The Rising Influence of China in Africa
Recommendations for British foreign policy on China
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TRADE

Policy recommendation: an institutional framework is needed between Britain, China and African states, in order to make sure future regulations are discussed with China.

In 2012, it became Africa's second biggest trading partner. Its trade with Africa represented approximately half of that of the European Union. It exported twice as much to Africa as the United States, and its imports from Africa were slightly superior to those of the United States (International Monetary Fund, 07/03/14).

Exports from Africa to Important Trade Partners (1980-2012)

In terms of oil trade, China imports half the amount of oil imported by the United States. 56 per cent of its oil comes from the Middle East, and 24 per cent from Africa. Specifically, 15 per cent of its total oil imports originate from Angola, 6 per cent from Sudan, and 3 per cent from Libya. In particular, China imported approximately 70 per cent of Sudan's oil in 2010.
China gives much less aid than the United States and the European Union to Africa. It gives $3.2 billion annually to Africa, whereas the United States and the European Union respectively gave $31 billion and $72 billion in 2011.

In 2011, Africa was the biggest recipient of Chinese aid in the world: 45.7 per cent went to Africa, 32.8 per cent to Asia; and 12.7 per cent to Latin America and the Caribbean.

This trade and aid presence is also mirrored by a demographic presence: between 500,000 and 800,000 Chinese migrants reside on the continent.
DIPLOMACY

Policy recommendations:
Make Chinese language compulsory for FCO and MOD officials
Encourage coordination within UN peacekeeping operations
Make bilateral military ties transparent – encourage cooperation between embassies
Discuss the pros and cons of military bases with Chinese officials
Encourage the signing and ratification of the ATT in China and African states.

At the international level, China has never prevented European states from intervening in Africa.

Constructive role in mediation activities, notably in Sudan and the DRC.

In its approach to mediation, with its focus on host-state consent, and the involvement of the pertinent regional organisation of which the host state is a member, China is showing initial signs of making rules for the world.

China has four types of security policies towards Africa, which are similar to those of European actors.

1. Participation in UN peacekeeping operations.
2. Bilateral military ties with at least 25 African states.
3. Planning on establishing military bases in East Africa.
4. Arms trade is an important aspect of this trade relation, although China's arms exports to Africa are inferior to those of Europe. From 2007 to 2010, China's exports represented approximately half of European states' arms exports to Sub-Saharan Africa, and one fifth of European arms exports to North Africa.

Three problems with Chinese arms exports have been highlighted by the media and NGOs.

1. Some Chinese companies have transferred arms illegally to Africa.
2. Chinese arms are often used by rebels.
3. China has not signed the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT).

To summarise:

China is a crucial economic partner for African states. Unlike European actors, it does not intervene militarily in conflicts in Africa. However, this does not mean that it has an aversion for military action. Like some European actors, it is involved in close military relations with African states.

This attitude can be explained in terms of economic realism: China intervenes for economic motives, and it makes sure it has bilateral military relations with African states in order to project its power there and at the international level.

China does not prevent European states and other international actors from deploying troops in a conflict zone.

It contributes to diplomatic mediation and the development of African organisations, and it takes part in UN peacekeeping operations. Normative realism provides the explanation for this: China is acting as a responsible international actor for reasons of prestige, in order to present a positive image of itself at the United Nations.