes the Pessimist view which ignores the possibility of China-US cooperation in Africa.

IV. CONCLUSION

During the period that has been the focus of this paper, as evidenced by statements emanating from China's leaders in the 1990s and China's African Policy white paper produced in 2006, in the political arena it has displayed a tendency to make common cause with African countries both as relatively young modern states adhering to traditional norms of sovereignty and as developing countries. Seeing the burgeoning China-Africa relationship in the 1990s within the context of China's support for the 'multipolarization' of the US-led post-'Cold War' world order as Shinn and Eisenman (2012, p. 48) have done, tends to support the Pessimist perspective which sees in it a threat to the US position in Africa. The emphasis placed in the Beijing Declaration of the first Ministerial Meeting of FOCAC held in 2000 on the establishment of a new international political and economic order and the democratization of international relations could also be interpreted as a challenge to the post-'Cold War' world order with the US as the sole super power and as substantiating Pessimist fears. However, what must be highlighted here is that the same declaration calls on the developed North and the developing South to strengthen dialogue and cooperation on the basis of equality, which hints at the possibility of China-US collaboration on Africa. While the Declaration of the Beijing Summit of FOCAC in 2006 announced the establishment of a Strategic Partnership between China and Africa and continued to make common cause between China and Africa as developing countries, it also noted the increasing interdependence of the world and called for the enhancement of North-South dialogue, which indicates that FOCAC is not envisioned as a form of cooperation that aims to displace the developed Northern (i.e. Western) countries from Africa. This latter argument can be further substantiated by the pointing out that the Beijing Action Plan (2007-2009) issued by the FOCAC Summit and Ministerial Meetings in 2006 states the intention of China and the African countries to explore ways of cooperation with third parties. While the potential strengthening of China's and Africa's bargaining

position within the UN through the institutionalization of the political consultation among the Foreign Ministers of China and Africa on the sidelines of the UNGA following each FOCAC Ministerial Meeting might appear at first glance as supporting worries regarding the overturning of the US-led post-'Cold War' world order that are inherent to the Pessimist perspective, when taken together with the recognition of global interdependence and calls for enhancing North-South dialogue contained in previous FOCAC statements, this outcome appears in the light of an attempt to strengthen their position within that world order. In a similar vein even though the reference to the improving power position of developing countries contained in the Beijing Declaration of the fifth Ministerial Meeting of FOCAC held in 2012 could be used to support the Pessimist view, if one looks carefully at the practical manifestations of this tendency such as the G20ME, G20DN and BRICS what becomes clear is that this change is occurring very much within the prevailing world order led by the West. When the call for countries around the world to work together to recover from the global financial crisis contained in that declaration is also taken into consideration the intrinsic weakness of the Pessimist view is further revealed.

In the security sphere statements issued by FOCAC have consistently called for greater African representation in the UN Security Council. During the past two decades or so China's substantive involvements in African security have been through UN and AU peacekeeping operations and the multinational anti-piracy effort off Somalia in the Gulf of Aden. While the increasing number of Chinese peacekeepers and the dwindling number of US peacekeepers in Africa could be used to substantiate the Pessimist fear that the former is replacing the latter, Schneidman and Erickson (2012) have noted the scope for US-China-Africa trilateral cooperation in peacekeeping efforts in the context of the Obama Administration's 'US Strategy toward Sub-Saharan Africa'. The close cooperation between the US and China in anti-piracy efforts off Somalia that took place in 2009 further problematizes the Pessimist perspective which ignores possibility of US-China cooperation in the continent.

While the Optimist-Pessimist dual framework does provide a useful tool for analyzing contemporary China-Africa relations there is a fundamental weakness common to both the Optimist and Pessimist perspectives. This has to do with the Optimist thesis that China provides Africa with a political counterweight to the West, and the Pessimist postulate that China's strengthening ties with Africa are an unwelcome challenge to the West, both of which are cast in zero-sum terms. That is to say the gain of one party automatically

results in a loss for another party. With regard to the Optimist thesis Africa's gain leads to a loss for the West, and in the Pessimist postulate China's gain leads to a loss for the West. What is needed is more non-zero sum thinking aimed at realizing joint gains for all parties. While the emphasis on North-South dialogue and global interdependence contained in FOCAC statements indicate that China and Africa are open to cooperation with the West, a greater degree of cooperative thinking is needed in the West in responding to the growing China-Africa relationship.

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