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## **China's Hu Visits Sudan with Oil, Darfur Crisis on His Agenda**

By Karl Maier

Chinese President Hu Jintao arrives in Sudan tomorrow facing growing international calls to use his country's economic clout to convince the government in Khartoum to halt spreading violence in Darfur.

Hu has unique influence because China buys 60 percent of Sudan's oil output, builds projects such as the \$1.8 billion Merowe hydroelectric complex, which will almost double the country's power capacity, and refuses to back United Nations sanctions over Darfur.

“You will see a balancing act, with some quiet diplomacy and pressure on Sudan to implement UN resolutions on Darfur but without making Khartoum lose face,” Tanja Vestergaard, a China analyst at Global Insight, a consultant and forecasting company, said in a telephone interview from London.

Hu's eight-nation trip to Africa is both a diplomatic mission and an attempt to secure supplies of oil and minerals for the fast-growing Chinese economy. The Sudan stop is the most delicate because of the crisis in its western region of Darfur, but also the most important economically. Sudan supplies China about 8 percent of its oil.

More than 200,000 people have died and 2 million have fled their homes in Darfur since a rebellion broke out in February 2003. Andrew Natsios, President George W. Bush's special envoy for Darfur, visited Beijing last month to ask China to help convince Sudanese President Umar al-Bashir to accept a strong peacekeeping force.

Hu will reiterate China's preference for the Darfur conflict to be resolved “through peaceful negotiations” when he visits Khartoum, Assistant Chinese Foreign Minister Zhai Jun said at a press briefing last week.

### **Terrorism and Slavery**

China emerged as Sudan's dominant international partner in the 1990s after Western companies froze investments following President Bill Clinton's 1997 economic sanctions on the country for alleged support of terrorism and slavery.

“We could not just sit around and wait until the United States decided we were a good country, so we looked east,” Ali Abdalla Ali, a professor of business studies at the Sudan University of Science and Technology, said in an interview. “The Chinese came to help us when others went away.”

Hu will announce a series of aid and investment agreements on his 12-day African tour, mainly in oil and commodity-rich nations. Hu has visited Cameroon and Liberia and will tour Zambia, Namibia, South Africa, Mozambique and Seychelles from Feb. 3 to 10.

### **Oil and Silver**

“China is after resources, whether it is oil, gold or silver,” Ali said. “They cannot run their economy at 10 or 11 percent growth without securing these resources.”

Sudan's oil output is rising thanks to Chinese investment in oil production and pipelines, mainly through China National Petroleum Corp. Those investments have accelerated the country's crude output to more than 500,000 barrels a day in six years.

China National's 41 percent-owned Petrodar opened a 1,400-kilometer (870-mile) pipeline last April to carry 200,000 barrels of crude a day from oil fields in the Melut Basin to Port Sudan on the Red Sea.

The oil boom helped Sudan record a projected 12 percent growth in gross domestic product last year and 11 percent this year, according to the International Monetary Fund.

“One of the most important merits of our relations with China and all other countries dealing with it is that there is no political agenda,” President Bashir said in a Nov. 28 press conference. “There is no intervention in the internal affairs of any country.”

### **Civilian Targets**

Criticism of Sudan's government, accused of supporting militias in Darfur known as the “Janjaweed” and conducting air strikes on civilian targets, has increased since then.

While Bashir has accepted a UN decision to provide advisers and equipment strengthening the 7,000-member African Union peacekeeping force in Darfur, he has rejected a purely UN contingent, saying it would be tantamount to an invasion by Western powers similar to the U.S.-led occupation of Iraq.

More than two months after agreeing in principle to allow the deployment of a joint AU-UN force of 20,000 troops and police, Sudan hasn't made a final decision on accepting them.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon directly criticized the Sudanese government in a Jan. 29 speech to the African Union summit in Addis Ababa.

“Together we must work to end the violence and scorched-earth policies adopted by various parties, including militias, as well as the bombings which are still a terrifying feature of life in Darfur,” he said.

“A compromise could be sending UN Chinese peacekeepers there,” Jaspal Singh, a researcher at Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies in Washington, DC., said in a Jan. 25 interview.

China already contributes more than 450 soldiers to the 10,000 UN peacekeepers monitoring a January 2005 peace agreement that ended a 21-year civil war between the Islamic government and the mainly Christian and animist southern Sudan.

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