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Abstract

Cognizant of the deep ties between China and Africa which date to the Song dynasty (960-1279 A.D.) when there was evidence of trade in ceramics and silk, this paper addresses the third period of China-Africa cooperation which started in 2000 and makes three main arguments. First, the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation is a strategic and crucial element in Africa’s international relations and has deepened ties between China and Africa. Second, the Ezulwini Consensus has the potential to influence the current position of China on the United Nations Security Council reforms. Third, there is now undeniable ‘Power Trinity’ influencing the current world order and the United Nations.

Key words: China-Africa Cooperation, United Nations, Security Council Reforms, Power Trinity

Introduction

The relations between China and Africa are historically deep and continue to grow. Using a qualitative research method, specifically by drawing on the existing literature, United Nations reports, public and private media (news) reports and analytical experiences and interviews in China and Africa, this paper answers two main questions. Why does the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) matter for Africa in relation to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) reforms, and why does China’s position on the UNSC reforms matter for Africa? In light of this, the paper categorizes China-Africa ties into three periods.

According to the Chinese historical records written (in a book) around 1418 called “The Marvellous Visions of the Star Raft” (The Economist 2006), the first period dates to the Song dynasty (960-1279 A.D.) when there was evidence of trade in ceramics and silk and ended in 1949 when the People’s Republic of China was founded (Beijing Review 2005). It was in this period that Admiral He Zheng took his famous/infamous voyages to the East African Coast during the 15th century, while Holland began taking their slaves to Taiwan during the 17th century. However, some slaves later escaped to mainland China and joined the warrior, Koxinga, in his unsuccessful uprising against the Qing dynasty. After the abolition of the slave trade the trend changed, with European colonizers beginning to import indentured Chinese to work in Africa (Shambaugh 2013:108-109).

The second period started in 1949 after the founding of the People’s Republic of China and ended in the late 90s. It was in this period that Chinese-African ties were strengthened, as China sought support of African countries for a permanent seat in the UNSC. China in this era also supported anti-colonial and imperialist movements in Africa, endeavored to spread the communist revolution and Maoist ideology, started to balance the Soviet Union, formulated foreign aid principles, and received brotherly support of Africans after the 1989 Tiananmen Square incident, when it was isolated by mostly Western countries.

The third- and current- period of Chinese-African relations began in 2000 with the formation of the FOCAC. It is this period in which this paper is concerned, as it will make three main arguments in relation to the prospects for FOCAC under the framework of the UNSC reforms.

Writing in 2008, He Wenping noted: “At the end of the 1990s, some African countries proposed that as the US [United States], Britain, France, Japan and other European countries had established mechanisms for contact with Africa, it was necessary for China and Africa to establish a similar mechanism to fit in with the need to strengthen relations. After earnest study, China decided to echo the suggestions of African countries, and proposed to hold the Forum in 2000” (He 2008:147; Taylor 2011:38). The 1st Ministerial Conference, which took place in Beijing in 2000, marked a strong start of the FOCAC. Here, China and Africa established their stance in rising to meet changing global challenges, as well as seeking common development (goals) with joint efforts (Ampwera 2011:47). The conference adopted the Beijing Declaration of the FOCAC and the Programme for China–Africa Cooperation in Economic and Social Development (FOCAC 2009; Zhang 2011:501). One of the key issues highlighted in the Beijing Declaration was the lack of representation concerning developing countries in international economic and financial institutions, including UNSC. Specifically, the declaration attempts to reflect the democratic principle governing international relations, calling for “the recognition of the legitimate place due to Africa in the Security Council…” (FOCAC 2009; Taylor 2011:41-42, 88).
The initial FOCAC conferences proved to be successful, with African leaders and elites welcoming the principles and objectives of the Beijing Declaration and the Addis Ababa Action Plan. And so, in January 2006, the Government of the People’s Republic of China issued its first ever official China’s African Policy as a new strategy towards Africa. In this policy, Beijing pledges to urge the UNSC to recognize and aid in resolving regional conflicts in Africa, as well as pledging to continue its support and participation in the United Nations peacekeeping operations (UNPKO) in Africa (China Report 2007:383; People’s Daily 2006).

Since then, FOCAC has strategically become a crucial element in Africa’s international relations (Taylor 2011:38). Both Africa and China have repeatedly used this forum to assert that many of Africa’s problems, such as conflicts and some unsuccessful peacekeeping operations are due to the lack of a permanent position on the UNSC, as well as interference in Africa’s internal affairs. Different from the Western stance on Africa’s problems, China has further emphasized that what Africa needs is “understanding rather than interfering in their internal affairs” (Taylor 2011:37). This emphasis is motivated by China’s longstanding struggle in obtaining a permanent seat in the UNSC. With overwhelming support from developing countries, especially newly independent African countries, China became one of the five permanent members of the UNSC (Wuthnow 2013:15; 14, 142). However, what has remained unanswered is how FOCAC benefits Africa in relation to UNSC reforms, as well as the vitality of China’s position on the UNSC reforms for Africa. Given the fact that Africa, a continent with 54 independent states and a population of over one billion people, still has no single permanent representation in the UNSC (Population Reference Bureau 2012: 6), continues to be one of the most neglected parts of the world, in terms of decision making in the United Nations (UN). Furthermore, incidents such as the Rwanda genocide and the conflict in Somalia stand to prove that Africa has some of the worst cases of UN-neglected conflict.

Although UNSC has only been reformed once (in 1965 when its membership was expanded from 11 to 15 countries [Muns 2006]), African hopes were once again raised after a first proposal in 1997 by the President of the General Assembly and suggested by Kofi Annan. This 2004 proposal, titled the “Panyarachun Report,” suggested expanding the Council to 24 members. It was because of this report that all the African countries gathered in 2005 around the “Ezulwini Consensus and the Sirte Declaration,” calling for the creation of two permanent seats with veto power as well as two additional non-permanent seats for Africa (Permanent Mission of France to the United Nations in New York 2012). Since then, China has issued its position paper on UNSC reforms, though Africa has remained doubtful on when and how UNSC reforms will be implemented. What remains unclear is how FOCAC can be used to position Africa on the Permanent Seat of UNSC, what challenges face FOCAC regarding UNSC reforms, and the Ezulwini Consensus’ potential to influence the current position of China on UNSC Reforms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year (s)</th>
<th>Reform Process</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>UNSC formed - to maintain international peace and security in accordance with the principles and purposes of the United Nations among other purposes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>Reformed – Membership expanded from 11 to 15 countries. This was in addition to the five permanent members who had veto powers. However, 10 new non-permanent members remained without veto powers and are chosen for two-year terms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>First proposal on UNSC reforms by the President of the General Assembly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>The Panyarachun Report requested by Kofi Annan, suggested expanding the Council to 24 members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>A special 16-member commission which was entrusted with the task of drafting proposals about reforming the UNSC, and the UN in general, submitted its report in December of 2005.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s Analysis

1The Ezulwini Consensus refers to the common African position on the proposed reform of the United Nations, named after the location in the Swaziland Mountain Kingdom where African leaders brokered the Consensus. It was arrived at after African leaders had deliberated on the “Report of the UN High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change”. It was adopted at an extraordinary session of the Executive Council of the African Union, in March 2005, in Addis Ababa Ethiopia. Apart from proposals on the reform of the Security Council, the Ezulwini Consensus also addressed reforms of the UN General Assembly, the Secretariat, the Economic and Social Council and the Commission on Human Rights. The Ezulwini Consensus was followed by the Sirte Declaration of July 2005, which required at least two permanent seats and two non-permanent UN Security Council seats for African states.
A Theoretical Perspective

Given that the primary aim of states within the international system is to achieve their national interests defined as power ( Morgenthau 1973), reforming UNSC is difficult because it requires the consent of at least two-thirds of the members of the UN and all of the permanent members of the Security Council (who each have veto power). This implies that states are the crucial actors in the international system. However, the vitality of the role played by non-state actors in the international system is not lost on realists. For example, China’s current participation in the global and regional forums within the international system is to some extent viewed as a strategy to not only become more politically and economically integrated, but also to become diplomatically and economically powerful (Roy 1983: Botha 2006:16). This makes the UNSC reform procedure very constraining. Therefore, it is crucial to cooperate in order to secure support from a vast majority of member states in a bid to reform UNSC.

According to Robert Keohane, cooperation is possible after hegemony, particularly in situations where the hegemony (the US) no longer has the superiority and the capability in some issue areas to dominate global affairs (Keohane 1984). He adds that cooperation among the developed countries has been possible in international regimes or organizations simply because it involves only a small group of states and suggests that “intensive interaction among a few players helps to substitute for, or to supplement, the actions of a hegemon” (ibid:79). However, China has so far proved that cooperation with or among a large group of states or regimes is possible. It has cooperated with many states through regional and sub-regional regimes/organizations such as the African Union (AU), the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) on mainly political and economic issues (People’s Daily 2004; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China 2007; Xinhua 2008). For example, China cooperated with AU on issues of Sudan over the Darfur crisis in 2004, SADC on Zimbabwe Sanctions in 2008 and ASEAN on Myanmar/Burma case in 2007 in the UNSC. Therefore, this reality (China’s experience) slightly contradicts the realist arguments that international regimes like UN are not fundamentally crucial in that foreign policy behaviors of states are built on self-interests. International regimes like the UN certainly matter because they possess the legitimacy to both influence and change state behaviors. These institutions have become strategic motivation points for states to use regional or sub-regional forums, such as FOCAC, to cooperate on specific issues.

How can FOCAC Position Africa on the Permanent Seat of UNSC?

Since 2000, FOCAC has become a strategic and crucial element in Africa’s international relations and has deepened ties between China and Africa. This deep camaraderie between China and Africa, as well as the growing common desire for development and strategic interests, can be used as a framework for positioning African countries (selected by the African Union) on the permanent seat of the UNSC. Though both China and Africa are benefitting from this cooperation, it could be even more beneficial if Africa were stable and not undermined in the UNSC (Africa needs permanent representations on the UN Security Council to safeguard her interests). The UN, as an international regime, must summon changes in the operations of the Security Council in order to have more legitimacy and credibility in member states. African leaders have always called for permanent representation in UNSC. While addressing the 65th UN General Assembly in New York, the Ugandan president, Yoweri Museveni said “The Council needs greater credibility, legitimacy and representation. It is an injustice that the entire continent of Africa, with 54 member states and a population of over one billion people, has no permanent representation on this Council” (Wang 2010; Ampwera 2011).

Considering China’s current role as a growing economic power, as well as Africa’s own economic growth and political readiness to join the council, this cooperation opens many possibilities, including voting alliances which could lead to fairness and pertinence in the Council. Although the Council has 15 member states, only 5 are permanent members (US, United Kingdom, France, Russia and PRC), the rest are seasonal members. After the death of US soldiers in Somalia, the US has been reluctant to send peacekeepers to Africa but China inter alia filled this lacuna in Africa. Therefore, if China could use this cooperation to strengthen its pledge of urging for fair reforms, prospects could be raised for Africa obtaining a position within the Security Council. With this, the Security Council could become more even handed and transparent in its approach to dispel the perception that, on some issues under its consideration, vested interests override fairness.
Although China has supported African regional organizations such as the AU by constructing its headquarters in Addis Ababa, working more closely with regional regimes is crucial. Recently, regional and sub-regional regimes including the AU, SADC and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) have shown a strong capacity to resolve regional problems and they have since been commended by the international regime (UN). Through FOCAC, China can work more in partnership with the AU and sub-regional organizations to raise African concerns in the UN, an opportunity that could see Africa at the decision table in future.

Chapter VIII of the UN Charter states that “nothing in the present Charter precludes the existence of regional arrangements or agencies for dealing with such matters relating to the maintenance of international peace and security as are appropriate for regional action provided that such arrangements or agencies and their activities are consistent with the purposes and principles of the United Nations” (Charter of the United Nations and Statute of the International Court of Justice 1945:11). This cooperation could make pertinent use of Chapter VIII to call for reforms in the UNSC. The Security Council underscores the importance of developing effective partnerships between the UN and regional organizations, in particular the AU, in accordance with the Charter of the UN and the relevant statutes of the regional organizations. China could spearhead these efforts since it is one of the permanent members of the Security Council. As a result, Africa’s goal (according to Ezulwini Consensus and Sirte Declaration) to be fully represented in the decision-making organs of the UNSC, i.e. the principle decision-making organ of the UN in matters relating to international peace and security, could be realized (Ikome and Samasuwo 2005; Adejoko and Scanlon 2006).

Challenges Facing FOCAC Regarding UNSC

Reform of the Security Council has been on UN agenda for decades. All five of the permanent members officially (diplomatically) support UNSC reforms but in reality each is pursuing a separate agenda. While they may agree to some extent on the need to reform the Security Council, they remain undecided on how this reform should take place, particularly in regards to which countries should become new members of the Security Council. This presents an opportunity for Africa to strengthen its common position (the Ezulwini Consensus) on the UNSC reforms in order to overcome the following challenges:

First, the criteria laid down in the UN report of the high-level panel on threats, challenges, and change brings unwelcome news to most developing countries. It is here that we should note that most developing countries are in Africa. The report stresses that the new members of the UNSC must have contributed the most to the UN in terms of finance, military force, and diplomacy, particularly through contributions to UN assessed budgets, as well as participation in mandated peace operations. Again, the new members should represent the broader UN membership, increase the democratic and accountable nature of the Security Council, and should not impair its effectiveness (United Nations 2004:80). At present, most African countries are unable to meet all of these conditions. These criteria seem to delay or keep Africa out of the UNSC. Although FOCAC is promising vis-à-vis calling for reform, it still faces the challenge of harmonizing these conditions.

Second, there are still competing interests prevailing over the UN reform. Some countries are optimistic about the UN reform because they see a more transformational reform while others remain skeptical regarding the chances, or even the value, of any reform soon. This presents a challenging task for China and Africa to overcome. The skeptical camp regards the “experience of previous attempts at UNSC reform, and suggests that the circumstances underlying the failed experiences remain firmly in place” (Yale Center for the Study of Globalization 2005:5-7). The point is that they (Permanent five) “do not want to see their power diluted; they understand the existing deep political differences” (ibid). These reform skeptics argue that, given the present dilemmas in the international system, it is disadvantageous to enlarge the Security Council. However, the optimists assert that the “present arrangement is simply unsustainable… it grossly underrepresents Africa and Latin America” among others (ibid). Whereas China and Africa must look at this challenge as a formative one, vital initiatives such as how to speak with one voice (with respect to the Ezulwini Consensus), as well as forming alliances with both optimists and skeptics, should be cultivated now in order to prevent future challenges.

Even with the Ezulwini Consensus, there are still some disagreements within the AU over which two countries should represent Africa on the UNSC. Wafula noted that “the AU has not only failed to pick candidates for potential African seats on the UNSC, but has also been unable to forge consensus on how Africa should be represented at
the top decision-making body. This indecision is only likely to increase the nasty undertones among those countries campaigning for the seat” (Wafula 2005). Unless this is resolved, it will remain a challenge for FOCAC to push efforts to position Africa on the UNSC. In addition to this, African countries have not yet recovered from colonial pitfalls, including the multi-faceted issues concerning national identity. Whereas other regions of the world are waiting to benefit from Africa’s lack of consensus, the AU should not offer them a chance but instead emphasize on the question of regional representation by respecting the Ezwilwini Consensus. Solving the consensus question provides an opportunity for FOCAC to push for African interests within the UNSC.

Consensus proves to be a challenge not only for Africa, but for the United Nations as a whole. Following Kofi Annan’s strong support for quick reforms in the UNSC, a small number of countries which were aspiring for a seat failed to garner consensus on ‘Models A and B2’ (Yale Center for the Study of Globalization 2005; Crossick and Reuter 2007). India, Japan, Germany, and Brazil formed a so-called ‘Group of Four’ seeking Model A solution. Other nations such as Argentina, Italy, Pakistan, and Canada formed a ‘United for Consensus’ (UFC) movement, strongly opposing adding new permanent members’ (Gustaaf Geeraerts, Chen Zhimin and Gjoval Macaj 2007:3).

The Current Position of China on UNSC Reforms

On 8 June 2005, China released a Position Paper on the UNSC Reforms. It was the first time China stated her position on UN reforms. China stated the following six main principles that should guide UN reforms:

1. Reforms should be in the interest of multilateralism, and should enhance UN’s authority and efficiency, as well as its capacity to deal with new threats and challenges; 2. Reforms should safeguard the purposes and principles enshrined in the UN Charter, especially those of sovereign equality, non-interference in internal affairs, peaceful resolution of conflicts, and strengthening international cooperation; 3. Reforms should be all-dimensional and multi-sectoral, and should aim to succeed in both aspects of security and development. In particular, reforms should aim at reversing the trend of UN giving priority to security over development by increasing inputs in the field of development and facilitating the realization of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs); 4. Reforms shall accommodate the propositions and concerns of all UN members, especially those of the developing countries; 5. Reforms should be based on democratic and thorough consultations, and utilize the most broadly-based consensus; 6. Reforms should proceed gradually from tackling more manageable problems to thornier ones, and should be carried out in a way that will maintain and promote solidarity among members. For those proposals on which consensus has been reached, decision may be made promptly for their implementation; for important issues where division still exists, prudence, continued consultations and consensus-building are called for. It is undesirable to set a time limit or force a decision. (China Daily 2005; Zhang & Feng 2011: 979).

China’s UN position paper on UN reform stresses the vitality of enlarging UNSC membership and increasing representation of developing countries, thus allowing small and medium sized countries an opportunity to enter the Security Council on a rotating basis. That being said, Africa must keep in mind the fact that, for the past 60 years, the world has been run based on the order of the countries that won the Second World War.

However, since the beginning of the 21st century, the ‘Power Trinity’ in the international system has undeniably emerged. Power Trinity refers to the three major influences in the current world order, namely: - International Institutions and Non-government Organizations, - the ‘West’ and - the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa). This is mainly due to the massive economic and military rise that occurred in the present BRICS countries. The rise of such emerging countries/economies has affected the way decisions or actions on global issues are made to the extent that any reform of international institutions such as UN is difficult without strategic cooperation between both established and emerging

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2 Model A provides for six new permanent seats, with no veto being attached, and three new two-year term nonpermanent seats, divided among the major regional areas. Model B provides for no new permanent seats but creates a new category of eight four-year renewable-term seats and one new two-year non-permanent (and non-renewable) seat, divided among the major regional areas.
members. It is in this view that Africa should focus on understanding how to balance the current Power Trinity that is influencing the current world order (in this context, referring to the UN) to win the seat. Power Trinity is where the power to decide and act on global affairs is largely influenced not by one powerful actor but by the big three actors or largely dependent on the positions, perceptions, capabilities, support and influence of the big three global economic, political, military and normative actors. The big three global actors are;

1. International Organizations and Non-government Organizations (such as UN, World Bank, International Monetary Fund, World Trade Organization, International Criminal Court, World Health Organization, Oxfam, Red Cross etc)
2. The ‘West’ (here referring to the US, UK and the European Union [EU])
3. The BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa)

The Nature/ Main Features of the Power Trinity Actors

1. International Organizations and Non-government Organizations - global in membership, development support, promotion of justice/rule of law, peace, aid, relief provision.
2. The ‘West’ (the US and the EU) – have global normative, relational and structural reach and influence, the support of most developed countries, and holds both military and economic power.
3. The BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) – are now global in economic/financial influence, active in public diplomacy, have support of most developing countries, and hold market and military power.

Crucial to note is that no single factor in isolation of others can fully elucidate the rise of the power trinity in the international system, but a combination of many factors. For instance, the consistent effects of the shifting nature and loss of power of the state due to the disintegrating away of the Westphalian system built on sovereign states, the emerging influence of novel kinds of actors (like transnational non-governmental actors), and the effect of globalization and global governance.

There has also been the declining normative power of the United States of America and European Union, as well as the inability to exert real relational power. This is because of their failure to address development and security challenges in the developing world. For instance, ‘the European Union had to cave in and allow Zimbabwe to attend the EU-Africa summit in Lisbon 2007, against its wishes (Holden 2009:187).’ The political, security, economic and social crises in Africa and the Middle East continue to escalate despite of the western interventions. These regions used to be under the western’s political, social and economic orbit for a long time - have changed (Holden 2009).

The shifting economic conditions have weakened the international status quo, to the level that the hegemonic stability has somewhat lost its economic dominance and influence. The foremost role in development cooperation has been embraced by the smaller powers, the international organizations, and the private business.

Figure.1: Power Trinity Influencing the Current World Order

Source: Author’s Analysis

The proponents of the UNSC reforms contend that for the UN to have more credibility, the UNSC should be reformed to include more developing countries or unrepresented regions so that it can be democratically representative. For too long, decisions on military or economic intervention (or other sorts of intervention) had been based mainly on both capacity and authority, with the understanding that other member countries did not have enough capacity (Weiss 2003). This gave the U.S. and other western powers multiple chances to intervene because they possessed both the authority and capacity to do so. But now that BRICS countries are steadily gaining greater influence over the international decision-making process, there is a strong call for UNSC to reform
in order to become more legitimate, representative and effective. It is in light of this that Africa will not only need to use FOCAC and the Ezulwini Consensus as platforms, but also think beyond it to get support of the main players in the power trinity in order to win a permanent UNSC seat.

**Conclusion**

UNSC reforms have remained unimplemented primarily for three reasons. First, the five permanent members that would have spearheaded Security Council reforms are key beneficiaries of the existing UN/Security Council order since its formation in 1945 and view such reforms as a way of giving their legitimacy. In fact articles 108 and 109 of the UN Charter give veto power to the permanent five over any amendment to the Charter. Therefore, no reform can be possible without the consent of the permanent members. Second, current emerging economies (BRICS) previously lacked economic capacity to balance Western permanent members in the UNSC.

Finally, the hypocritical nature of the global diplomatic system caused by competing national interests among states created disagreements. But with the current rise of the power trinity, there is an imminent possibility for implementing Security Council reforms due to the strong global call for democratic representation, legitimacy and the effectiveness of the UNSC. However, for Africa to benefit from these possible reforms, it must not only focus on FOCAC and the Ezulwini Consensus as strategic platforms but also on how to win support of the main players in the power trinity. Citing Samuel Kim, Andornino noted that China’s release of a Position Paper on the UNSC reforms implies that the days of her low profile are over (Andornino 2010:101). Therefore, China and Africa must establish a more cooperative, pragmatic, and peaceful approach under FOCAC to push for UNSC reforms that would see Africa win permanent representation on the most powerful council.

**References**


