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## **In South Sudan conflict, China tests its mediation skills**

***Driven by commercial interests, China is taking the unusual step of mediating between rival South Sudanese factions.***

By Shannon Tiezzi

Indian Strategic Studied (06.06.2014) / <http://thediplomat.com/2014/06/in-south-sudan-conflict-china-tests-its-mediation-skills/> - As mediators try yet again to jumpstart stalled peace talks between warring factions in South Sudan, the world will get to see China playing an unfamiliar role: that of lead mediator in another country's internal conflict. Usually, China's insistence on non-interference in others' affairs prevents it from taking such steps, but China's unique interests in South Sudan have [called for a different tactic](#).

[According to Reuters](#), Western diplomats have noticed a more "hands-on approach" from China on the South Sudan issue. China has been heavily involved in the peace talks in Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia. Talks began in January 2014, less than a month after the conflict began, and the negotiations have continued on and off ever since (two ceasefire agreements, reached in January and May, both failed to actually halt the violence). Throughout the process, China has been in close contact with both sides, and with Western diplomats and African mediators. It's a stark difference from China's usual approach to internal crises; Beijing typically prefers to stay out of the fray and call for a peaceful resolution from afar.

When asked why China was taking "a more proactive role" in the South Sudan crisis, Foreign Ministry [spokesman Hong Lei said](#) that China was acting with the goal of "maintaining regional peace and creating enabling conditions for local development." Of course, this doesn't answer the fundamental question — there are many other internal crises where Beijing has chosen not to get involved, despite threats to "regional peace" and "local development."

China's involvement in South Sudan recognizes the substantial commercial interests Beijing has at stake — most notably in the oil industry. According to Reuters, before the conflict began in December, South Sudan was providing five percent of China's oil imports. Now, oil production in the country has been slashed by one-third. Chinese workers have also been evacuated from South Sudan due to the threat of violence. Principles aside, China had every reason to push hard for a swift resolution to the crisis.

Perhaps even more importantly, other major world powers, including the U.S., have far less reason to take proactive action in South Sudan. Other countries have fewer interests in the new nation, and were unlikely to get involved to the extent Beijing has. China stepped into the void, taking up a rare role as a mediator. "We have huge interests in South Sudan so we have to make a greater effort to persuade the two sides to stop fighting and agree to a ceasefire," Ma Qiang, the Chinese ambassador to South Sudan, told Reuters.

Despite China's active role in addressing this crisis, Hong Lei emphasized that "it does not mean that China has changed its diplomatic principles." Interestingly, Hong spoke of China's "peace promotion work between the South Sudan and Sudan," rather than addressing China's role as mediator between the two rival factions in South Sudan's internal conflict. Meditating between two sovereign states is one thing; mediating in an internal war poses thornier questions for Beijing's policy of non-interference.

As China's interests abroad grow, its policy of non-interference will face more and more challenges. China's [vision for a "New Silk Road"](#) would see increased Chinese investment and trade in some of the most unstable regions in the world. Much closer to home, the [China-Pakistan Economic Corridor](#) could face serious security threats from extremists operating within Pakistan's border. As China continues to build-up economic interests in vulnerable areas, it will face more pressure at home and abroad to replicate its South Sudan performance in future regional crises – even if this means interfering in strictly internal conflicts.

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## **Human Rights in South Sudan examined in the European Parliament**

***By Dr Mark Barwick, Human Rights Without Frontiers***

HRWF (21.03.2013) - On 19<sup>th</sup> March, a workshop on enhancing capacities for human rights for South Sudan was held in the European Parliament, moderated by MEP Véronique De Keyser (S&D). De Keyser was the Chief Observer of the EU observation mission for the January 2011 referendum. Southern Sudanese voted overwhelmingly at that time to secede from the Republic of Sudan. On 9<sup>th</sup> July 2011, South Sudan became an independent nation.

Since independence, South Sudan has faced many obstacles to development, including inter-communal clashes, armed groups and continued hostilities from neighbouring Sudan. Disputed territories are at the heart of tensions between Sudan and South Sudan. There are presently more than 200,000 refugees from South Kordofan and the Blue Nile living in camps due to the violence in the region.

Rosalind Marsden, EU Special Representative for Sudan and South Sudan, expressed guarded optimism for recent talks in Addis Ababa, although to date Khartoum has demonstrated little political will for implementing earlier agreements already in place.

In South Sudan, reports of harassment of journalists and human rights defenders remain a serious concern for the freedom of expression in the country. The killing of well-known columnist Isaiah Abraham in December 2012 is but one example. Arrests have reportedly been made in connection with the murder, but the investigation continues.

Social and economic rights likewise go unfulfilled, fuelling frustration and conflict in South Sudan. The judicial system remains weak. Police and security forces lack training and capacity. Civil society is extremely fragile.

However, Marsden did indicate some positive signs. South Sudan recently became a signatory to the African Charter for Human and People's Rights. A national reconciliation initiative has been put in place. Also, the EU is supporting the constitutional review process and helping to strengthen judicial reform within South Sudan.

Dr Kathrin Maria Scherr of the Max Planck Foundation for International Peace and the Rule of Law ([www.mpfpr.de](http://www.mpfpr.de)), spoke about the challenges ahead for protecting human rights in South Sudan. The ratification of international human rights instruments are a

vital first step, she said. The "clean slate approach" that constitutes the modus operandi of the country's present leadership needs to give way to a new spirit of internationalism and respect for international norms. One important challenge is the lack of knowledge, even on the part of policy makers, of existing constitutional and international human rights standards. Technical support is needed at a number of levels to increase general awareness and to shape human rights policies and practices for the future.

Expedit Kkaaya of Mekere University in Kampala spoke about capacity building for legal and judicial officers in South Sudan. Kkaaya is the principal trainer for the Juba-based Access to Justice Programme of RCN Justice & Démocratie, which assists the South Sudanese law enforcement and justice systems by improving their capacities to function more efficiently.

Human rights in South Sudan is a contentious issue, as the legacy of ancient inter-communal violence, ethnic violence and a prolonged war for independence from the Khartoum government have left their mark on the cultural and political memory of the South Sudanese people. While political leaders call for patience, many people are suffering from violence and violations of human rights and dignity. It is hoped that they find justice sooner than later.

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## **South Sudan security forces abusing civilians**

BBC News (03.10.2012) - South Sudan's security forces have committed "shocking" acts of violence against civilians, including killings and rapes, Amnesty International says.

In a report, the UK-based human rights group says the abuse has been taking place during a disarmament campaign in the eastern Jonglei state.

Amnesty urges South Sudan to take "immediate action" to end the violence.

The government in Juba has played down the scale of the violations, saying they are isolated cases.

### ***New conflict fears***

Amnesty says its researches interviewed scores of people in the region, who described widespread torture and abuse against civilians, including children as young as 18 months old.

It also says that in some cases the security forces looted property and destroyed crops.

"Far from bringing security to the region, the SPLA [South Sudan Army] and the police auxiliary forces have committed shocking human rights violations," said Audrey Gaughran, Amnesty's Africa director.

She accused the authorities of "doing very little to stop the abuse".

The government launched Operation Restore Peace in March in response to ethnic clashes in Jonglei in which hundreds of people were killed.

South Sudan - which gained independence just over a year ago - has previously sought to play down the accusations, the BBC's Grant Ferrett says.

The danger, though, is that the alleged abuse could fuel resentment and a new round of conflict, our correspondent adds.