

THE ROLE OF CHINA IN THE AFRICAN CONTINENT: THE CASE OF SOUTH SUDAN

*O PAPEL DA CHINA NO CONTINENTE AFRICANO:
O CASO DO SUDÃO DO SUL*

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Abstract

The research aims to answer the following question: what is the relationship between China and South Sudan in the current context? The African continent, particularly South Sudan, emerged as an important strategic area of the globe in the twenty-first century. If on the one hand, Africans have mineral and energy resources, on the other, China has become an important player in the international scene, eager to expand its political and economic sphere of influence. Thus, South Sudan is a fertile territory suitable for Chinese investment because the country is rich in iron ore, copper, chromium, zinc, wolfram, malacacheta/mica, gold, silver, and diamonds, in addition to having one of the largest oil reserves in Africa. Therefore, the paper aims to analyse China's foreign policy for South Sudan from an international relations perspective, with special emphasis on economic, political, psychosocial, and military links. Finally, it also aims to contribute to the construction of a new instrument of analysis of international relations that unites two poles of global geopolitics.

Keywords: China, South Sudan, International Relations.

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Resumo

A pesquisa visa responder à seguinte pergunta: de que forma a China se relaciona com o Sudão do Sul, no contexto atual? O continente africano, particularmente o Sudão do Sul emergiu no século XXI como uma importante área estratégica do globo. Se por um lado, os africanos possuem riquezas minerais e energéticas, por outro a China surge como importante player no cenário internacional, ávido por expandir sua área de influência política e econômica. Neste contexto, o Sudão do Sul se apresenta como terreno fértil e propício para a investida chinesa, tendo em vista que é um país rico em jazidas de minério de ferro, cobre, cromo, zinco, volfrâmio, malacacheta/mica, ouro, prata e diamantes, além de ter uma das maiores reservas de petróleo na África. Desta feita, o trabalho pretende, sob o prisma das Relações Internacionais, analisar a política externa que a China adota em relação ao Sudão do Sul, destacando os enlances nos campos econômico, político, psicossocial e militar entre ambos. No final, pretende-se, ainda, contribuir para a construção de mais um instrumento de análise da relação internacional que une dois extremos da geopolítica mundial.

Palavras-Chave: *China, Sudão do Sul, Relações Internacionais.*

Introduction

Since 1970, China's foreign policy, led by Deng Xiaoping, focused on developed countries because the goal at the time was to attract countries that could invest in China. After this phase, the economic development achieved led to a different need: that of raw materials to ensure the production flow of the Chinese industry.

Pollock (2007, p. 57) states that the relationship between China and Africa began in 1955, the year of the Bandung Conference, and that, over the years, it has been reflected in China's support to African liberation movements and in the medical aid, transport infrastructure, and military support it provides to countries such as Angola, Tanzania, Zambia, Algeria, Congo, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe.

Specifically, in the case of Sudan, China initiated relations in the 1970s by sending medical teams and agricultural experts to assist the Sudanese. In 2005, the country was one of the witnesses to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) signed between northern and southern Sudan, which ended the civil war that had lasted for nearly 40 years and established the autonomous government of South Sudan. Since then, China has initiated formal relations with South Sudan and bilateral cooperation in various fields has increased steadily.

South Sudan has abundant deposits of iron ore, copper, chromium, zinc, wolfram, malacacheta/mica, uranium, bauxite, gold, silver, and diamonds, which, combined with its oil potential, justify the country's geopolitical and strategic importance. "South Sudan is known because of its rich reserve of oil deposits which is an important economic resource."¹

¹ Available from: <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/biggest-cities-in-south-sudan.html>. [Accessed 09 April 2017].

Attracted by the high potential for mining, China set up a consulate in Juba, opening the way for other institutions to enter the country. That same year, the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) funded the creation of a computer centre in a local university, providing South Sudan with incentives in the educational field as well.

In February 2011, the Chinese government announced that it recognised the results of South Sudan's self-determination referendum held on 9 January 2011, and China was among the first countries in the world to recognise the country's independence. On 9 July 2011, when the Republic of South Sudan was established, China's Minister of Housing and Urban-Rural Development, Jiang Weixin, attended the independence celebrations as the country's special envoy. On behalf of the Chinese government, Jiang signed the Joint Communiqué on the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries with South Sudanese Foreign Minister Deng Alor Kol. This means that on the day of the founding of South Sudan, China established official diplomatic relations with the new country, becoming one of the first countries to do so.

From 2013 onwards, with the Xi Jinping's induction, the Chinese government implemented economic and social reforms and moved towards a stronger foreign policy that would bring greater stability and security to China. Jinping's stance sought, on the one hand, to create and/or re-establish markets that could absorb the Chinese production and, on the other, to develop that production by guaranteeing the supply of mineral and energy resources. Hence the Chinese interest in African countries, particularly South Sudan, a country that has an abundance of these resources.

The relationship with China has provided African countries the opportunity to increase their political, economic, social, and military infrastructure. China is Africa's largest trading partner since 2009, according to data from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)², generating about \$85 billion³ in 2017.

In the context of International Relations, China has been a major player in the international arena, and its participation in international organizations has been significant. The country is a permanent member of the UN Security Council and its relations with Africa spark the interest of those who wish to understand modern geopolitics.

In addition to the above, South Sudan, the world's newest independent country, is a developing country with internal problems that are causing a serious humanitarian crisis in the African continent. Moreover, the country has vast reserves of natural and mineral resources which have attracted the attention of foreign investors, especially from China.

Therefore, this paper analyses the relationship between China and South Sudan to identify the interests of that power in a young country that is in the midst of severe political, economic, and military instability but that shows great promise regarding its strategic reserves, and

² Available from: <http://www.oecd.org/dev/africaneconomicoutlook2011.htm>. [Accessed 09 April 2018]; and from: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/realspin/2017/10/18/china-is-africas-biggest-economic-partner-but-what-role-for-the-united-states/#646ae1fb7f43> [Accessed 09 April 2018].

³ Available from: http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/business/2017-08/03/content_30345488.htm [Accessed 09 April 2018].

to answer the following research question: in the current context, what is the relationship between China and South Sudan?

The paper's object of study is the relationship between China and South Sudan. The paper aims to analyse China's foreign policy for South Sudan, with special emphasis on the economic, political, psychosocial, and military links between the two countries. In order to achieve the general objective, specific objectives have been formulated which provide a logic for the theoretical reasoning explored in this study: describing the characteristics of South Sudan; examining China's foreign policy for the African continent; analysing the importance of South Sudan in Africa and Sino-South Sudanese relations, describing them in political, economic, psychosocial, and military terms.

As for the methodology, the work consists of a theoretical essay based on a review of the literature and a documentary research that included published articles, theses, and dissertations by authors who addressed the following topics: defence and security; Chinese International Relations; neorealism; security in Africa; China's foreign policy; the formation of South Sudan; Sino-African relations; and by authors who wrote about the issues of imperialism and interdependence in International Relations. This procedure will allow us to prepare a work plan with a proposal for a feasible approach to the topic, prioritising the concepts, main ideas, and objectives to be achieved while obtaining a broad overview of the object of study – the relationship between China and South Sudan –, in line with the basic procedures advocated by Raymond Quivy and Luc Van Campenhoudt in their book *Manual de Investigação em Ciências Sociais* [Handbook of Research in Social Sciences, Portuguese edition] (Quivy et al, 2013, p. 24).

The topic for this paper is interdisciplinary because it has its roots in military science, a field in which several areas of knowledge intersect, such as political science, social science, and International Relations.

As for organization, the work is divided as follows: Introduction; 1. Theories and conceptualisations; 2. China's foreign policy for Africa; 3. South Sudan in the African continent; 4. Sino-South Sudanese relations; and Conclusions. Thus, we aim to draw conclusions about how China conducts its relations with South Sudan.

1. Theories and conceptualisations

The paper intends to be an approach to Military Science by way of International Relations, establishing a symbiotic link between the application of military power and foreign policy, between soldier and diplomat, and demonstrating the Clausewitzian concept that “war is the continuation of politics by other means [...]” (1984, p. 69).

To understand the question that we propose to answer, we must first understand Kissinger's (2015, p. 359) statement that the end of the Cold War brought multipolarity to International Relations, which was accelerated by the globalisation process. This process directly influenced the emergence of a diffuse and extremely complex operational environment with diversified threats, creating instability and triggering local and regional conflicts. Therefore, the end

of a major event such as the Cold War paved the way for a new era of international politics, reestablishing the parameters of International Relations, which now viewed individuals as beings worthy of protection (Rothschild, 1995, p. 54).

The common thread that will facilitate our understanding of the complex problems in the present-day international environment is rooted in the Marxist concepts advocated by Lenin regarding imperialism at the onset of the twentieth century and the belief that there were economic motives behind the Great War of 1914-1918. Lenin argued that to expand their production capacity, the European powers needed to dominate the colonies, to exploit their raw materials, and to create an international labour organization, describing imperialism as the highest stage of capitalism (Lenin, 2003, p. 52). The imperialist stage is therefore associated with the use of force to capture territories that could guarantee the industrial development of the dominant country.

In his book written in 1910, Norman Angell argued for the need to review the political axioms, stating that it was a misconception that war generated material benefits through territorial expansion, proposing, as a counterpoint to imperialism, that “political and military power is economically futile – that is to say, can do nothing for the trade and well-being of the individuals exercising such power” (Angell, 2002, p. 26). Thus, by calling into question one of the oldest human traditions – war –, Angell proposed a new perspective from which to analyse International Relations, based on liberal premises, which was strengthened by the fact that the 1929 economic crisis that had its epicenter in New York was felt in London. In light of this, Angell argued that a nation or territory cannot remain isolated without causing harm to others (Angell, 2002, p. 40). This led to the emergence of the theory of mutual dependence in International Relations, which dismissed as unfeasible any benefits to be gained from conquering territory and used mechanisms such as courier services, instantaneous news broadcasts, and communication programmes to mitigate animosity among nations.

Edward Carr relied on empirical studies to address relations between states, exploring the truth of the facts and noting that states do not seek the good of society but rather private goals (Carr, 2001, p. 128), in opposition to Norman Angell’s theories, and introducing the theory of realism. The theory was inspired by Morgenthau’s ideas, which held that only a rational foreign policy would be able to minimise risks and maximise benefits (Morgenthau, 2003, p. 16), increasing rationality and morality in International Relations.

Thus, foreign policy is one of the manifestations of political power, which in turn is the “[...] relation between those who exercise it and those over whom it is exercised” (Morgenthau, 2003, p. 51). However “by political power, we refer to the mutual relations of control among the holders of public authority and between the latter and the people at large” (Morgenthau, 2003, p. 51). Even if a nation’s foreign policy is well accepted in the international scene, it will come to nothing if it is not supported by good government, Morgenthau argues (2003, p. 280).

Good government, viewed as an independent requirement of national power, means three things: balance between, on the one hand, the material and human resources that go into the making of national power and, on the other, the foreign

policy to be pursued; balance among those resources; and popular support for the foreign policies to be pursued (Morgenthau, 2003, p. 280-281).

Beginning with the conviction that individuals are good and that it is society that corrupts them, Morgenthau explored the concept of international anarchy as a lack of political governance and argued that bridging this gap would require the balance of power. Thus, “the aspiration for power on the part of several nations, each trying either to maintain or to overthrow the status quo, leads of necessity to a configuration which is called the balance of power and to policies which aim at preserving it” (Morgenthau, 2003, p. 321), promoting stability in a system composed of several autonomous forces.

The means employed to maintain the equilibrium consist in allowing the different elements to pursue their opposing tendencies up to the point where the tendency of one is not so strong as to overcome the tendency of the others, but strong enough to prevent the others from overcoming its own. (Morgenthau, 2003, p. 324).

It was in this context that China emerged as a counterbalance in the period of the Cold War, thus increasing the relevance of its present-day role, particularly after the Shanghai Cooperation.

For Raymond Aron, another proponent of political realism, International Relations is the extension of group interests, as Lenin wrote. However, for Aron, power is the ability of a state to influence the conduct of other states (Aron, 2002, p. 141). Aron places the same importance on the political and the military because they are part of the same society, and views the diplomat and the soldier through the prism of internal power relations, which extend to foreign policy. Therefore, he places great importance on armies, and considers that military power is a relevant force in a state’s international autonomy. Aron does not view strategic thinking as separate from political thinking, but believes that relations between states are established in two ways: diplomacy in peacetime and the military in wartime (Aron, 2002, p. 24).

Hedley Bull was the leading theorist of the English “Realist” School. For Bull, society was formed by a world order established between states, which in turn was characterised by the absence of a controlling entity, hence the term anarchical society. Thus, he believed that diplomacy played an important role in International Relations by facilitating communication and negotiating agreements on behalf of the state using peaceful means (Bull, 2002, p. 187).

Waltz approached International Relations from a neorealist perspective, defending that war was a means to adjust and control relations between states. Waltz argues that “structures emerge from the coexistence of the primary political units of a given era, be they city-states, nations, or empires” (Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff Jr, 2011, p. 105) but also stresses the importance of the state in International Relations and the need for a balance of power (Waltz, 2011, p. 164). One of the factors that compose this balance of power is the economic system, which Waltz divided into two types: command economy and market economy. In the first, a regulating entity coordinates and makes decisions about production

and consumption, while in the second there is coordination, but no coordinating entity (Duarte and Campos, 2013, p. 65).

The Theory of Interdependence described by Keohane and Nye influenced world politics and the behaviour of states, going beyond Realist Theory, which, upon examination, reveals that the application of military power alone is not sufficient as the main instrument to counteract the anarchical system. Proponents of this theory recognise that the system exists, but argue that the solution lies in a policy of cooperation between states (Axelrod and Kehone, 1985, p. 243), giving the same priority to both security and economic issues.

“Generally, they [the authors] argue that situations of interdependence are not balanced; they are usually the midpoint between two extremes: perfect symmetry, on the one hand, and complete dependence on the other” (Galvão, 1993, p. 150). Therefore, the theory of interdependence points out that traditional military force has lost its relevance as an instrument of power because status and power are increasingly determined by economic criteria (Keohane et al, 2012, p. 24).

Thus, to achieve the research objective and based on the concepts described above, this work addresses the main aspects of China’s foreign policy for the African continent and analyses China’s engagements in South Sudan.

2. China’s foreign policy for Africa

Bell (2008, cited in Teles and Souza, 2015, p. 71) states that the pillars of China’s foreign policy were formulated in the last century, however, it is also said that current Chinese policy was largely shaped over several years by various cultural issues. One example of this is Confucianism, a traditional Chinese philosophical doctrine viewed by some as a religion, which can be defined as follows:

Confucianism was named after the western name of its creator, Confucius (551 BC - 479 AD), a Chinese philosopher who analysed Chinese society and proposed a set of values for individuals to follow, which are collected in the *Analects* or *The Conversations of Confucius*, a book compiled by his disciples. The influence of Confucianism went beyond providing a set of teachings about morality and decency, but extended to dynasties and their policies, taking roots in Chinese society and becoming a part of its tradition (Bell, 2008; Kissinger, 2011 cited in Teles and Souza, 2015, p. 71).

The Confucian doctrine was consolidated over the years and, thanks to its specific features, went from an ideological influence to a constant presence in political life:

The core feature of Confucianism is the development of harmonious relations between members of society as well as between Chinese society and those outside it. This harmony aims to establish peaceful internal and external relations based on mutual respect between parties. Confucius’ teachings propose elements that regulate community life: humanity (*ren*), ritual decorum (*li*), and respect (*xiao*), principles which contribute to the more general goal of bringing harmony to Chinese society (Adler, 2011; Kissinger, 2011; Yao, 2000, cited in Teles and Souza, 2015, p. 71).

Inspired by the Confucian principles described above, particularly respect and humanity, over the years China has adopted a foreign policy that cultivates good relations with third countries to ensure its political and economic interests, such as peaceful coexistence and respect for the sovereignty of states.

Africa is important because it helps China balance its relations with the United States and with other Western powers. But healthy Sino-African relations also provide China with a platform through which it is able to establish and polish its “South-South” cooperation relations (Wenping, 2007, p. 27), increasing its area of influence in the continent.

Power and Mohan (2010, p. 478) argue that multipolarity, anti-hegemonism, and non-interference are the old concepts of a relatively weak and isolated China. The new concepts of a strong and globally engaged China – peaceful rise, win-win diplomacy, and harmonious world – are more consistent with multilateralism than multipolarity. However, Racy and Oliveira (2015, p. 51) argue that the reason some Western analysts criticise China’s relations with Africa is that they are based solely on guaranteeing the supply of oil and other natural resources, leading to claims that China, blinded by its aims, supports authoritarian regimes to the detriment of “democracy” and “human rights” (Eisenman, 2005, p. 9-11).

Against this background, isolated and facing competition from other countries, China has pursued a policy of rapprochement with the African continent:

Economically, China has had a very special interest in partnerships with African countries since the 1990s, that is, when the country was isolated by some Western states, Africa emerged as an alternative market for Chinese products and also served as an alternative way to meet China’s energy needs as the country lost its self-sufficiency that decade (Teles and Souza, 2015, p. 71).

Lopes, Cardoso, and Vadell (2013, p. 85) state that, from the perspective of African countries, one thing that makes China’s entry into the continent attractive is that the country’s foreign policy has historically been based on the principles of peaceful coexistence, legal equality between states, and the development of win-win relations.

The characteristics of China’s foreign policy allow for a broadening of diplomatic and economic relations between China and African countries:

The five principles of peaceful coexistence are more relevant than ever in this new phase of relations between China and the countries of the African continent. Furthermore, China has committed to respecting the different political systems and paths of development chosen by Africa’s nations; to support the African cooperation unit and the Organization of African Unity (AU). Finally, China advocates a stance of equality among states. In other words, the active participation of African states in the international system should occur in an egalitarian manner – a primary aspect of crucial importance for Sino-African economic cooperation and relations. Thus, China’s entry into Africa illustrates its leadership in the world of developing countries and is an example of South-South Cooperation (Lopes, Cardoso and Vadell, 2013, p. 87).

Large (2009, p. 611) states that, during the Maoist period until the early 1990s, People’s China deployed a “thick” ideological rhetoric in its foreign relations – of sovereignty, equality,

non-interference, and solidarity –, in the midst of a “thin” content of actual aid, trade, and political relations in Sudan, which marked its initial interest in the region.

According to Schiere (2014, p. 49), for many fragile sub-Saharan states, China and traditional donors play an important role in reconstruction and peacebuilding. This includes rebuilding physical infrastructure, basic social services, public finances, as well as acceptable economic growth and job creation. Post-conflict reconstruction is more successful in establishing stable democracies and peace processes when it is accompanied by post-conflict economic growth (Travers and Owen, 2007, cited in Schiere, p. 49). However, the greatest challenge for the success of the development community is adapting to the dynamic process of peacebuilding, which is only carried out by local actors (Brinkerhoff, 2011 cited in Schiere, p. 49). This fact is the reason why the New Deal principles include national ownership, and why they are in line with China’s South-South approach, which respects the principles of national sovereignty.

Ross (2015, p. 23) states that China is one of the largest investors in Africa, that Chinese foreign direct investment (FDI) in Africa has increased significantly over the last decade, and that the implications for African countries must also be considered. First, African countries that do not have properly developed infrastructure or a business-friendly regulatory environment will find it difficult to attract investment from one of the continent’s largest investors, which can lead them to lose out on FDI-related advantages. Second, because Chinese investment in Africa is focused on the acquisition of FDI in the form of natural resources, host countries must ensure that they are not exploited to the detriment of the country in the long run, which can be achieved by improving the environment and increasing the ease of doing business, helping expose African countries to the prospects of a broad range of international investors.

Finally, China has a strong presence in Africa because its foreign policy is centred on the principles of Confucian doctrine, without neglecting its economic interests in the region.

3. South Sudan in the African continent

This section analyses the importance of South Sudan to the African continent to understand Sino-South Sudanese relations. This African country with capital in Juba has borders with the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, and Sudan. The following excerpt is a brief summary of its history:

South Sudan saw two civil wars which were essentially about constitutional arrangements and the rights to self-determination for South Sudanese and people in other peripheries. The second, between the Government of Sudan and the guerrilla movement the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A), began in 1983. From 1986 the parties negotiated in different forums; a peace settlement was finally reached in 2005. This provided for a six-and-half-year transitional period (2005 to 2011), during which South Sudan was a semi-autonomous entity. Relations between the SPLM – the rebel movement-cum-political party – and the National Congress Party in Khartoum – their partners in peace – were stormy. Few expected the peace agreement to last; one of the

contingencies was the lack of internal cohesion within the rebel movement. Except for some minor rebellions and defections, however, the SPLM managed to stay united during the interim period (Rolandsen et al, 2015, p. 88).

Although South Sudan is a recent country, it has had a political structure for decades, with roots that go back to the outset of a major political movement that signed the 2005 peace agreement after the Second Civil War: the Sudan People's Liberation Movement.

Riak (2013, p. 490) states that South Sudan is dominated by the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) and its military wing, the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA). The other political parties are weak and are often repressed into not speaking up about the country's governance issues. Civil society is weak and its members are often coerced and tortured to refrain from talking about government corruption. Therefore, measuring the perceptions of people in the street is the only way to get a sense of how prevalent corruption is.

As for the psychosocial area, according to the Sudan Household Health Survey (2007 cited in Oliveira e Silva, 2011, p. 25), South Sudan was born with some of the worst social indicators in the world. Basic sanitation infrastructure is virtually inexistent and only 13% of the population has access to treated water, 3.3% to piped water and sewage, and 90% of the population is below the poverty line and subsists on less than a dollar a day (Oliveira and Silva, 2001, p. 25).

In addition, the country only has three hospitals and a ratio of only one doctor per five-hundred-thousand people. These data paint a grim picture. There are several reasons for the fact that South Sudan has the highest infant mortality rate in the world, such as the lack of health personnel, services, and medication, among other factors. Furthermore, estimates for 2015 reveal a maternal mortality rate of 789 deaths per thousand children, making the country one of the worst in the world in this area⁴.

For Badal (1990, p. 265), the policy of preserving the Muslim North, which follows Islamic law, would later lead to a full-fledged "Southern Policy" because the South was in favour of maintaining Christianization as the status quo. In brief, this meant introducing stricter measures to contain the Islamic influence in South Sudan, sowing the seeds of the conflict to come.

Buzan and Waver (2003, p. 242) state that the long civil war and famine in Sudan killed more than 2 million people and displaced about 5 million more, resulting in serious social problems. Nascimento (2012, p. 27) states that, in addition to this problem, its internal characteristics marked by ethnic and religious diversity and its history of conflict make Sudan a particularly interesting case from the perspective of the theoretical discussion about the role of ethnic and religious differences as causes of violence.

The ethnic issue was the main reason for the problems that arose between the various groups in the country, as described below:

⁴ Available from: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/the-world-factbook/geos/od.html> [Accessed 10 April 2017].

Another issue for the new nation refers to the ethnic conflicts in the territory. Sudan was culturally dominated by a Sunni Arab majority of about 34 million people, while in the Republic of South Sudan there was an ethnic mix of approximately 200 culturally interdependent groups with their own languages and traditions. In this context, the Dinka ethnic group maintained control of the southern territory, especially in the Jonglei region, northwest of Juba, where the land is extremely fertile for cattle breeding and in water reserves. In the months that followed the independence of the new republic, the fighting intensified between the nomadic Arab tribes and the black Dinka farmers for the right to access these natural resources, resulting in the displacement of thousands of people (Sánchez, 2011 cited in Freitas, 2013, p. 179).

Against the background of the internal conflicts that broke out in the post-independence period, the securitization of security issues in South Sudan led to the emergence of new irregular armies, militias, and rebel groups in various locations.

Economically-speaking, according to Oliveira and Silva (2011, p. 25), the new country lacks a complex transport, energy, or communications infrastructure, since the one that exists is concentrated in Khartoum, Sudan's capital. South Sudan only has 50 km of paved roads in a territory of 619 thousand km², and most of the asphalted roads are concentrated in the outskirts of Juba, the capital. In addition, part of the few infrastructures left from the colonial era was destroyed in the country's first civil war (1955-1972) and was never rebuilt. The little that remained was destroyed during the second civil war (1983-2005).

On the other hand, Dash (2012, p. 87) argues that South Sudan is one of the largest oil producers in sub-Saharan Africa and that the country has opened new channels for transnational partnerships and export earnings in the oil industry. The globalisation of oil, the diversification of supply and demand, and the transnationalisation of the process of exploration, production, and transportation have created a means for emerging African countries to use their oil resources as a diplomatic instrument to implement their foreign policies.

Over the last decades, the United States of America has been a major oil explorer in the Sudan and South Sudan region. However, the Sudanese Government's relationship with terrorist cells, the insecurity in the region, the condemnation of the Sudanese president by the International Criminal Court, and the economic embargoes imposed on the country have sidelined investments in Sudan and the main US company, Chevron, left the region before the signing of the peace agreement in 2005.

Against this background, China seized the opportunity to acquire concessions that were previously owned by US companies. Freitas (2013, p. 185) states that China and the United States are the main economic partners in the export of southern petroleum and that they could cooperate to intervene in the internal conflict in the country, promoting agreements and peaceful mechanisms of conflict resolution. In addition, China has always had good trade relations with Sudan:

Since the establishment of its relations with African countries, but mainly from the 1990s China developed projects in a number of areas. Oil and other natural resources account for a large part of Beijing's investment in the continent. In the

face of Beijing's growth, the strategy of the great western powers of progressively controlling China's access to natural resources, particularly in Central Asia, led the Chinese government to turn to developing countries, especially those in Africa, a continent that, in 2007, owned approximately 10% of the world's oil reserves. Thus, Sudan and Angola – in the first decade of 2000, the latter surpassed Saudi Arabia as the largest supplier of oil to Beijing – would be among the most important energy partners in Africa (Visentini, 2014, p. 45).

Therefore, South Sudan's geopolitical importance for the African continent is due to its mineral and natural resources, which attract the economic and political partnership of the two main world powers: the United States of America and China. However, the country has serious psychosocial and security problems.

4. Sino-South Sudanese relations

This section deals with Sino-South Sudanese relations in the various arenas of power. According to the ICG (2017, p. 1), China's proactive approach to South Sudan seemingly contradicts its longstanding non-interference principle. Indeed, the official rhetoric may suggest that the doctrine has not changed, but China's interpretation of non-interference has evolved to reflect the national interests and goals. Even as the theoretical discussion continues, Beijing has devised a middle way, maintaining the broad principle of non-interference while stretching its interpretation and experimenting with various forms of application⁵.

Brautigam (2009, p. 10) states that the costs of China's rapid industrialization are now being taken into consideration by the country's "great leaders". For many Africans, these costs are invisible and China's prosperity is reflected in the numbers of traders that arrive to sell goods and in the growing numbers of Chinese tourists and delegations of Chinese business leaders traveling to Africa. The idea of China as a model of prosperity has captured the imagination of many ordinary Africans, but others fear the threat of competition from the Chinese industrial giant and the increasing numbers of Chinese traders competing in local African markets.

China is a different kind of donor and strategic partner because it is also a developing country, and its development success, which can be seen in its rapid economic transformation and its reduction of poverty, lend it credibility as a partner with relevant and recent experience (Brautigam, 2009, p. 11).

China's aid and economic cooperation differ both in the content and the norms of its aid programmes. Chinese assistance is considerably simpler and has changed little over recent years. Influenced by their own experience of development and by the requests of beneficiary countries, Chinese aid and economic cooperation programmes emphasise infrastructure, production, and education at a time when traditional donors downplay them. Chinese loans for infrastructure aim to reduce the high costs of production, but the contracts are tied to Chinese firms. Subsidies for productive joint ventures should be directed at creating jobs,

⁵ Available from: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/south-sudan/288-china-s-foreign-policy-experiment-south-sudan> [Accessed 28 November 2017].

local capacity, and demand for Chinese machinery and equipment. Chinese aid largely consists of loans for buyers of Chinese products and tariff-free access to commodities from low-income African countries. Furthermore, popular rotating health teams have staffed local hospitals for decades (Brautigam, 2009, p. 11).

In June 2017, the United Nations World Food Program (WFP) received a \$5 million contribution from the government of the People's Republic of China to provide food aid to 160,000 people suffering acute hunger in South Sudan, including 30,000 children under five. South Sudan is experiencing the worst levels of acute hunger since independence, and in some parts of the country more than 90,000 people are affected. An estimated 5.5 million people in the country do not know where their next meal will come from. China's contribution has allowed the WFP to buy and distribute about 2,400 tonnes of sorghum, a local foodstuff. This was the second time in two years that China contributed to the WFP's food aid operation in the country⁶.

In October 2017, the Chinese government sent its third batch of emergency relief rice to the government of South Sudan (which consists of 60 containers with 1,500 tons of rice, 27 containers of non-food items including 3,700 tents, 15,000 packages of mosquito nets, and 30,000 blankets). The first two batches of emergency relief rice, a total 2,750 tonnes, were delivered in August and September 2017, the fourth batch of 1,000 tonnes of rice is now being shipped from Mombasa of Kenya to Juba, and the fifth batch of 1,000 tonnes of rice is on its way to shipping via sea freight. The remaining rice will be shipped to South Sudan in several batches according to China's handling capacity. Since December 2013, China has consistently provided regular and emergency humanitarian assistance to South Sudan. China will continue, within its capacity, to provide strong support to the South Sudanese in the areas of humanitarian aid and nation building⁷.

China has also provided psychosocial aid to South Sudan in the form of university education. About 200 South Sudanese students received scholarships to study at various Chinese universities. The programme is one of the ways in which China contributes to the development of South Sudan by supporting the development of the country's human resources. Attending study programmes in China will increase the expertise of the people of South Sudan, a country that has been at war since 2013. China has offered 4100 scholarships and short-term training programmes for South Sudanese people since the new nation gained independence in July 2011⁸.

Breslin (2013, p. 1285) notes the importance of Chinese exports, highlighting its role as an arms supplier, as an exporter of major industrial plants and technology, including energy-related technology, and as a supplier of consumer goods, particularly textiles and low-tech consumer goods.

⁶ *World Food Programme (WFP)*. Available from: <https://www.wfp.org/news/news-release/china-contributes-us5-million-wfps-emergency-operation-south-sudan> [Accessed 27 November 2017].

⁷ *Embassy of the People's Republic of China in South Sudan*. Available from: <http://ss.chineseembassy.org/eng/sbjw/t1501334.htm> [Accessed 28 November 2017].

⁸ *Sudan Tribune*. Available from: <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article63398> [Accessed 28 November 2017].

Security is a crucial issue in the relationship between China and South Sudan. According to Large (2016, p. 40), the Government of South Sudan (GRSS) received a Chinese arms shipment which was detailed in a UN sanctions panel report documenting a shipment of arms, ammunition, and material that the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) received from Norinco (China North Industries Group Corporation) in July 2014. This arms shipment, which was worth about \$46.8 million according to the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, was sent before the outset of the war. Moreover, the simple fact that, at the same time as the Chinese government sought to promote peace and participate in UN peacekeeping in a conflict marked by massive civilian suffering, a Chinese company was supplying weapons of war to Juba paints a dramatic picture, that of the mixed, contradictory role played by a Chinese engagement involving multiple actors (Large, 2016, p. 41).

Large (2016, p. 36) states that from the perspective of the Chinese government, Beijing's relations with South Sudan were greatly influenced by its engagement in Sudan, especially since the mid-1990s, when the Sino-Sudanese oil partnership was initiated. The oil operations led by the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) began and were expanded during the civil wars that were taking place in Sudan at the time; that is, not only the North-South conflict, but also the conflict within the territory of South Sudan. The largest foreign power with a practical interest in a peaceful southern Sudan is China. Chinese companies have a 40 per cent stake in South Sudan's largest oil fields, which in turn represent 5% of China's oil imports (Large, 2016, p. 36).

The Chinese ambassador to South Sudan confirmed that the country's oil industry continued to be "vital to the Chinese economy" and to "oil import security" since southern oil prices were stronger in 2013 and because China imported 3.5 million tons of crude oil from the country in the same year (Martina, 2014 cited in Barber, 2014, p. 226).

It is also important to note that, according to Large (2016, p. 38), it was in this context that China's relations with South Sudan developed and were formally shaped by China's leading role in the oil sector. This meant that, in addition to the challenges that strengthening its political relations and developing its economic involvement in South Sudan entailed, China was dependent on the turbulent relationship between South Sudan and Sudan.

The Chinese state-owned oil companies shared the Chinese government's concern with protecting the immediate well-being of Chinese workers operating in conflict-stricken areas as well as with protecting their oil investments. Although reliable and accurate oil production statistics are hard to come by, before December 2013, South Sudan's reported production level was about 245,000 barrels per day (bpd), although in October 2013 the Ministry of Petroleum and Mining stated it was about 190,000 bpd. In March 2014, oil production in South Sudan was about 167,000 bpd and 140,000 bpd in 2015 (Large, 2016, p. 40).

According to the ICG (2017, p. 1), oil companies were not alone in investing in South Sudan. Other companies followed, and so did Chinese loans. Bilateral trade reached \$534 million in 2012 and, by 2013, about 100 Chinese companies were registered in South Sudan, in the energy, engineering, construction, telecommunications, medical, hotels, restaurants, and retail sectors. For some, South Sudan was an "investor's paradise": a country rich in oil

earnings, with huge infrastructure needs, almost no industry, and no western competition. Cheap rent and labour meant low operational costs, and profit margins reached 50 per cent before the current economic crisis. However, according to the ICG (2017, p. 1), when the civil war broke out in December 2013, the CNPC evacuated many of its employees in company planes and other Chinese citizens fled using caravans⁹.

Large (2016, p. 36) argues that China's security adjustment was multifaceted, and that the country's responses to the threats that the conflict posed to Chinese interests were set up by Chinese agencies in coordination with the government, together with an effort to contribute to UN peacekeeping as part of China's multinational role, which extends to the UN Security Council. Such responses went beyond the relations of the central Chinese government with the government of South Sudan because they featured other actors, mainly corporations.

Benabdallah (2016, p. 24) states that Chinese peacekeeping missions are involved in training the local security forces. For example, he points out that the former Prime Minister of Mali, Moussa Mara, expressed that "Chinese peacekeepers are not only a force of peace; they are also a force of development. They understand that maintaining peace not only means weaponry and sending troops, but also means improving the livelihoods of locals. Chinese peacekeepers have won the hearts of the Malian people". Moussa Mara's statement suggests that Chinese peacekeepers play an important role in shaping China's image abroad and work directly to convey that China's role in Africa is peaceful and non-aggressive. According to the author, of all the permanent members of the UN Security Council, China is currently the largest supplier of peacekeeping troops, providing 10% of the budget of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO).

However, China's foreign policy in South Sudan, where it is a key player in peace talks and development, is facing challenges that call into question the effectiveness of the relationship between development and security. The Chinese government has certainly worked hard to provide investment, development and capacity building programmes for South Sudan, and the significant increase in South Sudan's GDP is partly due to China's involvement. However, despite all efforts, economic growth in South Sudan did not translate into an environment of peace and security. More importantly, China's bilateral relations with South Sudan are at a very low point because of the uncertainty caused by the disputes between Sudan and South Sudan (Benabdallah, 2016, p. 26).

Benabdallah (2016, p. 26) reports that China was one of the first countries to recognise the establishment of the new state of South Sudan, and that business focused on obtaining oil exports. However, in late 2013, a series of violent conflicts broke out between rival factions within South Sudan, leading to the evacuation of about four hundred Chinese oil workers and to a decrease in exports. When the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) rushed to issue statements calling for an immediate ceasefire and urging the South Sudanese government to protect Chinese citizens in the country, it did so without evoking the non-

⁹ Available from: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/south-sudan/288-china-s-foreign-policy-experiment-south-sudan> [Accessed 28 November 2017].

interference principle. MOFA played a proactive role as a mediator in the negotiations between belligerent factions in Addis Ababa in 2014, and, in May 2014 China deployed 314 soldiers to the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS). This first contribution consisted of non-combatant peacekeepers that were sent to work on development projects such as drilling water wells, building housing units, and providing basic medical assistance. In September 2014, China announced that a second unit of seven hundred troops would deploy with UNMISS, four hundred of whom were withdrawn in April 2015 when a rebel group captured the main oil fields. This was the first time in China's history that the mandate of its peacekeeping troops included the protection of civilians, peacekeepers, and infrastructure.

China is one of South Sudan's most important political partners. Large (2016, p. 42) states that China's political engagement with South Sudan has evolved considerably after the young nation became independent, interlinking direct and indirect connections, bilateral intrastate relations, and party ties. Moreover, China's support in international mediation efforts means that it is taking on a more multilateral role. While economic interests are still a major driver in China's engagement, the challenges that protecting investments and providing conflict responses entail require an adaptation of its political involvement. China and the Republic of South Sudan continued to maintain regular bilateral ties at the highest level and Beijing prioritised relations with the South Sudanese central government, ruling party, and army (Large, 2016, p. 42).

According to the ICG (2017, p. 1), the Chinese influence encouraged Khartoum to exercise restraint in South Sudan, which also helped prepare the Sudanese government in 2016 for negotiations over sanctions relief from Washington, which advocated the same approach. This influence contributed to solve the pending issues between Sudan and South Sudan, and it was the first time that China played the role of mediator in foreign soil¹⁰.

Conclusions

This paper led us to conclude that the Chinese presence has occurred at a rhythm and intensity that indicate an initiative with strong political and strategic content, which goes beyond the traditional economic linkages that characterise Chinese relations.

After the rise of Deng Xiaoping, the Chinese economy grew strong. This was partly due to the stance of China's foreign policy for Africa, which allowed it to establish a direct economic presence and significantly influence the continent's development policies.

However, since 2009, China has emerged as one of Africa's major partners. Particularly in the case of South Sudan, China has been actively restructuring the country, contributing to peacebuilding, and rebuilding physical infrastructure, basic services, and the finance sector. Thus, China's foreign policy seeks to open a way for building the South Sudanese nation.

¹⁰ Available from: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/south-sudan/288-china-s-foreign-policy-experiment-south-sudan> [Accessed 28 November 2017].

China, for its part, has attached importance to cooperation with African countries, and, to a large extent, this has allowed it to expand its sphere of influence to developing countries, particularly in the African continent. The Chinese rapprochement to Africa was marked by characteristics such as peaceful coexistence and the search for legal equality between states, and the fact that China respected the principles of national sovereignty ensured the strengthening of those ties.

Given the geopolitical importance of South Sudan and China's constant search for innovative ways to pursue its foreign policy, although the two countries are in opposing poles in the international scene China has occupied a vacuum in the sectors of South Sudan that lacked assistance from the Western powers, conquering that space by historically respecting the Confucian principles, which allowed it to expand its influence in Africa.

Furthermore, China's appreciation for national sovereignty, equality, and mutual respect sets the country apart from other nations and proves that China values the domestic stability and territorial integrity of the world's nations, which has greatly facilitated its entry into the African continent.

The above allows us to conclude that current Sino-South Sudanese relations show trends linked to the theory of interdependence between states, the main proponents of which are Keohane and Nye. There are also traits of the economic system described by Waltz, with China playing the role of coordinating country, which has generated benefits for both sides. For China, the benefits, which are a determining factor in whether it remains in the region, lie in strengthening its presence and influence on the African continent as well as in its trade relations. For South Sudan, these relations are a social and economic driver that is largely beneficial to the development of South Sudan as a nation.

Finally, although China's military power is far superior to that of South Sudan, the path it has chosen is not marked by soldiers but by mutual cooperation. Thus, China uses interdependence as a source of power because, as the less dependent member of the relationship, it has more political resources to control the outcome of negotiations, and this helps it enhance its international projection while cooperating to foster growth and development in South Sudan.

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