

# China's Participation in the Conflict Resolution in Sudan and South Sudan: A Case of "Creative Mediation"



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**HEND ELMAHLY MAHHOUD SULTAN**

Ph.D. candidate.  
Middle East Studies Institute, Shanghai International Studies University

**DEGANG SUN**

Prof. Dr.  
Institute of International Studies, Fudan University

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*Hend ElMahly Mahhoud SULTAN is a Ph.D. candidate at the Middle East Studies Institute, Shanghai International Studies University, China. She is fluent in Arabic, Chinese and English, and basic in Spanish. Hend is a young sinologist and her research interests are security in the Horn of Africa, China's peace mission in the Horn of Africa, and Gulf security. She published extensively in leading Chinese and international Journal of West Asia and Africa, Journal of Contemporary Arab Affairs, Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies. She has translated and published six books from Chinese into Arabic.*

*Degang SUN is Professor of Political Science at the Institute of International Studies, Fudan University, Shanghai, China, and Editor-in-Chief of Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies (published by Routledge, Taylor & Francis). He was Professor and Deputy Director of the Middle East Studies Institute of Shanghai International Studies University, China. He was a visiting scholar at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Harvard University (September 2018-September 2019), Senior Associate Member at St. Antony's College, Oxford University, and an Academic Visitor to Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies (2012-2013), Denver University (2007-2008) and Hong Kong University (2004-2005). His research interests are Middle Eastern politics and International Relations, great powers' strategies in the Middle East and China's Middle East diplomacy. His articles have been featured in journals such as Mediterranean Politics, Journal of Contemporary China and Africa Spectrum.*

## ABSTRACT

This article explains China's response to the conflict in Sudan and South Sudan through its cautious involvement to protect its practical interests in this region. Beijing has made great efforts to improve conflict resolution in Darfur and South Sudan and has attempted to adopt a new paradigm for constructive engagement and creative mediation. Its response to the conflict in Sudan and South Sudan is driven by the dilemma of protecting national interests and shaping its great power identity, along with adhering to the principle of non-interference. This article also analyzes China's national interests in the region and its relevance to China's response to conflict and participation tools. It puts forward a new concept of 'creative mediation' to explain China's participation in multilateral security affairs and engagement in conflict resolution. Moreover, the article explores how such a creative mediation is compatible with China's principle of non-interference.

**Keywords:** China, conflict resolution, mediation diplomacy, South Sudan, Sudan

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THE HISTORY OF CHINA-SUDAN RELATIONS goes back the Ancient Silk Road linking Sudan's eastern ports to trade with the Middle East. The relations flourished between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. Diplomatic relations between the two states began in January 1959. Sudan was the first country in sub-Saharan Africa to recognize the People's Republic of China (PRC). Before the 1989 military coup, there was a positive image between the rulers, people, and elites of Sudan regarding China's contributions to the rapprochement and development of Sudan. During this period, China provided Sudan with developmental assistance, which amounted to \$ 95.6 million and contributed to the establishment of the textile industry and the construction of roads, bridges, and hospitals in Sudan (Large, 2008). Sudan also actively contributed to bolster China's strategic interests in Africa and the Red Sea.

Following the military coup in 1989, Sudan's domestic affairs had gone through three notable phases that have had a major impact on Sino-Sudanese relations: (1) The military Islamist regime; 2) The Darfur crisis in 2006 and the Chinese response; 3) South Sudan's inde-

pendence in 2011. Since 1989, China had been keen to strengthening its relations with the new Sudanese regime to break the international isolation imposed by the United States and its allies. More importantly, Beijing became a net importer of oil products in 1993, and a net importer of crude oil in 1996. Since then, the new situation has required the adoption of a "going out" strategy to searching for energy, investment in oil and gas. In 1994, Sudan invited China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) to conduct a preliminary survey on Sudan's oil sector. President Al-Bashir's visit to Beijing in late 1995 had resulted in an agreement to provide low-interest soft loans to Sudan and signed an agreement to finance oil development in Sudan. Subsequently, CNPC started operations in Block 6 (Al-Mamas of Kordofan and South Darfur), and in late 1996, other oil companies were also discovered. At the beginning of March 1997, oil exploration operation started in South Sudan, CNPC signed a cooperation agreement with Petronas, Talisman (then Arakis) and Sudapet to develop three oil blocks and share investment risks (Abdelbagi, Siti-Nabiha&Shahbudin, 2013). China's

economic expansion in Sudan had also broken the international isolation imposed by the international community on Khartoum in the pretext of “supporting terrorism and human rights violations in Darfur and South Sudan”. On August 12, 1993, the US State Department designated Sudan as a “state sponsor of terrorism” (U.S. Department of the Treasury, 2017). Khartoum also viewed Beijing as an attractive political and economic partner. The relation between China and Sudan was mutually beneficial: Sudan made rapid strides in the development of its oil industry, and China gained important test points for the technical development of its oil-owned companies, which were technically lagging behind major international oil companies. China had played a significant role in the re-orientation of Sudan’s foreign economic relations toward ‘Asia’. The top export destinations of Sudan are the United Arab Emirates (\$1.71B), China (\$611M), Saudi Arabia (\$600M), India (\$426M); the top import origins of Sudan are China (\$2.34B), the United Arab Emirates (\$972M), India (\$834M), Saudi Arabia (\$638M) and Russia (\$636M) (OEC, n.d.).

**China’s mediation endeavors reflect its cautious measures to maximize its economic interests and minimize its political venture.**

However, The Darfur crisis in 2005 put China’s national interests and national identity in a quandary between adhering to the doctrine of non-interference and safeguarding its national interests in Sudan on one hand, and international pressure on Beijing and strengthening its national identity as a responsible power in the

international community on the other hand. The International community had criticized China’s policy in Sudan and argued that the oil relations between the two countries had supported and encouraged the Sudanese government to carry out “genocide” in the Darfur region: Sudanese government used oil revenues to buy weapons and killed dissidents in Darfur, and thus China indirectly supported the killing of people in the region.

China saw a political solution as the only way to address the crisis and began to use its influence in the United Nations to pressure the Sudanese regime to accept the deployment of hybrid UN-African Union mission forces. Beijing also began to keep itself away from being deeply involved in Sudan’s internal affairs and opened the door for the international community to punish the Khartoum government for its assumed attempts to assassinate the Egyptian President. Beijing allowed the passage of three UN Security Council resolutions against the Khartoum government, resolutions 1044, 1054, 1070, which included imposing a kind of diplomatic threat and pressure on Sudan. China also played a mediator role between Sudan and the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM), which resulted in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005. On 9 July 2011 South Sudan became the newest country in the world, and China immediately announced its recognition of the new country and established diplomatic relations with South Sudan.

It is apparent that China seeks economic benefit in Sudan and South Sudan, thus it is hard for China to shy away its political responsibility for conflict resolution, albeit reluctantly. China’s mediation endeavors reflect its cautious measures to maximize its economic interests and minimize its political venture.

## 1. The Concept of China-Styled Creative Mediation in International Conflict Resolution

There are two types of protecting states' overseas interests: one is the use of force by a state without the consent of the host state, and sometimes under the authorization of the UN Security Council, to protect its national interests that are facing multiple threats. The second one is the use of diplomatic tools, based on the consent of the target state and under the authorization of the UN Security Council such as mediation, constructive involvement, indirect engagement, and consultation with a state concerned. Creative mediation diplomacy is based on the right of protecting overseas interests under the international law and the consent of the host states. The diplomatic tools of China's creative mediation diplomacy are based on the types (strategic political, security, economic and ideological) and degrees (vital, major, survival) of national interests in Sudan and South Sudan, along with adhering to the doctrine of non-interference in other's internal affairs.

Western academics have made significant contributions to understanding the mediation theory and its dynamics, terms, methodology, and mediators and adversaries (Bercovitch, 1991a; Bercovitch, 1991b). Mediation is an extension of negotiations where the conflicting parties accept the involvement or assistance of external parties without breaking international law or the state's sovereignty, or a low-cost and flexible strategy, legitimately and creatively adopted by external security actors and international organizations. The success of mediation depends on the experience and efficiency of the mediator and successful judgment on the conflict from all directions. Therefore, the mediation process often

fails to manage and resolve the conflict. It is a complex process with rarely positive results. Conflicts can easily escalate into wars as a result of the mediator's calculations and motives. In a way, any external actors may become a formal or informal mediator.

Bercovitch divides the mediator into three categories: individuals, countries and institutions (organizations). The international mediator aims to influence or change the conflict system through its resources and diplomatic tools. These resources illustrate the behavior and strategy of the mediator, which include good offices, creative conciliation, mediation, constructive engagement, negotiation, and arbitration (Bercovitch, 1996; Bercovitch&Houston, 1996). Ravan also introduces six types of resources or so-called "rules of influence":

*Reward Resources:* the ability of the mediator to provide tangible covenants and benefits to the warring parties such as the form of economic assistance.

*Coercion Resources:* the threat of the mediator to withdraw mediation or punish one or both parties such as the use of his economic influence to force the warring parties to conflict resolution.

*Referent Resources:* the use of shared identity or ideologies between the mediator and the conflicting parties.

*Expertise Resources:* The mediator's experience and superior ability to manage and resolve conflict.

*Information Resources:* The ability of the mediator to disclose valuable information that leading to the changing outcome of the conflict.

*Legitimacy Resources:* Legitimate resources are linked to the internal values of the parties which the mediator has the right to change or influence the conflict.

Table 1: Differentiating Chinese and Western Mediation Diplomacies

	Western Mediation Diplomacy	China's Creative Mediation Diplomacy
Mediator's Interests Involved	Security and Strategic Interests	Commercial and Political/Diplomatic Interests
Attitudes of Mediators	Proactive	Selective on a case-by-case basis
Positions	Dominating	Participating
Roles of Mediators	Leading	Following
Mediation Process	Agenda-Setting	Agenda-Revising
Resources that Mediators Commit to	Major Resources	Minor Resources
Primary Goals	Conflict Resolution	Conflict De-Escalation

Source: Sun & Zoubir, 2016: 240.

The choice of these resources also depends on the nature of the conflict and warring parties, the characteristics of conflict management and methods of conflict management. It also links to the type and degree of mediator's interests in the host state. When the ongoing conflict threatens the mediator's interests, the mediator has a defensive attitude, and even it engages in joint mediation (for example, Russia, Iran, and Turkey cooperation in the Syrian crisis). There are also two types of mediators: A negative mediator interferes to spread more chaos or to forge security alliances with one of the warring parties in order to harm the interests of other external actors or other mediators; a positive mediator seeks to conflict resolution to protect his interests and enhance international peace and security and reduce the consequences of acute conflicts. While private motives are usually related to the reduction of the indirect effects of the mediators such as trade disturbances, refugee flows are threatened their commercial interests in a troubled country. Besides the interest-based approach, humanitarian concerns or human rights are also an important factor that leading the mediator to strengthen its status or national identity in the

international community. A positive mediator is supposed to be neutral and proposes a just solution and uses his influence and international prestige to push the conflict process towards an effective position and influence on the warring parties to accept a settlement and negotiation.

Sun and Zoubir (2018) argue that China takes a proactive mediation in conflict resolution in order to protect its security and political interests. Unlike what it has done in the North Korean nuclear issue, Beijing adopts Quasi-Mediation Diplomacy in the Middle Eastern and African security issues to protect its economic and strategic interests. China's approach in Sudan and South Sudan has provided all warring parties with economic assistance, trade concessions such as lower tariffs on imported goods, and invited the leaders of all parties to visit China and in some cases provided military assistance to reach an agreement between the conflicting parties. Beijing also has used economic clout and international status to compel warring parties that don't want to resolve the conflict.

This study introduces a new concept of "creative mediation diplomacy" to understand China's involvement in the conflict resolution

of Sudan and South Sudan and asserts that this concept has undergone gradual steps, including indirect participation, cautious participation, negotiation, and multilateral participation. These steps are determined by the type and degree of China's interests in the region. Moreover, the variables and characteristics of the nature of the conflict and the warring parties, the characteristics of conflict management (the degree of conflict) also affect the tools of its mediation diplomacy. Even though this concept shows the evolution of China's non-interference policy without adhering to the main principles of this very policy, the debates over China's dynamic approach in conflict resolution still raises many questions whether or not the dynamic process of Chinese engagement in conflict resolution still adheres to the principle of non-intervention, especially China's growing overseas interests, the increasing participation in UN peacekeeping missions in strategic regions and new concepts and calls in the new era regarding a community with a shared future for humankind and forging a new international system based on multilateralism and win-win strategy.

## 2. China's Creative Mediation Diplomacy to Settle the Darfur Crisis in Sudan

Following the Cold War, China-Sudan relations have been characterized by steady expansion of trade and investment, especially in the energy sector. The CNCP has become the largest foreign investor in Sudan's oil sector and acquired the largest overseas projects. Chinese private small businesses have also entered the Sudanese market and invested in various sectors, such as agriculture, beverages, shoemaking, and enterprise creation. According to the United Nations, China accounts for 64% of Sudan's trade volume.

Between 1990 and 2006, Sudan's oil exports to China increased from 266,126 to more than 6.5 million tons. In 2005 and 2006, China imported 47% of Sudan's total oil production (UN Comtrade Database, 2007). However, China's economic interests had been affected by the volatile security environment in Sudan. In 2004, the rebels abducted Chinese citizens and sent them to the southern part of the country, which had driven Beijing to engage in Sudan's conflict resolution. China's engagement in the Darfur crisis had undergone gradual phases of its creative mediation diplomacy in line with the evolution of non-interference principle.

### • *Passive Participation*

At the beginning of the Darfur crisis, China did not respond directly or pay much attention to the crisis. The Sudanese government convinced Beijing that the crisis was just an internal chaos and the army could control it. The international community saw this internal chaos as "genocide" and denounced the regime's crimes in Darfur. China supported the Sudanese government against external intervention and stressed the respect for state sovereignty and non-interference in Sudan's domestic affairs. For example, China resisted the UN-planned sanctions to adopt a US-backed resolution of imposing sanctions on Sudan (Human Rights Watch, 2015). Chinese representatives at the United Nations portrayed Darfur's crisis, not as genocide but as domestic violence over natural resources involving the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM). China called on the United Nations to provide financial assistance to the African Union (AU) peacekeeping mission in Sudan (Large, 2011).

### • *Double Mediation*

China's engagement in the Darfur crisis had undergone a shift from passive participation to

active engagement and multilateral mediation between the Sudanese government and the international community to persuade Khartoum to accept a joint agreement and deployment of peacekeepers. In April 2004, after the Sudanese government signed the Humanitarian Ceasefire Agreement and rebel movements withdrew from Darfur, the Sudanese government allowed AU peacekeeper to deploy as a monitoring mission in Darfur (AMIS) (De Waal, 2007). The opposition stressed that China backed the Khartoum government and viewed the crisis as an internal affair of the government in Khartoum. Following the incident, the Chinese government sent an assessment mission led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which included representatives from the Ministry of Commerce and CNPC and recommended new measures to conflict resolution. China also supported United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) to play a role in planning the 2010 referendum that determining Darfur as an autonomous region. Since 2006, Beijing gradually stepped up its efforts to persuade the Sudanese government to accept UN Resolution 1706.

**China used creative legitimate mediation to persuade the Sudanese government to conflict resolution and called for political dialogue and consultation, rather than hard political tools such as sanctions and military interventions.**

Beijing considered that a neutral position or friendly relations would undermine the chances of steady progress towards peace and security in Darfur. It adopted a strategy of “influencing without interference”, which was based on respecting state sovereignty, pushing for pri-

vate persuasion and continuous consultation. This was reflected in its support of the United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (UNPKOs) in Darfur, which ran counter to President Bashir’s wishes in particular. In addition, Chinese representatives and senior aides had formally criticized the policies of the petrified Sudanese regime undermining the settlement of the crisis and stressed the mandatory recommendations to conflict resolution. Then Chinese President Hu Jintao sent a message to Bashir that China backed UN Resolution 1706 and expressed his willingness for the Sudanese government to accept the hybrid UN-African Union peacekeeping force during his visit to Sudan in February 2007 (Embassy of People’s Republic of China in the Republic of Estonia, 2005). In other words, China’s efforts had focused on persuading the Sudanese government to accept the deployment of the UN-African Union hybrid peacekeeping mission and encouraging mediation actors and international organizations to urge opposition groups to engage in negotiations with the central government. Because of the lack of contact with opposition groups, the Chinese government has paid much attention to the Sudanese government, not as neutral as it is a commitment to the policy of non-interference.

- *Creative Mediation Diplomacy*

China persuaded the Sudanese government to accept UN resolutions and became more intelligent and proactive in exerting pressure on Khartoum. Sudan regime rejected any replacement of African Union troops by UN troops, as well as the invitation to attend the special meeting of the Security Council. China used creative legitimate mediation to persuade the Sudanese government to conflict resolution and called for political dialogue and consultation, rather than hard political tools such as sanctions and military interventions. China had dispatched 275

engineering troops, 100 transportation troops, and 60 medical personnel for the UNMIS; and 315 engineering troops for the AU/UN Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID).

China's attempts have succeeded to persuade Khartoum to join the meeting table at the high-level consultation on the situation in Darfur at the AU headquarters in Addis Ababa on 16 November 2006. The UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan also proposed the deployment of a hybrid African Union-UN peacekeeping force and 22,000-strong policeman. However, the Sudanese position was stubborn and rejected the plan. When President Omar al-Bashir arrived in Beijing for the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation Forum, Chinese President Hu Jintao formally called for peace and security in Darfur. He also sent a message to the Sudanese government that Beijing supported and respected Annan's plan (UN News, 2006).

He also proposed four principles for conflict resolution: respecting Sudan's sovereignty, maintaining local stability in the region, upholding political dialogue and coordination on the basis of equality, and strengthening the constructive role of the AU and UN in the crisis (Pen, 2007). China has decided to provide 40 million Renminbi (RMB) in aid to the Darfur region. 'China's diplomacy has gradually changed from conveying the message to active persuasion and working with the international community (China Daily, 2007). In April 2006, Chinese Assistant Foreign Minister and Special Envoy Zhai Jun visited the continent and made good efforts to persuade Khartoum to accept the Annan plan. China stressed that the root of the crisis is the development issues. For this reason, China urged the Sudanese government to implement the development plan and reformed its economic plan. Additionally, the international community called to provide financial assistance to Sudan.



*A group of 165 Chinese peacekeepers were preparing to leave for South Sudanese capital, Juba from Zhengzhou, the capital city of central China's Henan Province, on Sept. 11, 2018. (Xinhua)*

The US and Western countries launched horrific campaigns against China to boycott 'China's Olympics and decided to impose further restrictive measures on Khartoum. In May, Chinese Ambassador Liu Guijin visited some African countries and talked with the Sudanese government, the Arab League, the African Union, and many Western countries to reach some common views for conflict resolution. Since 2001, China abstained eight times of 22 UN Security Council resolutions on Darfur crisis. In June 2006, the Chinese government provided modest aid to Darfur, including donations of \$ 3.5 million to the AMIS (Permenant Mission of the People's Republic of China to UN, 2008).

Some observers and academics have argued that Beijing abandoned the doctrine of non-interference and its mediator role in Darfur, which marked a change to its traditional foreign policy. However, China's creative mediation diplomacy in Darfur's conflict resolution is encompassed by multilateralist efforts. In this perspective, with the consent of Sudan, peacekeeping forces was deployed under the joint authorization of the UN and the AU. Beijing stressed the role of the Sudanese government in cooperation with



the UN and the AU and underscored the task of the African Union. Moreover, China provided assistance to the AU and used its economic influence to force Sudanese government to conflict resolution. In 2011, China also welcomed the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur, which was signed between the Sudanese government and the Liberation and Justice Movement in Doha and commended the ongoing efforts of the Qatari government and the Arab League. China was the first country outside Africa to deploy a 315-member multi-function engineering unit for a hybrid (United Nations-African Union Mission UNAMID) peacekeeping operation in Darfur. UNAMID is the second-largest peacekeeping mission around the world after United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC), with more than 20,000 troops, military personnel, police and personnel of various nationalities, an estimated \$ 1.4 billion for 2014 (UNAMID, n.d.). These steps prove that China's creative mediation diplomacy in Darfur conflict resolution led to some developments in its non-interference policy, but without prejudice to the basic principles of this policy, which are based on respect for Sudan's sovereignty. It did not seek to change the regime and bring chaos in the country.

On 10 July 2017, UNAMID has announced the launch of a plan to reduce the number of its military by 44% and the police by 33%. The target for ending the mission is 30 June 2020 (United Nations, 2017). China provided the missions with four Mi-17 helicopters which are mainly tasked with 24-hour air patrol, battleground reconnaissance, transport peacekeepers, evacuation of rescued personnel and air supplies provision. So far, the Chinese helicopter contingent to

Darfur has carried out 636 sorties, rescued more than 280 people and delivered 3,800 passengers, 220 tons of cargo, 16.6 tons of dangerous goods such as weapons and ammunition (Yang, 2019).

On 12 December 2018, China has dispatched 100 blue helmets to take part in a one-year peacekeeping mission in Darfur. In July 2019, the 140 soldiers of the 2<sup>nd</sup> China Medium Utility Helicopter Unit (CMUHU02), has awarded UN peace medals (Sudan Tribune, 2018a). They have helped to establish UNAMID's infrastructure, including the construction of camps, the construction of protective fences and guard towers, carrying out community projects in Darfur, most notably the development and maintenance of Nyala airports in South Darfur and Al-Da'een in East Darfur.

In June 2019, the UN Security Council split over the withdrawal of a peacekeeping force deployed in Darfur between Europeans and Africans who demanded a suspension, while China and Russia supported the continuing of the mission. Since 2018, the political landscape in Sudan has dramatically changed after the Sudanese military removed Omar al-Bashir from his position as President of Sudan. Before the handover of power to the transitional government, some European members have pointed to the situation of Sudan and the absence of a government at the time, but China and Russia stressed that the internal crisis is only the responsibility of Sudan state.

China's gradual steps of creative mediation diplomacy toward the Darfur crisis was mainly driven by strategic economic and political interests. China's diplomacy has focused on reconciling between short-term gains with the long-term stability in Sudan and the expectations of other actors. China recognized that the escalating vio-



*Chinese President Hu Jintao welcomes South Sudanese President Salva Kiir Mayardit at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, April 24, 2012. (Xinhua)*

lence would jeopardize its economic interests in Sudan and the potential of Darfur unrest could reach South Sudan after peace has been settled, as well as China's oil interests which stretching across Chad, Libya, and Ethiopia throughout the threats of refugees and rebels from Darfur. Therefore, Darfur's stability was embedded in regional security. China's respect state's sovereignty and refusal intervention in Sudan had led the harsh criticism of western against this policy. In this direction, Western countries launched a big campaign to boycott the Beijing Olympics, which raised China's concerns about its national identity in the international community. China did not adopt a unilateral position or isolate itself from the international community. In other words, its mediation was based on cooperation with the international community and participation in multilateralism efforts.

### 3. China's Creative Mediation in South Sudan's Cessation

China has been keen to portray itself in the African continent as an economic partner; however, the conflict between South Sudan and Sudan has pushed Beijing to increase engagement in Horn of Africa's security affairs. The reason lies in its growing interests in the region and enhancing its great power diplomacy with the Chinese through its participation in the UN peacekeeping operations in the continent. In fact, China had been engaging in friendly exchanges with South Sudan in the 1970s when China decided to send the first medical teams of agricultural experts to help South Sudan. In January 2005, China was one of the mediators between North and South Sudan during the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, which ended 22-years

of civil war, and paved the way for a referendum for South Sudan's independence. In March 2005, a high-level SPLM delegation paid an official visit to Beijing, which considered the first official contact between two sides. In February 2007, during President Hu Jintao's visit to Sudan, he met Vice President Salva Kiir and invited him to Beijing to discuss the common cooperation and development projects (Zhang, 2011).

**The Chinese government has adhered to its traditional doctrine of non-interference and acknowledged the appropriate and legitimate role of the central state in maintaining state unity.**

In September 2008, China opened its consulate in Juba and then started diplomatic relations with South Sudan, which allowed China to strengthen direct channels of communication with the Government of South Sudan, having gained independence from Sudan on 9 July 2011 as the outcome of a 2005 agreement. The Chinese government respected the results of the referendum and was one of the first countries in the world to recognize the new country. In July 2011, Jiang Weixin, China's Minister of Housing and Urban-rural Development, attended South Sudan independence celebrations as President Hu Jintao's special envoy who sent a congratulatory message to President of South Sudan and established diplomatic relations with the country (Munene, 2019). In April 2012, South Sudan President visited China, and the South Sudan Embassy in Beijing hosted the first investment forum between Juba and Beijing to identify investment and trade opportunities. Oil has been very important in the wealth-sharing protocol between North and South Sudan. The

CPA asserts the respecting of existing contracts and granting South Sudan 50 percent of all oil revenues produced in the southern oil areas. The Chinese government has adhered to its traditional doctrine of non-interference and acknowledged the appropriate and legitimate role of the core state in maintaining state unity. By avoiding political fragmentation, it has accepted the importance of political stability and refused external interference that supports "regime change." However, Sudan's internal situation was suffering from the weakness of the central government to exercise effective control over its full jurisdiction and the state's sovereignty, which led to armed conflicts in Darfur and South Sudan. The CPA transformed the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) into a national unity sharing power with the central government. This agreement enabled China to begin the process of negotiation and communication with South Sudan. Political communication between China and the SPLM was extremely sensitive because of 'China's political, economic and military support to the central government in Khartoum in wartime and its refusal to deal with the SPLM. However, the two sides have found pragmatic interests that have opened the door for enhancing mutual needs and prospects for mutual benefit.

#### **4. China's Creative Mediation between Sudan and South Sudan Conflict**

Oil is a vital commodity for both Sudan and South Sudan, but the two countries have not agreed on what the south should pay as transit fees to send its oil exports through northern ports. Therefore, oil production faced political turmoil both inside and outside South Sudan. The 2012 Oil Revenue Sharing Agreement was primarily used by Sudan to ease economic pressure, was halted by a dispute over the value of

using oil pipelines and led to the closure of the pipeline to South Sudan, which was producing 350,000 barrels per day (Sudan Times, 2017).

In January 2012, the Government of South Sudan made a radical decision to close the oil pipelines and relations between two sides had sharply deteriorated to the extent that in April 2012 the increased cross-border tensions with an SPLA attack on the Heglig oil field. The oil facilities were severely damaged and production ceased for more than a month, aggravating the economic crisis in Sudan and South Sudan. On September 27, 2012, Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir and South Sudanese President Salva Kiir signed a series of agreements for conflict resolution, which set relatively low transit fees of \$ 1 per barrel, while processing and transport charges were close to commercial rates. In addition, a \$ 3.028 billion was a transitional financial arrangement payable to Sudan over a period of three years and a half is transferred at a rate of \$ 15 per barrel of oil shipped from Port Sudan (United to End Genocide, 2012).

However, the September 2012 agreement was not immediately implemented, because Sudan wanted to see a significant improvement in the security situation of the borders. Ultimately, this dilemma was addressed and oil production in South Sudan resumed in April 2013. In September 2013, South Sudan's President Salva Kiir visited Sudan for a summit to resolve disputes and promote cooperation. The summit led to significant improvement in relations between the two countries. However, Sudan and South Sudan's security landscape has transformed from inter-State conflicts to intra-State conflict. Sudan has experienced uprisings as a result of deteriorating economic conditions, and a civil war in South Sudan also erupted in 2013.

China attaches great attention to the region's stability and peace due to its overseas interests

and citizens. South Sudan had used its new sovereign political influence to pressure China National Petroleum Corporation and its partners to bolster Juba's position in negotiations with Sudan over pipeline fees. Despite the development of good relations between the Government of Southern Sudan (GRSS) and Beijing, China was involved in disputes over oil transit charges between Sudan and South Sudan, threatening oil supplies between the two countries. China has been seeking to maintain good relations with the two countries since South Sudan declared independence from the north, but the disputes have tested China's ability to balance the two countries. China called both sides for implementing the agreement and sent its former special envoy to Africa, Liu Guijin, to solve the disputes between two governments over transit fees between oil shipments that threatening oil-supplies. South Sudan authorities expelled the head of China-Malaysia oil company Petrodar and accused Chinese oil companies of helping Sudan seize South Sudan's oil, which was exporting oil through a Petrodar pipeline.

SPLA also abducted twenty-nine Chinese citizens working in Sinohydro for the construction of a highway. The decision of shutting down oil production had led to a large deficit in oil-dependent economy revenue and GDP in Sudan and the government's sudden loss of more than 90 per-cent of oil revenues. The decision also resulted in a series of interconnected crises experienced in the economy and in financial, security, political and humanitarian areas in South Sudan. In March 2015, Juba requested a reduction of the financial outcome of oil transit due to the decline in world crude prices below \$ 30 a barrel, but Sudan refused this request, which was also suffering an economic crisis. In December 2016, the oil ministers of Sudan and South Sudan

held talks in Khartoum upon the revision of the southern oil transit fees (Sudan Tribune, 2016).

South Sudan's production fell from 350,000 barrels per day (BPD) after independence to 150,000 BPD due to the eruption of the country's civil war in December 2013 between President Salva Kiir and rebels led by his former deputy Riek Machar. Sudan and South Sudan signed a number of agreements, including an oil agreement in 2012 in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa, sponsored by high-level African mediation. In September 2017, Khartoum signed an agreement with South Sudan to reactivate the stalled oil fields in the south, where both parties agreed that Khartoum would provide technical assistance and electricity supply to oil fields in the south (Sudan Tribune, 2018b). In August 2019, South Sudan's oil minister revealed that his country increased oil production by 6000 barrels, bringing the total production to more than 180 thousand barrels per day, pointing out that the increase was achieved after the country resumed oil production in blocks 1 and 2 in the manga field, which was closed six years ago due to insecurity in the northern parts of the country (Sudan Tribune, 2019).

### 5. China's Creative Mediation in South Sudan's Civil War (2013-2019)

China saw itself as a newcomer in the South Sudanese conflict resolution. Its investment and protection of its nationals became a part of China's response to the conflict from mid-December 2013. Bilateral trade between China and South Sudan reached \$ 534 million in 2012; more than 140 Chinese companies registered in South Sudan, including energy, engineering, telecommunications and infrastructure (Xinhua, October 8, 2013), as well as more than 23,000 Chinese residents was in South Sudan before the civil war

(African Development Bank Group, 2013). Chinese companies and workers have been robbed, kidnapped, and faced with minor crimes and property threats. Chinese officials discussed whether the withdrawal in favor of its national interests or the losses will harm its interests abroad. The Chinese leadership has recognized that the Libyan experience and the decision of abandoning oil fields and other investments were a big mistake.

**China's resources are economic influence, humanitarian aid, and peacekeeping. Beijing has benefited from its political and economic influence in South Sudan and succeeded in bringing the government and the rebel group to the table.**

South Sudan's economy is heavily dependent on oil revenues. In turn, the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC), one of the largest oil companies in the world, controls around 40% of the two main oil consortia in the country (Kuo, 2017).

Therefore, China used its economic influence as a coercion resource for its creative mediation diplomacy in order to pressure the Government of South Sudan to protect oil fields and cease hostilities and implement a ceasefire. Chinese participation can also be considered as a responsible initiative to safeguard the future of South Sudan's economy and security in cooperation with international and regional organizations. China's resources are economic influence, humanitarian aid, and peacekeeping. Beijing has benefited from its political and economic influence in South Sudan and been successful in bringing the government and the rebel group to the table.

Following the outbreak of the South Sudan civil war, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, during his visit to Saudi Arabia, in December 2013, underlined that China would make efforts to sustain peace and security negotiations between the South Sudan government and rebel groups (Wang, 2013). In January 2014, Wang Yi met with representatives of the two conflicting parties of South Sudan in Ethiopia, asserted the importance of South Sudan's stability and developing economy, and called the Government of South Sudan and the rebel group to immediately cease fire and activate peace talks to end the wave of conflicts (Wang, 2014). In August 2014, China put forward a four-point solution to end the civil war and subsequently supported the engagement of the IGAD. In January 2015, Beijing held a meeting in Khartoum, which included South Sudan's warring parties, Ethiopia, Sudan and IGAD, which was an attempt to solve the differences between Sudan- South Sudan relations as a result of Sudan's support of South Sudan's rebels.

Beijing has asserted its commitments to protecting oil infrastructures and integrating its economic interests with Sudan and South Sudan. China called the regional organizations to discuss conflict resolution. A case in point is the UN and AU Peace and Security Council communiqué in May 2011, which stopped the attempts of external actors to interfere in the conflict between Sudan and South Sudan in Abyei.

Since the outbreak of the civil war, Beijing has provided military support to the Government of South Sudan to defer the rebel group and secure oil facilities. According to the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, the GRSS has received Chinese arms supplies, worth some \$46.8 million from China North Industries Group (NORINCO). The rebel group has destroyed some of the oil installations and threatened to attack and destroy other facilities. China has sought to protect oil facilities in the troubled Greater Nile region through negotiations with the rebels and the government and provided financial support to secure the oil infrastructure. Military support has provoked much controversy and doubts about China's mediation in South Sudan's conflict resolution. In September 2014, the reported statement of the Chinese embassy in Juba stated that Beijing would stop the remainder of its arms deal and the Chinese Foreign Ministry has also announced that Beijing would dispatch a full infantry battalion to the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) (Zhao, 2014). Ambassador Zhong Jianhua arrived in Kenya to attend a special IGAD session on South Sudan on December 27, 2013, and also visited South Sudan and Ethiopia afterwards and asserted that China seeks to maintain peace talks and request the continued production of oil facilities and the protection of Chinese nationals and investments in turbulent



*Leader of the female peacekeeper unit of Chinese peacekeeping infantry battalion to South Sudan; Yu Peijie sings songs with local children in Juba, South Sudan, on April 30, 2018. (Xinhua)*

areas. In July 2018, South Sudan's president has signed a peace agreement with rebels during the IGAD summit (United Nations, 2019). China has urged parties to fast-track its implementation and end the conflict in the region. The Chinese Embassy in South Sudan said: "Beijing supports efforts to restore peace and stability in South Sudan and sincerely hopes that relevant parties in South Sudan will be able to leave their personal problems and focus on the interests of the people, establish peace, abide by and speed up the implementation of the peace agreement and achieve lasting peace in the region." (China Daily, 2019). Since the outbreak of civil war in Juba, China has provided at least \$49 million of humanitarian assistance, with \$10 million to the World Food Programme (WFP), other food and medical assistance aid (FOCAC, 2018a).

From the perspective of human rights, China has made visible and effective contributions. For example, Beijing has built a Juba Training Hospital and an outpatient and emergency center. In February 2017, the two sides have signed an agreement to develop the Juba Hospital and renovate the Care Mayardit Women's Hospital in the South Sudanese city of Rumbek. This agreement is part of a \$ 33 million medical assistance, which was pledged by the Chinese government to improve South Sudan's health sector. In 2017, China has donated 100 million RMB worth the food for emergency humanitarian aid to South Sudan and contributed 5 million USD to WFP for a quick response of emergency to South Sudan.

In September 2018, At the meeting with President Salva Kiir on the sideline of the FO-CAC Beijing Summit, President Xi Jinping announced that the Chinese Government would provide South Sudan with emergency humanitarian aid worth 100 million RMB (FOCAC,

2018b). In January 2019, The WFP welcomed a \$7 million contribution from Beijing to support and maintain food assistance in South Sudan. In April 2019, the two sides signed two infrastructure development agreements, which included a grant to the South to rehabilitate the Gore River Bridge and build a 1.48-kilometer road linking the bridge to Wau (Al Ain, 2019). China has also provided a grant to develop and modernize Juba Training Hospital, the country's largest public health facility. As a result of these investments, Juba has announced to triple the amount of oil to the Export-Import Bank of China to support road construction projects linking the capital and other cities.

China has also played a prominent role in peacekeeping operations in South Sudan. For example, in December 2015, China has sent 700 troops to the UNPKOs in South Sudan, the first battalion to a peacekeeping operation. It has also deployed 350 peacekeepers in South Sudan- including medical staff, engineering units, and liaison officers, which provided medical assistance to both local refugees and peacekeepers, besides the provision of logistics support to international humanitarian organizations.

## Conclusion

This paper introduced the new concept of "creative mediation diplomacy", which reveals China's involvement in the conflict resolutions of Sudan and South Sudan. This mediation is based on diplomatic resources (economic influence, China's role in the United Nations, development and military aid, and multi-cooperation efforts) to address the conflict and bring the conflicting parties to the negotiating table and reach a peaceful solution. This is geared to protect China's interests in the region and adheres to the basic principles of non-interference policy.

This mediation has gone through gradual steps, or the so-called meditation tools, which are also determined by the degree and type of China's interests in the region. China's mediation combines pragmatic mediation or private mediation that focuses on protecting its huge investment and Chinese citizens, with general mediation that includes resolving the dispute to maintain the two countries' economies and providing a regional security environment in the Horn of Africa. China's involvement in Africa's security issues constitutes a dynamic process that is linked to its national interests and national identity. Its diplomatic tools are related to variables and characteristics of the nature of the conflict, warring parties, and the degree of conflict. Therefore, the creative mediation diplomacy in Sudan and South Sudan has adhered to the basic principle of China's non-interference policy, which is closely linked to its national interests. It has relied on multilateralism, (regional and international) efforts, participation in UN peace-keeping missions, political dialogue, and consultation, among others.

Despite a few minor exceptions – including the way China has engaged with all the conflicting parties by using coercive resources to compel the Sudanese government to settle the conflict and providing military aid to protect oil installations–, Beijing has mostly adhered to the fundamental principles and the doctrine of “non-interference in others’ affairs”, which aims to respect the target state’s sovereignty instead of seeking to topple the regime or spread creative chaos. Chinese mediation assumes a dynamic process that is closely linked to Beijing’s type and degree of interests abroad and the type and degree of conflict among the conflicting parties. Therefore, major factors that exerted noticeable effect on this process included the broader

changes taking place in the African continent, the international community, and the policies of other external security actors in the region, along with China's growing interests in Africa. As a new comer in the Horn of Africa, China's creative mediation is experimental, and it will be increasingly implemented in a cautious manner. 🌸

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