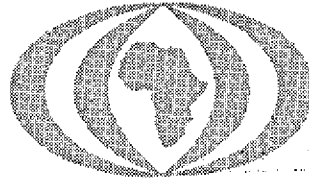


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BELJING'S (PEKING'S) AFRICAN POLICY

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Brief Report No. 47

During the period December 1982 to January 1983 the Chinese Minister, Zhao Ziyang, visited Africa. This development led to speculation that China would renew her African involvement after a period of dormancy. This Brief Report focusses on these developments.

INTRODUCTION

The African goals of the People's Republic of China (PRC) mesh closely with its overall foreign policy objectives. For instance, China seeks to maintain global revolutionary credibility by supporting newly independent African states and liberation movements. In theory, the PRC regards support for liberation movements as a way-station in the global revolutionary struggle. Another goal is to use Africa both as a direct and an indirect battleground in the conflict with the USSR and the USA. China portrays herself as the champion of smaller states and has attempted to expose what she interprets as the true nature of American and Soviet policies in Africa, viz. self-interest. Thirdly, Beijing aims to portray China as a model for Third World Independence, and the path to development and nation building.

Despite vigorous pursuit of China's Africa policy, these goals have not been fully realised. The unsettled African situation and constraints on her own policy-making process and other resources, plus a host of external factors, have provided real limitations for China's approach to Africa. Further, the more pragmatic line which has been followed by Chinese leaders since the death of Mao Zedong, finds expression in foreign policy matters too.

Early Chinese Involvement in Africa:

Starting with the Bandung Conference (1955), China's initial focus was Africa north of the Sahara; she gained diplomatic recognition from Egypt (1958), Morocco (1958), the Sudan (1958) and Guinea (1959).

Thereafter, in 1964 and 1965 the then Chinese Premier, Zhou Enlai, and his Foreign Minister, Chén-yi, visited a number of other African countries and pledged US \$ 190 million in aid to seven states; this was a significant increase in, and a widening of, China's commitment to Africa. As a result, the PRC established formal links with 15 additional African states.

Finally, in the period 1966 to 1976, China's Africa policy was erratic: on the one hand, a more thoughtful approach to Africa and, on the other, wrangles with African states as a result of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1968). It is clear that the Cultural Revolution alienated many African countries, some of whom severed their diplomatic relations with China. (For example, Beijing's African missions dropped from 18 in 1965 to 13 in 1969.) However, by October 1970, an additional 7 African countries had recognised the People's Republic of China.

A primary indicator of Chinese activity in Africa is the quantity of credits and grants which the PRC has extended to African states. This is set out in the following table, which also includes data on the USSR for comparative purposes.

Table 1: Chinese and Soviet Aid Commitments to Africa, 1954-1966, and 1970-1976 (in \$ million)

	1954 - 1966		1970 - 1976	
	China	USSR	China	USSR
Algeria	52	236	40	479
Angola	-	-	-	10
Benin	-	-	44	-
Burundi	-	-	20	-
Cameroon	-	8	71	-
Central African Empire	4	-	-	2
Chad	-	-	50	2
Congo	25	10	-	4
Egypt	35	1 001	28	299
Equatorial Guinea	-	-	-	1
Ethiopia	-	102	85	3
Gambia	-	-	17	-
Ghana	42	93	-	-
Guinea	56	106	11	2
Guinea-Bissau	-	-	17	14
Kenya	18	48	-	-
Malagasy Republic	-	-	66	-
Mali	55	59	4	-
Mauritania	-	-	59	1
Mauritius	-	-	35	-
Morocco	-	44	32	44
Mozambique	-	-	59	3

	1954 - 1966		1970 - 1976	
	China	USSR	China	USSR
Niger	-	-	51	2
Nigeria	-	-	-	7
Rwanda	-	-	22	1
Senegal	-	7	49	2
Sierra Leone	-	28	30	-
Somalia	22	66	111	87
Sudan	-	22	82	-
Tanzania	54	20	305	-
Togo	-	-	45	-
Tunisia	-	34	40	55
Uganda	15	16	-	-
Upper Volta	-	-	52	1
Zaire	-	-	100	-
Zambia	-	-	290	-
TOTALS	\$ 428	\$ 1 900	\$ 1 815	\$ 1 019

The Table shows that in the early period the Soviet Union's aid to Africa outstripped that of the PRC. China was the major donor in Tanzania and the Congo (Brazzaville), where she was involved in smaller projects than the USSR. There was, for example, no major "flagship" project on the same scale as the Soviet-financed Aswan Dam.

It must be noted, however, that the figures of the earlier period skew the direct comparison as the Soviets were involved in Africa far earlier than the Chinese. China's aid commitment reached recognisable proportions only after 1961, rising to US \$ 195 million in 1964.

While the Cultural Revolution temporarily halted China's African programme, the 1970-1976 figures show a reversal in the role of China and the USSR. Beijing quadrupled her aid from the previous period, doubling the amount contributed by Moscow; becoming the chief communist aid donor to African countries. Aid was also horizontally spread as China offered aid to 22 new African states compared with a Soviet contribution to 11 new states. It was in the later period that China undertook her first "flagship" project in Africa - the construction of the massive Tazara (also known as Tanzam) Railway line at an initial cost in excess of US \$ 450 million.

After the Cultural Revolution, China stressed the necessity of close ties with a limited number of African countries, and again Tanzania and the Congo (Brazzaville) were the most prominent. This policy of intimacy persisted despite the fact that during the 1970s Beijing managed to establish formal links with a number of African states; in this she was clearly assisted by her recognition by Washington, in 1972, and the fact that she took a seat at the United Nations.

Attitude to Superpowers:

Although Beijing improved relations with the US, she has treated both the Superpowers as equal rivals in Africa. This even-handed treatment of the Superpowers was to change in the late 1970s when the Chinese began to regard the Soviets as a greater threat to international security (including African security) than the US. Since 1977, Moscow's interest in Africa has again surpassed that of Beijing and China has been more cautious.

A major complication arose from Beijing's involvement in the Angolan war. China supplied aid both to Unita (1968-1974) and to the FNLA (1974-1975), and the revelation that these two movements had also received aid from South Africa may have served to damage Chinese-African relations. African states, for their part, are prone to perceive Beijing's interest mainly in terms of Sino-Soviet competition and China's absence from the General Assembly during the vote on Angolan membership of the UN, in late 1976, may have alienated her even further from Africa.

Recent Chinese Involvement in Africa:

The upswing in Moscow's Africa policy, which peaked in the late 1970s, did not mean that China had removed herself from the continent altogether; Beijing maintained close ties with Tanzania and Zambia as well as other African states. Beijing also gave extensive support to Robert Mugabe's ZANU faction in Zimbabwe and the victory of ZANU in Zimbabwe may have been the harbinger of a new shift in Sino-African ties and the beginning of a new Chinese posture in Africa.

To China, the eventual outcome of the Zimbabwean conflict indicated a possibility that remaining southern African conflicts will be settled by negotiation, rather than a long drawn out guerrilla war. Beijing feels that freedom can be attained through the barrel of a gun and by face-to-face negotiations, as in the Zimbabwean situation. The Chinese have further argued that "Zimbabwe's independence represents a rebuff to the Soviet expansionist designs in southern Africa". The refurbished Chinese approach to Africa was evident when senior officials of the PRC - including the Chairman, Hua Guofeng - visited south and east African countries in 1980, and was underscored by the recent visit to 11 African states by the Chinese Prime Minister.

Chinese policy was stated clearly in The Peoples Daily before Mr Zhao left Beijing on his African tour. The paper argued that, with the exception of South Africa and Namibia, African countries had achieved national independence and this independence had to be consolidated by strengthening their national economies. Beijing's policy towards Namibia was direct and not linked to the Cuban factor. It stated that, irrespective of Havana's close links with Moscow, "Namibia's independence should not be linked with Cuban troop withdrawal from Angola". Simultaneously, China criticised the US for its policy of "constructive engagement" with South Africa. Such flexibility was also apparent in talks held in Lusaka with representatives of the ANC and SWAPO, (both supported by the USSR); previously Beijing had given exclusive support to the PAC.

Zhao visited both radical and conservative African countries: Guinea, Algeria, Tanzania, the Congo, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Zaire, Morocco, Kenya, Egypt and Gabon. His visit was not controversial, although an important and noticeable exclusion from the itinerary was Mozambique; Maputo's closer ties with Moscow are no doubt still an issue affecting Chinese-Mozambiquan relations. However, Beijing's re-opening of formal relations with Luanda reflects her changed policy of establishing relations with African countries which also enjoy Soviet support.

China has established particularly close links with Zambia, Tanzania and Zimbabwe, without interfering in their domestic affairs. Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe is the only progressive leader in Africa who has not taken Soviet support and who has had consistent backing from the Chinese, and Beijing committed a further US \$ 33 million to the interest free loan of US \$ 19 million given to Zimbabwe at independence. China demonstrated further generosity by releasing Zaire from a commitment to reimburse US \$ 100 million due for payment in July 1983, and by allocating this money to joint Sino-Zairean projects instead. Moreover, it appears that the PRC may write off the US \$ 680 million loan on the Tazara Railway line, since Tanzania and Zambia are critically short of foreign currency.

China's African policy has changed in emphasis over the years but whether or not she plans to increase her aid commitment is uncertain. Apart from commitments made by Zhao during his African tour, Chinese aid to Africa has not been substantial in recent years. Beijing's total aid commitment in 1981 amounted to US \$ 190 million, (as compared with US \$ 243 million in 1980), and disbursements have averaged just over US \$ 125 million in the last two years. In 1981, for example, China extended US \$ 173 million to Guinea-Bissau for a hospital, a football stadium and a bamboo goods factory. The only other Chinese commitment in Africa during 1981 was a US \$ 17 million supplement to the US \$ 40 million granted to the Sudan in 1980 for road construction, textile and agricultural projects. Early in 1982, Beijing offered US \$ 30 million to Liberia for its failing sugar industry. These few examples illustrate that China's aid commitments are in the developmental rather than the military field.

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