

THE END OF NON-INTERFERENCE?

ABOUT

The Chinese have long been obsessed with strategic culture, power balances and geopolitical shifts. Academic institutions, think tanks, journals and web-based debate are growing in number and quality and give China's foreign policy breadth and depth.

China Analysis, which is published in both French and English, introduces European audiences to these debates inside China's expert and think-tank world and helps the European policy community understand how China's leadership thinks about domestic and foreign policy issues. While freedom of expression and information remain restricted in China's media, these published sources and debates provide an important way of understanding emerging trends within China.

Each issue of China Analysis focuses on a specific theme and draws mainly on Chinese mainland sources. However, it also monitors content in Chinese-language publications from Hong Kong and Taiwan, which occasionally include news and analysis that is not published in the mainland and reflects the diversity of Chinese thinking.

The French version of China Analysis can be accessed online at www.centreasia.eu.

Introduction by François Godement

According to Qiu Lin, a well-known columnist, China's non-interference policy is "naïve" and unsuited to protecting its global interests. He says that, caught between international demands for China to take "responsibility" and the need to defend its growing stake in many foreign economies, China has proven hesitant in choosing either course, and may be losing on both counts.

This issue of *China Analysis* focuses on China's foreign-policy debate on Iran, Sudan, Syria, North Korea and Burma. Even at a moment when ideological unity is being strongly reasserted, the range of views expressed in this debate is striking. Chinese analysts mention the dangers of China's high-profile commercial foothold in countries like Iran and Burma. They acknowledge public support for newly-elected President Hassan Rouhani and its reasons – a yearning for reform. A controversial party intellectual, Deng Yuwen, even writes that the ideological gulf between China and North Korea is larger than that between China and the West. There is stark realism on what close partners think of China – for example, some analysts reveal the fear that they have of North Korea one day simply reversing alliances and leaning towards the United States.

However, criticism and doubts mostly go in the other direction. China's balancing game in the Middle East, where it has strived to keep friendly relations with everyone, is now seen as ineffectual. Instead, and because America is seen

as being so keen to attack Iran and to neglect any opening, China is urged to launch an “aid Iran, strike America” policy. The motto is based on one of Mao’s toughest domestic campaigns at the outbreak of the Korean War: Iran is seen as today’s China and Syria is Iran’s North Korea; both are believed to deserve China’s full support.

One of China’s currently most prominent strategy pundits, Yan Xuetong, takes a different and somewhat contradictory approach. He argues that China should merely stand firm with Russia at the United Nations and let the West extricate itself from its impulse for an intervention it can ill afford. By saying no and remaining committed to non-interference, China will actually improve its international standing. Yan’s attitude, expressed before the Obama administration’s u-turn on Syria, seems prescient. But it also reveals contradictions. After all, Yan was among the first to criticise the principle of non-interference and recommended that China build its own alliances.

Economic security and energy resources clearly play a major role in Chinese foreign policy. Even though our experts acknowledge that the US has actually been encouraging China’s access to oil, there is a nagging fear of the potential for future blackmail. Our Chinese analysts have a strangely detached view on North and South Sudan: the two Sudans are locked in conflict and energy interdependence and America is actually restricting its aid to South Sudan because this also indirectly helps North Sudan. They seem to conclude this is no longer a strategic issue (and do not mention the traditional ideological preference for Khartoum). The clincher is that they estimate that Sudan’s oil resources are on a fast road towards depletion.

Pessimism reigns among Chinese analysts. They fear that the Pentagon is extending its “lily pad” strategy (that is, one based on a network of small bases around the region) to Burma, which has been successfully pressured by the West’s strategy of sanctions rather than by a desire to hedge China. They think that, if Bashar al-Assad’s regime in Syria fell, it would be replaced by a government that leans towards the West. Were anybody from the West to make such a prediction, it would be seen as wishful thinking.

Non-interference may have hampered Chinese diplomacy by preventing nimble responses and protecting stodgy thinking. Our experts express the same frustrations on widely different issues. But moving to a more committed policy that is not afraid to take sides and favour particular domestic outcomes opens up a gulf of doubts and different answers. It seems China is caught between the risks of being an absentee landlord and the hard choices of exercising imperial power.

1. China-Iran relations: China's hawks condemn US influence

Nathan Beauchamp-Mustafaga

Sources:

Zhao Kejin, "Rouhani represents a strategic opportunity for China-Iran relations", *Qilu Wanbao – Shandong Evening News*, 18 June 2013.¹

Dai Xu, "China should support Iran's initiative to 'resist America and assist Syria'", *Huanqiu Shibao Boke – Global Times blog*, 10 August 2012.²

Hua Liming, "The US factor in China-Iran relations", *Sohu blog*, 27 June 2012.³

Zhao Jingfang, "Solving the energy dilemma: foreign policy and military solutions", *Shijie Zhishi – World Affairs*, No. 18, 2012.⁴

Chu Zhaogen, "The Iranian sanctions and the Chinese dilemma", *Fenghuang Zhoukan Boke – Phoenix Weekly blog*, 21 June 2010.⁵

Beijing's quest for energy security has brought China closer to Iran over the last decade. This also draws China into the problems and tensions of Middle Eastern politics. Iran helps provide China with the oil imports it needs to fuel its economic growth. But Chinese scholars recognise that China's relationship with Iran also involves the controversy surrounding Iran's nuclear programme, raises tensions in US-China relations, and even drags China into taking sides in the ongoing civil war in Syria. The United States, the European Union, and others have called on China to play a more active role in the resolution of the Iranian nuclear crisis, particularly in the enforcement of sanctions. However, the Chinese scholars surveyed here doubt the intentions of these third parties. They think China should pursue its own economic and security interests in the region, and should pay no attention to criticism from abroad.

Several of the writers are well-known hawks who hold very strong opinions on the Iran issue. So, their analyses may not reflect the entirety of academic opinion in China. However, they represent one important current in Chinese policy discussion.

¹ Zhao Kejin is associate professor at Tsinghua University's Institute of International Studies and deputy director of the Tsinghua Center for US-China Relations.

² Dai Xu is a colonel in the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Air Force. He is well known for hawkish and nationalist public commentary. For a short profile, see David Lague, "Special Report: China's military hawks take the offensive", *Reuters*, 17 January 2013, available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/01/17/us-china-hawks-idUSBRE90G00C20130117>.

³ Hua Liming is a research fellow at the China Institute of International Studies (CIIS), the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs' think tank. He was China's ambassador to Iran from 1991 to 1995.

⁴ Zhao Jingfang is a lieutenant colonel in the PLA and an associate professor in the Centre for Strategic Research at the PLA National Defence University.

⁵ Chu Zhaogen is a researcher at the Zhejiang Academy of Social Sciences and a widely published commentator.

China-Iran relations in the era of President Rouhani

Hassan Rouhani's election as president of Iran in June 2013, after eight years of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's leadership, raised hopes around the world for an improvement in Iran's foreign relations and for possible progress on the nuclear issue. Rouhani is a moderate, as compared to the conservative candidates approved by the Guardian Council headed by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. He promised to expand ties with China even before he was sworn into office in August 2013.⁶ Zhao Kejin sees Rouhani as a "moderate conservative" (温和保守派, *wenhe baoshoupai*) and believes that his victory was evidence that Iranian politics are changing. Hua Liming, a former Chinese ambassador to Iran, says Rouhani won because of a higher voter turnout. The fact that he could marshal support from people who would not otherwise have voted was evidence of the Iranian people's desire for reform and economic progress.⁷

Zhao Kejin suggests that observers should put off judgement on President Rouhani until he has begun to make real policies rather than campaign pledges. However, he says that even if Rouhani has a reformist agenda, his policy flexibility will be limited by domestic and external political constraints. At home, the new president is under pressure from Ayatollah Khamenei and the conservatives and cannot stray too far from the positions they have already established. Rouhani is a former nuclear negotiator for Iran, but if he now concedes too much in talks on the nuclear issue, he runs the risk of losing public support to the conservatives. In the international sphere, Zhao says, Rouhani has to deal with fundamental and intractable problems of geography and identity. Iran is a Shiite country embroiled in a bitter ideological confrontation with the wider Arab Sunni region. For this reason, any Iranian leader, whatever his political inclination, has to maintain a strong military. The US, which has made Iran an "imaginary strategic enemy" (战略假想敌, *zhanlue jiaxiangdi*) since the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, is using the perceived Iranian threat to legitimise its control of the Persian Gulf. Thus Rouhani has limited options going forward, since the West will not put much effort into improving relations with Tehran and domestic pressure will prevent him from reaching out on his own. Hua Liming agrees that the new president is unlikely to be able to make significant changes to Iran's policies either on the nuclear issue or on Syria.

Both Zhao Kejin and Hua Liming are optimistic about the future of relations between China and Iran. They do not foresee a dramatic change in Iran's China policy, because the two countries have complementary interests on many

⁶ "Iran's Rouhani vows expansion of ties with China", *Xinhua*, 27 June 2013, available at <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90883/8301051.html>.

⁷ Hua's comments on the June 2013 election come from an interview published in the Chinese media. See Shi Xianzhen, "Experts: Rouhani's election can only improve China-Iran relations, no negative impact", *Fengcheng Wanbao – Fengcheng Evening News*, 16 June 2013.

issues, in particular on oil exports. Zhao Kejin thinks that Rouhani may see China as presenting a “strategic opportunity” (战略机遇, *zhanlue jiyu*) to break through the diplomatic impasse with the West. However, Chu Zhaogen notes that the flow of cheap products from China into the Iranian market is hurting Iran’s industrial sector and threatening Iranian employment. He says that the Iranian people do not speak out about this problem because of restrictions on freedom of expression in the country. Chu concludes that Iran needs China more than China needs Iran.

The ever-present US threat

Dai Xu, Zhao Jingfang, and Chu Zhaogen all look at Iran through the prism of US-China relations. They see Iran as a useful bulwark against US pressure, and their writing betrays deep suspicions of US intentions towards China and towards China’s relations with the Middle East. One common theme is the issue of energy security as a strategic vulnerability for China, which the US could exploit to contain China or undermine its growth.

The Iran situation is just one example of the way that US actions in the wider Middle East have damaged Chinese economic interests. Some Chinese commentators see a link between US sanctions on Iran and the US policy of containing China. Chu says “some people even believe the new sanctions on Iran are aimed at undermining China’s commercial and strategic interests.” However, he points out that under the US-China Joint Statement on Energy Security Cooperation, the US has asked Qatar and the United Arab Emirates to guarantee an increase in oil exports to China to offset any losses caused by Iranian sanctions.⁸

The writers are not worried about a direct US-China conflict, but they see Iran as an important factor in US-China competition. China’s resistance to the Western-led international order is really part of its conflict with the US. But Chu warns that China is still not strong enough to confront the US directly. Zhao Jingfang says that since the US and China both have nuclear weapons, war is unlikely. The US must therefore look for a weakness to exploit, and the most obvious one to choose is energy. He says that the “hegemon” (霸权国, *baquanguo*) has historically used energy blackmail as a way to manage the rise of new powers.⁹

Dai Xu thinks that China’s interests in Iran and Syria are closely related to China’s own survival in the larger US-China competition. Comparing the Syrian civil war to China’s involvement in the “War to Resist America and Assist Korea”, China’s term for the Korean War, Dai says that China should support Iran’s campaign to “resist America and assist Syria” (抗美援朝, *kangmei yuanxu*). He

says the only difference between the two situations is that this war is on the opposite side of China. Dai thinks Iran is backing Syria because the two countries share a common destiny, and he supports Iran’s efforts in funnelling Hamas and Hezbollah fighters into Syria. The fall of the Assad regime would bring about a US- and EU-backed puppet regime that would provide a staging ground for a US military encirclement of Iran. After the US conquered the Middle East, Dai says, it would move on to attack Russia and China. So, China should ignore US criticisms of its approach to Iran. It should protect China’s interests by allying with Russia, Iran, and Pakistan to create a “Greater Eurasian Community” (大欧亚共同体, *da’ouya gongtongti*), thus derailing the US plan to divide the Eurasian landmass.

Iran’s oil and China’s energy security

Chu Zhaogen and Zhao Jingfang agree that Iran is an important source of oil imports, but they believe that

Chu sees China’s position on Iran’s nuclear programme as a balancing act between China’s interests and its responsibility as a great power, with the US forever present in the background.

Beijing still needs to do more to ensure its energy security. Chu says that China needs to maintain good relations with Iran to eliminate risks to its energy supply.

He points out that in 2009, China overtook the EU to become Iran’s leading trade partner. Oil is an important part of the trade balance: Iran is China’s third largest supplier of oil.¹⁰ Chu says that China’s investments in the Yadavaran oil field and the South Pars natural gas field are key assets for China’s future energy security. Hua Liming says that energy security is an important factor in China’s decision-making on the Iranian nuclear issue.

Writing in *Shijie Zhishi*, a journal affiliated with the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Zhao Jingfang discusses China’s energy security problems. He speaks out against Beijing’s lack of clarity on the importance of energy security to China’s economic development, national strategy, and competition with the US. Both Zhao Jingfang and Chu Zhaogen say that although China’s economy depends on foreign oil, China cannot control the external factors that affect its energy security. Chu says that not only is China concerned about its access to energy resources, it is also worried about its energy supply lines, which are controlled by the US and its allies. Zhao Jingfang believes China is vulnerable because it has no “military safeguard” (军事保障, *junshi baozhang*) over either the sources of

⁸ The joint statement was announced during the 2010 US-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue. See US Department of State, “US-China Joint Statement on Energy Security Cooperation”, 25 May 2010, available at <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2010/05/142179.htm>.

⁹ In China, the term “hegemon” is a common euphemism for the United States.

¹⁰ By August 2013, Iran had supplied roughly 7.5 percent of China’s oil imports since the beginning of the year, behind Saudi Arabia and Angola, although imports were down from 11 percent in 2011. See Wayne Ma and Tennille Tracy, “Sanctions Gap Allows China to Import Iranian Oil”, *Wall Street Journal*, 21 August 2013, available at <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424127887324619504579026333611696094.html>; US Energy Information Agency, “China”, 22 April 2013.

production or the supply lanes – and energy cannot be secured through money and markets alone. Zhao stresses the risks of China's current energy situation for China's national security, since 90 percent of China's foreign energy is imported using sea routes and 80 percent transits through the Malacca Straits. He says that third parties are the unintended victims of the geopolitical conflict between the US and Iran. Zhao notes that Japan and South Korea have been forced to decrease their imports of Iranian oil, but he does not mention that China too seemed to be making an effort to reduce imports from Iran in 2012.

To solve China's energy security problem, Zhao Jingfang suggests focusing on military preparedness and creating a holistic foreign policy that incorporates energy security. China should cultivate one or two countries in the Persian Gulf, Africa, Central Asia, and the Americas as "energy hubs" (能源支点国家, *nengyuan zhidian guojia*). Zhao thinks this plan would involve creating supply lines through Pakistan, Burma, and Singapore, although he leaves out Iran, despite the fact that the Chinese and Iranian governments have expressed strong interest in extending the Iran-Pakistan pipeline to China.¹¹ China should also build energy security into its military planning. And it should develop China's domestic oil and natural gas fields, including those in the East China Sea and the South China Sea, with or without international cooperation.

The impact of the Iranian nuclear programme and of sanctions

For the most part, the writers see Iran's nuclear programme as a side issue in China-Iran relations. Insofar as it is a problem at all, it is up to the US to solve. Zhao Kejin underlines his doubts about the issue by referring not to Iran's "nuclear weapons programme" (核武器项目, *hewuqi xiangmu*), but only to Iran's "nuclear research and development" (核研发, *heyanfafa*).

Chu is the writer most concerned about Iran's programme. He sees China's position on Iran's nuclear programme as a balancing act between China's interests and its responsibility as a great power, with the US forever present in the background. Chu believes China's support for sanctions has not had an effect on China-Iran relations, since China and Russia worked together at the UN to weaken the most recent round of sanctions. But he warns that China cannot blindly defend Iran, because Beijing must uphold the international non-proliferation regime, even as it keeps the door open for mediation.

Zhao Jingfang talks about the impact of sanctions on the average Chinese citizen. Will petrol prices and inflation rise because of a fall in Iranian oil imports? He cites a Morgan Stanley report according to which every \$10 increase in oil

price costs the Chinese economy 0.315 percent of growth and another 0.315 percent in consumer subsidies.¹² Zhao offers no suggestions for ways to reconcile concerns over Iran's nuclear programme with Chinese economic interests.

Hua Liming says that China has an interest in ensuring Iran does not acquire nuclear weapons. However, he says that the US is suspicious of China-Iran relations and is using China's Iran policy as a test of China's commitment to becoming a "responsible stakeholder" (负责任大国, *fuzeren daguo*). He argues that the discussion of sanctions goes beyond a mere disagreement with the US over foreign policy principles. Instead, it directly affects China's economic and energy interests in Iran. He says that although the US has so far applied no sanctions to Chinese energy companies in Iran, the sanctions have had an impact on Chinese companies' commercial activities.¹³

Hua thinks that Iran is a central issue in US-China relations, and that the US is an equally large factor in China-Iran relations. Hua believes that the US should respect the normal relationship between China and Iran. The US expects China to fall in line with its "zero-sum policy" on Iran (零和游戏, *linghe youxi*). But this expectation ignores China's considerable economic interest in Iran, making friction on the issue inevitable.

¹¹ PTI, "Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline could be extended to China", *The Times of India*, 24 August 2013, available at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/international-business/Iran-Pakistan-gas-pipeline-could-be-extended-to-China/articleshow/22030498.cms>.

¹² The author could not verify the existence of these exact figures from Morgan Stanley, although previous Morgan Stanley analysis did argue for a similar correlation between increases in oil prices and impact on developing countries' GDP. See "Oil demand tapped amid price surges", *Xinhua*, 15 October 2004.

¹³ Ma and Tracy, "Sanctions Gap Allows China to Import Iranian Oil".

2. China's diplomacy in post-partition Sudan and South Sudan

Martina Bassan

Sources:

Liu Hongwu and Xiao Yuhua, "Reflections on the security situation in the Horn of Africa", *Xiandai Guoji Guanxi – Contemporary International Relations*, No. 3, 2012, pp. 32-38.¹⁴

Zhang Chun, "How can China judge the internal affairs of North and South Sudan?", *Dongfang Zaobao – Oriental Morning Post*, 2 May 2012.¹⁵

Yang Zhenfa, "Opportunities and challenges in petroleum cooperation between China and South Sudan", *Xiya Feizhou – West Asia and Africa*, No. 3, 2012, pp. 90-106.¹⁶

In 2011, Sudan split into two countries. The north of the country remained the Republic of Sudan (often simply referred to as Sudan) and the south became the new state of South Sudan. Although the region is unstable and divided, it is still a key element in China's Africa policy. Yang Zhenfa says that because of its large-scale cooperation with Beijing on oil, Sudan offers a model for Chinese companies operating in Africa, and represents a potential strategic base for expansion into other parts of the continent. China sees internal instability in the Sudan region, whether economic, political, or social, as a potential threat to its interests. So, in response to the Darfur conflict, the Chinese government appointed a Special Representative on African Affairs in May 2007. The first envoy, Liu Guijin, was replaced by Zhong Jianhua in 2012.

South Sudan's declaration of independence on 9 July 2011 opened up new opportunities for Chinese engagement in the region, but so far it has not advanced China's position in either the new or the old Sudan. The authors analyse the new challenges facing China's diplomacy since the partition of Sudan. China has to deal with a political, economic, and security landscape that is becoming more and more unstable because of South Sudan's domestic problems, the growth of tensions between the two Sudans, and the attitude to the two Sudans of other foreign powers, particularly the United States.

South Sudan's risky dependence on oil

Yang Zhenfa and Zhang Chun agree that one of South

¹⁴ Liu Hongwu is director of the Institute for African Studies at Zhejiang Normal University. His research is particularly focused on China-Africa relations and questions of development in Africa. Xiao Yuhua is a researcher at the Institute for African Studies at Zhejiang Normal University.

¹⁵ Zhang Chun is deputy director of the Centre for West Asian and African Studies at the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies (SIIS).

¹⁶ Yang Zhenfa is a researcher at the School of International Studies at Yunnan University.

Sudan's main problems is its over-dependence on oil. South Sudan inherited more than 80 percent of Sudan's pre-partition oil reserves. Its economy is almost exclusively based on oil income: in 2011, 98 percent of taxation revenue came from the petroleum sector. But although it is rich in resources, South Sudan does not have the infrastructure needed to transport and export oil, such as pipelines, ports, and so on. All of its exports are controlled by the Republic of Sudan, which owns the two main pipelines that enable South Sudan's crude oil to be carried to the Red Sea. This extremely unstable situation led to an interruption of trade between the two countries that lasted for more than a year, from January 2012 to March 2013, because of a dispute over oil transit fees.¹⁷ This "suicidal act" (自杀式行动, *zishashi xingdong*), in Zhang Chun's phrase, is thought to have cost both sides several billion dollars.¹⁸

Yang points out that the profit margin on international oil sales depends on external variables. This means that as long as South Sudan's public revenues are dependent on exports, the country and its oil industry's development will remain compromised or under threat. Yang says that the prospects for oil exploration in South Sudan are limited. According to World Bank statistics, South Sudanese oil production reached its peak in 2012, at roughly 527,000 barrels a day. If no other wells are discovered, oil production could start to decline drastically as early as 2015. Only the southern parts of the country have not been targeted for oil exploration, and their exploration potential is uncertain. And a solution needs to be found to border disputes and the distribution of resources in the disputed areas, particularly in the Abyei area.¹⁹ If Sudan and South Sudan cannot reach an agreement on the disposition and management of the border territories, regional stability will remain under threat, as will China's investments and security of supply.

Western intervention and "proxy war" in Sudan

Liu Hongwu and Xiao Yuhua say that the West has taken an ambiguous position on the region's affairs. After South Sudan's independence, the Republic of Sudan lost one quarter of its land, one fifth of its population, and the majority of its oil resources. In spite of that blow, Liu and Xiao say that the West has not yet lifted sanctions on Sudan, and has taken South Sudan's side in the border conflict. The writers think that sanctions have worsened the Republic of Sudan's security problems and have strengthened the Sudanese government's authoritarian tendencies.

¹⁷ Because of an on-going dispute on transit fees, Khartoum seized shipments of South Sudanese oil in December 2011. As a result, Juba decided to suspend its oil production and announced its intention to look for new export routes. The transportation of oil resumed more than a year later and exports resumed.

¹⁸ See AFP, "Soudan: le pétrole du sud traverse le pays" [Sudan: oil from the South crosses the country], *Le Figaro – Flash Eco*, 14 April 2013, available at <http://www.lefigaro.fr/flash-eco/2013/04/14/97002-20130414FILWWW00088-le-petrole-sud-soudanais-par-le-soudan.php>.

¹⁹ This oil-rich region is coveted by both states and is currently considered part of both Sudan and South Sudan.

Liu and Xiao say that the Western powers' involvement must be seen in the context of the "proxy war" strategy (代理人战争, *dailiren zhanzheng*) of the states of the Horn of Africa, which are relying on Western intervention to conduct indirect wars against their troublesome neighbours. Liu and Xiao say that South Sudan is seeking to "create opportunities for Western intervention" (在给西方的干涉制造机会, *zai gei xifang de ganshe zhizao jihui*) so as to put pressure on the government of the Republic of Sudan. South Sudan's armed forces regularly ask the international community to prevent humanitarian crisis by backing the army's actions in the region. Liu and Xiao say that this was the strategy used at the time of the deadly bombardment of the border zones by Sudanese forces.²⁰ This conflict brought the situation in Sudan to the attention of the international community and set off a heated debate on the need for humanitarian intervention.

The influence of the US

Liu and Xiao contend that the US represents the "key external factor" (关键外部因素, *guanjian waibu yinsu*) in the region. Zhang Chun says the partition of Sudan, together with the ensuing conflicts and tensions, have their roots in the peace agreement that ended the Second Sudanese Civil War in 2005. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) is a set of protocols signed by the Sudan People's Liberation Movement, representing South Sudan, and the government of Sudan. Zhang says the agreement was signed under pressure from the US. The CPA is often criticised for its lack of clarity on measures that would ensure a peaceful partition. But Liu and Xiao go further, criticising the outcome of the agreement itself. They say that the original objective of the talks was to speed up the unification of Sudan, not bring about its partition.

Yang says that the US was responsible for the change in objective. The US, he says, is the "main player behind the scenes in the independence of South Sudan" (美国是南苏丹独立的主要幕后推手之一, *meiguo shi nan sudan duli de zhuyao muhou tuishou zhiyi*). The US intervention in the partition of Sudan signals a US return to the Sudan region where, according to Liu and Xiao, the US has interests connected to its anti-terrorist strategy. The US wants to strengthen cooperation with regional allies in the Horn of Africa and increase military training and logistical support for friendly regimes. It wants "to align its development aid in Africa with its diplomatic and strategic interests" (其目的, 就是将美对非的发展援助与美外交利益和国家安全整合在一起, *qimudi, jiushi jiang meiduifei de fazhan yuanzhu yu meiwaijiao liyi he guojia anquan zhenghe zaiyiqi*). To this end, South Sudan is today a major recipient of US development assistance. In 2010, the US government provided \$300 million in aid to South Sudan. In 2011, the US Department of Commerce adjusted its export policy on

South Sudan, with the aim of encouraging US companies to invest in the country.

Even so, the US commitment to South Sudan remains limited. Washington favours a "wait and see approach" (观望状态, *guanwang zhuantai*), which seems to contradict the US's stated good intentions and promises. Yang believes the US is worried that the Republic of Sudan might benefit from American investment in South Sudan's oil, through profits that would accrue from cooperation between the two countries. That would explain why US diplomacy towards South Sudan "remains complicated and contradictory" (外交心态上是复杂和矛盾的, *waijiao xintai shang shi fuza he maodun de*). Yang thinks the US is continually "procrastinating" (犹豫不决, *youyubujue*) about its return to Africa. Zhang sees a gap between China's "genuine support" (真诚支持, *zhencheng zhichi*) for an African solution to the tensions and the "empty promises" (空头支票, *kongtou zhipiao*) of the US. Washington talks about its willingness

to support Africa, but in fact it wants to duck out of its obligations. The Western powers calls on China to assume its responsibilities, but the US is the one most to blame for Sudan's chronic instability.

China's principle of non-interference remains the cornerstone of oil cooperation between China and the two Sudans.

China's role in resolving the dispute

China is now the main investor in and purchaser of oil from South Sudan. For this reason, China was asked to play the role of mediator after tensions rose between the Republic of Sudan and South Sudan. But Beijing is wary of taking on this role. Zhang Chun says that China has to think about its interests in this part of the world. Any intervention by Beijing in the relationship between the Republic of Sudan and South Sudan could affect China's image in the region as well as contradicting its fundamental principles of being responsible in taking action abroad and of non-interference in the internal affairs of third states. So, Zhang explains, China cannot impose itself as the arbitrator of disputes between the two Sudans. Unlike the West, China has never set conditionalities on its aid allocation process in Sudan, and China's principle of non-interference remains the cornerstone of oil cooperation between China and the two Sudans.

In the wider context of the continent as a whole, Liu and Xiao say that some African countries hope that China will take a more active part in building peace and security in Africa. However, the writers do not believe this will happen. Beijing's logistical capacity is limited, since China cannot easily deploy troops so far from home. And the major powers' distrust of China significantly limits China's potential space for action.

²⁰ The author does not give a precise date for the bombardments, but he probably refers to either (or both) the bombardment of Jau bombing in February 2012 or that of Bentiu in April 2012.

Even so, Beijing's political will to resolve the dispute between the two countries through consultation and dialogue has proved itself effective on several occasions.²¹ Liu and Xiao say China must continue to respect the principle of non-interference, even as it becomes more actively and "constructively" (建设性, *jianshexing*) involved. Zhang Chun agrees, saying that because of China's limited scope for unilateral action, it must support a multilateral approach and help provide more flexibility for the United Nations and the African Union. The UN is often accused of being "paralysed" (瘫痪, *tanhuan*) and the African Union of being "slow" (迟钝, *chidun*). But China still needs both these players and must continue to support them, not only in the "microcosm of Africa" that is South Sudan (非洲的缩影, *feizhou de suoying*), but also across the rest of the continent.

²¹ Between 10 and 13 March 2012, a few months after the interruption of oil trade between South Sudan and the Republic of Sudan, Ambassador Zhong Jianhua, the Chinese government's special envoy to Africa, made two separate visits to the Sudan and South Sudan, with the aim of encouraging both parties to solve their differences through dialogue. On 13 March 2012, the representatives of both countries met in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, where they signed a preliminary agreement, which made special reference to the demarcation of the border.

3. Reassessing China-North Korea relations

Antoine Bondaz

Sources:

Deng Yuwen, “Should China abandon North Korea?”, *Liaowang Zhongguo – China Outlook*, No. 199, March 2013.²²

Editorial, “In the face of North Korea’s nuclear programme, China should not be cowardly, delusional, or prickly”, *Huanqiu Shibao – Global Times*, 17 February 2013.

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²² Deng Yuwen was deputy editor of the Central Party School’s *Zhongguo zhongyang dangxiao xuexi shibao (Study Times)*. He was reportedly suspended from his position after the publication of this article.

²³ Hu Yihu is a presenter for *Phoenix TV*. Su Hao is a professor of foreign affairs and director of the Asia-Pacific Research Centre at *China Foreign Affairs University*. Shi Yinhong is professor of International Relations and director of the Centre for American Studies at Renmin University. Peng Guangqian is a major general in the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) and a former strategist for the PLA’s Chinese Academy of Military Sciences.

²⁴ Ren Weidong is a research fellow at the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR).

²⁵ Shen Dingli is associate dean of Fudan University’s Institute of International Studies and director of its Centre for American Studies.

²⁶ Yu Shaohua is a senior research fellow at the China Institute of International Studies (CIIS) and director of the Department for Asia-Pacific Security and Cooperation Studies. She is a recognised expert on North Korea, where she was stationed as a diplomat between 1990 and 1993 and again between 2002 and 2006.

²⁷ Zhang Liangui is professor of international strategic research at the Central Party School in Beijing and a leading international expert on North Korea.

Ignoring repeated appeals for restraint from the international community (including China), North Korea carried out its third nuclear test on 12 February 2013. In response, on 7 March, the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 2094 (2013), condemning the nuclear test and broadening sanctions against the North Korean regime.

Many people in China spoke out against the North Korean test. In March and April, official China abandoned its previous silence and began to openly criticise the North Korean leadership. China’s Foreign Minister Wang Yi, for instance, said that China “did not countenance troublemakers at its door”. This criticism was widely echoed within China’s academic community as well as in the official media. However, as early as summer 2013, these harsh critiques had already given way to more traditional analyses stressing Pyongyang’s strategic importance.

Reactions to North Korea’s third nuclear test

In the days immediately following the test, some of the editorial writers of *Huanqiu Shibao* were harsh on China’s North Korean neighbour. They said that it would be “naïve” to think North Korea’s insecurity would be lessened by this nuclear test and they called for sanctions to be imposed. The editorial of 17 February said China should reduce aid to its neighbour. On 18 February, an editorial said Beijing should have the courage to oppose Pyongyang: North Korea’s attitude went against China’s interests, and it was “necessary to punish” (惩罚是必要的, *chengfa shi biyao de*) the country. China should not allow itself to be forced to supply a “blind shield” (一味庇护, *yiwei bihu*), or unconditional protection, to its neighbour.

Some of the paper’s other editorials were less forthright. As early as 16 February, an editorial said that it was “unrealistic” (不切实际的假设, *buqieshiji de jiashe*) to believe that China could keep its neighbour in check without the support of other powers. So, China should negotiate a new balance with other stakeholders. Even so, it had to avoid making a complete reversal and falling in behind the United States, Japan, and South Korea. A full u-turn on policy would risk China becoming “Pyongyang’s enemy number one” (头号敌人, *touhao diren*), wiping out decades of efforts to build up the China-North Korea bilateral relationship. This would play into the hands of the other powers.

Su Hao, interviewed on *Phoenix TV* on 24 February, said China and the international community’s failure to denuclearise the peninsula would prove costly. In their articles, Shen Dingli and Zhang Liangui wrote that North Korea would inevitably continue “along the nuclear path” (核道路, *he daolu*). Shen Dingli said North Korea’s nuclear programme “cannot be stopped” (无可阻挡, *wuke zudang*), no matter what sanctions were applied. Pyongyang’s goal is to be recognised and accepted as a nuclear power, as Zhang Liangui has been saying since 2010. Shen Dingli

wrote that the US has always accepted the nuclearisation of other nations after the fact. Once Obama leaves office in January 2017, the US might well accept North Korea as a nuclear power, as might the international community as a whole, since it “would have no other choice” (无奈接受, *wunai jieshou*).

In the *Phoenix TV* broadcast, Shi Yinhong said that China could not be held responsible for North Korea’s behaviour, since North Korea acts in favour of its own national interests and has no regard for China’s. Peng Guangqian summed the discussion up: North Korea’s nuclearisation is not solely China’s problem; China is not the source of the problem; and China alone cannot solve the problem.

Should China abandon North Korea?

Deng Yuwen’s argument for abandoning North Korea in the *Financial Times* of 27 February was something of a bombshell, although the proposal gained much more attention in Western circles than within the academic debate in China.²⁸ The full version of the article, published in *Liaowang Zhongguo* in March, presents the writer’s proposal in greater detail. He says that China can continue to support North Korea for historical, ideological, and strategic reasons. Or, it can choose to “abandon” its neighbour (放弃, *fangqi*), which has spiralled off control and become a “bad asset” (负资产, *fu zichan*).

Deng goes on to try to dismantle the reasons for continuing to support North Korea. He says that the ideological argument for supporting North Korea is fallacious. China’s foreign policy should not be and is not based on ideology. If it were, China would have no relations with the West. In any case, the differences between the ideologies of China and North Korea are greater than those between the ideologies of China and the West.

He argues that the strategic argument is largely exaggerated. During the Cold War, North Korea was a useful buffer zone, but the emergence of modern technological warfare has made this function obsolete. Moreover, a buffer zone is supposed to keep out danger, but now the buffer zone is itself the source of the danger. China must avoid being dragged into a war with the US on behalf of another country, especially because it has no need of the alliance to ensure its security.

In spite of expectations raised by Kim Jong-un’s rise to power, North Korea is not reforming. In fact, Deng says, the country is unreformable. Any attempt at reform would lead to the collapse of the regime, which is anyway unsustainable in the long term. So, it is irrational for China to maintain special relations with the state.

Deng says that North Korea does not share China’s almost sentimental feelings about the historical intimacy between two closely interrelated countries (唇亡齿寒, *chunwang chihan*, “if the lips are gone, the teeth will grow cold”). Since the 1950s, North Korea has worked hard to undervalue China’s role in the Korean War. In 1956, it even purged the Workers’ Party of Korea of its pro-China elements.

Deng worries that Beijing could in the future become a target of Pyongyang’s “nuclear blackmail” (核讹诈, *he e’zha*). North Korea could get rid of its current alliances and align itself with the US. A shift like this would seriously threaten China’s security. Even without this kind of dramatic policy change, a nuclear North Korea would necessarily have more weight in international negotiations and would be able to obtain more important concessions from China.

China must therefore review its diplomacy and refocus on its own national interest. It must abandon North Korea, or

In North Korea, Beijing should give up its “non-intervention policy” and develop a system of “limited intervention” that could better serve its national interest.

at the very least, it should seriously consider the option of cutting ties with the country. Keeping the present regime in place prevents the reunification

of North and South Korea, which could benefit both the North Korean people and China itself. Reunification would delegitimise US regional military alliances, reduce international pressure on Beijing, and facilitate China’s reunification with Taiwan.

If the Chinese authorities do not choose to abandon North Korea, Deng says, they must at least try to install in Pyongyang a pro-Chinese regime that would denuclearise North Korea. Beijing should give up its “non-intervention policy” (不干涉政策, *bu ganshe zhengce*) and develop a system of “limited intervention” (有限干涉, *youxian ganshe*) that could better serve its national interest.

A speedy return to dogmatism

Deng Yuwen’s proposal was harshly criticised by Chinese experts such as Ren Weidong, a researcher at the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR). Ren said that the US was most to blame for tensions on the peninsula, because the US has resituated the North Korean problem within a regional context that is marked by American dominance. Instead of overturning China-North Korea relations, the connection between China and North Korea should be strengthened.

In his 20 March article, Ren Weidong said that the Korean peninsula is a key element in the US’s long-term strategy. Ever since the fall of the USSR, the US has refused to normalise its relations with North Korea (whereas Beijing

²⁸ Deng Yuwen, “China should abandon North Korea”, *Financial Times*, 27 February 2013, available at <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/9e2f68b2-7c5c-11e2-99f0-00144feabdc0.html>.

has recognised Seoul), even including it in President George W. Bush's "Axis of Evil".²⁹ The US's long-term goal is to preserve the division of the peninsula in order to guarantee the US military presence in South Korea and secure the dependence of South Korea and Japan on the US. Washington wants to use the Korean peninsula to contain China. One of Washington's goals is thus to create friction between Beijing and Pyongyang. If relations deteriorate and China stops supporting the Pyongyang regime, South Korea will be able to annex the North, which would benefit the US and establish a new military demarcation along the Yalu River.

To prevent this from happening, China must invest in strengthening its relationship with North Korea to act as a counterbalance to the US. Ren says that American "hegemony" is unlikely to change and that it is a mistake to think that if China abandoned North Korea, the US would withdraw its troops from South Korea and Japan.

Ren explains the reasons why he believes that North Korea's nuclear and ballistic programme will not lead to an arms race. South Korea has no need to be concerned, since the programme is not aimed at South Korea, but instead is intended to act as a deterrent against the US. The US will not allow Japan to develop its own nuclear programme. And there has been a double standard in the international non-proliferation system from the very beginning (such as, for example, the cases of Israel and India).

Ren Weidong repeated his attack on Deng Yuwen's arguments in his article of 9 July. He writes that North Korea remains a "strategic barrier" (战略屏障, *zhanlüe pingzhang*) to American dominance. If, as some people think, modern warfare makes North Korea's function as a buffer zone irrelevant, then why does the US maintain its military presence in South Korea? Beijing should not try to get closer to Seoul at Pyongyang's expense, because Seoul is an ally of Washington in the US "Pivot to Asia" strategy. Since American troops are stationed on its soil, South Korea is not fully independent and must remain within America's "strategic orbit" (战略轨道, *zhanlüe guidao*).

Consensus for a modest shift in relations

Deng Yuwen and Ren Weidong represent the two extremes on the spectrum of Chinese opinion about North Korea. In between these two poles, a broad consensus has emerged for a limited development of China-North Korea relations. Yu Shaohua's article is representative of this new consensus. She talks about Chinese Vice President Li Yuanchao's July trip to North Korea, during which he participated in the commemorations in Pyongyang on 27 July of the sixtieth anniversary of the signing of the Panmunjom armistice that ended the Korean War. Li's meeting with Kim Jong-un is

a sign of Beijing's continuing attachment to Pyongyang. China is not going to dissolve ties with its neighbour.

However, Yu says that a change in the relationship between the two countries is needed. During the Cold War, China's fate was very closely bound up with that of North Korea. But since the break-up of the Soviet bloc, the two neighbours have taken different directions. China has broken free of its Cold War mindset and normalised its relations with South Korea. Even though China still has to manage its strategic rivalry with the US, it has largely benefited from the post-Cold War period of stability. On the other hand, North Korea remains belligerent, and Pyongyang's nuclear programme has created a point of disagreement between the two countries. China, which is opposed both to an alliance with the US and to North Korea's nuclear programme, wants to promote collective security and to turn the 1953 armistice into a peace treaty. If this is to be achieved, both North Korea and the US will have to modify their behaviour, get beyond their Cold War mentalities, and start making a positive contribution to building peace.

²⁹ In his State of the Union address on 29 January 2002, President George W. Bush spoke of an "Axis of Evil" made up of Iraq, Iran, and North Korea, three countries that he said represented a major threat to world peace.

4. Has China lost Burma?

Damien Garnier

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Over the last two years, the United States has changed its perspective on Burma. The US once saw the country as a "rogue state" but now sees it a nation that has introduced democratic reforms that should be encouraged.³⁶ The historic visits made to Burma by then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in November 2011 and President Barack Obama in December 2012 are evidence of this rapid thaw in relations. However, the relationship between China and Burma is still coloured by the economic and trade sanctions that the US implemented after General Ne Win's bloody

³⁰ Li Yibo is associate professor in the Department of Social Sciences at the Beijing Institute of Graphic Communications.

³¹ Shi Qingren is a research fellow in the Defence Policy Research Centre at the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Academy of Military Sciences. *Zhongguo Qingnian Bao* is the official newspaper of the Communist Youth League.

³² Wang Dong is associate professor in the School of International Studies and director of the Centre for Northeast Asian Strategic Studies at Peking University.

³³ Xiao Ke is associate professor in the School of Politics and Law at Northeast Normal University. His research focuses on the foundations of political science theory.

³⁴ Zhou Xinyu is a research fellow at the Centre for Public Diplomacy Studies at Beijing Foreign Studies University. His research interests include American foreign policy, the rise of China, and Chinese public diplomacy.

³⁵ Qiu Lin is a columnist who regularly contributes to China's leading newspapers.

³⁶ The symbolic beginning of the political transition in Burma was the release of Aung San Suu Kyi on 13 November 2010. The dissolution of the State Peace and Development Council and the resignation of General Than Shwe on 30 March 2011 signalled the end of the junta, which gave way to the elected civilian government of President Thein Sein. The new president introduced several reforms aimed at democratising the country, including easing censorship and releasing political prisoners.

coup in 1988.³⁷ The resulting diplomatic and economic isolation of Burma encouraged the development of privileged relations between Burma and China. China built roads and pipelines for its neighbour and still continues to exploit the country's natural resources.

The sudden thaw in diplomatic relations between Burma and the US and Europe has upended China's prospects in Burma. One of the most obvious signs of the shift was Burmese President Thein Sein's suspension of one of China's most controversial projects in Burma, the Myitsone Dam.³⁸ Another sign of a change in the balance was the unexplained withdrawal in May 2013 of the Vodafone/ChinaMobile consortium from the tender process for Burma's first mobile telecoms licence.³⁹

China considers Burma to be important to its security, and Chinese commentators are concerned about the new US interest in the country. They try to explain Burmese and US motivations for closer ties and consider the implications of the new relationship for the future of China-Burma relations.

China's interest in Burma and Burma's outreach to the US

Burma has considerable strategic importance for China. Li Yibo says that Burma forms a bridge between China and the Indian Ocean. It provides a geographical linkage that could enable Beijing to free itself of the "Malacca Dilemma" (马六甲困局, *malujia kunju*), which the writers agree represents a serious vulnerability for China.⁴⁰ Beijing is building a pipeline between Yunnan province and Burma's port city of Kyaukpyu, perhaps in order to facilitate the import of hydrocarbons from Africa and the Middle East. China is also spending a considerable amount of money on upgrading the famous "Burma Road" from Mandalay in Burma to Kunming in China's Yunnan province, along which US weapons were transported to the Kuomintang during the Second World War. The road could become the main route for China-Burma trade. China is also very interested in gaining more access to Burma's natural resources, such as oil, copper, and hydropower.

³⁷ The United States, the European Union, Australia, and Canada introduced a wide range of sanctions against Burma after 1988. These included a ban on imports, an arms embargo, a freeze in trade relations and investment, a visa ban on certain leaders, whose assets abroad were also frozen. These sanctions have been progressively lifted as democratic reforms have been implemented. US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced a partial lifting of trade sanctions in September 2012, a decision that was followed in May 2013 by removing the visa ban on Burmese leaders and their close family members.

³⁸ The dam project, suspended on 30 September 2011 by Thein Sein "until the end of his term", has been very controversial in Burma due to its direct ecological and social consequences (flooding, population displacement, etc.). Besides, most of the electricity produced would have been distributed in China.

³⁹ Gu Shuren, "Has China lost Burma?", *Tianxia*, No. 525, 26 June 2013.

⁴⁰ Eighty percent of Chinese oil imports pass through the Straits of Malacca.

As well as explaining China's strategic interest in Burma, the writers talk about the historical relations between the two countries. Xiao Ke says that the China-Burma relationship is based on a shared history of Japanese colonialism, common economic interests, and China's support during Burma's period of isolation. For these reasons, the writers believe that China and Burma have a special and necessarily close relationship. The relationship is designated by the evocative term *paukphaw* in Burmese and in Chinese, by a derivation of the Burmese, *baobo* (胞波). The term signifies an intimate and symbiotic relationship. In both Burmese and Chinese, the term is exclusively used to describe China-Burma relations.

The writers believe that Burma's outreach to the US was made for pragmatic reasons. Burma wants to escape from the economic sanctions in place since 1988. Zhou Xinyu says that the US "carrot-and-stick" approach gave the Burmese authorities no other choice but to reform the regime in the hope of ending sanctions. Li Yibo cites John Blaxland, an Australian expert on Burmese affairs, who says that Burma does not want to build close ties with the US and is in fact only looking for "more breathing space" (呼吸空间, *huxi kongjian*). So, Li says, China should not be too worried about the rapprochement.

Shi Qingren is the only writer who suggests that the Burmese government's positive attitude towards the US could be the result of the rise of China, which has caused its neighbours some concern. He believes that Burma's rapprochement with the United States cannot be explained solely in economic terms but is also driven by a desire to gain some "strategic room for manoeuvre" (战略回旋余地, *zhanlüe huixuanyudi*) by increasing its number of external partners.

US motivations for changing track on Burma

Zhou Xinyu says that when the US is in a position of international strength, its foreign policy is determined by arbitrary ideological factors. For example, in the period after the Second World War and the period following the end of the Cold War, he says, ideology strongly influenced American policy. One feature of this ideological approach was the use of what Zhou calls "human rights diplomacy" (人权外交, *renquan waijiao*). This kind of "unilateralism and interventionism" (单边主义, 干涉主义, *danbianzhuyi, ganshezhuayi*) was the catalyst for the US sanctions on Burma in the late 1980s.

When the international environment is less favourable to the US, as was the case in the late 1970s, it tends to adopt a realist approach to foreign policy, putting human rights on the backburner. The current pragmatic shift in US foreign policy can be explained by the 2008 financial crisis, which has created a more difficult international environment for the US. Obama's "Pivot to Asia" strategy, of which Burma forms a part, exemplifies this new realism. Zhou Xinyu

believes the US accepts that its "human rights diplomacy" has failed, having served only to antagonise Burma's rulers. The US has realised that this failure could turn Burma into a new North Korea, and that sanctions deprived it of its opportunity to capitalise on the significant potential offered by the country. "The United States could not just sit by and watch the influence of China, India, and other powers on the Indochinese peninsula grow," Zhou says. Now, the US is scrambling to catch up. Zhou Xinyu adds that Obama's Burma policy is also intended to help Obama at home, by offering him an opportunity to showcase his foreign policy achievements. Xiao Ke says the US only wants to democratise (the term is used here in a pejorative sense) and privatise Burma's economy. China, on the other hand, wants to settle Burma's ethnic conflicts and promote the development and economic stability of the country.

The writers agree that the main aim of US policy in Burma is to contain China and prevent it from exerting too much influence in Burma.

The example of Burma proves that to safeguard its own interests, China needs to get involved in the internal affairs of its neighbours.

But Xiao Ke says that Burma is only the final link in the chain of American policy in Southeast Asia. The short-term goal is to

make the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) the "southern 'watchdog' of China" (中国南部的 "守望者", *Zhongguo nanbu de "shouwangzhe"*), the role fulfilled by Central Asia in the west of China and the Japan/South Korea pairing in the east. Xiao is speaking to the fear of encirclement that is a major characteristic of Chinese foreign policy. Li Yibo illustrates this idea using a metaphor of the pond and the water lilies. He compares the "silent" proliferation (消消, *xiaoxiao*) of military bases in Asia, which possess hi-tech mobile equipment but only a handful of soldiers, to the imperceptible movement of water lilies stretching out across the surface of the pond. Sitting on top of the lilies, the frog can launch himself quickly and from a distance at his prey. Like the lily pond, Li sees a "hidden killing machine" (暗藏杀机, *ancang shaji*) of bases surrounding China in all directions, from northeast to southeast Asia and even into the Pacific. The missing link in the chain is Burma. Including it in the US sphere of influence would enable the South Asian bases to be linked to ASEAN.⁴¹ Ironically, what Li is describing is analogous to the Chinese "string of pearls" strategy.

Shi Qingren thinks US policy in Burma "is exerting pressure on China's strategic space" (挤压中国的战略空间, *jiya Zhongguo de zhanlüe kongjian*), of which Burma forms a part. Zhou Xinyu is concerned that US influence has "infiltrated" (渗透, *shentou*) Burmese society. Li Yibo thinks US influence could in future lead to military links between the two countries. In a possible forerunner to future military cooperation, the Burmese were invited to

⁴¹ The American base in South Asia to which Li is referring is probably Diego Garcia in the Chagos Islands.

observe the Golden Cobra military exercises between the US and Thailand in February 2013. Li says that China should be worried about the possibility of a military alliance between Burma and the US, because it would shut down the Burmese alternative to the Malacca dilemma.

China-Burma relations: future prospects

As a possible model for Burma's future policy direction, Li Yibo points to Vietnam, which has succeeded in getting beyond its historical animosity towards the US. He says that the example proves that 20 years of poor relations between Burma and the US will not necessarily prevent closer ties being forged. Burma will have to choose a strategy from the various models adopted by other countries in Southeast Asia: neutrality, like Thailand; a pro-American policy with the aim of containing China, like Vietnam; alliance with the US, like the Philippines; or an "orientation towards China", like Cambodia.

Qiu Lin expects Burma to follow the Vietnamese model. He suggests that China may have already lost Burma (中国«丢掉缅甸», *zhongguo diudiao miandian*).⁴² Qiu says the Burma-US rapprochement is the direct result of China's naive foreign policy. China's guiding principle of non-interference has caused it to bury its head in the sand like an ostrich (鸵鸟政策, *tuoniao zhengce*), leading to the creation of a policy that "lacks strategic vision" (外交缺乏战略眼光, *waijiao quefa zhanlue yanguang*). China's wait-and-see approach stems from its "wishful thinking" (一厢情愿地认为, *yixiangqingyuan de renwei*) that Burma's internal affairs, and the internal affairs of China's neighbouring states more generally, cannot harm China's interests. But the example of Burma proves that to safeguard its own interests, China needs to get involved in the internal affairs of its neighbours.

Wang Dong thinks China's Burma diplomacy has been too monolithic. To improve China-Burma relations, China has to build on its soft power in Burma. It should continue to advocate for the lifting of sanctions. It should also support education, micro-credit, and development assistance programmes. Li Yibo agrees China needs to "win hearts and minds in Burma" (赢得缅甸人民的心, *yingde miandian renmin dexin*). Wang Dong says that China should reach out beyond Burma's political leaders to ethnic minorities and to Burmese society at large. Wang says that while Chinese investments in Burma benefit the country, Chinese companies must take on "greater social responsibility" (更大的社会责任, *gengda de shehui zeren*). Wang Dong talks about the social conflicts brought about by two Chinese projects, the construction of the Myitsone Dam and the exploitation of a copper mine in the province of Sagaing.⁴³

⁴² Qiu's entire article is in fact a reaction to the speculation that China has already lost Burma, a theory put forward by journalist Jamil Anderlini in his article "Myanmar's old friend China is left wondering where it went wrong", *Financial Times*, 17 June 2013, available at <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/398274d8-d4e8-11e2-b4d7-00144feab7de.html>.

⁴³ The Myitsone Dam project has been suspended since this article was

This kind of commentary on the shortcomings of Chinese projects is highly unusual for a Chinese media outlet.

Shi Qingren is optimistic about Chinese prospects in Burma. He says that, while the US presence would pose challenges to the China-Burma relationship, China's relationship with Burma is too firmly entrenched to be completely overturned by the US arrival on the scene. However, he says that China must anticipate the problems ahead and "repair (consolidate) the house before the rainy season" (未雨绸缪, *weiyuchoumou*). On 19 June, the official publication *Huanqiu Shibao* published an unedited, albeit partial, translation of an article in the *Financial Times* that was highly critical of Beijing's policy on Burma.⁴⁴ This unusual willingness to critique official policy represents another sign of the media's impatience with Beijing's management of a relationship whose future is highly uncertain.

written.

⁴⁴ "A view from the British media: China must think about the real lessons to be drawn from the case of Burma", *Huanqiu Shibao – Global Times*, 19 June 2013. This is a partial translation of British journalist Jamil Anderlini's article, "Myanmar's old friend China is left wondering where it went wrong", published in the *Financial Times* two days earlier. *Huanqiu Shibao* published this article without making any comment or questioning Anderlini's extremely critical tone. The article was then taken up by various Chinese media outlets, including news websites and blogs, also without comment, which is most unusual indeed.

5. Syria and China's international engagement

Antoine Bondaz

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The popular uprising that began in Syria in March 2011 has turned into a violent civil war. The UN has estimated that by July 2013, the conflict had caused more than 100,000 deaths. The international community is divided on how to respond to the Syria crisis. The United States, France, the UK, Turkey, and the Gulf States (especially Saudi Arabia and Qatar) officially support the armed rebellion against Bashar al-Assad's regime. Some emerging countries, such as India, Brazil, and South Africa, have adopted a more cautious stance. And Russia and China are refusing to put pressure on the Assad regime.

Like Russia, China has three times exercised its veto in the UN Security Council (UNSC) to oppose draft resolutions on Syria put forward by the Western powers, on 4 October 2011, 4 February 2012, and 19 July 2012. Before

⁴⁵ Zhong Sheng is a regular columnist for *Renmin Wang*, whose views are often stridently nationalistic.

⁴⁶ Li Baodong is China's ambassador to the United Nations. Speeches available at http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/PV.6734 and http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/PV.6810.

⁴⁷ Le Yucheng is Assistant Foreign Minister. His areas of responsibility are policy planning, Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan-related foreign affairs, translation, and interpretation.

⁴⁸ Li Weijian is a senior fellow at the Shanghai Institute for International Studies (SIIS) and executive director of the Chinese Association for Middle East Studies.

⁴⁹ Qu Xing, a former diplomat, is president of the China Institute of International Studies (CIIS).

⁵⁰ Yan Xuetong is dean of the Institute of Modern International Relations at Tsinghua University, Beijing. His article is available at <http://yanxuetongvip.i.sohu.com/blog/view/203112403.htm>.

the Syria crisis, China had used its veto only six times since 1971.⁵¹ China's position on Syria has been criticised by the West. France's Permanent Representative to the UN, Gérard Araud, said on 4 February 2012 that China and Russia were "making themselves complicit in the policy of repression being implemented by the Damascus regime" and that they had "without scruple aligned themselves with a regime [that] slaughters its own people".⁵² Many Chinese publications have sought to explain and defend Beijing's position in response to this kind of criticism. At the same time, they speak out against what they see as the West's double game. They accuse Western powers of wanting to follow the precedent of Libya and overthrow the Bashar al-Assad regime.

Justifying the Chinese vetoes

China's Ministry for Foreign Affairs has made the country's official position on Syria clear on several occasions. To help it present its case more effectively, the ministry has tried to diversify the channels it uses for communication. In June 2012, Chen Xiaodong, director-general of the Ministry's Department of West Asian and North African Affairs, took the unprecedented step of giving a long interview to the Qatar-based television station *Al Jazeera* to explain China's Middle East policy. This communications campaign was aimed at countering Western criticisms. It also tried to explain China's fear that the West could use the "responsibility to protect" (保护的责任, *baohu de zeren*) as an excuse to turn regime change into a new norm in international relations.

In a speech at the China Institute of International Studies (CIIS), China's Assistant Foreign Minister Le Yucheng talked about China's view of the international system and of the country's role within the international community. He justified China's veto by referring to the fear that the "Libyan model" (利比亚模式, *Libiya moshi*) could be replicated. He said the US and its allies want to overthrow the Syrian regime by raising the "banner" (旗号, *qihao*) of the "responsibility to protect" in order to justify the use of force. He called on people "not to forget the lessons of Libya" (不能忘记利比亚的教训, *women buneng wangji Libiya de jiaoxun*), saying that the responsibility to protect should also imply "responsible protection" (负责任的保护, *fu zeren de baohu*).

On 12 March 2012, China's Permanent Representative to the UN, Li Baodong, also spoke out against the West interfering in Syria's internal affairs in the name of "humanitarianism" (人道主义, *rendao zhuyi*). On 19 July 2012, during a debate at the UN Security Council, Li took an even tougher line

⁵¹ China's previous vetoes were in 1972, on the admission of Bangladesh to the United Nations and the situation in the Middle East and Palestine; in 1997, on Burma; in 1999, on Yugoslavia; in 2007, on Burma; and in 2008, Zimbabwe. Half of these cases involved a double veto by China and Russia.

⁵² Gérard Araud, speech at the UN Security Council, 4 February 2012, available at http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/PV.6711&referer=/english/&Lang=E.

against the West, saying that “certain countries are keen to interfere in the internal affairs of other countries, to stir up trouble and to sow dissension, in complete disregard of the possible consequences” (个别国家则热衷于干涉别国内政, 煽风点火, 挑拨离间, 惟恐天下不乱, *gebie guojia ze rezhong yu ganshe bie guonei zheng, shanfung dianhuo, tiaobolijian, weikong tianxia buluan*).

In an editorial in *Renmin Wang* on 17 July 2012, Zhong Sheng agrees that national sovereignty and non-interference in the internal affairs of third countries are red lines that cannot be crossed, even if some international actors want to intervene to cause regime change. He says that overthrowing the Syrian leadership has become the main objective of some powers. Over the past few years, under cover of “promoting democracy” (推行民主, *tuixing minzhu*) and “humanitarianism”, the Western powers have been looking for “pretexts to pursue their own interests” (谋求私利的幌子, *mouqiu sili de huangzi*).

Qu Xing, an influential commentator who is the president of the China Institute of International Studies (CIIS), wrote an article in March 2012 criticising the West’s intransigence in UN negotiations on the February 2012 draft resolution. Basing his argument on international law, he says the Western proposal violated fundamental principles of the United Nations’ Charter.⁵³ And the Western states refused to consider amendments proposed by Russia and supported by China. He says the Western countries’ concept of the “responsibility to protect” is dangerous: not only is it vague, but it has often been abused or applied arbitrarily.

Ending the violence: a shared objective

Li Weijian, head of Middle East studies at the Shanghai Institute for International Studies (SIIS), has written two articles defending China’s position. In his 2012 piece, he wrote that in spite of the West’s insinuations, China has few material interests in Syria. China-Syria bilateral trade represented less than 0.1 percent of China’s total trade in 2010, amounting to around \$2.5 billion, as compared to a total figure for China-MENA trade of \$100 billion, which includes \$43 billion in trade with Saudi Arabia. In 2010, Chinese FDI in Syria (excluding the financial sector) was worth less than \$17 million, while technical contracts totalled just \$1.8 billion. Fewer than 30 Chinese companies were active in the country, and fewer than 1,000 Chinese nationals were living in Syria. And, although Chinese oil companies have plants in Syria, China does not import Syrian oil; in fact, 95 percent of Syrian oil is exported to Europe.

Li Weijian sees the Syrian civil war as an extension of the fight for regional dominance and as a means for Washington

⁵³ The Charter of the United Nations states that “All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations.” (Chapter 1, article 2, paragraph 4).

to contain Tehran. He does not see China as being a passive observer of the Syrian problem. In fact, he believes China is acting as a mediator in the Middle East. China has worked to end the conflict, sending special envoys to the area in the first half of 2012, including Ambassador Wu Sike, former Ambassador to Syria Li Huaxin, and Assistant Foreign Minister Zhang Ming.

Li defends the Chinese vetoes, saying that all votes on resolutions within the UN Security Council are part of a democratic process. China is entitled to vote according to its own interests and has no obligation to vote the same way as the Western countries. In any case, the underlying problem is not China’s actions but instead the growth of Western fears about China’s emergence. This distrust has caused permanent suspicion and leads the West to criticise every position China takes.

While all the members of the Security Council want to see an end to the violence, they differ on the best way to achieve it. Li says that the US and its allies want to put unilateral pressure on the Assad regime. China, on the other hand, is very conscious that the regime is holding its ground, that the army is still powerful, and that the carnage is continuing. It therefore wants all the parties in the conflict to engage in dialogue.

In the case of Syria, criticising China is just an excuse to mask the West’s inability to impose its point of view and intervene.

In a second article published in 2013, Li Weijian looks at China’s wider Middle East policy as an indicator of China’s change in status from a regional power to a global power. He believes that China has developed a more offensive diplomacy to better serve its interests in the region. However, it still lacks on-the-ground capacity and is incapable of influencing the international agenda on the region. The West is responding to China’s nascent activism by talking down China’s position. It hopes to perpetuate the idea of an irresponsible China, to upset relations between China and the Arab world, and to create confusion in public discussion in China. Western countries are trying to manipulate domestic public opinion by radically simplifying the situation: the West is supporting the Arab peoples, while China is propping up dictators. In reality, the Western powers want to take advantage of the uprisings in the Middle East to curb China’s expansion. Li Weijian says the “Arab revolutions are being manipulated” (被操纵的“革命”, *bei caozong de geming*). In the case of Syria, criticising China is just an excuse to mask the West’s inability to impose its point of view and intervene. In fact, it is not China and Russia that are holding up an intervention: the Western powers are prevented from intervening by their limited capacities and by their fears of setting off a regional conflagration.

Yan Xuetong: China has nothing to gain by intervening

Yan Xuetong rejects the notion that the first two Chinese vetoes damaged China's international image and offended both Arab countries and the West. If China and Russia had voted in favour of the draft resolutions, the rebel groups would have come to power. However, China got no gratitude in 2011 for abstaining from voting on Resolution 1973, which set up an air exclusion zone in Libya. Similarly, it would not have been thanked for abstaining in the Syrian crisis. The rebels would have turned to Western countries for post-war reconstruction, as they did in Libya. China stands to receive few material benefits from the fall of the Assad regime.

Yan says that China's image in the West will not change, whichever way the country votes at the UN. Western countries will continue to see China as an undemocratic nation, ruled by a single party that has no regard for human rights. And the Arab countries always take the side of the US, in spite of the fact that Washington is blocking the resolution of the Israel-Palestine conflict and that China has always stood alongside the Arab world in supporting Palestine.

Instead of damaging China, Yan thinks that blocking the Security Council resolutions will bring China some "absolute" (绝对, *juedui*) gains. Exercising its right of veto along with Russia will strengthen Beijing's partnership of strategic cooperation with Moscow, which is essential to advance China's international interests. And as long as the crisis in Syria persists, the risk of war between the US and Iran is reduced, which lessens the likelihood of an interruption to Iran's supply of oil to China. Meanwhile, both the Western countries and the Arab countries are coming to realise that China's support is vital in Middle Eastern affairs, which confirms China's expanding role in the region and in international affairs. Finally, the Chinese veto shows the West that China's foreign policy is not only about its material interests, but is also based on strong principles, such as respect for non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries. Yan also points out a "relative" (相对, *xiangdui*) gain: the Syrian crisis is partially diverting the attention and capabilities of the US away from China and the Pacific.

In responding to Western criticisms of the Chinese vetoes, the Chinese writers stress China's new role on the international stage. Beijing has become a major player, even a mediator, in world affairs. Once only relevant in Asian issues, the country has become a leading actor in more distant regions like the Middle East, mainly because of the diversification and growth of its interests in the region. However, although China is keen to become more actively involved in global affairs, the case of Syria demonstrates that China is not prepared to automatically align itself with Western positions.

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