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"How China's Support of Sudan Shields a  
Regime Called 'Genocidal'" by Danna Harman

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## China's Africa Strategy: The Puzzle of Trade and Reform

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## China's Africa Strategy: The Puzzle of Trade and Reform

### Abstract

China's growing presence is certainly one of the most important developments in Africa since the end of the Cold War. The strategy of "trade and non-interference" is how the Chinese government describes its relations with Africa. Oil and metals, such as cobalt, iron ore, and manganese are what China's manufacturing industry needs; while foreign direct investment and an increase in oil production are what some African governments—especially those in Angola, Congo, Nigeria, South Africa, Sudan, and Zimbabwe—seek.

### Keywords

Human rights, China, Sudan, Darfur, Trade, Genocide

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## China's Africa Strategy: The Puzzle of Trade and Reform

by Mahmood Monshipouri

China's growing presence is certainly one of the most important developments in Africa since the end of the Cold War. The strategy of "trade and non-interference" is how the Chinese government describes its relations with Africa. Oil and metals, such as cobalt, iron ore, and manganese are what China's manufacturing industry needs; while foreign direct investment and an increase in oil production are what some African governments—especially those in Angola, Congo, Nigeria, South Africa, Sudan, and Zimbabwe—seek.

Danna Harman's article sets out to explain the sharp rise in Chinese interest in Africa. Trade between China and the African continent has reached a record volume of \$55 billion. Chinese foreign direct investment exceeded \$1.25 billion in 2006, with Sudan being its top recipient. Sudanese production of oil has risen from about 60,000 barrels per day in 1999 to more than 500,000 in 2006, [largely due to Chinese investment](#). This policy undermines the Western policy of demanding transparency, accountability, and respect for human rights in return for access to trade and investment. China's strategy clearly puts economic interests and civic work above concerns for basic freedoms.

Chinese leaders insist that they will not "interfere" in other countries' domestic affairs. China's aid, development programs, and debt relief have overtaken that of the World Bank and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). China will also build 30 hospitals and 30 clinics as part of its \$37.5 million package to assist African countries to fight malaria. China has [canceled more than \\$10 billion in debt](#) for 31 African countries and has given \$5.5 billion in development aid, with a pledge of a further \$2.6 billion in 2007-2008.

China-Sudan relations, however, have been overshadowed by a seemingly intractable and annoying problem: Darfur's four-year-long conflict. The Sudanese government continues to intensify this conflict by giving money and arms to various groups, but keeping those weapons under government control has become increasingly difficult. Khartoum's involvement is [more about politics than ethnic cleansing](#). The Sudanese government has in the past armed *janjaweed* militias to suppress a rebellion in South Sudan. But its failure to compensate tribes who lost fighters, along with the realization that they had been used, caused the militias to switch sides. The militia eventually joined the rebels, forcing the government to sign a peace agreement in November 2006, which calls for the deployment of international peacekeeping forces. Meanwhile, pressure is ratcheting up for U.N. sanctions, asset freezes, and criminal indictments. Some Sudanese officials and militia leaders have been charged by the International Criminal Court with numerous counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Given this genocidal state conduct, the neutral position adopted by the Chinese government is problematic at best. The real question is: Should China share responsibility for the genocidal killings of non-Arab Sudanese in Darfur? China has frequently opposed economic sanctions on Sudan. The Darfur crisis has killed more than 200,000 and displaced more than 2.5 million in Western Sudan.

Chinese investors in Sudan have found a secure place for their business opportunities. The amount of money transferred to the semiautonomous government of South Sudan, Harman writes, is left to the discretion of Khartoum. [The production and sales figures](#) all go directly to the Ministry of Mining and Energy from the Chinese-run Greater Nile Production Company, with little or no oversight regarding whether the estimates are accurate. In recent months, as [Danna Harman points out](#), South Sudan's share in oil revenues has sharply dropped from nearly \$80 million in January to below \$40 million in March. China buys 64 percent of the country's oil and is a key partner in the consortiums extracting the oil. China's National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) controls between 60 to 70 percent of Sudan's total oil production. Additionally, [it owns the largest single share](#) (40 percent) of Sudan's national oil company, Greater Nile Petroleum Operating Company.

China's preference for quiet diplomacy appeared to have paid off when President Omar al-Bashir conceded to a deployment of 3,500 U.N. peacekeepers into Darfur. Yet China's willingness to do business and maintain normal diplomatic relations with repressive regimes, such as Zimbabwe, is troubling. To condone human rights violations in Zimbabwe and other African countries is certain to undermine China's international image as it prepares to host the 2008 Olympics.

The deleterious effects of China's policy on Africans' human rights and governance need to be balanced against the economic gains stemming from trade. Improving governance and tackling corruption are as crucial for creating an effective business environment, as are loans and investments. Disregarding this reality is much too risky for those Chinese companies, which are keen on using wise tactics to promote their brand, products, and images. Ultimately, the Chinese will find it contrary to their national interests to continue doing business as usual with repressive regimes. China's reaction to such criticisms has been slow in coming, as it has appointed a Chinese special representative for Darfur and has vowed to enhance its humanitarian aid to Sudan, while sending in about [300 Chinese military engineers](#) to help relieve an excessive burden placed on the African Union peacekeeping force in Darfur.

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