



LESS THAN MEETS THE EYE

BEIJING'S RECENT CHARM OFFENSIVE ON DARFUR

MARCH 19, 2008

Over the past month, the Chinese government has made a series of assertions about its relationship with Sudan and its role in Darfur, many of which are misleading or inaccurate. In this paper, the Save Darfur Coalition and Dream for Darfur provide an analysis of Beijing's recent statements, and the evidence and facts that challenge them.

This paper is divided into two parts. The first addresses the four points the Chinese government has made in numerous public statements. The second addresses the statements and actions of China's Special Envoy for Darfur Liu Guijin.

INTRODUCTION

A series of actions on February 12, 2008 brought renewed and intense scrutiny to China's role in Darfur. Darfur advocates held protests targeting China in 11 countries spanning four continents. Two letters were released that day, one signed by Nobel Prize Laureates and Olympic athletes, the other by U.S. Members of Congress. Both condemned China's ongoing support of Sudan and urged Beijing to do more to promote security in Darfur. In a separate development that day, Steven Spielberg resigned his position as artistic director of the Beijing Olympics, citing China's lack of action on Darfur as the reason for his "decision of conscience."

China responded in a very public manner, first by advancing a series of pronouncements in international and Chinese media outlets defending its approach to Darfur and denouncing the positions of its critics. Then on February 21 China sent its Special Envoy for Darfur to the United Kingdom, France, and Sudan; in this widely-publicized trip the special envoy reiterated some of these arguments, advanced some new ones, and announced further self-proclaimed positive steps.

This paper assesses whether the arguments being advanced by China withstand scrutiny, and whether the visit by the Special Envoy advanced the cause of peace.



CHINA'S CLAIMS

In the aftermath of the criticism it received on February 12, China articulated four main arguments in defending its role on Darfur. Each of these arguments is deeply flawed.

CHINESE CLAIM 1:

Linking China with the crisis in Darfur is “completely unreasonable, irresponsible, and unfair.” ¹

THE FACTS:

The actions of China, more than the actions of any other country besides Sudan, have facilitated the atrocities in Darfur.

ANALYSIS:

China is Sudan's leading trade partner and leading player in its oil industry. This economic support provides Khartoum with the resources needed to carry out violence against the people of Darfur.

For more than a decade, China has been a major military benefactor of Sudan, including its number one supplier of small arms. Chinese small arms have regularly been used in Darfur, as a UN report documented, and much of Sudan's indigenous arms production capacity has been developed with Chinese technical assistance.

China has also been Sudan's most important defender in the United Nations, blocking or weakening measures that would compel Sudan to end its violence in Darfur.

CHINESE CLAIM 2:

“The Chinese government has made unremitting efforts to resolve the Darfur issue.” ² “China has been using its influence to the largest extent possible to persuade the relevant parties to resolve the [Darfur] situation.” ³

THE FACTS:

For most of the past five years, essentially all of China's actions supported the government in Khartoum, thereby enabling the atrocities Khartoum committed. Even in the brief period it has been more balanced in its approach, China has done much more to support Khartoum than to help the people of Darfur.

ANALYSIS:

From the start of violence in Darfur in 2003 through most of 2006, China was a full and unremitting supporter of the Khartoum regime, continuing its economic and military support and thwarting attempts by the United Nations to address the atrocities by Khartoum in Sudan. Once criticism of its role began to mount, China took some modest steps, playing a more constructive role in the peace process, providing some humanitarian aid, and then eventually helping pass UN Security Council Resolution 1769 and sending military engineers to support it.

At the same time, however, China doubled trade with Khartoum, deepened its commitment to the military relationship (indicating its desire to further its military relationship with Sudan “in every sphere”⁴), weakened the terms of 1769, often defended Sudan by echoing its official positions, and provided far more direct aid to Khartoum than to Darfur.

From the passage of 1769 in July 2007—which led to (somewhat undeserved) international praise of China's role—until February 2008, China essentially reverted to its earlier stance of unqualified support for Khartoum, defending its interests strongly in the United Nations.



CHINESE CLAIM 3:

“Soft measures” and “patience” with Sudan are the appropriate approach to bringing peace.

THE FACTS:

For decades, the regime in Khartoum has shown that it only responds to direct pressure and not to soft encouragement. The soft approach with respect to Darfur has only led to continued atrocities.

ANALYSIS:

China's opposition to using “sanctions, embargoes, or pressures”⁵ against Sudan, and its public support of soft measures instead, ignores not only the behavior of the Khartoum regime since 1979 but, more to the point, the history of its behavior with respect to Darfur. The largely soft response by the international community to Sudan's actions in Darfur has meant that a genocide that began in 2003 continues to produce atrocities five years later, and that UN Security Council Resolution 1769, passed seven months ago, has barely begun to be implemented. China weakened this resolution by helping strip strong sanctions language from it; the lack of any enforcement mechanism helps explain why Khartoum has readily put up obstruction after obstruction to its implementation. Sudan's government has shown a consistent willingness to ignore soft measures, or to appear to respond to soft pressure, only to back off once the pressure has subsided.

As further evidence that a “soft” approach does not work, in the last few weeks as China has publically returned to applying some soft pressure on Sudan, Khartoum has nonetheless intensified its attacks in Darfur, mounting what has been characterized as a “scorched earth”⁶ campaign.

CHINESE CLAIM 4:

Politics and the Olympics should not be mixed.

THE FACTS:

China itself is mixing politics and the Olympics today, continuing its long history of interjecting politics, including boycotts, into the Olympics.

ANALYSIS:

As host of the 2008 summer games, China has reacted sharply to any criticism that connects its role in Sudan with its role as host of the Olympics game. This reaction is in direct contradiction with its own approach to the Games. The government of China hopes to use the Olympics to advance its position on the world stage and to improve its position with the Chinese people: both are political motives. Moreover, China has a history dating back half a century of mixing politics with its own attendance, or lack thereof, at the Olympics. China boycotted the Olympics in 1956 because of Taiwan's participation, then did not participate in the Olympics until 1980 largely because of the Taiwan issue. In 1980, China attended only the winter Games; China boycotted the summer Games held in Moscow in protest of the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan.

We should also make clear that our organizations do not support a boycott of the games. Rather, we believe that China's approach to Sudan and Darfur should be consistent with the Olympic ideals of peace and brotherhood.



THE MISSION TO SUDAN OF CHINA'S SPECIAL ENVOY



After the array of critical news coverage on the relationship between China and Sudan in mid February, China sent its Special Envoy for Darfur, Liu Guijin, back to Sudan. As part of this mission, the Special Envoy also met to discuss Darfur with officials from the United States, the United Kingdom, and France. Upon his return to China, Mr. Liu held a press conference for foreign correspondents.

During this trip and upon his return, Mr. Liu stressed three main points. To assess whether or not Beijing is working to address the Darfur crisis, in deed as well as word, Mr. Liu's statements require full scrutiny.

ENVOY POINT 1:

Sudan must do more to facilitate the deployment of the UNAMID force required by 1769.

RESPONSE:

This public call, while welcome, does not appear to be matched by private pressure. In fact, China's exact phrasing sidesteps the true reason for the immense problems with the deployment of UNAMID—Sudanese obstructionism.

In widely-reported remarks, the Special Envoy said “the Sudan government should cooperate better with the international community and demonstrate greater flexibility on some technical issues.”⁷ The effectiveness of this public call depends, in part, on whether a similar or more direct message was conveyed behind the scenes; this is not knowable.

What is known is that the phrase “demonstrate greater flexibility on some technical issues” obscures the true story behind the delayed deployment of UNAMID; indeed, the problems with UNAMID's deployment have become so severe that UN peacekeeping officials have said it may never be successful. Khartoum has dragged out negotiations over key issues for months on end, using the cloak of “technical issues” to stall its deployment.

Khartoum has refused to accept most non-African Union troops, going back on earlier agreements; delayed and then watered down the Status of Forces agreement; and refused to grant unimpeded access for humanitarians. These are not mere “technical issues”; they are based on the requirements of 1769 and should not be open to debate. Khartoum's objections indicate it does not want UNAMID to deploy as it was outlined and authorized in UN Resolution 1769.

ENVOY POINT 2:

The announcement of new humanitarian aid by China, and the reaffirmation of China's positive humanitarian and development role to Darfur.

RESPONSE:

China's humanitarian and development aid to Darfur pale in comparison to Beijing's economic aid to Khartoum. The new aid constitutes a very small amount in the context of China's robust economic relationship with Khartoum.

China offered \$2.8 million in new humanitarian aid, with this offer featured prominently in Mr. Liu's remarks to the press and in a story by China's official news agency, Xinhua.⁸ This amount, however, is paltry compared to the scope of the humanitarian crisis in Darfur, with 4.2 million people in need of aid. It is also a pittance compared to the amount of trade between Sudan and China, estimated at \$3.9 billion, as well as the amount of economic aid China provides to the regime in Khartoum directly. In one telling illustration, when this new humanitarian aid is combined with all the humanitarian aid China has provided to Darfur, the total of about \$14 million is still only equivalent to just one interest-free loan China made last year to Sudan so that it can build a new presidential palace.

ENVOY POINT 3:

The West should do more to bring the rebels into peace negotiations.

RESPONSE:

China is right to observe that the peace process is important, and that peace negotiations will only be successful if most (if not all) rebel factions participate. But this observation overlooks how the government of Sudan has consistently undermined these negotiations. Also, China's emphasis of this point is designed to shift attention from China's own responsibilities.

On at least two occasions Khartoum has bombed locations where rebel leaders were due to meet in order to unify their negotiating positions. Khartoum has also engaged in a campaign designed to exploit, increase and perpetuate divisions between all rebel groups and factions.

It also bears mentioning here that the Sudan's People Liberation Movement, South Africa, the UN and the AU and others have gotten a significant number of rebel factions to agree to unify their negotiating positions at any future talks.



ASSESSING CHINA'S REENGAGEMENT

After remaining largely silent on the issue of Darfur since September (while being of assistance to Sudan at the UN), China's public reengagement with Sudan, and its somewhat more direct criticism of Khartoum, provides a glimmer of hope. But so far this reengagement seems to be more about improving China's image than improving conditions on the ground.

Ultimately, the best test of this reengagement is whether it produces any real changes in Sudan's behavior, whether, for instance, Khartoum stops obstructing the deployment of UNAMID and halts the violence against the people of Darfur. In short, the bottom line question is this: Has China helped bring peace to Darfur?

The early indicators are not promising. Khartoum has not been more "cooperative" in the deployment of UNAMID. More ominously, the regime has actually escalated its campaign of violence against the people of Darfur. China remains the state with the power and influence to move beyond conducting a high-profile public relations campaign with respect to Darfur and toward meaningful action that ensures security on the ground in Darfur immediately.

1 Quote is from a statement by the Chinese embassy in Washington, D.C. as reported in "China Says Play Fair Over Beijing/Darfur Link," Reuters, February 13, 2008.

2 Statement by China's organizing committee for the Olympic Games as reported by David Lague, "China Rejects Darfur Criticism," *The New York Times*, February 15, 2008.

3 Statement by Ambassador Liu Guijin, China's Special Envoy for Sudan, as reported by Edward Cody, "China Steps Up It Argument Over Darfur," *The Washington Post*, March 8, 2008.

4 Statement of China's Defense Minister, as reported in the *International Herald Tribune*, "Report: China, Sudan to boost military cooperation," April 3, 2007.

5 Special Envoy Liu Guijin, interview on BBC television, February 21, 2008. <http://tinyurl.com/2izw9l>

6 Lydia Polgreen, "Scorched-Earth Strategy Returns to Darfur," *The New York Times*, March 2, 2008.

7 Special Envoy Liu Guijin quoted in Opheera McDoom, "China presses Sudan over Darfur peacekeepers," *The Washington Post*, February 24, 2008.

8 Ibid.



ABOUT THE SAVE DARFUR COALITION

The Save Darfur Coalition raises public awareness about the ongoing genocide in Darfur and mobilizes a unified response to the atrocities that threaten the lives of people throughout the Darfur region. It is an alliance of more than 180 faith-based, advocacy and human rights organizations. The coalition's member organizations represent 130 million people of all ages, races, religions and political affiliations united together to help the people of Darfur. For more information on the coalition, please visit www.SaveDarfur.org. To obtain footage from the Darfur border region, coalition events, various interviews, and more, please visit the Save Darfur Coalition media gallery at <http://media.savedarfur.org>. All footage may be previewed in non-broadcast quality and may be purchased in broadcast quality by filling out the purchase request form provided on the site.



ABOUT DREAM FOR DARFUR

Olympic Dream for Darfur is a global advocacy campaign. Our goal is to secure protection for civilians in Darfur. Our strategy is to use the 2008 Olympics to focus attention on the special relationship between Sudan and China. China, host of the next Olympics, is uniquely positioned to exert real and consequential influence to help resolve the crisis in Darfur. For more information, please visit www.dreamfordarfur.org.