

Peace through prevention: practical steps for deepening China-Africa security co-operation

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Abstract

Highlighted at the last Forum on China-Africa Co-operation (FOCAC) as one of five key areas for deepening co-operation, African peace and security has moved up the Sino-Africa agenda. This has been in parallel to, and as a consequence of, the maturing of relations. African actors - most notably states and regional organisations - will have considerable influence over defining the future shape and direction of Chinese engagement on this agenda. Nonetheless, Chinese policy-makers still have important choices to make. While examining why matters of African peace and security are of increasing importance to them, this paper also identifies some of the existing obstacles to deepening engagement. Arguing that an approach rooted in the principles of conflict prevention could prove both practical and effective, the paper identifies three policy areas that merit consideration by Beijing. First, it explores the diplomatic measures China could take to help mediate disputes and crises, as well as why a broadening of diplomatic relations within African countries may be required. Sec-

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ond, the paper draws attention to the need for China to support African efforts to tackle the proliferation of small arms whilst critically examining the end-use of Chinese-made weapons. Third, China's economic co-operation with post-conflict African countries is identified as a means to prevent relapses into violence if the principles of conflict sensitivity are adopted in what are especially fragile and difficult environments.

Introduction

The underlying foundations of contemporary China-Africa relations – economic co-operation – continue to deepen with trade and investment figures growing by the year¹. Nonetheless, the nature of China's relationship with African states has evolved. Though the fantasy of Chinese manufacturing jobs moving *en-masse* to Africa's shores remains just that, there are signs of a slow diversification beyond the traditional sectors of commercial interaction. Chinese official development aid is potentially evolving into new modalities (Saferworld, 2012) while aid directly from Chinese NGOs will likely become more visible on the continent². Relations are expanding elsewhere, with a concerted effort by Chinese and, to a lesser extent, African actors, to engage on issues such as media, academic exchange and the environment. As is inevitable in any relationship, the political honeymoon looks set to end: African civil society and opposition leaders have vocally scrutinised some practices of Chinese engagement, the nuts and bolts of day-to-day relations have generated conflicts of interest and the belief that China's approach would fundamentally differ from that of others has been checked by reality. While perhaps not welcomed by those Chinese and African diplomats who are forced to revise their rosy rhetoric of the past, these problems are a healthy part of maturing relations and progressive change.

Another healthy sign is the increasing attention that Chinese officials, companies and researchers are paying to the reality of conflict and insecurity in Africa, how it

relates to Chinese interests and how they should respond. Once considered a potentially sensitive issue that Chinese policy-makers and company executives would rather steer clear of, the issue has risen up the agenda and is now more openly discussed and debated in Beijing. As is the case across all dimensions of the relationship, African actors - most notably states and regional organisations - will have considerable influence over defining the future shape and direction of Chinese engagement on issues of peace and security. Nonetheless, as important agents themselves, Chinese decision-makers still have important choices to make. Examining the issue through the lens of conflict prevention may help the Chinese to effectively do so, while getting around some the current obstacles and forging deeper engagement.

This article examines several options for Chinese policy in this regard. It reflects the outcomes of Saferworld's own field research, alongside numerous consultations and engagement with a wide range of African and Chinese officials, NGOs, academics and think-tanks over the past four years. First, it explores some of the reasons why African peace and security has moved up the Chinese foreign policy agenda. Second, it outlines some of the obstacles to deepened Chinese engagement on this issue. The article then explores three policy areas where deeper China-Africa co-operation would be both practical and effective in preventing conflict: diplomacy, arms control and conflict-sensitive economic co-operation.

China and African insecurity

Over past two decades Africa has become a more peaceful continent (Africa Progress Panel, 2012: 64-66). Nevertheless, continued instability in Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Mali and elsewhere demonstrate that conflict and insecurity continue to act as obstacles to socio-economic development. As is widely recognised in China, stability is required for development. It has been estimated that by 2025 “the locus of global poverty will overwhelmingly be in fragile, mainly low-income and African, states” (Kharas & Rogerson, 2012: 3). The World Bank considers 17 countries in Africa to be fragile. It estimates that “civil conflict costs the average developing country roughly 30 years

of GDP growth, and countries in protracted crisis can fall over 20 percentage points behind in overcoming poverty” (World Bank, 2011). It has also been noted that low-income, fragile, or conflict-affected countries have been those that have struggled the most to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Globally, countries affected by serious violence account for 60 per cent of the world’s undernourished, 71 per cent of child deaths under the age of 5 and 77 per cent of children not in primary school (World Bank, 2011). In his speech to the United Nations (UN) on the MDGs in 2010, then-Premier Wen Jiabao argued that “if a country does not have durable peace and stability, its people can hardly live and work in happiness and contentment”³. Individuals, families, and communities in these countries suffer twice: first from the direct impact of violence; second from the longer-term consequences that act as barriers to the relative prosperity enjoyed by the rest of the world.

During his tour of Africa in March 2013, President Xi Jinping followed past Chinese leaders in promising that China would be a partner for Africa, stating that “China will continue to uphold the principle of peace, development, co-operation and mutual benefit, and dedicate itself unswervingly to safeguarding world peace and promoting common development” (‘China will be Africa’s all-weather friend and partner’ – Chinese President, 2013). For a global power with such ambitious aspirations, insecurity in Africa should, at least in principle, be of great concern to Beijing.

Of course, there are other pressing reasons why instability in African countries may worry leaders in the *Zhongnanhai* headquarters of China’s Communist Party and State Council. The safety of Chinese citizens remains a pressing issue. Over 30,000 Chinese civilians working in Libya had to be evacuated by land and sea when violence broke out in 2011, a vast and challenging logistical operation for the Chinese Government (Virtually all 30,000 Chinese in Libya evacuated China, 2011). Elsewhere in Africa Chinese citizens have been caught up in violence, being kidnapped by pirates off the coast of Somalia and targeted by rebels in Ethio-

pia. In fact, senior officials frequently voice their concern that insecurity in Africa may suddenly force China's hand and draw it into a crisis it is unprepared to manage. For example, being publicly pressured into deploying military forces to rescue trapped Chinese citizens is understood as an extremely disturbing scenario to be avoided at all costs⁴.

Risks to large investments are also a concern. When the conflict broke out in Libya, 75 Chinese companies were involved in contracts worth \$18.8 billion, representing in 2009 some 4.6% of China's total global project turnover (Chan, 2011). In Sudan and South Sudan, conflict has led to substantial loss in revenues for Chinese companies involved in the oil sector. While starting to adopt more sophisticated risk-management tools themselves, private Chinese businessmen, large company executives and heads of State Owned Enterprises (SOEs) all expect the Chinese government to help protect their interests.

Furthermore, China's reputation and image are at stake. Conflict-affected countries often exist within extremely polarised contexts. Chinese actors may be perceived to be supporting one side over the other in a conflict, for example, when closely working on economic projects with the host government. A negative image in the eyes of local communities, civil society, and political leaders may have long-term costs, especially as political dynamics inevitably change. Globally, it is partially due to China's engagement in conflict-affected states that have led to accusations of Beijing's support for 'pariah regimes' and complicity in human rights violations. It was Darfur and the crude 'genocide Olympics' slogan that threatened to smear China's coming out party in 2008.

Cooler heads, who recognise that these are overly-simplistic and one-dimensional accusations, still maintain that China's rising power must contribute to the global public good, including Africa's security. Likewise, Chinese scholars, researchers and increasingly informed students have joined the chorus of pressing the Chinese government to 'do more' as a power. Added to this are calls from African capitals themselves for China to provide more in the form of financial and technical support which

can match its perceivedly deep pockets. Meanwhile, in multilateral forums, diplomats from established powers increasingly expect Chinese delegations to make informed contributions while their embassies in Beijing continue to push for cooperative partnerships with China. All of these pressures on Chinese policy-makers have had an impact. The question today is no longer *if*, but *how* China should engage on peace and security in Africa.

Three steps

It is clear that outside actors cannot solve Africa's security problems. As the last Forum on China-Africa Co-operation (FOCAC) Action Plan states, the "Chinese Government appreciates the concept and practice of 'Solving African Problems by Africans'"⁵. However, in today's globalised world, insecurity is not only the problem of Africans, and neither are the solutions. Outside actors can have both a positive and negative impact on peace and security, directly and indirectly, intentionally and not. China – which has so dramatically deepened its relationship with Africa – is one such actor.

Attending his last FOCAC meeting in 2012, Chinese leader Hu Jintao called for a deepening of the China-Africa relationship in five key areas, one of which directly addresses insecurity issues. He emphasised the need to "promote peace and stability in Africa and create a secure environment for Africa's development" (President Hu propose measures in five areas to boost China-Africa ties, 2012). This clearly reflected the growing priority of the issue. In the FOCAC's Beijing Action Plan (2013–15), there exist clear commitments for co-operation in several broad areas. China will seek to continue its participation in UN peacekeeping missions on the continent, deploy more defence attaches to its embassies and strengthen security relations with those states considered regional and sub-regional powers⁶. Notable is the FOCAC agreement to create the 'Initiative on China-Africa Cooperative Partnership for Peace and Security'. The Chinese Government and African Union's (AU) Peace and Security Council are soon to formalise agreement on this agenda. This will likely facilitate the donation of greater resources to the AU

peace and security architecture, training for AU peacekeepers and African standby forces, and closer coordination in multilateral forums. While the agenda seems promising, the details on such initiatives are scarce and, when compared with other FOCAC commitments, do not appear to have yet resulted in many tangible outcomes.

Indeed, the future direction of China-Africa security co-operation remains somewhat undefined. Beijing is navigating a cautious approach to engagement on African security issues. Perhaps most pressingly, its wider foreign policy establishment remains reluctant to be seen as setting a precedent for creeping interference in what are still seen to be highly sensitive political affairs of other sovereign states. Nonetheless, this could change. Although it will unlikely announce any radical departures from traditional foreign policy principles, the new leadership may in practice allow for the testing - especially in Africa - of a more flexible interpretation of non-interference that will give it greater manoeuvre to protect national interests such as the safety of Chinese citizens or the preservation of partner regimes. At the same time, domestic stability remains the overriding priority for Beijing in the face of a slowing economy, popular political upheavals overseas and perceived containment by the United States. As such, it is equally likely that the new leadership will strongly push back against any further dilution of international norms related to the primacy of state sovereignty, even going as far as to take the lead and build coalitions of developing country solidarity on this issue. Deepening interests to protect in Africa are no guarantee of a softening on non-interference.

Furthermore, serving officials perceive themselves to lack the required experience of engaging on security issues in Africa in order to make informed interventions. They also lack the necessary capacities or even institutional mandates, budgets and structures to do so⁷. Officials are often unclear of where these issues sit between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and other bodies. Information and analysis is another weakness. As the wider policy community in China is well aware, its knowledge and expertise on African security remains rela-

tively thin despite notable advances in the past few years.

Other obstacles to engagement exist: Beijing is intent on managing African expectations of China, especially financially. While policy-banks have established means for financing huge infrastructure projects requested by African governments, the MFA has struggled to convince the rest of the government to quickly allocate finances for African security issues. For example, at a 2013 Mali donor conference, Japan pledged \$120 million, the US \$96m and Germany \$20m. China only managed to mobilise \$1m, the same as Sierra Leone (Mali conflict: Donor conference raises \$445 million, 2013).

Two further issues make Beijing cautious. As with any other external actor, it is worried about being drawn into intractable conflicts, far away from China, which distract attention from far more pressing domestic priorities. Senior decision-makers simply do not want to have to worry about these issues. Second, they are cautious of alarming other powers with a far more established security footprint in Africa. While often urging China to 'do more', Chinese officials calculate that any deepening engagement, especially involving the military, might be perceived as threatening or masking geopolitical intentions. That it has taken such great care even in quietly announcing the inclusion of combat troops as part of its contribution to the UN peacekeeping mission in Mali – a first for China – illustrates this well.

While these obstacles are by no means insurmountable – where there is a will there is a way – officials in Beijing face a number of challenges to deepening China's engagement on African peace and security issues. There are no simple answers to such a large and complex issue, but approaching it through the lens of conflict prevention might help to identify tangible and acceptable measures that China can adopt. Conflict prevention can mean taking actions to prevent disputes from escalating violently, containing and preventing existing violent conflict from spreading, or even preventing relapses into violence in post-conflict environments. Strategies can both be direct and short-term (for example during a crisis), structur-

al and long-term (for example addressing the root causes of future conflict) or systematic (for example addressing international drivers of conflict)⁸. There are three specific areas – which are already made reference to in the Beijing Action Plan – where China-Africa co-operation could be deepened to help prevent conflict without resorting to militarised approaches or political interference. First is the area of diplomacy; second is the problem of small arms proliferation; third is the issue of post-conflict reconstruction. There are several tangible and practical steps that can be taken in each of these three areas.

Diplomacy

Firstly, greater focus on what diplomatic measures China can take to de-escalate crises and prevent conflict is required. The on-going dispute between Sudan and South Sudan has shown that China not only has great influence over the conflicting parties but that it is able to actively use this leverage to promote peace. Through sending Special Envoys, engaging with Juba and Khartoum's leaders at frequent intervals and in various forums, and accepting a lead role in the UN Security Council (UNSC), the Chinese Government has tried to meet the expectations made of it. As Ambassador Zhong Jianhua, China's Special Representative on African Affairs, notes, the "diplomatic efforts made by China in solving the Sudan – South Sudan issue have been productive, not only easing the regional tension and promoting the two sides' reaching an agreement in oil revenues sharing, but also consolidating China's relations with both countries" (Zhong, 2012). It should be noted that every time China takes bold diplomatic action – whether over the case of peacekeepers to Darfur, the peaceful referendum, or the South's invasion of the contested Heglig/Panthou border area – there is a positive result on the ground in Sudan and South Sudan.

Nonetheless, Beijing's existing interpretation of the policy of non-interference has meant that in crises elsewhere on the continent China has often, though not always, stayed silent or only reacted at the last moment. Beijing's voice carries great weight in today's African capitals. Its potential diplomatic role in preventing conflict re-

mains grossly underutilised. The Initiative on China-Africa Cooperative Partnership for Peace and Security presents an opportunity for exploring how China can lend the weight of its influence in support of the AU and other African actors who are trying to deal with crises but often lack the necessary leverage over conflict parties. Agreement on a formal framework for such diplomatic activism in the future means that traditional concerns about interference can be put aside and subsumed by a discourse on constructive intervention. Such a framework could also identify ways for African actors to take the lead to guide and inform Beijing's interventions, addressing Chinese fears about legitimacy and knowledge gaps. Furthermore, identifying longer-term conflict prevention strategies could lead to benefits that far supersede those of short-term, reactionary, and ad-hoc responses. For example, this could include Beijing starting to build the necessary capacity and confidence to be a neutral host, or facilitator, of negotiations and dialogue between conflicting parties.

Another challenge for China's non-interference policy is that, if it is to protect Chinese interests in the long-term, it may be necessary to broaden diplomatic relations *within* African countries. China has traditionally relied on healthy bilateral relations with host governments as the most effective means to facilitate economic co-operation and protect Chinese interests. In order to keep relations healthy, and citing its non-interference policy, Chinese diplomats have prioritised and even restricted their engagement to formal state officials and structures at the expense of engagement with other political actors, civil society or the wider public.

The experience of commercial actors illustrates some of the problems with this approach. Chinese company executives explain that they initially believed that because Beijing had a close relationship with the host government, that host government would protect them⁹. Based on understandings of the nature of the state developed by their experience at home in China, some companies saw this as a sufficient approach to managing risk in conflict-affected contexts. However, these assumptions have been checked by the realities of operating in unstable African

countries where a weak state is unable or unwilling to provide basic security, to enforce regulations (if they exist), manage relations with local communities or resolve disputes. Furthermore, multiple political actors – ranging from competing ministries in capitals to the *de facto* authorities of remote regions - place competing pressures on companies, each seeking to prioritise their own demands, thus blurring lines of authority. In addition, a lack of openness and communication with the public has created a vacuum of information on company operations. In some cases, this has meant that local political entrepreneurs have been able to mobilise popular opinion against companies based on misinformation or half-truths. Finally, political authorities in fragile states have a habit of coming and going without much warning. Many companies have reluctantly accepted that they have had to reach out, listen to and communicate with a much wider set of actors beyond central state authorities.

The Chinese Government also requires a broadening of its still state-centric diplomatic approach. Traditionally, only visiting Party delegations have been able to formally reach out to a wider set of political actors who may be alternative guarantors of Chinese interests, such as opposition leaders, trade unions or civil society. In its day-to-day diplomacy in Africa, the MFA is usually much more restricted. As many African civil society activists have found out, meeting with anyone at a Chinese Embassy can prove impossible, especially when they lack even a public relations officer. The MFA must be allowed to reach out to a much wider set of actors in African countries, including civil society, in order to listen to their concerns, explain China's own position, better understand conflict dynamics and build relationships that may outlast unstable regimes. Such an approach will support a more effective, prepared and nuanced diplomatic response that can help prevent outbreaks of conflict, instability and crises.

Combating illegal small arms

One crucial security issue in Africa is the proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW), which should be a second focus area for China. There are millions of illegal SALW in circulation in Africa and an unlimited capacity by rebel

groups, terrorists, pirates, and other criminals to obtain such weapons, both old and new. SALW do not cause conflict, but they most certainly fuel it and are common factor across diverse manifestations of insecurity. Addressing the issue will help tackle a structural or proximate driver of conflict. While often themselves a direct source of proliferation, African governments have made efforts to address the problems of uncontrolled SALW, establishing national strategies and at the same time agreeing to various regional initiatives, such as the AU's continent-wide strategy on SALW or Eastern Africa's Nairobi Protocol. However, Africa's governments and regional bodies require significant international support to implement their commitments. And, given that over 95 per cent of SALW originate from outside the continent, the international community has a responsibility to provide this support.

As a major supplier of SALW, China has in fact already made concrete commitments to fulfil these responsibilities. At the first three FOCAC meetings in 2000, 2003, and 2006, explicit commitments were made to enhance co-operation to address SALW proliferation. For example, the Beijing Action Plan of the 2006 FOCAC meeting promised from China "financial and material assistance and related training for African countries within its capacity"¹⁰. However, none of these FOCAC commitments have been implemented to date. In fact, at the 4th FOCAC meeting in 2009, no references were made to SALW at all.

In a welcome development, however, at FOCAC 2012, a new commitment was made by China "to support African countries' effort to combat illegal trade and circulation of small arms and light weapons"¹¹. This provides the basis for China to start providing practical support for African-led efforts to tackle the problems associated with SALW. Practical action on the ground needs to replace words. For example, as it has already done to a limited extent for Latin America, China could commit financial assistance for the implementation of regional, sub-regional, and national initiatives that are hamstrung by a lack of resources. Examples of practical initiatives include support for weapons-marking initiatives, assistance with

electronic registration of arms, or provision for the basic infrastructure required to securely stockpile weapons.

Greater focus on the proliferation of SALW presents an opportunity for a frank discussion between African and Chinese governments and civil society on what constitutes a responsible arms transfer. By some estimates, China is already Africa's largest arms supplier¹². Others might dispute these figures. But debates over who is the largest supplier are largely irrelevant to African security. What matters more is in whose hands weapons end up and how they are used. Responsible transfers can promote stability; irresponsible arms transfers can fuel chaos.

It is the intended end users, always sovereign states according to China's regulations, that hold primary responsibility for where weapons imported from China end up. Indeed Beijing sees sovereignty as a largely sufficient condition to authorise arms transfers. But it would be patently absurd for Beijing to repeatedly authorise transfers of weapons to a state that repeatedly embarrasses China by misusing them. Nor is it credible for Chinese authorities to consistently claim ignorance of their end use.

There is often criticism of China's arms exports that is grossly exaggerated. Looking for evidence of Beijing's apparent indifference to suffering or ill-intentions, western media coverage often only tells half the story. Furthermore, it is also unfair that the finger is only pointed at China: many of the most established arms exporters make a mockery of their professed commitments to peace, human rights and democracy. However, just because criticism is exaggerated does not mean there is no truth to them: Chinese-made weapons have too often fallen into the wrong hands and been used for the wrong reasons. And just because many other larger arms suppliers are irresponsible does not mean China can ignore its own faults.

In April 2013 in New York, the UN passed the Arms Trade Treaty. This treaty establishes common rules on what constitutes a responsible arms transfer. It requires signatories to make risk assessments on agreed criteria before authorising an arms transfer, including risks to regional peace and security, and violations of international

human rights and humanitarian law. African states and civil society led the charge for such a treaty. It could not have happened without their leadership. While China is yet to sign the treaty, it nevertheless provides them with a golden opportunity in joining the majority of developing countries and major arms exporters in demonstrating their commitment to making Africa safer and more peaceful place.

Economic co-operation

A third area that merits serious attention is the great potential China can play in post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding to help prevent relapses into violence. Recurring civil wars have become the “dominant form of armed conflict in the world today. In fact, since 2003 every civil war that has started has been a continuation of a previous civil war” (Walter, 2010). China’s financial assistance for development projects, especially in the area of infrastructure, can have a significant impact in countries emerging from war. Schools, universities, hospital, roads, railway lines, and power facilities all need to be rebuilt or, as is often the case, built for the first time. While Western donors shied away from funding infrastructure development in post-conflict Angola, oil-for-infrastructure deals with China contributed to the reconstruction of the country. In South Sudan, assistance for infrastructure has been promised, and in the DRC and Liberia, Chinese companies are active in a wide range of infrastructure projects. More broadly, China’s mutual benefit approach to economic co-operation has been welcomed across the continent and provided benefits, such as jobs and services, which in many cases may be more beneficial and sustainable than Western aid. Economic growth after conflict can help address the root causes of instability and provide a peace dividend, for example, through employing young men who would otherwise join armed groups or through creating economic incentives for elites to seek compromise and maintain stability. In this regard economic co-operation with China can support long-term peacebuilding efforts.

However, China-Africa business-as-usual does not guarantee such an outcome. While explaining China’s continued economic co-operation with a Sudan that was

mired with conflict, some Chinese officials espoused the theory of ‘peace through development’. But as is acknowledged in China, the reality of economic cooperation presents a far more complex picture (Saferworld, 2012; Large, 2012). For example, while Sudan saw GDP growth figures above 10 per cent in 2006 and 2007, the country was far from peaceful in that period. Economic growth, and outside support for it, does not lead to stability on its own.

In fact, outside economic engagement, no matter how well-intentioned, can actually inadvertently fuel conflict and resentment. This is especially when it is seen to favour one group at the cost of another in divided societies. This can occur at a very local level – for example, between two clashing communities – but also on a larger, national scale. China’s role in pre-secession Sudan holds important lessons in this regard: in the South, where economic marginalisation fuelled conflict, people widely believed China only provided development assistance to the North. “They say they have built things – hospitals and schools – but this is in the North, not in the South”, summarises one South Sudanese observer of China’s role¹³. Perceptions of to whom the benefits of development assistance are distributed often matter more for peace than whether assistance is delivered at all. Furthermore, the exploitation of contested resources – whether land, water, or minerals – can be a violent process, as was the case in the development of Sudan’s oil infrastructure. It is disingenuous to argue that the operations of Chinese businesses in these sectors are independent of conflict dynamics. More often than not, they are actually perceived as conflict actors themselves.

These challenges are not unique to China: all actors playing a role in the economy of a conflict-affected state face them. In order to help minimise these risks, there is need for the adoption of more conflict-sensitive approaches by Chinese state-owned banks, the Ministry of Commerce, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and both state-owned and private companies. A three-step approach is required to be conflict-sensitive: firstly, providers of development assistance or commercial actors must better understand the conflict dynamics of the environment in which they operate,

systematically consulting with all the stakeholders – including governments, local leaders, civil society groups, and communities – is crucial; secondly, they must analyse how their assistance or operations risk impacting on these conflict dynamics; and thirdly, they must act on this analysis to minimise negative impacts and promote positive ones.

Taking a more conflict-sensitive approach offers several benefits to China. For the Chinese Government, it is a way to coordinate the benefits of China's economic strengths in order to more effectively contribute to post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding. This would be in line with an emerging narrative amongst some Chinese researchers that suggests that China can present a unique approach to peacebuilding through explicit focus on boosting socio-economic growth after wars end¹⁴. For companies, conflict sensitivity offers a means through which to manage risks, protect workers, safeguard investments, and shield their reputations. Using consultation and communication to gain the acceptance of local communities and conflict actors can be a more effective risk management strategy than relying on government security services, who are often targets themselves in conflict zones. Finally, for both government and companies, conflict sensitivity is a way in which to ensure that their actions do not mistakenly fuel conflict, preventing unintentional negative interference.

Of course host African governments and society hold primary responsibility in ensuring that assistance from China is shared equally between the country's people, that development is catalysed, and that conflict is not exacerbated. But in order for Chinese officials and companies to support such efforts, they must understand how economic co-operation can potentially have an impact on violent conflict and – at the very least – take concrete measures to ensure that no harm is done.

Conclusion

Finally, it should be remembered that China is not Africa's only international part-

ner. Other external actors have equal responsibility to support stability on the continent and to be sensitive about how their current engagement might fall short, considerably so, on many occasions. China should seek to reach out to other international actors, both at capital and in-country levels, to discuss steps that can be taken to partner on the ground. To start with, basic information-sharing between embassies, which is often minimal in many conflict-affected states, would support more coordinated approaches and identify shared interests and priorities. Small, practical projects should be jointly supported to create entry-points for wider co-operation. While African host states might be reluctant to encourage closer coordination between China and other foreign partners, preferring instead to balance them off another, it is in their interests to lead on and develop this agenda before it is developed for them and without them.

Policy coherence is also required at the international level. Further global dialogue and agreement on how the international community can best support conflict-affected and fragile regions of the world is required. As the MDGs expire in 2015, non-governmental organisations, academics, diplomats, and UN officials are already discussing what international development framework should follow them. In its final report, a UN High Level Panel on the post-2015 framework, which included Chinese diplomat Yingfan Wang and several prominent African leaders, prioritised building peace and good governance as one of five transformative shifts for global development, noting that “freedom from fear, conflict and violence is the most fundamental human right, and the essential foundation for building peaceful and prosperous societies” (High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the post-2015 Development Agenda, 2013: iv). The re-negotiation of a global development framework presents an excellent foundation for an intergovernmental discussion in which both African states and China should make their voices heard, especially with regards to addressing systemic conflict drivers.

China’s engagement in Africa is evolving on several fronts as the relationship matures. The area of peace and security is no exception, where pressures from numer-

ous directions are forcing the Chinese Government to become a more engaged actor. Such a direction of travel is unlikely to be reversed. There are perfectly acceptable reasons why policymakers in Beijing are reluctant to engage on what are often highly politicised and sensitive issues on which China has little experience or capacity to engage on. However, these concerns are insufficient to justify inaction, especially when national interest and moral responsibility are at stake.

China is not the answer to Africa's security challenges, nor to its wider development aspirations. Instead, solutions lie in the hands of African governments, political leaders, and civil society. What matters is how China chooses to involve itself in these efforts. Adopting a conceptual approach of conflict prevention to make these choices offers benefits that are not dependent on militarised responses or unilateral interference. Starting to better utilise China's diplomatic leverage, paying greater attention to the problem of SALW, providing more thoughtful development assistance to countries emerging from conflict and seeking partnership with others would be strong foundations to build upon.

Endnotes

1. China's economic slow-down, associated with a falling demand for commodities, may temper this with significant implications for some, but not all, African economies. See for example see Minto, Rob (2013) 'What's the impact of China's slowdown on Africa' in *Financial Times: Beyond Brics* 24 April 2013
2. For example, a major Chinese NGO involved in poverty-reduction in China will open its first office in Africa by the end of the year. Saferworld interviews, Beijing, 2013
3. Statement by HE Wen Jiabao, Premier of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, at the UN High-Level Plenary Meeting on the Millennium

Development Goals, New York, 22 September 2010.

4. Saferworld interviews, Beijing 2013
5. Forum on China-Africa Cooperation Action Plan, 2010-2012
6. This includes Egypt, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Kenya, Angola and South Africa. Saferworld interviews, Beijing 2012
7. Saferworld interviews, Beijing 2013
8. For a useful summary of the literature on conflict prevention, see Melander, Erik & Claire Pigache (2007) 'Conflict Prevention: Concepts and Challenges' in Walter Feichtinger & Predrag Jurekovic, ed., *Konfliktprävention zwischen Anspruch und Wirklichkeit*. Wien: the Austrian National Defence Academy and Michael Lund, 'Preventing violent interstate conflicts: Learning lessons from experience', in Paul van Tongeren, Hans von de Veen and Juliette Verhoeven (eds), (2002), *Searching for Peace in Europe and Eurasia: An Overview of Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding Activities* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner)
9. Saferworld interviews, Juba 2012, Juba 2013, Beijing 2013
10. Forum on China-Africa Cooperation Action Plan, 2007-2008
11. Forum on China-Africa Cooperation Action Plan, 2013-2015
12. See, for example, Grimmet RF, Kerr PK (2012), *Conventional Arms Transfers to Developing Nations, 2004-2011* (Washington, DC, Congressional Research Service)
13. Saferworld interview, Unity State, South Sudan, August 2011.
14. See for example Zhao Lei (2011) 'Two Pillars of China's Global Peace Engagement Strategy: UN Peacekeeping and International Peacebuilding' in *International Peacekeeping* Vol 18 Issue 3 and Alden, Chris & Chun, Zhang &

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