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## China's Relationship with Sudan—and Human Rights Consequences

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## China's Relationship with Sudan—and Human Rights Consequences

### Abstract

China is the largest country in the world and has a rapidly expanding economy. Its streets are starting to crowd with cars instead of bicycles and there is an increasing demand for the luxuries of developed nations. The desire to keep up with major international players has pushed the Chinese government to overlook whatever human rights abuses may be occurring inside and outside of its borders. China has taken steps to support Sudan despite its use of child soldiers and the genocide in Darfur that has been occurring for years. By criticizing and withdrawing support from President al-Bashir, China could serve as a major player in curtailing the human rights abuses in Sudan.

### Keywords

Human rights, China, Sudan, Darfur, Child soldiers, Genocide

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## China's Relationship with Sudan—and Human Rights Consequences

By Tessa Li Powell

### Introduction

China is the largest country in the world and has a rapidly expanding economy. Its streets are starting to crowd with cars instead of bicycles and there is an increasing demand for the luxuries of developed nations. The desire to keep up with major international players has pushed the Chinese government to overlook whatever human rights abuses may be occurring inside and outside of its borders. China has taken steps to support Sudan despite its use of child soldiers and the genocide in Darfur that has been occurring for years. By criticizing and withdrawing support from President al-Bashir, China could serve as a major player in curtailing the human rights abuses in Sudan.

### Child Soldiers

Sudan has been suffering from internal conflicts for years, and boys are often drafted into militia and government armies. At a young age, boys are forcibly drafted and brainwashed into committing acts of violence throughout the country. These orphaned children are already vulnerable because their parents have been killed in the violent conflict; serving in the army or militia provides protection and a sense of belonging in a unified group. The leaders of these armies convince the boys that the opposing side is responsible for the death of their family members and force them into a life of violence. The militias also provide the children with protection, basic needs, and a sense of solidarity in an otherwise unstable life. For many children, the only alternative to serving in the army or militia is living alone, unprotected, and uncertain of where their next meal will come from.

### Genocide

In 2004, President George W. Bush and Secretary of State Colin Powell acknowledged that the conflict in the Darfur region of Sudan was genocide. The Arab militia, the Janjaweed, was systematically attacking the non-Arab Sudanese and driving them from their homes. Many victims fled to refugee camps along the Sudan-Chad border. The destruction left by the militia eerily echoed the genocide that took place in Rwanda only ten years earlier. With grassroots movements springing up from young activists, public awareness of the conflict in Darfur has spread nationwide, and the push for government action has increased. While some have called for economic divestment from Sudan and Sudanese partners, others feel that military intervention is the answer.

Firsthand accounts from survivors claim that President Omar al-Bashir and the government of Sudan were either participating in the genocide or at least playing an active role by providing weapons to the Janjaweed and by not taking concrete steps to alleviate the growing conflict in Darfur. In March 2009, the International Criminal Court (ICC) indicted al-Bashir on five counts of crimes against humanity—murder, extermination, forcible transfer, torture, and rape—and two counts of war crimes. This is a major step in the fight against the genocide in Darfur. Article 59 of the Rome Statute, which governs the ICC, states that it is the responsibility of any government that is party to the ICC to turn over anyone who is under indictment. However, because al-Bashir controls the Sudanese government and military, he has not been turned over to proper authorities.

### China

China has a rapidly growing economy and an expansive population, with well over 1.3 billion citizens. With this burgeoning economy comes a need for more natural resources. More factories need more fuel, and as citizens earn enough money to make major purchases—such as buying a car—the demand for oil drastically increases. In the competitive world market, the price of oil and other natural resources continues to rise.

To meet the demand for oil and other natural resources, China has taken steps to form and build on relationships with African states. Rich in mineral resources, but plagued by poverty and corruption, many of these states rely on oil and natural gas exports to sustain their economies. This is the case in Sudan. China has partnered with Omar al-Bashir and has traded weapons for oil. These weapons are supplied to the military and militias in Sudan, who then use them to systematically kill the non-Arabs in the Darfur region of southern Sudan.

The genocide in Darfur is not an unknown problem to those in power in China. However, it is clear the Chinese government will do whatever it takes to support and maintain China's economic growth. Because the Chinese government is focused on this one goal, it is more willing to turn a blind eye to corruption and oppression within the Sudanese regime.

The resulting criticism from states, particularly in Europe and North America, is based on the determination that certain regimes support or in some ways are responsible for corruption, oppression, and even death within their states. It would be hypocritical for China—guilty of human rights abuses in its own state—to refuse to buy oil or any other commodity from a state that is guilty of the same oppression. Because individual human rights are not given high value or priority in China, the government is more likely to buy from other oppressive regimes as long as doing so supports the Chinese state.

The need for energy resources is a major reason for China's growing trade relationship with African nations. By establishing an economic relationship, China secures a possible future ally should any conflict arise. The hesitance of Western states to trade with oppressive regimes allows China the opportunity to import oil at a cheaper price while establishing a relationship without much competition.

Many researchers in the field assert that China has been pressuring Omar al-Bashir to make changes within his regime, but that it has done so out of the public eye. "China has been pushing the Sudan government behind the scenes for at least two years now," says Alex De Waal, a Sudan expert at Harvard University. "They were a driving force behind the hybrid force of the United Nations and African Union (AU) peacekeepers." Due to the quiet nature of these talks, China has faced severe public criticism.

### **Public Reaction**

The public has been very vocal in its condemnation of Omar al-Bashir and the actions of the Janjaweed in the Darfur region of Sudan. Civil society groups call for more action on the part of states that have signed the Genocide Convention. Once governments have recognized the violence of genocide, they have a degree of responsibility for taking steps to stop it. Many feel that economic divestment from Sudan and its largest supporters—namely China—would make a large enough statement that trading in arms would decrease. While this seems like an easy solution, the United States is in a delicate balance with China, which has lent and continues to lend billions of dollars to the United States.

At the 2008 Olympic Games, many came out to protest the myriad human rights abuses committed by the Chinese government. Some referred to the event as the "genocide games." The

hope was that enough political pressure during such a high-visibility event would lead China to rethink some of its human rights policies and trade relationships.

### Conclusion

Despite small steps on the part of the Chinese government to criticize the administration of President al-Bashir, China continues to support Sudan. Human rights abuses occur throughout the world, and without anyone holding complicit states accountable, these abuses will persist. In addition to examining its own human rights record, China also needs to support human rights among its economic partners and strategic allies. With public criticism and economic pressure from China, the Sudanese government would be more likely to take steps to correct human rights abuses within its borders.

### Annotated Bibliography

Ahmed, G. K. 2008. "China's developing foreign policy initiatives towards major international issues (North Korean and Iranian nuclear issues and the question of the Western Sudan Darfur region)." *Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies (in Asia)* 2 (2): 16.

Annotation: This article focuses on China's foreign policy with other states. It focuses particularly on China's relationship with oppressive regimes and those that have been accused of committing human rights abuses. It covers relations with Iran and North Korea, as well as Sudan. China trades arms for oil with Sudan, and it is particularly relevant to examine the nature of Chinese foreign policy with the Sudanese regime. It is also key to understand what drives China to continue to support these types of regimes. In doing so, we may better understand what steps must be taken to alleviate the problem.

Bahgat, Gawdat. 2007. "Africa's oil: potential and implications." *OPEC Review: Energy Economics & Related Issues* 31 (2): 13.

Annotation: The article examines the growing strength of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and the increasing oil demand of the United States, China, and the European Union. As demand grows in high energy-consuming states, many governments find they need to purchase oil from states which they may not support politically. This article reviews the outlook for the economic balance between these major forces. This is of particular interest because China is trading arms for oil in Sudan, an oil-rich state in Africa. As China's economy continues to grow, the demand for oil increases. China continues trade for oil with Sudan despite public outcry and criticism of the genocide in the Darfur region.

Chen, M. E. 2007. "Chinese national oil companies and human rights." *Orbis: A Journal of World Affairs* 51 (1): 13.

Annotation: The author of this article asserts that states need to negotiate not only with the government of China, but also with the oil companies in China. China has been internationally criticized for its economic support of the oppressive regimes of Burma

(Myanmar) and Sudan. As Chinese companies continue to trade with Burma and Sudan, the denial of rights to citizens in those countries remains constant or continues to increase. The author also argues that if major states like China continue to support these regimes, other states are likely to fall in line in an effort to maintain or increase the national energy supply.

Committee on Financial Services. 2008. "Negative Implications of the President's Signing Statement on the Sudan Accountability and Divestment Act." Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.

Annotation: The sixty-seven members of the House Committee on Financial Services held a hearing to consider the economic implications of divestment from Sudan. While a bill passed in both the House and the Senate, President George W. Bush was opposed to it. The purpose of the hearing was to examine the reasons President Bush was against the legislation and to present arguments to change his mind. Non-governmental organizations (such as the Save Darfur Coalition), lawyers, a judge, and the General Treasurer of Rhode Island (which had successfully passed divestment legislation in 2007) all submitted statements. Correspondence between the executive branch, federal agencies, and members of Congress are included to highlight positive and negative reactions to the idea of divestment from Sudan.

Committee on Foreign Relations. 2005. "Darfur Revisited: The International Response." Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.

Annotation: In 2004, the United States recognized the crisis in Darfur as genocide and began taking steps to slow and possibly stop the violence. These steps were taken through economic, diplomatic, and humanitarian channels, and this hearing before the Committee on Foreign Relations in the US Senate was held to review the progress the United States is making with regards to Sudan. The Committee reviewed policy relations with the African Union and ways in which the United States could foster stronger nations in the area, thus increasing regional stability and security.

Committee on International Relations. 2005. "China's Influence in Africa." Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.

Annotation: The Subcommittee on Africa, Global Human Rights, and International Operations in the US House of Representatives convened this hearing to discuss China's growing influence in Africa. Several academics, members of Congress, and representatives from the executive branch joined together to examine the rapidly growing economy of China and its effect on African nations. There is a fear that China's growing influence and rapid consumption of natural resources necessitate a strong trade relationship with resource-rich countries in Africa. The concern is that China may form relationships with oppressive political regimes and may hinder the development of freedom and democracy in Africa.

Congressional-Executive Commission on China. 2006. "Human Rights and the Rule of Law in China." Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.

Annotation: Bringing together representatives from the Department of State, Department of Labor, Department of Commerce, as well as members of the House of Representatives and Senate, this hearing recognized the improvement of the rule of law in China. At the same time, members asserted that simply passing a law is not significant enough; China needs to have significant implementation as well. The panelists came together to discuss the real status of the rule of law and human rights in China and how the United States should proceed in dealing with China in light of these facts. Representatives from Columbia Law School, Human Rights Watch, and a law firm were present to provide additional information that would help determine what policy steps should be taken next.

———. 2009. "UN Human Rights Council's Review of China's Record: Process and Challenges." Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.

Annotation: This roundtable, held before the Congressional-Executive Commission on China, consisted of several experts in the fields of human rights, humanitarian law, public policy, and Asian studies. The roundtable was held as a forum prior to the United Nations Human Rights Council Review of China's human rights record. The experts review and critique the human rights issues and the challenges nations face when criticizing China's record. It is clear that China does not have a strong history of freedom for its people, though it is pointed out that, at present, the government provides more human rights to its citizens than any Chinese government of the past.

Friedman, Thomas. 2006. "The First Law of Petropolitics." *Foreign Policy* 154: 28-36.

Annotation: In this article, the author asserts that there is a direct correlation between freedom within a state and the price of crude oil. He argues that as oil prices decrease, freedoms increase in a given state. If a state relies on oil for a large portion of its income, then it is more likely to change politically with the changes in the price of oil. If demand and price are high, then the government of that state sees that it is not necessary to concede particular human rights concerns. In fact, the author cites Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Hugo Chávez as leaders who are more likely to deny freedoms now that the price and demand for oil are on the rise. Should oil prices begin to lower, then these leaders, among many others, would be resigned to bowing to the political pressures of the states that wish to buy the oil. In the same way, as demand for oil grows, less importance is placed on human rights. The push for humanitarian action is reduced, as major energy consumers need to buy oil to support states and industry.

Herbst, M. 2008. "Oil for China, Guns for Darfur." *BusinessWeek Online*: 1.

Annotation: The author of this article highlights the statistics that back the argument that China is trading arms for oil with Sudan. He argues that in 2007, China purchased forty

percent of Sudan's oil exports, while arms sales went up in China. This article was published as a forerunner to the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing. Herbst points out that China denies any responsibility and claims that it was the first major nation to send peacekeepers to the Darfur region of Sudan. The author does highlight that while it may be obvious that human rights abuses are occurring in Sudan, it is difficult to place blame on those who trade with the oppressive regime and to hold them accountable.

Holslag, J. 2008. "China's Diplomatic Maneuvering on the Question of Darfur." *Journal of Contemporary China* 17 (54): 13.

Annotation: This article examines China's foreign policy maneuvering regarding the situation in Darfur. China has come under fire for its economic relationship with Sudan; the government has been accused of crimes against humanity and—in the public eye—has been seen as complicit in the genocide of the Darfur region. China faces a difficult situation, balancing the growing need for energy sources for the state and international criticism and accusations of human rights abuses. Not only is the state facing criticism for human rights abuses within its own borders, but it is also being criticized for supporting regimes that are guilty of similar crimes.

International Federation for Human Rights. 2009. "The Case Against Bashir." *New African* (484): 22-25.

Annotation: This article is a review of the atrocities and human rights abuses committed (or abetted by) President Omar al-Bashir. It highlights the charges that the International Criminal Court brought against al-Bashir and why he was charged with crimes against humanity but not with genocide. The author also looks at the forced migration and displacement of native Sudanese into neighboring countries such as Chad. The International Federation for Human Rights and Amnesty International are active voices pushing for justice for the Sudanese people.

Jakobson, L., and D. Zha. 2006. "China and the Worldwide Search for Oil Security." *Asia-Pacific Review* 13 (2): 13.

Annotation: In this article, the authors examine the energy policy of China. As the demand for oil grows throughout the world, states need to find resources wherever necessary. This has led to a strong relationship between China and Sudan. Jakobson and Daujiong explore the geo-strategic and geo-economic motivations behind China's continued investment in Sudan despite public criticism. The Chinese government established an energy ministry in 2005 to evaluate growing energy needs and to take steps to prevent geopolitical consequences for China. The authors are both professionals who live in China. Daujiong directs the Center for International Energy Security at Renmin University of China.

Kindiki, Kithure. 2007. "International Law on Trial: The Darfur Crisis and the Responsibility to Protect Civilians." *International Community Law Review* 9 (4): 445-473.



Annotation: The author explores the human rights abuses that are occurring in Sudan. The article focuses specifically on the origin of the genocide. Kindiki examines what steps the international community needs to take when dealing with a humanitarian crisis on the scale of genocide. The article also highlights international law and conventions that bind Sudan and its economic and political partners.

Large, Daniel. 2007. "A 'Chinese Scramble'? The Politics of Contemporary China-Africa Relations." *African Affairs* 106 (422): 3.

Annotation: Daniel Large summarizes a conference held at Sidney Sussex College in Cambridge. He states that the relationship between China and Africa is often misunderstood, clouded by a standard media image. He argues that there needs to be more of a joint effort between academics in Asian studies and those in African studies. When these two fields come together, people can begin to understand the true nature of the relationship. By bringing academics together at this conference, hot topics involving Africa and China were covered, including the growing need of the Chinese government to continue increasing oil imports from Africa.

Large, Daniel. 2009. "China's Sudan Engagement: Changing Northern and Southern Political Trajectories in Peace and War." *China Quarterly* (199): 17.

Annotation: Daniel Large, a leading academic in China-Africa relations, explores the developing relationship between China and Sudan. He explores two different components of the relationship. First, he examines the ruling National Congress Party in Sudan and China's growing political influence on it. Large also looks at the difficulty China is facing in its relationship with Sudan. China needs to maintain a strong trade relationship with Sudan, but is aware of the violence and instability of the region. In order to keep up with its growing energy demand, China must rely on strategic political and economic steps.

McCannon, A. 2008. "Activists Target the 'Genocide Olympics.'" *BusinessWeek Online*: 1.

Annotation: The author of this article brings to light the role that major international corporations can and should play in denouncing China's human rights abuses prior to the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing. In an effort to protest the abuses, Mia Farrow's nonprofit, Dream for Darfur, called on major sponsors of the games to start speaking out against human rights abuses committed by the Chinese government. The organization targeted General Electric, Adidas, and McDonalds. These efforts also led Steven Spielberg to resign from his role in directing the opening ceremonies of the Olympic Games.

Mills, Kurt. 2008. "Which Responsibility in Darfur?" *Peace Review* 20 (2): 175-183.

Annotation: In this article, the author examines the responsibility of the international community in dealing with mass violence, crimes against humanity, and genocide in the

world. Not only are nations bound by law not to commit such atrocities, but it is also the responsibility of the international community to take steps to end genocide when it does occur. After charging those responsible for the genocide, major countries send humanitarian assistance to help rebuild a torn nation. The author looks specifically at the case of Darfur, but acknowledges the broader applicability of the argument in the future.

Pannel, C. W. 2008. "China's Economic and Political Penetration in Africa." *Eurasian Geography & Economics* 49 (6): 24.

Annotation: In this article, Pannel presents three reasons for the growing relationship between China and African nations. Unlike many other authors, he argues that energy and mineral resources are only part of the reason for the fostering of diplomatic and economic ties. As China continues to grow economically, it is important for the government to establish alliances with several countries. The more states that support China's position internationally, the more strength China has to do what is necessary to continue its growth. Interaction with Africa also expands market options for trade. China is focused on unity and sustained economic growth. Established lines of trade and political support, in addition to friendly relations with energy and mineral-rich states, will only contribute to China's international strength and success.

Patey, L. A. 2007. "State rules: Oil companies and armed conflict in Sudan." *Third World Quarterly* 28 (5): 19.

Annotation: Patey examines the complex nature of multinational corporations (MNCs) and their historical role in armed conflict throughout the world. As political pressure increased with the genocide being committed in the southern Darfur region of Sudan, American oil companies pulled out of the country. Canadian and European companies soon followed suit. The difficulty with this reaction to human rights abuses is that the profits to be made in the region fall to nations that are less concerned with human rights and are willing to get energy from any source. Patey argues that MNC investment in foreign energy sources can lead to continuing tensions in regions of conflict because the money goes to the elite class.

Subcommittee on African Affairs, Committee on Foreign Relations. 2008. "China in Africa: Implications for US Policy." Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.

Annotation: This hearing was held before the US Senate Subcommittee on African Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Relations. In recognition of growing Chinese interest in Africa—specifically Sub-Saharan Africa—the subcommittee convened to examine the balance of interests between the United States, China, and Africa. Recognizing the need of stronger economic powers to support the development of China, Senator Feingold calls on the subcommittee to determine how the growing relationship between China and Africa may affect the US economy and foreign policy. Two panels presented before the subcommittee, including representatives from the Office of the Secretary of State and international non-governmental organizations. The testimony of these people will aid the US Congress in deciding on any necessary adjustments to foreign policy with regards to China and Africa.

Subcommittee on Human Rights and the Law, Committee on the Judiciary. 2008. "From Nuremberg to Darfur: Accountability for Crimes Against Humanity." Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.

Annotation: This hearing before the Subcommittee on Human Rights and the Law of the Committee on the Judiciary explores the crimes against humanity that have been committed over the past sixty years and the accountability of nations in those crimes. Senator Durbin points out that while the United States has a history of standing up to injustice, the government itself has no formal law for crimes against humanity, and therefore a perpetrator who escaped to the United States would be free from prosecution for those crimes. Taking statements from senators, law professors, NGOs, and a refugee from Darfur, the subcommittee urges the executive and legislative branches to impose more economic sanctions against Sudan and to create a federal law for crimes against humanity.

Taylor, Ian. 2006. "China's oil diplomacy in Africa." *International Affairs* 82 (5): 23.

Annotation: Taylor looks at the steps China has taken to establish ties in Africa. Since the end of colonization, many African countries have experienced drastic poverty and instability. Many, however, have natural resources that can be sold to developed countries. By establishing relationships with developed nations, African states can find a way to support a weak economy. China has taken advantage of this and has established economic and political ties to Africa, thus securing natural resources and possible allies for the future.

US House of Representatives. 2008. 110 H.Res. 1370. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.

Annotation: The US House of Representatives drafted this legislation in an effort to bring attention to the myriad human rights abuses by the Chinese government prior to the 2008 Olympics in Beijing. The House calls on the government of China to continue with the Olympic Games, but also to take steps to correct human rights abuses within the state. The legislation highlights China's support of the Sudanese and Burmese (Myanmar) regimes, the one-child policy, the oppression of the Uighur and Tibetan people, and abused labor regulation within China. As no consequences are attached to the document, it is more of a statement that members of the US Congress recognize the abuses suffered at the hands of the Chinese government and the need to correct them.

US-China Economic and Security Review Commission. 2006. "China's Role in the World: Is China a Responsible Stakeholder?" Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.

Annotation: As China continues to rise as an economic power, foreign policy with China and with international trade partners must be reconsidered. This extensive hearing looks at policy questions from an administrative and legislative standpoint. Not only is China's economic growth considered, but also the rapid increase in energy consumption. As the demand for

fuel in China increases, the Chinese relationship with nations rich in fossil fuels becomes more important. Sometimes these relationships are maintained despite human rights abuses (as is the case with Sudan) and international criticism. China's relationship with multinational companies and diplomacy towards other nations is also examined.

———. 2008. "China's Expanding Global Influence: Foreign Policy Goals, Practices, and Tools." Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.

Annotation: This hearing provides an extensive overview of foreign policy approaches in dealing with China. Pulling resources from multiple academic and policy fields, the commission addresses issues from administrative, security, military, economic, trade, and diplomacy standpoints. Reports are given by members of the federal government (the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State and the Deputy Assistant Secretary of War), academics in the fields of Asian studies and public policy, and organizations such as The Heritage Foundation and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. The hearing was held to inform those in the federal government of China's foreign policy changes and how they affect the United States.

United Nations. 1948. "The Universal Declaration of Human Rights." Paris: United Nations.

Annotation: Ratified in 1948 by forty-eight members of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights lays out the inherent rights held by all people. The document outlines thirty specific articles detailing the rights of mankind. Although the document does not legally bind those who ratified it, it sets in place a standard of ideals that every country should strive to attain for the betterment of its citizens. More than sixty years after its adoption, the Declaration continues to be an important guideline for governments and NGOs alike in promoting justice for the citizens of the world.