

STANFORD UNIVERSITY

China in the 21st Century

China's Strategic Role in Crises of International Concern

From carbon emissions to global resource markets, the emergence of China as a powerful force in the world is impossible to ignore. After many years of rapid economic growth, China is an essential actor on the global stage. The importance of China in all facets of global governance and international relations will only continue to grow in the years ahead.

China is becoming an increasingly assertive actor in international diplomacy as it develops relationships and agreements with a variety of states, most especially to secure access to the natural resources and raw materials that are fueling the rapid expansion of the Chinese economy. China has also been accused of providing economic, military, and political support to questionable governments and is sometimes perceived as undermining international efforts to resolve the crises in these countries. Trends indicate that China's influential position in these crises of international concern will only continue to grow. Therefore, it is imperative that those interested in resolving such crises acknowledge and understand China's emerging role – the multiple motivations for its participation and the ways in which China might be enlisted as a strategic partner in international efforts to resolve such humanitarian crises.

This phenomenon has received substantial attention in academia, government agencies, advocacy circles, and popular discourse. Unfortunately, the discussion has to date seemed informed more by vitriol than by a critical, prudent understanding of the complex dynamics of the global response to major crises. In organizing this conference, we strive to introduce nuance and complexity to the discussion and develop a more sober approach to this salient topic. The conference will not vilify China and instead seek to better understand its role in these crises and suggest ways in which China can participate as a “responsible stakeholder” in efforts to address these situations.

We believe that Stanford can play an important role in bringing that conversation and those engaged in it from various disciplines together. Through this conference we hope to enhance the dialogue, understanding of, and planning for this evolving dynamic, as well as to produce a framework for a cooperative process between existing and emerging global powers and the international community to address and resolve these crises.

We are eager to see the conference draw from many disciplines - foreign policy, environmental and resource studies, international law, human rights and humanitarian affairs, and global investment. Diverse participation will contribute to understanding the multiple motivations for China's engagement in these cases, the complexity of China's emerging strategic role, and the range of possible academic, governmental, and advocacy responses.

We have identified examples of crises in which China's participation is perceived as critical in determining the international community's ability to reach a resolution. In so doing, we are striving to set a fairly high bar for inclusion and consideration in this conference and to be specific in our critiques and analysis. As a result, we have chosen to focus on the cases of Chad, Myanmar (Burma), Sudan, and Zimbabwe.

We are hoping for a nuanced discussion of causes, motivations, effects, dynamics, and responses. In that context, there are four main questions we hope to address:

- 1) What is the nature of China's participation in countries in which these crises are occurring with a focus on China's role in Chad, Myanmar (Burma), Sudan, and Zimbabwe? Are China's actions in these countries decisive? Focuses on economic, military, and political transactions.
- 2) What are the various motivations for China's relationship with these countries and how do they explain China's actions?
- 3) What is China's general philosophy regarding foreign policy and how is it applied in the context of these countries?
- 4) What are the differentiated responsibilities of China, the United States, and the International Community in resolving these crises?

We hope that a closed door working session will produce a hypothetical agenda for a strategic dialogue between (minimally) the United States and China on responding to urgent international crises such as those identified as examples in this conference. The working session should also propose a policy agenda moving forward.