Concept Paper

For a Policy Advisory Group Seminar on

“Taming the Dragon? Defining Africa’s Interests at the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC)”

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Pretoria

Centre for Conflict Resolution, Cape Town, South Africa and the Institute for Global Dialogue, Midrand, South Africa

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Background

The proposed policy advisory group seminar in Cape Town, South Africa, in July 2009 is a collaboration between the Centre for Conflict Resolution (CCR), Cape Town, and the Institute for Global Dialogue (IGD), Midrand, South Africa. The project seeks to examine systematically how Africa’s 53 states define and articulate their geo-strategic interests and policies for engaging China within the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). The establishment of FOCAC in October 2000 following a proposal by China was significant. This sealed the institutionalization of Afro-China relations that date back to the 1950s. FOCAC started as a triennial ministerial conference that aimed to provide a mechanism for collective consultation, dialogue and pragmatic cooperation between China and African countries. “Equality” and “mutual benefit” were supposed to be the hallmarks of the envisaged Africa-China cooperation. FOCAC’s popularity among African countries is clear judging from the huge attendance at its ministerial conferences. 44 African countries were represented at FOCAC I which was held in Beijing in October 2000. FOCAC II took place in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in December 2003. FOCAC III was held in Beijing in November 2006. The third meeting was significant for the elevation of the gathering to the Heads of State Summit level. 43 African leaders attended the 2003 summit at which a declaration and Action Plan (2007-2009) on China-Africa cooperation were adopted. FOCAC IV will be convened in Cairo, Egypt, in November 2009. The Cape Town Policy Advisory Group Meeting in July 2009 seeks to coordinate and harmonize African common positions and interests which have often not – unlike China’s – been clearly defined. The meeting will involve largely African policymakers, including officials attending the forthcoming FOCAC, as well as African and a few Western scholars.

The series of FOCAC conferences has had a significant impact on China-Africa relations. Following FOCAC I, China annulled $1.2 billion of debt to 31 African countries. The aftermath of FOCAC II in 2003 saw a phenomenal expansion in Afro-Chinese trade and investment. Africa’s exports to China reached $1 billion within a year. Sino-African trade grew from $2 billion in 1999 to $5.5 billion in 2006. By 2006, China had become the third largest foreign investor on the African continent (at an estimated $6.6 billion) behind the United States and Europe.1 FOCAC III in 2006 was significant for its elevation to the Heads of State Summit level. 43 African leaders attended the summit. At the FOCAC III, the Chinese government unveiled an ambitious politico-diplomatic programme2 including provision of $5 billion in loans and credits; doubling of its development assistance by 2009; establishing a $5 billion China-Africa Development Fund (CADF) to promote Chinese investment in Africa; and an increase of two-way trade to over $100 billion by 2010. Beijing has already implemented some of its FOCAC III Summit commitments. It had cancelled $1.42 billion of African debt by mid-2007. China also pledged $20 billion for infrastructural development in Africa, over three years, at an annual

African Development Bank (AfDB) conference it hosted in Shanghai in 2007. A deeper understanding of Africa’s strategic calculus in its dealings with China, which the Cape Town seminar of July 2009 aims to foster, will help promote a better appreciation of the impact of FOCAC.

China, the world’s third largest economy, has a structured long-term view of engaging Africa. Its geo-strategic national interests and goals in the Sino-African relationship are clearly defined in China’s Africa Policy document that was published in January 2006. The inaugural White Paper on China’s strategy towards Africa stresses the fact that the China-Africa strategic partnership is based on “equal treatment, respect for sovereignty and common development.” Beijing has effectively used the FOCAC forum as a vehicle to articulate its White Paper policy road map for cooperation with Africa. This has allowed China effectively to set the rules of engagement in the FOCAC in spite of the forum’s supposed “view to seeking mutual reinforcement and common development”. It is this discrepancy that the Cape Town seminar aims to correct.

Many analysts are concerned that Africa lacks a coherent collective bargaining policy to engage with China. African governments’ responses to China’s activities on the continent have often been reactive, uncoordinated and ad hoc. This has made African countries susceptible to undermining their own interests. At the 2006 FOCAC, Africa failed to craft a collective bargaining strategy to shape the Sino-African relationship in a way that would be beneficial to the continent’s development. FOCAC is often depicted by China’s Africa mandarins as a regionalized initiative at China-Africa strategic cooperation. Notwithstanding this, and the rhetoric of multilateral engagement with African institutions such as the African Union, the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) and Africa’s Regional Economic Communities (RECs) such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), and the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU). China’s Africa policy has been mostly conducted on a bilateral basis, which some have seen as a “divide and rule” tactic. The essentially bilateral configuration of Afro-Chinese relations has thus often resulted in uncoordinated regional and multilateral African responses to China. The failure to develop a continental strategy towards China has the danger of turning

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4 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, China’s Africa Policy, January 2006
8 Alden, China in Africa.
11 See Rotberg (ed.), China into Africa: Trade, Aid and Influence.
12 See Alden, China in Africa.
FOCAC meetings into forums for Africa’s elites to swear “an oath of allegiance to the African continent’s ‘new tutor’” in an asymmetrical China-Africa relationship.

**Policy Seminar Description**

The rationale for holding the Cape Town policy advisory group meeting in July 2009 is that African governments need to adopt nationally, regionally and continentally appropriate policies, strategies and programming responses to engage China more effectively, and to ensure “win-win” outcomes for the continent in this partnership. Organized four months before FOCAC IV in Cairo, the policy seminar will focus on the opportunities and capacities for African policymakers to formulate an effective multilateral African response to China that can be transmitted through FOCAC. Africa needs to influence the shaping of FOCAC in a manner that promotes the continent’s political and socio-economic interests. African governments need to be more confident and sophisticated in ensuring the mutuality and two-sidedness of FOCAC.

Critically, the achievement of Africa’s broad developmental goals will involve a series of challenging collective action problems. Africa is a diverse and not a homogenous continent, making it notoriously difficult to craft a single blueprint that can assist all African countries to deal with the challenges of “taming the Chinese dragon.” Morocco is still not a member of the African Union, making coordination through the continental body more complicated. For these problems to be resolved, Africa’s elites and nations – often with different politico-economic interests and different capacities – have to work collectively and cooperatively. African states can map out some broad areas that cut across different country-specific interests.

FOCAC III resulted in the adoption of an Action Plan 2007-2009 to deepen and broaden mutual beneficial cooperation in the four key areas of political relations, economic cooperation, international affairs, and social development. The Cape Town seminar will focus on these four areas as well as three additional key issues: the role of the AU and Africa’s RECs in making FOCAC more effective; the impact of the rivalry between China and the West on FOCAC; and the implications of the global financial crisis on China’s commitments to higher volumes and more efficient development assistance to Africa. The meeting will consist of six substantive sessions of presentations and discussions that will evaluate how African governments have reacted to Beijing’s clearly defined principles and strategies in the four spheres of political relations, economic cooperation, international affairs, and social development. A rapporteurs’ summary and charting a way forward will conclude the meeting. Concrete policy recommendations will be sought from the policy advisory group to ensure the crafting of coherent, common African positions at the FOCAC IV meeting in Cairo in November 2009.

In particular, the seminar will seek to answer nine key questions:

- First, how does Africa define and express its interests and strategic goals for co-operation with China under the FOCAC framework?
- Second, is Africa a pawn or equal player in FOCAC with a clear, common strategy to manage the Sino-African interaction in a way that benefits the continent?

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14 See Sidiropoulos, “Options for the Lion in the Age of the Dragon.”
15 See Ibid.
• Third, does the upcoming FOCAC IV present an opportunity for Africa skillfully and confidently to renegotiate the Africa-China partnership in a manner that reflects Africa’s strategic interests?
• Fourth, can Africa develop a shared comprehensive, coordinated and coherent plan for engaging China at FOCAC IV?
• Fifth, can the African Union, NEPAD and Africa’s RECs develop sound policy instruments that clearly outline strategies for Africa-China relations that can be communicated through FOCAC?
• Sixth, what methodologies are currently being applied by African governments to undertake national, regional and continental assessments of previous FOCAC commitments and engagements?
• Seventh, what are the strengths and weaknesses of Africa’s engagement with China through FOCAC and what are the gaps with the current African reaction to Beijing?
• Eighth, what are the implications, if any, of the global financial crisis on the FOCAC commitments with particular regard to development assistance? And finally,
• Based on an evaluation of the implementation of the Action Plan 2007-2009, what African responses to China are to be recommended that can systematically incorporate Africa’s own needs, demands and expectations into this process?

The four areas outlined in Action Plan 2007-2009 will constitute the main themes of discussion in relation to FOCAC.

1. Political Relations
The first panel will analyze how African countries have individually and collectively engaged China in the political field and the impact of such engagement. Well-documented historical and political dynamics provide the foundations for China-Africa political engagements.17 These interactions are based on traditional mutual political trust and are reflected in the common high-level exchange of visits between Africa and China. Against the backdrop of Western global hegemony, China has strategically positioned itself as a putative leader of the Third World, and urged concrete South-South solidarity and cooperation to ensure an equitable political and economic world order. In this, China portrays its political relationship with the continent as a partnership between “the biggest developing country and Africa, the continent with the largest number of developing countries.”18 China’s interests and objectives also revolve around establishing a political alliance with Africa to prevent diplomatic recognition of Taiwan. While African actors are not homogenous, they should use FOCAC to try and determine China’s political role in Africa in order to ensure political equality and mutual trust.19

2. Economic Cooperation
Growing economic ties between China and Africa – the theme of the second panel - are significant determinants of the broader, evolving Sino-African relations. China is clear about its strategic economic goals: resource security provided by Africa’s depository of oil and mineral resources for the rapidly expanding Chinese economy; a huge market of one billion consumers; and an investment destination in the context of China’s “Go-out” or “Go-Global” strategy initiated in 2001.20 A convergence of interests is often portrayed, as Beijing offers funds,

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17 See Ampiah and Naidu (eds.), Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon?
19 Ibid.
technology, and infrastructure to facilitate Africa’s development. As earlier noted, China is Africa’s third largest trading partner, after the United States and the European Union. Against the backdrop of the global financial meltdown which started in 2007, the “Beijing Consensus” characterised by non-interference in state sovereignty, freedom from Western hegemony, and absence of political conditionalities on aid-giving is seen by many African governments as an attractive alternative to the “Washington Consensus” of marketization and democratization.

FOCAC processes and the White Paper on China’s African Policy have “explicitly become platforms in promoting and concretising China’s economic interests on the continent.”21 Beijing has also voiced its support for NEPAD through FOCAC. The second panel will assess how Africa has tried to advance NEPAD as the overarching framework through which China-Africa economic relations are developed.22 It will assess whether the bilateral deals between Beijing and individual African countries complement or compete with the priority areas identified under NEPAD. The activities of Chinese companies in Africa have also been criticized in various quarters for their environmental degradation; use of Chinese rather than African labour; undermining local industry; and importing sub-standard products. Interestingly, the FOCAC Action Plan commits China to conducting business in a manner consistent with environmental protection and sustainable development. Similarly, China’s White Paper provides for China-Africa cooperation in areas including climate change, water resources conservation, anti-desertification and bio-diversity.23 China is also a signatory to the 2004 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness that seeks to ensure that aid is aligned to the development policies of aid recipients. On the eve of FOCAC III, China’s State Council issued “Nine Principles to Encourage and Standardise Enterprises’ Overseas Investment”. These are avenues that Africa could use to ensure that its interaction with China promotes the continent’s long-term and sustainable development agenda. African governments should craft and implement strong regulatory frameworks and policies for business, investment, environmental protection and labour relations.24 There is also an urgent need for country-level studies that can carefully assess China’s economic engagements in order to strategise appropriate responses that can enhance mutual benefits.25 Some scholars have argued that African states should be able to exercise significant leverage in dealing with China primarily because of their abundance of resources.26 At the same time, however, the global financial crisis has placed China in a particularly advantageous position, in light especially of its huge financial reserves on which the rest of the world, including the industrialized economies of the West, appear to pin the prospects for global economic recovery. Although economic indicators suggest that the global financial crisis may not have any immediate and direct effect on the volume of Chinese development assistance to Africa, there are growing fears that the declining economic fortunes of Western countries could remove an important check on China’s growing influence and leverage on the continent.

3. International Affairs

Maintaining historical close coordination/solidarity in international affairs is a major aspect of the FOCAC, and the subject of our third panel. China needs Africa in numerous ways to further its

21 Tull, “The Political Consequences of China’s Return to Africa.”
25 Ibid.
26 See Sidiropoulos, “Options for the Lion in the Age of the Dragon.”
international ambitions. Africa is also viewed by Beijing as a critical partner in its strategic calculus to protect its security and broader global interests. China further needs Africa’s support in its endeavours to undercut US and Western dominance of the United Nations (UN) Security Council and other multilateral institutions such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The Group of 20 (G-20) meeting that was held in London in April 2009 discussed ways of reforming the weighted voting of the Bretton Woods institutions – which disproportionately benefits the US and its powerful Western allies - to enhance the power of China and developing countries, and to reduce Western dominance of these institutions. African governments must engage Beijing to ensure the success of these efforts. China is also one of five veto-wielding permanent members of the UN Security Council (along with the US, Russia, Britain and France). This third panel will assess whether Africa is engaging China effectively to influence UN Security Council decisions on conflict resolution and peacekeeping in Africa. In the international security sphere China has scaled up its contribution of personnel to UN peacekeeping operations in Africa. In 2007, 1,300 Chinese soldiers - nearly 75 percent of Chinese peacekeeping forces - were deployed to seven UN missions in Africa. Given the well-documented reluctance of Western nations to deploy peacekeepers to Africa after debacles in Somalia (1993) and Rwanda (1994), the seminar will examine whether Africa is engaging China effectively to increase its investment in Africa’s peacekeeping capacity and its personnel deployment levels.

4. Social and Cultural Interaction
Many scholars have noted the language, cultural and racial barriers to Africa-China co-operation – the so-called “yellow peril” stereotypes. China has provided training to three generations of Africans, and established links with tertiary institutions to offer Chinese language programmes. Beijing has also recruited English instructors from Africa. The onus is now on African civil society actors to play a critical two-fold role: first, to improve the interpersonal and inter-social environment for the Chinese in Africa; and second, to socialize and sensitize China to governance and accountability imperatives in Africa

5. The African Union and Africa’s Regional Economic Communities
The fifth panel will examine the role of the African Union and RECs in coordinating the continent’s interests towards China. The FOCAC Action Plan 2007-2009 noted the significance of the AU, RECs and African financial institutions such as the AfDB. The plan also emphasised the imperatives of strengthening cooperation between FOCAC and NEPAD and to “further explore specific ways and areas of cooperation.” Analysts have noted that the AU is aware of the need to forge a collective Africa strategy to allow better organised engagement with China. Alpha Oumar Konare, Chair of the AU Commission between 2003 and 2008, stated that “The terms and conditions should be set by us.” Some scholars have urged Africa to set up FOCAC-specific high-level coordinating bodies at the level of the AU and RECs to guide and implement Africa’s continental and regional engagements with China. This panel will analyse the preparedness of the AU and Africa’s RECs

to engage China constructively through FOCAC in a way that underpins issues of regional and continental integration and development.

6. China and the West
The final substantive panel of the seminar will examine the rivalry between China and the West in Africa which some have termed “A New Scramble for Africa.” Many African leaders seem to view China - in contrast to Western countries such as the United States, Britain, France, Belgium and Portugal - as representing an opportunity to increase their leverage towards the West. The fact that Beijing is prepared to invest in the much-needed road and railway infrastructure that Africa badly needs for its industrial take-off, and that China's purchase of Africa's raw materials has helped to increase global prices, has been widely seen as positive for the continent.

Western countries, however, still have much larger, often long-standing political, military, and trade ties on the continent than Beijing. One should, therefore, not exaggerate China's ability to dislodge Western interests from Africa in the short term. One must also note that, though Washington has been critical of China's role in places like Sudan and Angola, there are increasingly contacts and cooperation between American and Chinese officials on Africa - through a China-US dialogue - which appear to have been helpful in efforts to deploy a UN/AU peacekeeping force to Darfur in 2007. China’s largest two-way trade is with the EU at 300 billion euros, and both parties hold regular summits, though last year’s meeting was cancelled due to Beijing’s unhappiness at the meeting between French president, Nicolas Sarkozy and the Tibetan spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama.32 African governments must devise a strategy to transform the geo-strategic rivalry between China and the West into a triangular relationship that benefits the continent's development aspirations. This is another important strategic issue that the Cape Town policy advisory group will tackle.