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China's changing foreign policy towards Africa: a critical assessment of the possible implications, the case of Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

Although contemporary analysis of foreign policy now incorporate diverse issues originating from diverse subject areas, it has neglected the issue of change in foreign policy in favour of foreign policy continuity. This paper investigates the subtle changes that China has instituted in its foreign policy towards Africa. It argues that, these subtle foreign policy changes, although beneficial to China, have inherent negative implications on African states and signifies a manifestation of an active, assertive and confrontational Chinese foreign policy in future. In this investigation, China through the implementation of its moralistic five principles of peaceful development, the open door policy and its strategy of instituting policies that target states that it seeks to do business with, has managed to attract and solicit partnership from most African states.

Sub-national institutions like the Forum on China Africa Cooperation, the Chinese military, think tanks, Exim Bank and individual Chinese provinces have been tasked to carry out and implement China's Africa foreign policy. The FOCAC meetings have emerged to be the most important platform through which the notion of change and the main objectives of China's Africa policy are expressed. There, exists numerous models which can be used to analyse foreign policy change but the paper adopts Eidenfalk's extent of foreign policy change model to analyse the various issues, both domestic and international, that influence changes in foreign policy. For China, international more than domestic factors wield greater influence on foreign policy. As a result three strands of foreign policy change can be identified in China's Africa policy i.e. from single aid to aid provided on a win-win basis, from ideological focus during the colonial period to pragmatic considerations and from non-interference to active engagement on the continent. Given the close relationship that had formed between China and most African states, changes identified above, will have negative political and economic consequences for African states. For instance, African states will no longer enjoy Beijing's cushion against UN sanctions, weakening of African economies and identity crisis are all possible consequences of China's evolving policy. Zimbabwe is dependent both economically and politically on China. It would follow that any form of change in China's foreign policy will leave Zimbabwe exposed to the above effects.