

EUROPE AND CHINA IN INTERNATIONAL CONFLICT MANAGEMENT: RIVALS AND PARTNERS*

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INTRODUCTION

Since the end of the Cold War, the United States and Europe have been the leading actors in global conflict management. China is currently emerging as the third major player in global security governance. Much attention is given to the strategic relationships of the United States with Europe and China. However, in order to understand how the global security landscape is changing, the relationship between Europe and China should also be taken into account. Both Europe and China are permanently represented in the United Nations Security Council and have substantial economic and diplomatic influence in parts of the world far beyond their own regions.¹ This chapter focuses on the roles played by China and Europe in managing regional security crises in Africa and the Middle East.²

To understand what Chinese-European interaction on regional security crises could look like, it is useful to consider briefly a current example of Chinese-American relations in a part of the world where Europe is not an active security actor, i.e., East Asia. In 2003 Beijing initiated a mediation effort to address tensions between North Korea and the United States relating to Pyongyang's nuclear weapons programme. This effort became institutionalized in the 'Six-

* This essay is based on Emma van der Meulen & Frans-Paul van der Putten, 'European and Chinese Approaches to International Conflict Management in Africa and the Middle East: The cases of Sudan and Iran' (unpublished manuscript).

¹ On current developments in the relationship between the UN Security Council and the EU, see: Daniele Marchesi, 'The EU Common Foreign and Security Policy in the UN Security Council: Between Representation and Coordination', *Regional Integration & Global Governance Papers 3* (Bruges, College of Europe 2008).

² For a recent publication on the overall response of the EU (and the United States) to China's influence in Africa, see: Asteris Huliaras & Konstantinos Magliveras, 'In Search of a Policy: EU and US reactions to the growing Chinese presence in Africa', *European Foreign Affairs Review*, No. 13 (2008) pp. 399-420.

Party Talks' (involving also South Korea, Japan, and Russia). While the Americans became more appreciative of China's role in this crisis, especially after the nuclear test conducted by North Korea in 2006, the Chinese responded positively to US efforts to restrain Taiwan's pro-independence movement. Gradually a picture is emerging in which Beijing and Washington jointly manage potential conflicts in East Asia through their bilateral ties within the region, and through cooperation in the UN Security Council and the Six-Party Talks.³ At the same time, the North Korean crisis has enabled China to increase its influence in regional security. In terms of regional influence, this emergence of China results in a relative decline in the position of the United States. It remains to be seen how cooperation between China and the United States develops, not only with regard to East Asia but also regarding sources of regional instability in other parts of the world. Nonetheless, the North Korean issue seems to represent a model for great power cooperation on regional security crises that might also apply to great power interaction in other parts of the world.⁴

This chapter discusses how the relationship between China and Europe in conflict (or crisis) management is evolving by taking two recent crises, involving Sudan and Iran, as examples. Two questions in particular are of interest. First, does the growing influence of China lead to a weakening of Europe's role? Second, what is the potential for cooperation between Europe and China in conflict management?

EUROPE, CHINA AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

One reason why little has been written about Europe as a security counterpart of China is that Europe does not exist as a unified security actor. For the purpose of this chapter, Europe is regarded as an international security actor whose interests and behaviour are shaped in four major centres of decision making: Brussels, Paris, London, and Berlin.⁵ Geographically, Europe is taken here to refer to the European Union, while it is taken into account that Europe's three major countries dominate decision making in Brussels and also have – to some degree – a capability to operate individually on the world stage.

More than in any other region, in Africa and the Middle East great powers can play a leading role in managing local security crises. The Middle East has

³ This applies mostly to the situation on the Korean peninsula. Regarding the Taiwan issue, further Sino-US cooperation still faces serious obstacles.

⁴ On the North Korean case as a model for Sino-US cooperation, see: Bonnie S. Glaser & Wang Liang, 'North Korea: The Beginning of a China-U.S. Partnership?', 31 *The Washington Quarterly*, No. 3 (Summer 2008) pp. 165-180.

⁵ This four-part approach to Europe is also used by the Chinese government in its diplomacy towards Europe: Avery Goldstein, *Rising to the Challenge: China's Grand Strategy and International Security* (Stanford, Stanford University Press 2005) pp. 160-161.

no regional security mechanism, and in Africa's case the African Union has limited resources and external powers are highly influential. The leading great powers are the permanent members of the UN Security Council. They can play their role in conflict management through the Council, but also bilaterally or via other diplomatic platforms. The two crises most often cited as examples of China's growing role in African and Middle Eastern security relate to Sudan and Iran. The violence in Sudan's Darfur region is primarily a domestic crisis. For Europe, however, the failure of the Sudanese government to protect its citizens from large-scale suffering gives the international community a responsibility and a mandate to intervene. International pressure forced China, as a permanent Security Council member and closely tied to Khartoum, to take a stand. The case of Iran revolves around Tehran's uranium enrichment programme, and threats by the United States and Israel to intervene militarily if Iran continues to move towards nuclear weapons capability. Europe, China, and Russia have taken up a role of mediation between Tehran and Washington in order to prevent a military conflict.

ISSUES AT STAKE

The issues at stake for the Chinese and the Europeans are located at three levels. *First*, there are local interests and local influence. In a given country or region, both Europe and China have certain local economic and diplomatic interests and wish to protect these. *Second*, there is the question of how a given crisis affects the positions of both Europe and China vis-à-vis the United States. At the basic level, it is in China's interest to have good relations with both Europe and the United States while in certain instances benefitting from differences between the positions of the Europeans and the Americans. The same is true for Europe regarding its relations with Beijing and Washington. The rise of China could cause Europe to lose its position as the preferred security partner of the United States. Shifts in this triangular relationship affect power relations not only at the local but also at the global level.

Third, there is the general debate on how to deal with the concept of state sovereignty, in relation to both human rights and non-proliferation. This debate is of crucial importance for the future of global governance in terms of international conflict management. The differences between China and the West are the greatest in regard to human rights. Europe, along with the United States, is in favour of a system in which international security organizations such as the UN Security Council intervene in domestic affairs not only if international stability is in immediate danger, but also if a national government cannot or does not protect the human security of its citizens. However, China favours a global

security system that leaves a great deal of room for states to manage their internal affairs without external interference. The Chinese leaders believe that human rights norms can be manipulated by great powers to legitimize interventions in other countries.⁶ In China, protecting territorial integrity is crucial to the survival of the Communist Party.⁷ Local crises in Taiwan, Tibet, or Xinjiang always carry the risk of inviting outside interference, which would enhance the danger of increased autonomy in such regions. So while there is a high degree of confidence in the West that there is no danger of an undesired intervention by foreign powers in Western countries, China does not have this confidence.⁸ China's position in the debate on nuclear non-proliferation is based on a similar reasoning, as China believes that, in principle, countries have the right to develop nuclear capabilities for peaceful use. Many Chinese experts also believe that the proliferation of nuclear weapons is inevitable and helps countries to balance against the United States.⁹

Active participation in the debate on the norms and standards relevant to international interventions is a primary line of defence from the perspective of China's leadership. This does not mean that China always favours state sovereignty over human rights or non-proliferation, or that Beijing never actively supports certain interventions. As pointed out by Allen Carlson, in 1999 China criticized the Western intervention in Kosovo, but it supported international intervention in East Timor.¹⁰ The Africa specialist Ian Taylor argues that in the

⁶ Allen Carlson, *Unifying China, Integrating with the World: Securing Sovereignty in the Reform Era* (Stanford, Stanford University Press 2005) pp. 174-175.

⁷ Russell Ong, *China's Security Interests in the 21st Century* (London, Routledge 2007) p. 15.

⁸ For European perspectives on what China's role in global governance should be, see: Charles Grant, with Katinka Barysch, *Can Europe and China Shape a New World Order?* (London, Centre for European Reform 2008) pp.89-92; Marcin Zaborowski, 'EU-China Security Relations', *ISS Analysis Paper* (Paris, 2008) p. 2; François Godement, 'The EU and China: A necessary partnership', in Giovanni Grevi & Álvaro de Vasconcelos, 'Partnerships for Effective Multilateralism: EU relations with Brazil, China, India and Russia.', *ISS Chaillot Paper 109* (Paris, May 2008). On China's perspective see Samuel S. Kim, 'Chinese Foreign Policy Faces Globalization Challenges', in: Alastair Ian Johnston & Robert S. Ross, eds., *New Directions in the Study of China's Foreign Policy* (Stanford, Stanford University Press 2006).

⁹ François Godement, 'Is China a Reliable Partner in Non-Proliferation?', *China Analysis*, No. 19 (European Council on Foreign Relations, August 2008).

¹⁰ Carlson, *supra* n. 6, p. 176; also: Allen Carlson, 'Protecting Sovereignty, Accepting Intervention: The dilemma of Chinese foreign relations in the 1990s', *China Policy Series 18* (National Committee on United States-China Relations, September 2002) <[http://www.ncusr.org/files/3.%20Protecting%20Sovereignty,%20Accepting%20Intervention%20\(18\).pdf](http://www.ncusr.org/files/3.%20Protecting%20Sovereignty,%20Accepting%20Intervention%20(18).pdf)> (accessed 25 July 2008); *ibid.*, 'Helping to Keep the Peace (Albeit Reluctantly): China's recent stance on sovereignty and multilateral intervention', *77 Pacific Affairs*, No. 1 (2004) pp. 9-27; and *ibid.*, 'More Than Just Saying No: China's Evolving Approach to Sovereignty and Intervention since Tiananmen', in Johnston & Ross, *supra* n. 8. The changing Chinese perspective on state sover-

longer run, the interests of the West and China in the sphere of human rights in Africa are very similar, implying that Beijing's foreign human rights policy will move closer to Western norms.¹¹ However, according to Stephanie Kleine-Ahlbrandt and Andrew Small, in the foreseeable future China's policy towards pariah states will show only minor, experimental changes.¹²

For the moment, the focus on specific cases remains crucial in order to understand how the relationship between Europe and China in conflict management is developing. Not abstract theory but actual crises in international relations, whether these relate to human rights, armed conflict, natural disasters, or economic instability, shape the debate on sovereignty and intervention.

DARFUR

The crisis in Darfur is rooted in a split within the ruling Congress Party between Omar al-Bashir and Hassan al-Turabi that occurred in the late 1990s. Most party members from Darfur supported al-Turabi, whom al-Bashir ousted in 1999. Hence al-Bashir, fearful of losing influence in Darfur, appointed loyalists in the Popular Defence Forces (PDF), the local police force that later became known as the Janjaweed.¹³ The politicization of the PDF increased tensions that escalated into violence in February 2003 when the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army (SLM/A) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), the main Darfuri resistance movements, carried out a series of attacks on military installations. The Government of Sudan responded with a counterinsurgency campaign the extreme brutality of which drew the attention of the international community. Since 2003, over 200,000 people have been killed and two million have been displaced, according to estimates by the United Nations.¹⁴

eighty is also noted by Zhang Yongjin, 'Understanding Chinese Views of the Emerging Global Order', in Wang Gungwu & Zheng Yongnian, eds., *China and the New International Order* (Abingdon, Routledge 2008) pp. 160-161; Shan Wenhua: 'Redefining the Chinese Concept of Sovereignty', in Gungwu & Yongnian, *ibid.*

¹¹ Ian Taylor, 'Sino-African Relations and the Problem of Human Rights', 107 *African Affairs*, No. 426 (2008) pp. 63-87.

¹² Stephanie Kleine-Ahlbrandt & Andrew Small, 'China's New Dictatorship Diplomacy', *Foreign Affairs* (January-February 2008).

¹³ A. de Waal, 'Briefing: Darfur, Sudan: Prospects for Peace', 104 *African Affairs*, No. 414 (2005) pp. 127-128. See for more information on the origins of the crisis: H. Slim, 'Dithering over Darfur? A preliminary review of the international response', 80 *International Affairs*, No. 5 (2004) pp. 811-828; and A. de Waal, 'Who are the Darfurians? Arab and African identities, violence and external engagement', 104 *African Affairs*, No. 415 (2005) pp. 181-205.

¹⁴ <<http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/missions/unamid/background.html>> (accessed 7 July 2008).

China's local interests in Sudan are related to energy security, in addition to which trade and good diplomatic relations are also important. China has invested over \$15 billion in Sudan since 1996, much of it in oil-related projects.¹⁵ Because of these large investments, China has an interest in the continuation of good bilateral relations with the Government of Sudan. Oil from Sudan makes up around 6% of China's total oil imports. Most oil-producing regions are located in South Sudan. When the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the central government and the rebel movement in South Sudan (SPLM/A) was signed in 2005, it also became a real possibility that the South would become independent of the North after a referendum to be held in 2011. Consequently the Chinese government invited Salva Kiir Mayardit, vice president and representative of the SPLM/A in the government of national unity, to come to China soon after the CPA was signed.¹⁶ Chinese involvement in oil fields in Darfur is limited to a 95% stake in Block 6 in South Darfur, which produces relatively few barrels per day. However, China recently announced that it would expand its oil operations in Darfur. A political solution to the conflict in Darfur is the best way for China to protect its interests in the country. China has an interest in a stable Sudan to safeguard its large investments. In addition to its local interests in Sudan, China also has a major stake in the implications of the Darfur crisis for global governance. The way in which the UN addresses this particular crisis sets a precedent for future instances. Beijing is determined to defend the principle of state sovereignty, but at the same time it also wants to avoid undermining the legitimacy of the UN Security Council in global governance, or to come into a direct conflict with the United States or Europe.

When the Darfur crisis erupted, Beijing did not pursue an active role. In the Security Council, China threatened to use its veto on resolutions that included economic sanctions against Sudan, but has never put this threat into practice. Instead, China regularly abstained from voting.¹⁷ Key issues for China were the absence of economic sanctions and the consent of the Government of Sudan before any action was taken.¹⁸ China changed its position on international intervention in Darfur in 2006, when it became clear to Beijing that neither Presi-

¹⁵ Chris Alden, *China in Africa* (London, Zed Books 2007) p. 61.

¹⁶ 'Sudanese first vice president to visit China', *People's Daily Online* (12 July 2005).

¹⁷ Key resolutions relating to Darfur are: SC Res. 1556 (arms embargo; China abstained), 1564 (threats of 'additional measures'; abstained), 1574 (expansion of AMIS; approved), 1590 (expansion of UNMIS in Darfur; abstained), 1591 (establishing a sanctions committee; abstained), 1593 (ICC; abstained), 1672 (sanctions on war criminals; abstained), 1679 (transition AMIS into UNAMID; approved), 1706 (deployment of UNAMID, no consent by Khartoum; abstained), 1755 (facilitation of humanitarian operations in Darfur; approved), and 1769 (deployment of UNAMID with the consent of Khartoum; approved).

¹⁸ Daniel Large, 'Oil and Darfur. The evolution of relations between China and Sudan', *Small Arms Survey, Human Security Baseline Assessment*, No. 7 (2008) pp. 7-8.

dent al-Bashir nor the African Union (through its AMIS peacekeeping mission) were able to bring stability to Darfur. The fact that China now saw the need for an international solution became apparent through the firm diplomatic language of high-ranking Chinese officials, such as this statement by the Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao: 'China is very much concerned about the stability in Darfur [...] and of course we support the international society's decision to send in peacekeepers.'¹⁹ Wang Guangya, China's representative in the Security Council, also played an important and constructive mediating role behind the scenes during the negotiations on the 'Annan Plan', the road-map for the deployment of the UN-AU peacekeeping force, in Addis Ababa in November 2006.²⁰

The appointment of Liu Guijin as special representative in May 2007 further strengthened China's role as a mediator between the Western call for intervention and the Sudanese resistance to it. China helped to draft a resolution to which the Government of Sudan could give its consent, mainly by ensuring that the peacekeeping troops did not come from Western countries and that the final resolution did not contain any economic sanctions. Liu Guijin also took part in this active diplomacy by visiting Sudan regularly as well as holding meetings with the Arab League and the African Union on the subject.²¹ With Khartoum's consent to the deployment of the UN Darfur Mission (UNAMID), China approved resolution 1769 in the Security Council. China also voted in favour of resolution 1776, adopted by the Security Council on 25 September 2007, that authorised the deployment of EUFOR in Eastern Chad, near the border with Darfur in Sudan. China has given some humanitarian assistance to Darfur, but the amount is relatively limited in comparison to other donors. China also contributed \$3.5 million to the African Union Mission in Sudan in June 2006,²² and 435 troops to the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMIS). In February 2008, China also sent in 140 troops to contribute to UNAMID.²³

On the European side, France has the most extensive interests in the region. It is especially concerned with the implications that the conflict in Darfur has on the stability of the region. Darfur directly borders France's old colonies Chad and the Central African Republic (CAR), with which Paris maintains close mili-

¹⁹ Press Statement during a state visit to the United Kingdom: <<http://www.number10.gov.uk/output/page10056.asp>> (accessed 9 July 2008).

²⁰ Large, *supra* n. 18, p. 9. China's diplomatic activity had already started to change before a group of prominent Americans started the 'Genocide Olympics' campaign in mid-2007, criticising China for its involvement in Sudan. However, China may also have been sensitive to international pressure and criticism as this was damaging to its reputation as a responsible international player which might damage its position on the African continent in particular.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

²² *Ibid.*; UN News Service

²³ 'Sudan welcomes Chinese peacekeepers', *The Boston Globe/AP* (1 February 2008).

tary and economic ties. The United Kingdom has few local interests but nonetheless regards the Darfur issue as an important foreign policy priority. This seems related primarily to the more general aim of promoting Western values in combination with the high-profile status of the Darfur conflict in the international media. Germany's interests in Sudan are also limited and are mainly economic. Stability in Sudan would benefit the EU, as it would allow the normalisation of economic relations and – due to the relative closeness of Sudan to Europe – would contribute to Europe's own stability.²⁴

France, the United Kingdom and Germany have used largely similar means to address the conflict in Darfur, although France has taken the most active role in addressing the crisis. The big three operate bilaterally as well as through the EU and the UN. Military commitments elsewhere can explain the reluctance of Germans and British to become militarily involved in the Darfur crisis. All three have expressed their support for the African Union Mission in Darfur. In the end, however, Europe has produced much rhetoric but little commitment to actually ending the Darfur crisis. This is in line with its limited local interests and its focus on the more abstract dimension of human rights promotion and its global governance agenda.

When China pressured the government in Khartoum to accept foreign intervention by the UN in 2007, it risked losing some of its local standing. However, China still remains the main diplomatic ally and economic partner of Sudan and the strong pressure from the West continues to make Chinese support indispensable for Khartoum. In spite of Europe committing aid and support for peace-keeping missions and putting pressure on the Sudanese government, its influence at the local level remains insignificant in relation to China's. In terms of the positions of Europe and China relative to the United States, both sides have shown their worth to American foreign policy. On the one hand, Europe has manifested itself as a strong proponent of the same values that underlie US policy. On the other hand, China proves to be a key party when it comes to influencing the government in Khartoum.

In the sphere of global governance, both Europe and China have had to compromise. Beijing managed to defend the principle that external parties can only intervene with the consent of the Sudanese government. However, behind the screens China has had to put pressure on the Sudanese to go along with outside intervention. Europe has seen its sanctions against Sudan counterbalanced by China, and has had to accept a lesser degree of intervention than what would have been possible without China's involvement. Relatively minor areas aside, China and Europe do not act as partners in managing the Darfur crisis, due to

²⁴ European Commission's Delegation to the Sudan, Bilateral Relations, <http://www.delsdn.cc.europa.eu/en/eu_and_sudan/bilateral_relations.htm> (accessed 7 July 2008).

the fact that their main interests are opposed. This is true with regard to the principles of state sovereignty *versus* interventionism, but also with regard to the *status quo*. China benefits from its ties with the current regime, while Europe would benefit more from a regime change. A basis for joint conflict management does exist, since both sides have an interest in stability. The problem is that in this area China's stakes are much higher than Europe's. In other words, China is more genuinely interested in solving the crisis itself, while for Europe the crisis is primarily an opportunity to push its foreign policy agenda.

IRAN

The National Council of Resistance of Iran, an Iranian opposition organisation in exile, revealed in August 2002 that Tehran was secretly developing uranium enrichment facilities. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) started investigations and Iran reported its nuclear facilities officially to the IAEA in February 2003. Iran claimed that the programme had been set up to provide an alternative source of energy for domestic use and that the development of weapons of mass destruction ran counter to Islamic ideology.²⁵ Contradictory claims and further revelations of nuclear-related activity increased the suspicion of the international community about Iran's intentions. In an attempt to build trust and ensure Iran's future cooperation with the IAEA, Germany, France and the United Kingdom, as the 'EU-3', started a process of 'conditional engagement', whereby the continuation of trade was made dependent on Iran's improved behaviour. Despite its initial successes, such as the signing of an Additional Protocol committing Iran to fuller cooperation with the IAEA and the suspension of uranium enrichment activities for two years, the EU-3 could not prevent that Iran continued uranium enrichment at Natanz on 10 January 2006.

The crisis deepened as the possibility of a military conflict between Iran and the United States, or between Iran and Israel, seemed increasingly likely. The official positions of both the United States and Israel is that a nuclear Iran is not acceptable and that all options to prevent this are open. In addition to the EU-3, also Russia and China – as permanent members of the UN Security Council and because of their ties with Tehran – joined in the efforts to defuse the crisis. Together with the United States they constitute the 'Six Powers' who jointly negotiate with Iran on its nuclear programme. On 31 January 2006, the Six Powers agreed to report Iran to the Security Council. Since then, four resolutions have been adopted requiring Iran to fully cooperate with the IAEA and to suspend all uranium enrichment. Economic sanctions and an arms embargo have

²⁵ Wyn Q. Bowen & Joanna Kidd, 'The Iranian Nuclear Challenge', 80 *International Affairs*, No. 2 (2004) p. 258.

been imposed to enforce Iran's cooperation. Up until now, Iran has not complied.

China's main local interests in Iran relate to energy resources. Iran has the world's third largest reserves of oil, as well as the world's second largest gas reserves. Iran is currently China's third largest supplier of crude oil.²⁶ China also has economic interests in Iran beyond energy. Bilateral trade is extensive and growing, totalling \$30 billion by the end of 2008, according to Assistant Foreign Minister Zhai Jun.²⁷ China surpassed the major countries of the European Union, notably Germany, as Iran's largest trade partner in 2006. China is also involved in weapons trade with Iran and played a large role in building up the Iranian army after the revolution in 1979. As with the Darfur crisis, the Iranian nuclear crisis affects China not only in terms of local interests but also at the level of global governance. Here again, Beijing tries to uphold the principle of state sovereignty as much as possible. At the same time, China wants to avoid being regarded as an irresponsible global power that does not care about nuclear non-proliferation.²⁸ Beijing's reputation in this regard is highly relevant to its standing, and therefore influence, in international organisations. Moreover, China – for whom relations with the United States are also critically important – wants to avoid having to choose between Tehran and Washington in case of a further escalation of tensions between Iran and the United States.

China sought to prevent such escalating tensions from the start of the crisis, without, however, taking a leading role in international mediation. Initially the Chinese government announced its opposition to referring Iran to the UN Security Council, while stressing that Iran should operate in the framework of the IAEA.²⁹ When Iran openly continued its uranium enrichment in January, China agreed to refer Iran to the Security Council while remaining reluctant about imposing sanctions on Iran. Nonetheless, China voted in favour of each of the four Security Council resolutions aimed at forcing Iran to suspend its enrichment programme. China has emphasised that these sanctions were not intended to punish Iran, but to urge it to return to the negotiating table.³⁰ For China, Iran

²⁶ Energy Information Administration, Country Analysis Brief: China, last updated August 2006, available online at <<http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/China/Full.html>> (accessed 4 August 2008).

²⁷ 'Iran-China trade to reach dlrs 30b in 2008', *Iranian Republic News Agency* (14 July 2008).

²⁸ Dingli Shen, 'Iran's Nuclear Ambitions Test China's Wisdom', 29 *Washington Quarterly*, No.2 (2006) p. 56.

²⁹ Press Release on <<http://www.ie.china-embassy.org/eng/NewsPress/t169550.htm>>, 'Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing Pays a Formal Visit to Iran, 7 November 2004' (accessed 14 July 2008).

³⁰ 'Statements of Wang Guangya after the adoption of resolutions 1747 and 1803, Press Releases on 23-03-2007 and 03-03-2008', available online at <http://www.un.org/Docs/sc/unsc_press.asp> (12 July 2008).

has a right to develop nuclear energy as long as this is done within the IAEA framework. Meanwhile, diplomatic ties between Tehran and Beijing have remained intact, and the crisis has not deterred China from increasing its economic relations with Iran, in spite of American pressure to do the opposite.

In contrast to China's reluctant role, Europe has been highly active in international diplomacy since the start of the Iranian nuclear crisis. France has substantial economic interests in Iran. France's exports to Iran are diverse and encompass the automobile industry, hydrocarbon technology, transport and financial services, while imports are mainly crude oil.³¹ Iranian oil accounts for 3% of French oil imports.³² Iran was France's sixth oil supplier in 2006 and France's third biggest market in the Middle East.³³ French economic interests are being damaged by the sanctions. The value of exports to Iran declined by 20.3% in the period 2006-2007, totalling \$1.5 billion in 2007.³⁴ France has important regional interests in Lebanon, a country in which Iran is an influential actor through its ties with Syria and Hezbollah. Trade between Iran and the United Kingdom was valued at £400 million in 2007 (in 2006: £431m).³⁵ Iran is Britain's sixth biggest trading partner from the Middle East and Northern Africa region. Britain's involvement in the Iraq war increased its interests in the stability and security of the Middle East.³⁶ Iran's foreign policy tends to work against British interest. The United Kingdom blamed Iran for giving support to various groups that work to undermine the Middle East peace process and for supplying Shi'a militias in Iraq with arms.³⁷ The third major European actor, Germany, is Iran's largest trade partner within the EU. The German-Iranian trade volume totalled \$7.1 billion in 2007. German exports to Iran declined by 7% in 2006 and 13.5% in 2007.³⁸ The total volume of trade declined by 8.7% in 2007. The German economy is being damaged by the economic sanctions imposed on Iran and it is therefore in Germany's interests to solve the Iranian

³¹ French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Economic and Political Relations with Iran', see: <http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files_156/iran_301/index.html> (accessed 6 August 2008).

³² Statistics from French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, updated on 10 January 2006 (before international sanctions were enacted).

³³ Energy Information Administration, *Country Analysis Briefs: France*, updated April 2007 <<http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/France/Full.html>> (accessed 18 July 2008).

³⁴ 'France and UK reduce trade ties with Iran', *Financial Times* (17 July 2008).

³⁵ <https://www.uktradeinvest.gov.uk/ukti/appmanager/ukti/countries?_nfls=false&_nfpb=true&_pageLabel=CountryType1&navigationPageId=/iran> (accessed 22 July 2008).

³⁶ Mark Gasiorowski, 'The New Aggressiveness in Iran's Foreign Policy', *XIV Middle East Policy*, No. 2 (Summer 2007).

³⁷ <<http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/about-the-fco/country-profiles/middle-east-north-africa/iran/?profile=intRelations&pg=4>> (accessed 22 July 2008).

³⁸ German Federal Foreign Office, *Economic Relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran* (18 July 2008).

nuclear crisis swiftly. German companies are fearful that if economic sanctions force them to withdraw, Chinese and Russian companies will take over their position.³⁹ The interests of the EU as a whole in Iran are largely similar to those of the Member States in this study. The main interests of the EU in Iran are energy resources, trade and investment, while the EU also has an interest in cooperating with Iran in regional security issues because of its interests in the stability of the region.

Under President Chirac France assumed a balancing role in the Middle East after the Lebanon war of 2006, mediating between American and Arab, including Iranian, interests.⁴⁰ However, under President Sarkozy France's rhetoric and actions towards Iran have been less compromising and more directly in line with the US's stance. British Prime Minister Tony Blair adopted strong rhetoric, stating it was certain that Iran sponsored terrorism. British soldiers have been taken hostage by Iran's Revolutionary Guards twice, in 2004 and in 2007. Although both crises were solved diplomatically, Iran sent a strong signal of its power in the Persian Gulf.⁴¹ London's policy towards Iran is largely similar to American policy, as the United Kingdom is the main ally of the United States in the region. The United Kingdom is the most active European power lobbying for additional European sanctions. Germany has assumed an active diplomatic role in trying to solve the Iranian nuclear crisis, mainly within an EU or UN context. The fact that it is losing its business interests to China is an extra stimulus for Germany to work towards a diplomatic solution. When the UN took over the case from the EU, Germany's active role remained unchanged. The P5+1 construction, the five permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany constituting the Six Powers to deal with the Iranian issue, elevated Germany's status as an important international actor.

Although the EU is seen as having taken the lead in solving the Iranian nuclear crisis in the EU-3 context, this was an initiative of the 'Big Three', France, Germany and the United Kingdom, which was only two years later fully supported by the European Council. The three countries' foreign ministers visited Iran for discussions on the nuclear issue for the first time in October 2003. The talks led to the Tehran Agreed Statement in which the EU-3 recognised Iran's right to peaceful nuclear energy under the Non-Proliferation Treaty and promised cooperation on economic and security issues when the nuclear issue was fully resolved. Iran signed the Additional Protocol of the IAEA and suspended

³⁹ Kathy Gockel, *Energy, economic interests complicate Iran dealings* (The Stanley Foundation 2007), accessed online at: <<http://www.stanleyfoundation.org/resources>> (18 July 2008).

⁴⁰ Patrice de Beer, 'France and Lebanon: the diplomacy of tragedy' (2006) <<http://www.open-democracy.net>> (accessed 23 July 2008).

⁴¹ 'What the end of the hostage crisis means for the world', *The Independent* (7 April 2007).

uranium enrichment on a voluntary basis from 10 November 2003 onwards.⁴² This was perceived as a major breakthrough in the crisis. European diplomacy had prevented the crisis from further escalation and had built a bridge between the American and Iranian positions.⁴³

During the following months, Iran was perceived as further obstructing IAEA's access to nuclear facilities. As a result, the European and American positions converged, as both were now willing to refer Iran to the UN Security Council in case of further non-compliance and the provision of contradictory information.⁴⁴ The EU-3 presented Iran with a new incentive to continue working with the IAEA on 21 October 2004. This proposal included more economic benefits and cooperation and the delivery of light water reactors, in exchange for the suspension of uranium enrichment and full cooperation with the IAEA. This became the Paris Agreement, signed in Paris on 14 November 2004. The key issue in the follow-up negotiations remained uranium enrichment. Iran was not legally bound to suspend enrichment and did so voluntarily to increase the confidence of the international community. China supported Iran in this position on the ground that enrichment was an internal affair of Iran. The EU maintained that suspension was a prerequisite for further negotiations and a resumption would lead to referral to the UNSC.

In 2005 the newly elected President Ahmadinejad took a hard line and started converting uranium. The EU's diplomacy subsequently failed to convince Iran to cooperate in exchange for economic benefits. Iran was now brought before the UN Security Council, where the EU continued to play the leading role in ensuring a united international stance by adopting a 'twin-track' strategy.⁴⁵ This strategy consisted of mediating between the position of the United States, on the one hand, and China and Russia, on the other. EU diplomacy achieved results in both tracks, as the United States expressed its willingness to negotiate with Iran for the first time, subject to the condition that uranium enrichment was suspended first. The other track consisted of getting support from China and Russia, and the United States, for a 'package proposal', a set of economic and political incentives to convince Iran to cooperate with the IAEA. The resulting 'package proposal' was offered to Iran in June 2006. Iran did not accept the offer, leading to a UN Security Council resolution in July 2006 demanding that Iran suspended all enrichment activities. Resolutions that imposed sanctions followed in December 2006, March 2007, and March 2008. On 14 June

⁴² Eileen Denza, 'Non Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons: The European Union and Iran', *European Foreign Affairs Review*, No.10 (2005) p. 305.

⁴³ Tom Sauer, 'Coercive Diplomacy by the EU: the Iranian nuclear weapons crisis', 28 *Third World Quarterly*, No. 3 (2007) p. 618.

⁴⁴ Denza, *supra* n. 42, p. 307.

⁴⁵ Report of the FCO, *Global Security: Iran* (20 February 2008) p. 18.

2008, a renewed and more extensive ‘package proposal’ was offered to the Iranian authorities. The European strategy for dealing with Iran has so far succeeded in uniting the positions of China and Russia, on the one hand, and the United States on the other. This has increased its international prestige, but has failed to produce real results. A failure to produce a breakthrough may damage the credibility of the EU as an international actor in the long term.⁴⁶

Europe uses mediation and sanctions to deal with the Iranian crisis. Whereas the EU and Germany tend to favour mediation, the United Kingdom and – under Sarkozy – France put more emphasis on sanctions. In comparison, China puts a greater emphasis on mediation. Still, China has also supported a number of Security Council resolutions. The differences between the European and the Chinese approaches to Iran are most visible in terms of economic relations. While many European firms have severed their ties with Iran, Chinese-Iranian economic relations continue to expand. Thus, with regard to influence at the local level, China has clearly benefited while Europe has suffered. If we look at the global level, relevant factors are changes vis-à-vis the United States and the debate on global governance. As the European position gradually moved closer to that of the United States, Europe’s value as a diplomatic ally grew. At the same time the fact that Beijing has much influence in Iran means that China, too, is an important potential partner of the United States. In fact, Europe lost part of its influence when it cut its economic ties with Iran. In terms of global governance, the Iranian crisis caused both Europe and China to compromise. In order to obtain support in the Security Council, Western proposals for resolutions had to take into account the Chinese and Russian positions. Beijing, in order to avoid an escalation of tensions between Iran and the United States, had to vote in favour of four Security Council resolutions on the Iranian nuclear programme.

To an important degree, and although Europe has been far more active, China and Europe have acted as partners in dealing with this crisis. Both sides share a preference for diplomacy, consensus-building and dialogue within existing frameworks. The Iranian nuclear crisis has provided an opportunity for Europe to present itself as an international actor with a preference for diplomatic solutions and multilateralism. By cooperating with Europe in the Iranian nuclear crisis, China has added to the credibility of Europe’s efforts. In press conferences on the Iranian nuclear issue, China has called on Iran to continue dialogue with Europe. European policy preferences and initiatives have therefore strengthened the role of China, by allowing China to be integrated into the main international structure that has worked on the crisis. This position also enabled China

⁴⁶ Sauer, *supra* n. 43, p. 631.

to ward off criticism of protecting Iran too much, while ensuring that sanctions imposed did not hamper trade with Iran.

However, there is growing pressure from Europe to apply sanctions. Germany has tried to avoid unilateral European sanctions, but the United Kingdom and France under President Sarkozy have been pushing for more sanctions. China is reluctant to accept sanctions that would be detrimental to its energy interests. It delayed the referral of Iran to the Security Council, because it wanted to wait for tangible evidence that Iran was in breach of the IAEA statute. China thus insisted on the correct application of existing structures, while Europe showed a preference for operating pre-emptively as it saw the Iranian threat as more imminent. As the European countries limit their economic relations with Iran, Chinese and European local interests become less similar. While China continues to have good relations with the Iranian government, Europe would benefit more from a regime change – or at least a sharp policy change. At the same time, differences in the approach to global governance become more marked. Europe tends to support tougher sanctions that are more in line with US policy. With local interests becoming less similar, the differences between China's and Europe's approach to global governance become more visible. This makes it more difficult for Europe and China to act as partners.

SINO-EUROPEAN RIVALRY

The experience of Europe in dealing with the Darfur and Iranian crises suggests that China has an important impact on Europe's role in international security. This is most visible in regard to European influence at the local level. In both Iran and Sudan, local influence seems to a large degree to be mutually exclusive. While China has strong diplomatic and economic ties with both countries, Europe's ties are weak. The decision of the European countries to scale down their economic involvement allowed China to strengthen its relationship with Sudan and Iran. A core element in the European approach actually consists of trying to isolate the Iranian and Sudanese governments, while China's strategy is to uphold and protect its good relations with the same regimes. The European strategy of downgrading or severing ties to put pressure on certain countries is seriously weakened by the fact that China provides an alternative source of economic and political support. In this sense, the rise of China has a negative impact on Europe's position in international relations.

To some extent, Europe benefits from its close security relationship with the United States. American leadership in international security can provide those who are allied to the United States with added prestige and influence. Europe clearly remains an important partner of the United States in dealing with global

hot spots, as the European and American approaches tend to be similar. The growing international influence of (undemocratic) China enhances Washington's need for 'like-minded' (democratic) security allies such as Europe, Japan, and Australia. But at the same time, the strong local influence of China and its eagerness to avoid military conflicts in countries where it has large interests make Beijing a key partner for Washington when it comes to finding fundamental solutions to crises. China's rise does not end the close relationship between Europe and the United States, but it does result in Europe not being the only major partner for the United States in dealing with crises in the Middle East and Africa.

In terms of setting norms for global governance, the emergence of China also has a limiting effect on Europe's role. In the early 1990s, with the Soviet Union having collapsed and China keeping a low profile in international relations, the West was in an ideal position to set the agenda and define the norms of global governance. When it comes to international conflict management, Europe and America prefer an outcome that contributes to the spreading of democracy and open markets. While focusing on human rights violations and support for international terrorism as the key problems, Western governments promote (pro-Western) democracy as the best long-term solution. The emergence of China and other non-Western nations as great powers forces the West to compromise. The United Nations and other international organisations can preserve their central role in global governance only if influential powers such as China are included in the system. China, as a non-Western and non-democratic state, does not benefit from a global governance system that is aimed at spreading pro-Western democracy. Its sense of insecurity with regard to separatism within China is an added reason why Beijing is reluctant to allow international organisations to interfere in countries' domestic politics. This is a setback, especially for Europe, because it relies more on soft power, norms setting, and multilateralism than the United States.

The Chinese government also needs to compromise in order to keep the international system going and to retain European support for multilateralism. China faces not just the United States but also Europe in many issues. China can never be sure that countries like Iran and Sudan will not one day improve their relations with Europe to the detriment of China. However, in the regional security crises in Iran and Sudan, the current development is that Europe's role is receding while China's position is becoming more prominent.

POTENTIAL FOR COOPERATION

Rivalry between Europe and China over influence in international conflict management exists, but this does not necessarily mean that the two cannot act as partners. There is rivalry between China and the United States, but also a growing partnership in dealing with the North Korean issue. A Sino-European partnership can work in two ways. First, the two sides can be complementary. While one side puts pressure on the local government, the other side acts as a mediator. This is what happened in Sudan. The situation may be perceived as a partnership if European pressure is genuinely aimed at creating a solution to the crisis, and if Chinese mediation involves instances of serious pressure on Khartoum. The second form of partnership is China and Europe both acting as mediators. This is what happened in the Iranian case. Both parties have been trying to prevent a military conflict by getting Iran to change its nuclear policy.

The triangular relationship between the United States, China, and Europe plays a central role in global security governance, certainly in Africa and the Middle East. Cooperation between Europe and China is a major precondition for progress in this field. The Sudan and Iran crises show that there are restrictions to the Sino-European partnership. Since Europe has fewer local interests than China, there appears to be less inclination to aim at conflict resolution or prevention. Instead, Europe tends to push for more ideological objectives, such as promoting democracy and human rights. These objectives do not necessarily constitute the best or the quickest way out of a crisis. This is most clearly visible in Sudan, but increasingly also in the Iranian crisis. China, on the other hand, is reluctant to become too involved in conflict management. Beijing wants to avoid having to choose between good relations locally or good relations with the West. China may also feel that its local interests are not directly threatened by a security crisis. Chinese reluctance to approve sanctions generally creates tension between Beijing and the European capitals over which course to take. However, in spite of the rivalry and limitations to cooperation, the two examples of Sudan and Iran suggest that there is no reason why Europe and China cannot cooperate – within certain limits – in conflict management in Africa and the Middle East.