Peace from Outsiders

The United States and China in Darfur's Peace Process

Cheng Zilong

Abstract: This paper categorizes intervention activities into two types, namely, coercive and supportive ones. Both means are usually applied together in resolving internal conflicts of a fragile country, yet Western powers tend to employ coercive intervention more frequently, while developing countries prefer supportive intervention. By comparing the roles that the United States and China played in the Darfur crisis as a case study, this paper explores how different means of intervention interact and how the means adopted by one party influence the other's policy orientation. The mutual construction of national interests, national capacity and international values of different intervening powers constitute the analytical framework of this paper. In the case of Darfur, coercive intervention was found to impose more influence on the supportive one, while the latter played an indispensable role in facilitating the peace process in Darfur. As a leading power in favor of supportive engagement, China should learn to better deal with the coercive means of Western powers while working with

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all parties concerned to resolve internal conflicts of the target country by a pragmatic approach.

Keywords: Coercive intervention; supportive intervention; Darfur crisis; the United States; China.

Generally, foreign intervention is regarded as a forcible and punitive means to shape the target party's behavior. Foreign intervention against one or both sides in a civil war tends to influence the dynamics of the conflict. After heated debate between the right to intervene in a sovereign state and the duty to protect the well-being of the people, it has been widely accepted that when fragile states are experiencing domestic conflicts, the international community needs to consider imposing humanitarian intervention to end the crises. Given that "foreign intervention has the potential of increasing, or decreasing, the capabilities of the belligerents that, in turn, can radically change the nature of the warfare,"¹ the efficacy of intervention is not only determined by the willingness, but also by the type and tactic of the action.

There are many means of intervention. In this paper, all the means are grouped under two categories, namely, coercive intervention and supportive intervention. Coercive intervention, which includes political and economic sanctions, or military intervention in extreme cases, is meant to pressure concerned parties or individuals to secure peace, forcing all parties to drop arms and reach peaceful agreement. Supportive intervention refers to non-forcible solutions to persuade all parties to end conflict. Mediation, negotiation and peacekeeping fall into this category. History has shown that each tactic has its own strengths and weaknesses, and each must be applied in conjunction with some other tactics. Coercive intervention and supportive intervention are usually adopted together in a crisis, although Western powers are inclined to apply coercive means, while other powers in the international community generally favor supportive ones.

Humanitarian intervention is generally seen as a legitimate way to promote peace in fragile states.

¹ Adam Lockyer, "Foreign Intervention, Warfare and Civil Wars," *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 5 (2011), pp. 2338.

This paper aims to establish an interactive model between the two means of intervention and examine how the intervening countries with contradicting philosophies shape each other's tactics. It argues that during the post-Cold War era, humanitarian intervention often starts with coercive efforts by Western powers, while other powers engaged are usually pressured by Western powers on the pretext of economic, political or humanitarian concerns to strengthen their intervening influence. Yet Western powers can hardly achieve their goals by coercive means alone, thus they need supportive efforts from others as complements. In the end, it is often the combination of coercive intervention by Western powers and supportive intervention from other powers engaged that promotes the peace process. This assertion has been tested against the case of the Darfur humanitarian crisis from 2003 to 2008, in which the United States was the leading power imposing economic sanctions on the government of Sudan to secure peace, while China supported the peace process in a diplomatic way.

The paper is divided into three sections: the first introduces the philosophies behind different means of humanitarian intervention; the second and third sections analyze the interests, intentions, and roles of both the United States and China in intervening in Darfur, and how each party adjusted its tactics due to the other's action. It concludes by presenting some thoughts on China's future engagement in internal conflicts or potential crises within fragile states.

Intervention as a Means to Promote Peace in a Fragile State

Since the end of the Cold War, many states have been under increasing international pressure to protect their citizens from humanitarian disasters. If any state fails to protect its people from violation of basic human rights, or if it becomes a persecutor itself, the international community may choose to exercise intervention rather than stand by and watch. In theory, humanitarian intervention is supported by the just-war theory, which is elaborated by Michael Walzer in his book *Just and Unjust Wars*. As he asserts,

If the dominant forces within a state are engaged in massive violations of human rights, the appeal to self-determination in the Millian sense of

*self-help is not very attractive Against the enslavement or massacre of political opponents, national minorities, and religious sects, there may well be no help unless help comes from outside. And when a government turns savagely upon its own people, we must doubt the very existence of a political community to which the idea of self-determination might apply.*²

It can be seen that the basic rationale for humanitarian intervention is that sovereignty cannot, and should not, be a justification for rejecting engagement from the outside; the responsibilities that states have in relation to their citizens should be recognized as part of their sovereignty, thus permitting intervention to redress those rights when they are violated.³

Studies on humanitarian intervention have traditionally emphasized the contradiction between the responsibility to guarantee fundamental human rights and the principles of state sovereignty and non-intervention.⁴ Many scholars have also drawn upon changes in the 21st century to examine the ethics, norms, and incentives of humanitarian intervention.⁵

²Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), p. 101.

³Deen K. Chatterjee and Don E. Scheid, eds., *Ethics and Foreign Intervention* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

⁴Mohammed Ayoob, "Humanitarian Intervention and State Sovereignty," *The International Journal of Human Rights*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (2002); J. L. Holzgrefe and Robert Keohane, eds., *Humanitarian Intervention* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); and Jennifer M. Welsh, *Humanitarian Intervention and International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁵Oliver Ramsbotha and Tom Woodhouse, *Humanitarian Intervention in Contemporary Conflict* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996); Martha Finnemore, "Constructing Norms of Humanitarian Intervention," in Peter J. Katzenstein ed., *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Alex J. Bellamy, "Responsibility to Protect or Trojan Horse? The Crisis in Darfur and Humanitarian Intervention after Iraq," *Ethics & International Affairs*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (2005); Carsten Stahn, "Responsibility to Protect: Political Rhetoric or Emerging Legal Norm?," *The American Journal of International Law*, Vol. 101, No. 1 (2007); Gareth Evans, Ramesh Thakur, and Robert A. Pape, "Correspondence: Humanitarian Intervention and the Responsibility to Protect," *International Security*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (Spring 2013); and Richard Falk, *Humanitarian Intervention and Legitimacy Wars: Seeking Peace and Justice in the 21st Century* (London: Routledge, 2014).

Regarding how and how effective foreign intervention affects the dynamics of domestic conflicts, studies mainly focus on the changing legitimacy and capabilities of warring sides due to the intervention.⁶ Despite the existing knowledge on what has been and what should have been done about humanitarian intervention, there is still more to discuss on how humanitarian intervention affects the dynamics of domestic conflicts and the efficacy of specific tactics of intervention, especially in the cases of non-military intervention.

This paper does not intend to discuss the evolution of the principles of humanitarian intervention in terms of international law or international relations. Nor its significance to historical and contemporary states' external behavior. Instead, it examines the mixed use of intervening tactics and how they influence the peace process. This is because current debates about intervention usually focus on specific tactics in isolation rather than consider the effects of several tactics in combination, which often causes miscalculation of the value of a particular tactic.

Research is lacking on the interaction among various intervention tactics.

In fact, the concept of intervention is quite ambiguous. Although it generally refers to any "external actions that influence the domestic affairs of another sovereign state," yet the concept is "both descriptive and normative. It not only describes what is happening, but it also casts value judgments."⁷ Besides, as a foreign policy, it is hard to distinguish intervention from such practice as interference, deterrence, or forceful engagement.

There are a great variety of intervention tactics including casting mental stress, levying economic and political pressure, taking covert and paramilitary actions, threatening military action, or even launching a direct

⁶Dursun Peksen, "Better or Worse? The Effect of Economic Sanctions on Human Rights," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 48, No. 1 (2009); Lisa Hultman and Dursun Peksen, "Successful or Counterproductive Coercion? The Effect of International Sanctions on Conflict Intensity," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 61, No. 6 (2015); and Matthew Krain, "The Effect of Economic Sanctions on the Severity of Genocides or Politicides," *Journal of Genocide Research*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (2017).

⁷Joseph S. Nye Jr. and David A. Welch, *Understanding Global Conflict and Cooperation: An Introduction to Theory and History* (New York: Pearson Higher Education, 2013), p. 219.

invasion, the actual effect of which would vary sharply in different situations. Thus, some analysts “use the term more narrowly to refer to forcible interference in the domestic affairs of another state,”⁸ which emphasizes that in most cases, intervention is powerful, violent and coercive. Obviously, the extreme form of coercive intervention is the use of armed force against another state; sometimes, it can take the form of coercive diplomacy. As Thomas C. Schelling illustrated, coercive diplomacy has a dialectical meaning of deterrence and threat

*Coercion is the latent violence that can influence someone's choice — violence that can still be withheld or inflicted, or that a victim believes can be withheld or inflicted. It is the threat of damage, or of more damage to come, that can make someone yield or comply.*⁹

Coercive intervention also includes such non-military instruments as political and economic sanctions, arms embargoes, and international criminal prosecution, which are often applied as the initial steps in humanitarian intervention.

While coercive intervention is meant to directly threaten the interests of the target state, supportive intervention is applied to alter the target state's behavior in a non-forcible and non-violent way. To be more specific, supportive intervention differs from coercive intervention in that the outcome of the former is not as damaging as the latter, for it does not require causing direct harm to the target state; instead, it sometimes brings imminent benefits to the target state, such as economic rewards or strengthened political stability and confidence of the leadership. Besides, the use of supportive means toward another state is usually conditioned on the consent of, or at least is not rejected by, the target state. Supportive intervention tends to provide diplomatic and political support like mediation and negotiation rather than offer military or economic aid. Foreign peacekeeping operations are also a type of supportive intervention, as they are usually regarded as public goods provided by outsiders for a fragile state upon its consent.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), p. 3.

In practice, economic sanctions are the most commonly applied coercive tactic, while mediation and peacekeeping operations are primary supportive ones. Sanctions are meant to create pressure as a way to secure peace. They can serve as an additional counterweight in risk assessment by actors of a conflict, though there has been much criticism about the efficacy of economic sanctions on alleviating the severity of humanitarian crises.¹⁰ Sanctions may affect the internal power dynamics within the target country's government and ruling political party, and thus generate cleavages within opposition forces as well. However, sanctions can also create a "rally-around-the-flag" effect, in which support for the targeted leader grows rather than diminish; sometimes, sanctions can aggravate the humanitarian conditions in the target country by reducing already scarce resources, increasing corruption and illicit trafficking, and so on. Therefore, sanctions alone are usually not sufficient to lessen, not to mention end, humanitarian crises; instead, they must be complemented with other means as well.

Coercive and supportive tactics are seldom used in isolation.

Mediation, on the other hand, is meant to foster consensus and encourage peace. Mediators may serve as bridges among concerned parties by creating communication channels and platforms or providing consultation and diplomatic solutions. Peacekeeping operations are usually pre-

mised on consent reached by mediation. The greatest strength of supportive tactics is that they are easier for concerned parties to accept, especially when the mediators are believed to be impartial. However, mediation may sometimes be regarded as clandestine dealings benefiting the mediators rather than the concerned parties.

It must be noted that coercive and supportive tactics are seldom used in isolation. For instance, when the United States insists on imposing sanctions and threat of force against targeted regimes in North Korea or Iran, it seeks every opportunity for dialogue and negotiation as well.

¹⁰Lisa Hultman and Dursun Peksen, "Successful or Counterproductive Coercion? The Effect of International Sanctions on Conflict Intensity," pp. 1315–1339; and Krain, "The Effect of Economic Sanctions on the Severity of Genocides or Politicides," *Journal of Genocide Research*.

Similarly, the United Nations has both targeted sanctions and peace operations in Sudan, Congo, Mali and Somalia at the same time. Nevertheless, Western powers tend to employ coercive means much more often than other powers, in large part because they are stronger and have more resources and experience for coercive intervention. Besides, developing countries are more likely to experience humanitarian crisis at some point, thus they are potentially subject to similar treatment in the future if they are seen as favoring coercive intervention. Therefore, developing countries tend to apply supportive means rather than follow the coercive approach by Western powers.

In fact, both coercive and supportive tactics have their own strengths and weaknesses. It is very common for the intervening countries to adopt a mixed approach. Besides, intervening countries tend to consciously or unconsciously exert impact on each other, notwithstanding their professed goal to alter the targeted parties' behavior. Hence, it is necessary to set up an interaction model between the two types of intervention which are mutually constructive yet unequal in weight, as coercive means usually exert greater impact on supportive ones, but not the opposite.

Generally speaking, national interests, power status and prevailing international norms are the major determinants to the rationale for actions of intervening countries. Calculation of one's national interests is fundamental to a country's decision on whether (and to what extent) to intervene in others' internal conflicts. A country's power status — its relative strength as well as its relationships with the target country and other potential intervening countries — restricts its intervention tactics. The prevailing international norms may then determine the specific way of intervention.

Another issue about intervention is how a country's intervening tactics shape or are shaped by other countries' tactics. This paper presumes that, on the one hand, one country's intervening tactics will cause an effect on the others' national interests, thus they will take some actions to protect their own interests, which, in turn, influence the intervening country's tactics; on the other hand, the intervening countries that adopt coercive intervention tend to enjoy a moral edge over those adopting supportive means, so the latter are pressured to

Coercive intervenors tend to enjoy a moral edge over supportive ones during the peace process.

shift tactics to enhance their moral standing. In this way, supportive intervention would promote the efficacy of coercive means and facilitate the peace process.

These assertions are tested against the case of the Darfur humanitarian crisis between 2003 and 2008, when the United States and China were two major intervenors with quite different approaches and tactics: the United States was a leading power in imposing economic sanctions on the Sudanese government to secure peace, while China supported the peace process mainly by diplomatic means. Unlike the cases of North Korea and Iran, the Darfur issue is neither related to the core interests of China nor the United States. However, both powers invested great efforts to stop the crisis beyond their own national interest considerations. As the interaction between the two powers proceeded during the crisis, each power's intervening tactics were altered by the other, and the joint effect of their tactics finally brought about a ceasefire between the Sudanese government and anti-government forces, paving the way for later peace talks among concerned parties.

The U.S. Role in the Darfur Conflict

The Darfur conflict flared up only in 2003, but the roots of the crisis can be traced back to the 19th century colonial era. Like many other conflicts in Africa, the Darfur crisis was a result of the economic and political marginalization of non-Arabs, and of the fact that it "has not been characterized by religious divisions."¹¹ The Darfur region has been faced with one of the world's worst humanitarian situations, where rivaling militias were engaged in an ethnically targeted campaign of mass killing, forced displacement, destruction of properties, and the use of rape as a weapon of war. Reportedly, "by early 2004, an estimated 80,000 persons had died or been killed, 100,000 had taken refuge in neighboring Chad, and another million [had been] internally displaced."¹²

During the conflict, many ceasefire agreements were signed and broken, such as the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) signed between

¹¹"The Crisis in Darfur," *International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect*, <http://www.responsibilitytoprotect.org/index.php/crises/crisis-in-darfur>.

¹²David H. Shinn, "China and the Conflict in Darfur," *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (Fall/Winter 2009), p. 86.

the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) and the government of Sudan (GoS) in 2005, and the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) signed by the GoS and one faction of the Sudanese Liberation Army (SLA-MM) in May 2006. The agreements had done little to curb the violence, partly because they failed to secure endorsement from all the rebel factions. Since the outbreak of conflict, the international community had been concerned about the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Darfur. "In March 2003, just ahead of the 10th anniversary of the genocide in Rwanda, the UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Sudan, Mukesh Kapila, warned of the similarities between the situation in Darfur and that of Rwanda."¹³

Western powers tended to define atrocities in Darfur as genocide and thus advocated applying humanitarian intervention in Sudan. For example, on July 9, 2004, the U.S. Congress referred to the situation in Darfur as genocide,¹⁴ "a claim that was repeated in September in a report by the U.S. State Department and U.S. Secretary of Defense."¹⁵ On September 16, 2004, the European Parliament called the actions of the GoS "tantamount to genocide."¹⁶ On June 1, 2005, then U.S. President G. W. Bush also labeled the situation in Darfur as genocide.¹⁷ However, the rest of the world defined the situation in Darfur with more caution. The African Union (AU) refrained from using the term "genocide" in November 2004, stating that "there is mass suffering, but it is not genocide." Similarly, the League of Arab States (LAS) announced that it could not find "any proof of allegations that ethnic cleansing or the eradication of communities had been perpetrated."¹⁸ The contrasting definitions of the Darfur crisis indicated the different understanding and stances between Western powers and other countries, which would adopt different means of intervention in Sudan.

¹³"The Crisis in Darfur."

¹⁴U.S. House Resolution No. 467 — Declaring Genocide in Darfur, Sudan, 108th Congress (2003–2004), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/108th-congress/house-concurrent-resolution/467>.

¹⁵"The Crisis in Darfur."

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷"In Break with UN, Bush Calls for Sudan Killings Genocide," *Washington Post*, June 2, 2005, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/06/01/AR2005060101725.html>.

¹⁸"The Crisis in Darfur."

Indeed, many efforts had been taken by the international community to promote the peace process in Darfur, including both supportive means (such as mediation and peacekeeping operations) and coercive ones like economic sanctions and arbitration from the International Criminal Court (ICC). Since early August 2003, Chad, as the most concerned neighbor of Sudan, began to assume the responsibility of mediation, and achieved two ceasefires between the GoS and two rebel groups. Then the AU replaced Chad as the key mediator and supervised the implementation of relevant agreements with the United States and the European Union. Within two years after April 2004, the UN Security Council (UNSC) issued five resolutions regarding the Darfur crisis.¹⁹ Since 2004, there have been two large-scale peacekeeping operations conducted in Darfur by the AU and the United Nations.

U.S. sanctions on Sudan were partly out of strategic and domestic political considerations.

The United States, together with the European Union and Canada, played a significant role in putting the Darfur issue under the spotlight for the international community. Compared with the second civil war in Sudan, the Darfur conflict drew greater attention from the United States for many reasons. For one, as economic sanctions imposed by the United States did not

target American oil companies running in Sudan, the Darfur issue could be an opportunity for those companies to keep exploiting Sudanese oil with no local competitors.²⁰ For another reason, domestic politics in the United States also added to the weight of the Darfur issue: during the 2004 Presidential campaign, G.W. Bush condemned the Darfur crisis many times in order to win more votes from African Americans and Christians, and to offset domestic criticisms on his unilateralism in the Middle East. As a contrast, he often referred to his predecessor's "indifference" to the Rwanda crisis.²¹

¹⁹See UNSC Resolutions 1556 (2004), 1564 (2004), 1590 (2005), 1591 (2005), and 1706 (2006).

²⁰Wang Jianwei, "China-U.S. Cooperation and Conflict on the Darfur Issue," *Fudan American Review*, No. 1 (2008).

²¹*Ibid.*

Strategically, the significance of Africa was increasing for the G.W. Bush administration, and the Darfur issue had been integrated into the U.S. grand strategy towards Africa. With all the intervention tools in hand, the G.W. Bush administration chose to exercise economic sanctions as a major intervention tactic, while at the same time, the United States remained the biggest humanitarian aid donor in the Darfur crisis.²²

American economic sanctions on Sudan were first imposed by the Clinton administration in 1997 under Executive Order 13067, because President Clinton perceived the Sudanese government to be a sponsor of Islamist terrorism. Subsequently, President G.W. Bush issued Executive Order 13400, which expanded the provisions of Executive Order 13067 and “blocked the property and interests in property of certain persons connected with the conflict in Darfur.” Four months later, President Bush signed Executive Order 13412, upholding the provisions of 13067 but lifting most sanctions on trade and investment in regions of southern Sudan; it also ensured that transactions related to the petroleum industry — including southern Sudan — would be prohibited. The Order increased the number of Sudanese companies blacklisted by the U.S. government to 160, including the famous Great Nile Petroleum Oil Company, the consortium responsible for most of the oil production in Sudan. Interestingly, two members of al-Bashir’s government — Ahmed Haroun, State Minister for Humanitarian Affairs, and Awad Ibn Auf, Director of Military Intelligence of Sudan — were exempted from personal sanctions.²³

U.S. sanctions against the GoS did exert much pressure on the latter, and in particular encouraged international intervention in the Darfur crisis. For instance, since July 2002, the ICC has issued several arrest warrants of leaders and decision makers in the Darfur conflict, aiming to impose political impact on specific individuals involved in the conflict. However, the sanctions failed to achieve the expected results; instead, they deepened the economic despair in Sudan to some extent. The United States blamed China and some other countries for not joining in the sanctions while exploiting the business opportunities created by the sanctions. To China and African

²²Ibid.

²³Mohamed Malik and Malik Malik, “The Efficacy of US Sanctions on the Republic of Sudan,” *Journal of Georgetown University — Qatar Middle Eastern Studies Student Association*, No. 7 (2015), pp. 4, <http://www.qscience.com/doi/pdf/10.5339/messa.2015.7>.

countries, however, the immediate goal of the intervention in Darfur was to gain consent from the GoS to accept UN peacekeeping operations to alleviate the humanitarian crises and prevent the conflict from escalating; coercive means like the sanctions would further alienate the GoS and make a ceasefire even more difficult to reach. Therefore, they adopted a supportive means — mediation — to add confidence to the GoS and thus facilitated its acceptance of peacekeeping operations in the end.

China's Role in Darfur's Peace Process

Traditionally, China was rigidly opposed to any form of intervention in countries undergoing conflict, especially by an externally imposed and predetermined model of political and economic governance. In the Darfur case, China opposed the imposition of economic sanctions against the government of Sudan over its policy in Darfur. China's rationale was that, since poverty is the root of instability, the ultimate goal of peace-building efforts must be to ensure human security by focusing on alleviating both poverty and unemployment.

China has enjoyed a friendly relationship with Sudan since the 1960s. Yet its interests in Sudan should not be overestimated: in the early 21st century, trade between China and Sudan accounted for less than one percent of China's foreign trade, and oil imported from Sudan was less than 10 percent of China's total oil imports.²⁴ Although Western media often blamed China's military ties with the GoS, especially the proliferation of small arms in nearby African countries, for escalating the conflicts in Sudan, China's arms export to Sudan was actually far less than that from Russia, Belarus and Ukraine,²⁵ and there was no evidence that the proliferated small arms were smuggled from neighboring countries. The reason that China was under the spotlight was largely due to China's rising economic and political influence in Sudan and the rest of Africa, which caused growing anxiety among Western powers. China, with its veto power in the UNSC, was opposing economic sanctions of any form on Sudan. But in the meantime, China offered many proposals on the peaceful settlement of

²⁴Wang Jianwei, "China-U.S. Cooperation and Conflict on the Darfur Issue."

²⁵Joseph Hammond, "Sudan: China's Original Foothold in Africa," *The Diplomat*, June 14, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/06/sudan-chinas-original-foothold-in-africa/>.

the Darfur issue, and had been working closely with the United Nations to resolve the Darfur crisis by political means.

While China had acknowledged the humanitarian crisis going on in Darfur from the beginning, it was reluctant to intervene by coercive means, for it regarded the crisis as Sudan's domestic issue; even if it were necessary to intervene, China's stand was that it should be done by regional organizations like the AU, rather than extraterritorial powers like the United States or the European Union. As greater attention from the international community fell on Darfur, however, China shifted its thinking on intervention and began to participate in international intervention under the UN framework.

Even so, China upheld its principle of non-coercive intervention by abstaining from the votes on UNSC Resolutions 1556 in July 2004 and 1679 in August 2007, which were to authorize economic and political sanctions on Sudan. Outside the United Nations, China began to exercise more diplomatic influence on the concerned parties in Sudan. Mr. Wang Guangya, then Chinese ambassador to the UN, played an active mediating role in gaining the GoS' acceptance for the Anna Plan in November 2006.²⁶ In February 2007, Chinese President Hu Jintao paid a state visit to Sudan as part of his eight-nation Africa tour, during which it was believed that he had personally pressed President Bashir to accept the peacekeeping force, although the Chinese government described it in public as a journey of friendship and cooperation.²⁷ Mr. Zhai Jun, China's Assistant Foreign Minister for African and Middle East Affairs, and Mr. Liu Guijin, Special Envoy for Darfur, also paid timely visits to concerned parties in April 2007 and February 2008.

China opposed economic sanctions on Sudan while making proposals for political resolution of the Darfur Crisis.

²⁶Huang Chin Hao, "US-China Relations and Darfur," *Fordham International Law Journal*, Vol. 31, No. 4 (2007), pp. 827-842.

²⁷"Hu Jintao Arrives in Khartoum for State Visit to Sudan," Mission of the People's Republic of China to the European Union, April 2, 2007, <http://www.mfa.gov.cn/ce/cebe/eng/more/dfdgdgdfd/t295538.htm>.

Notably, China began to adopt a harsher attitude toward the Sudanese government as the humanitarian condition in Darfur kept deteriorating. For example, before leaving Sudan, President Hu delivered a public statement that outlined “four principles” as the basis for an international approach to Darfur. The fourth principle was that “it is imperative to improve the situation in Darfur and living conditions of local people.”²⁸ In March 2007, China’s National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), together with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and the Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM), released a public document announcing that Sudan had been removed from the latest list of countries with preferred trade status.²⁹

How should China’s changes in attitude and actions be explained, given the fact that Western economic sanctions may have had little negative impact on China’s economic presence in Sudan? From one point of view, the economic sanctions left China with an absence of competition from the United States and other Western countries. The U.S. sanctions began roughly around the same time China invested in Sudan’s oil industry in the late 1990s. As a journalist revealed,

*In June 1997, the Greater Nile Petroleum Operating Company was established with the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) taking 40 percent ownership and Malaysia’s Petronas taking 30 percent. India’s ONGC Videsh acquired 25 percent when a forerunner of Canada’s Talisman Energy had to leave due to sanctions.*³⁰

The fact is that, even if the economic sanctions exerted no direct effect on China’s economic interests in Sudan, it imposed great moral pressure on China’s intervening tactic by amplifying China’s “irresponsible indifference,” and ascribing the failure of sanctions to China’s support for the GoS.

In fact, much of the Western criticism on China’s role in the Darfur crisis was due to ignorance or misunderstanding of China’s non-intervention principle. Above all, China’s mediating efforts among concerned

²⁸“Hu Puts Forward Principle on Darfur Issue,” *China Daily*, February 5, 2007, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2007-02/05/content_801432.htm.

²⁹Huang Chin Hao, “US-China Relations and Darfur.” p. 838.

³⁰Joseph Hammond, “Sudan: China’s Original Foothold in Africa.”

parties — whether in Sudan or the international community — tended to be invisible compared to the coercive efforts led by the United States, placing China in a relatively disadvantageous moral position. Besides, China's humanitarian aid to Sudan had often been misunderstood as aiding the conflict and thus offsetting the efficacy of sanctions. Due to China's close ties with the Sudanese government, Chinese aid to Sudan was many a time described as one-sided, assisting Bashir himself. That is in large part because Chinese aid was mainly government-led and focusing on infrastructure. As a matter of fact, to improve the humanitarian situation in Darfur, China had "provided material assistance worth 80 million RMB (about 11 million US dollars) to Darfur, 1.8 million US dollars aid to African Union, and 500,000 US dollars donation to the UN fund for solving Darfur issue" by the end of 2007.³¹ Apart from state aid, Chinese firms had also joined in humanitarian relief in Darfur. As official Chinese media reported,

*In recent years, Chinese companies have helped dig 46 wells, build 20 small-scale power plants in Darfur and water supply projects in southern and northern Darfur states. Chinese companies also provided computer equipment and facilitated technical training in the region.*³²

In this way, China contributed to alleviating the Darfur Crisis by a non-coercive approach, and it fostered a favorable diplomatic environment for its mediating role among the concerned parties.

The 2008 Beijing Olympic Games was believed to be a key determinant to China's policy change toward the Darfur Crisis, because China wanted to foster an open and responsible image by hosting the Olympic Games, and eager to do all it could to prevent international criticism on China's role in Sudan from tainting that image. Fortunately, as Chinese diplomatic efforts increased and the number of deaths in Darfur dropped sharply, criticism of China diminished in the year of 2008. As Professor David Shinn of the George Washington University observed, "[s]ince China completed a successful Olympics, little has been heard from Hollywood on the issue and

³¹"China Makes 'Unremitting Efforts' to Resolve Crisis in Darfur," *China Daily*, February 16, 2008, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2008-02/16/content_6460400.htm.

³²*Ibid.*

the Save Darfur Coalition seems to have lost much of its steam, especially on college campuses."³³

China did not stop its steps toward alleviating the suffering in Sudan after the Olympic Games. In May 2009, China and the United States agreed to work together to promote an early resolution to the Darfur issue and to integrate their humanitarian activities, which marked the beginning of their comprehensive collaboration on the Darfur issue.

China's supportive tactics in Darfur created asymmetric impact on the shift of the U.S. intervention policy.

In comparison, China imposed less influence on the American intervening tactics. Although opposed by China and some other developing countries, the United States maintained its coercive stance toward the Sudanese government for its delay and rigidity of the UN-AU force deployment. The biggest change on the U.S. part was probably that it gained deeper understanding of the crisis. At the end of the 4th round of the U.S.-

China Senior Dialogue held on June 20–21, 2007, the U.S. State Department officially acknowledged the Chinese characterization of what was happening in Darfur as a "humanitarian crisis" instead of "genocide."³⁴ Regarding the sanctions, the U.S.-drafted UNSC resolutions became more cautiously worded, particularly with regard to the sanction terms and emphasized the role of the United Nations in resolving the Darfur issue. The United States also reevaluated the efficacy of those sanctions, it realized the limitations and side effects of its coercive means, which prompted the Obama administration to launch a new policy that softened some long-time American sanctions against the Sudanese government.

Obviously, the changes of the United States were due in part to China's active participation and compromise, as well as the GoS' acceptance of the mixed UN-AU force. What is noteworthy, however, is that without China's supportive efforts, it would be far more difficult for the United States to meet its goals — though military conflicts ensued between the Sudanese

³³David H. Shinn, "China and the Conflict in Darfur." p. 93.

³⁴Media Note, Office of the Spokesman, "Conclusion of the Fourth US-China Senior Dialogue," U.S. Department of State, June 21, 2007, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2007/jun/86997.htm>.

government and rebel forces, the GoS did agree to accept the mixed UN-AU force for peacekeeping operations. During the process, the United States and China did not negotiate secretly to reach a compromise on temporary settlement of the issue; nor did they play their respective roles, either coercive or supportive, on a common agenda. Rather, it was a result of random facilitation.

Conclusion

Both China and the United States were significant international players in facilitating the peace process in the Darfur crisis, but they had opposite intervening tactics. The United States advocated coercive methods, forcing the warring sides in Sudan to drop arms and accept a mixed UN-AU peacekeeping force, while China opposed the imposition of sanctions against the government of Sudan over its policy in Darfur. As one of its fundamental principles in foreign affairs, China is rigidly opposed to any form of intervention in countries undergoing conflicts, especially by an externally imposed and predetermined model of political and economic governance. Instead, China has been advocating that the long-term objective of peace-making must be combined with respect for others' sovereignty and facilitating economic development of the target country. That is why China has abstained on most UNSC resolutions that call for political or economic sanctions, choosing to seek settlement of conflicts by diplomatic means with concerned parties instead. However, as indicated in the Darfur case, if the Chinese government is convinced of escalation of internal conflicts in a country to such an extent as to trigger a serious humanitarian crisis, and especially when the whole international community tends to hold such a belief, China is very likely to join with other major countries in economic sanctions against the country; but in the meantime, it still takes tremendous efforts to play a mediating role among conflicting parties in order to generate a peaceful resolution. Its supportive efforts usually complement the coercive tactics employed by Western powers that would be futile or even damaging if applied alone.

It is common that coercive and supportive intervening tactics are used together in resolving the humanitarian crisis in a fragile state, but such a random mixture does not guarantee success of the intervention. Though the interaction model may vary in different backgrounds, the Darfur case

gives a salient example. To China, the Darfur case is important because even though China is already the world's second largest economy and its comprehensive power continues rising rapidly, it is still faced by the challenge of how to uphold its fundamental diplomatic principles and be regarded as a responsible power in the international arena at the same time. When collaborating with other powers in their engagement in a country's internal affairs, China needs to be better aware of how to cope with others' coercive means, and to present its stance and efforts in a way that is more easily understood and acknowledged by the international community.

A similar but trickier case is the Korean Peninsula nuclear issue. To China, its peaceful development strategy relies heavily on peace and stability of its close neighborhood, especially the Korean Peninsula. Thus, China has to demonstrate a clear position and adopt more constructive intervening tactics to forestall any potential crisis. Significant changes have been observed in China's policy toward North Korea in recent years, including the harsh rhetoric used by its official media toward North Korea's nuclear tests and its strict implementation of UN sanctions against the country. Yet China's engagement in the issue should be creative rather than simply more aggressive. Admittedly, UN sanctions on North Korea do hurt its economy, causing great decline of economic growth, government finance, trade and foreign investment.³⁵ But despite the peaceful gestures made by the North Korean leader, a denuclearization process has yet to start while the sanctions have caused increasing possibilities of deteriorating humanitarian conditions in North Korea. Therefore, China, as one of the five permanent members of the UNSC, has the responsibility to call on other powers to better balance their intervening policies and help set up a comprehensive agenda that incorporates both coercive and supportive means of intervention.

To China and the United States, North Korea is apparently seeking to exploit their strategic distrust and conflicting interests in Northeast Asia to enhance its own leverage in the ongoing dynamics of the nuclear issue; the efficacy of their intervention tactics may be to a large extent cancelled out by each other. Therefore, it is necessary that China and the United States

³⁵Mikael Weissmann and Linus Hagstrom, "Sanctions Reconsidered: The Path Forward with North Korea," *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 39, No. 3 (Fall 2016), pp. 61–76.

reach a basic consensus about their interests and goals in the issue and make good use of their respective comparative advantages in intervention. After all, denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula is not only a shared goal of China and the United States, but it is in the interest of the whole international community as well.