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The United States and China understands Africa's importance and potential. China's interest in Africa is mostly economical; the rise in military activities are a result of China's growing footprint in an unstable continent, and the need for China to protect its people and investments since many African states cannot fulfill that task. Currently, China's military presence is not a threat to the United States in Africa, but it does not mean the US should not take active and cautious steps when dealing with China in Africa. Although the United States and China will disagree in their fundamental foreign policy approach to Africa, both countries must find areas where they can cooperate in order to secure mutual interests.

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Mentor and Oral Defense Committee Member: Jonathan E. Phillip, Ph.D.  
Approved: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: 24 April 2019

Oral Defense Committee Member: PAUL M. ARMSTRONG  
Approved: \_\_\_\_\_

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## Executive Summary

**Title:** China's Military Activities in Africa

**Author:** Major Ralph Scott, US Army Reserve

**Thesis:** Although the pessimists have valid concerns regarding China's military activities in Africa, there are areas of mutual interest where the United States and China can cooperate.

**Discussion:** Africa is important to the United States for many reasons including the continent's population and economic growth, vast mineral resources, and energy production. Regardless of the causes, instability in Africa affects the US. Clearly, China also understands Africa's importance and potential. So, like other major powers, it is striving to compete in the region. As China continues its engagement on the continent, the Chinese military sees a need for a more robust physical presence. Today, China participates in anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden and has increased the number of personnel assigned to United Nations (UN) peacekeeping operations. Additionally, China has also deployed combat troops to Africa for counter-terrorism operations. All of these activities concern some in the United States, but the recent construction of a military base in Djibouti has been the most alarming. This essay will argue that China's interest in Africa is mostly economical, and the rise in military activities should be seen as the natural result of China's growing footprint in an unstable continent, and China's need to protect its people and investments since many African states cannot fulfil that task.

**Conclusion:** Currently, China's military presence in Africa is not a serious threat to the United States, but this does not mean the US should not take active and cautious steps when dealing with China. The United States and China will disagree in their fundamental foreign policy approach to Africa, but both countries must find areas where they can cooperate in order to secure mutual interests.

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## **Introduction**

The current competition between the United States and China is a highly debated topic among stakeholders in the United States government, the private sector, and in academia. The trade war and the South China Sea dispute already dominate conversations. This paper will focus solely on the continent of Africa, where there is a paradigm shift and a polarizing debate as to whether or not China's military expansion has negative implications for the United States. A paradigm shift usually occurs when something new fundamentally changes prevailing views, formal theories, and trusted methods.<sup>1</sup> Although China established contact with Africa centuries ago,<sup>2</sup> China's activities in Africa in recent years warrants some analysis.

China forged relationships with African countries as they first gained independence in the 1950s and 60s. However, the paradigm shift occurred in the last two decades as China's activities in Africa grew and continue to grow exponentially with a stream of high-level visits from Africa's political elites, large commitments of loan capital, and extensive investments in Africa. The overall reaction to these activities in the United States varies. One camp, the pessimists, assess China as a strategic threat that seeks to dominate access to vital natural resources such as oil, minerals, and timber, thereby ultimately undermining Western influence. The other camp, the optimists, reject the idea of a strategic threat, but acknowledge China as a formidable competitor for both political influence and commercial advantage.

This paper will analyze China's military activities and subsequent expansion in Africa. The paper begins by outlining Africa's importance to the United States. This is followed by an examination of China's military activities on the continent. The next section provides an explanation and analysis of China's activities through the understanding of China's grand strategy. Finally, the paper concludes that although the pessimists have valid concerns regarding

China's military activities in Africa, there are areas of mutual interest where the United States and China can cooperate, more in line with the optimist perspective.

### **Africa's Importance to the United States**

The 2017 National Security Strategy (NSS) acknowledge that Africa “remains a continent of promise and enduring challenges.”<sup>3</sup> Africa contains a good majority of emerging economies as its population increases. Essential minerals vital to US defense also exist in abundance in Africa. Due to globalization, the United States must pay close attention to instability in Africa, caused by transnational threats such as terrorism, piracy, nuclear material proliferation, illegal trafficking, cybercrime, and health epidemics. The NSS, as the overarching document to drive US foreign policy has charted the course to partner with African states and help “facilitate their integration into the world economy [and] address threats to peace and security.”<sup>4</sup>

The strength of the US economy partly depends on Africa's demographic and economic trends; by 2025, an additional ninety million African households will enter the consumer class, contributing to a total household purchasing power of two trillion dollars.<sup>5</sup> In 2050, a quarter of the world's population will live in Africa with about a billion young adults under the age of eighteen postured to enter the labor force.<sup>6</sup> As one of the last frontiers of emerging markets, with massive potential for increased consumption, the rapidly growing and urbanizing African population will help shape global markets over the next few decades.<sup>7</sup>

The United States depends on Africa's stability as chemical and mineral reserves critical to its national defense are found in Africa: platinum<sup>i</sup> is used in automotive and aerospace applications; iridium<sup>ii</sup> is used in electronics, including in aircraft engines and satellites; tantalum<sup>iii</sup> is used for jet engines, missiles, and global positioning systems; and lastly, tourmaline<sup>iv</sup> is used for aerospace and ballistic purposes.<sup>8</sup>

As stated in the NSS,<sup>9</sup> terrorist groups based in Africa, such as Boko Haram (BH), Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), and Al-Shabaab inflict terrible suffering and directly threaten the interests of the United States and its allies. BH is among the most lethal terrorist groups in the world; in 2015, the number of people killed in terrorist attacks in Africa was as high as the number of fatalities caused by the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) in the Middle East.<sup>10</sup>

Although not as big a threat as transnational terrorism, maritime piracy in Somalia and the Gulf of Guinea, two hotspots of high strategic importance, threatens the lawful flow of international commerce and affects energy prices. Furthermore, maritime piracy also threatens US commercial interests and endangers American lives and assets. Between 12% to 20% of the world's vessels transit along the Somalia coast and through the Gulf of Aden, while the Gulf of Guinea is the gateway to trade with Nigeria, Africa's largest oil producer.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> Platinum (Pt) is the best known and most widely used of the six platinum metals of Groups 8–10 (VIIIb), Periods 5 and 6, of the periodic table. A very heavy, precious, silver-white metal, platinum is soft and ductile and has a high melting point and good resistance to corrosion and chemical attack.

<sup>ii</sup> Iridium (Ir) is one of the platinum metals of Groups 8–10 (VIIIb), Periods 5 and 6, of the periodic table. It is very dense and rare and is used in platinum alloys. A precious, silver-white metal, iridium is hard and brittle, but it becomes ductile and can be worked at a white heat, from 1,200° to 1,500° C (2,200° to 2,700° F).

<sup>iii</sup> Tantalum (Ta) is bright, very hard, silver-gray metal of Group 5 (Vb) of the periodic table, characterized by its high density, extremely high melting point, and excellent resistance to all acids except hydrofluoric at ordinary temperatures.

<sup>iv</sup> Tourmaline is borosilicate mineral of complex and variable composition. Three types of tourmaline, distinguished by the predominance of certain elements, are usually recognized: iron tourmaline (schorl), black in color; magnesium tourmaline (dravite), brown; and alkali tourmaline, which may be pink (rubellite), green (Brazilian emerald), or colorless (achroite). Some crystals are pink at one end and green at the other; concentric color zoning may also occur.

Another important interest is the United States' effort to stop the proliferation of nuclear materials. African nations do not possess conventional nuclear weapons, but non-state actors such as Al-Qaeda, who operate in Africa, have shown interest in the past to traffic and use radiological materials against the West. African countries do produce 20% of the world's uranium, but they usually lack the security or verification capacity to prevent uranium and other radioactive sources from contributing to the proliferation of nuclear proliferation.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, this lack of security could potentially allow terrorists to steal radioactive sources from vulnerable medical and industrial facilities across the continent with the aim to construct radiological dispersal devices or dirty bombs.

Cybercrime on the continent is quickly increasing as more and more African users gain access to the world wide web. While the trend to connect the world is good for Africans, the cybersecurity systems for most African countries lag behind those of their Western and Asian counterparts. Moreover, Nigeria, Africa's most populous country, is the originator of nearly 20% of all "advance fee" internet scams worldwide, and this type of fraud swindled Americans out of more than \$50 million in 2015.<sup>13</sup>

West Africa is now a major hub for various types of transnational threats, including the illegal trafficking of environmental and cultural products, drugs, weapons, and people.<sup>14</sup> The routes for these nefarious activities are the same routes used to strengthen terrorist networks in Africa. Illegal trafficked goods from Africa sometimes terminate in the United States. However, the serious issue is the fact that "illicit trade threatens the peace and stability of African countries, the sanctity of borders, the rule of law, and lawful commerce."<sup>15</sup>

Lastly, oceans and borders no longer contain communicable diseases due to the relative ease of global migration. At the onset of the 2014 Ebola outbreak, 3,000 to 6,000 passengers

traveled between West Africa and the United States weekly.<sup>16</sup> Fortunately, the US activated a sophisticated disease prevention system to ensure Ebola did not spread in the United States.

The economic potential of Africa, together with the other listed issues make Africa an important region that the United States must continue to engage. Clearly, China understands Africa's importance and potential, so like other major powers, it is striving to compete in the region. There is definitely a competitive dynamic between the United States and China in Africa.<sup>17</sup> However, Africa has a security problem since African governments are not capable of providing security for foreign nationals who work in Africa.<sup>18</sup> This lack of security is a detriment to progress and threatens the United States and other foreign interests. Understanding this "security dilemma" is very important when analyzing China's military activities in Africa.

### **China's Military Activities in Africa**

China has taken visible actions to increase its security policy in Africa in recent years. As China increases its engagement on the continent, the Chinese military sees a need for a more robust physical presence. China signed a ten-year agreement with the government of Djibouti to build a navy base to serve as a logistics hub for the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) ships engaged in anti-piracy operations off the coast of Yemen. The deal ensures China's military presence in the country up to 2026 with a contingent of up to 10,000 soldiers.<sup>19</sup> Djibouti sits on the Horn of Africa (HOA) and like the United States, China has capitalized on this geostrategic location for its operations in the region. The newly constructed base in Djibouti costs millions of dollars a year and is located only a few miles from Camp Lemonnier, the headquarters of Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF)—HOA.<sup>20</sup> The mission of CJTF-HOA is to develop and enhance influence, conduct military engagement, and provide security force

assistance in support of security cooperation.<sup>21</sup> Additionally, CJTF-HOA executes crisis response and contingency operations, in order to promote regional stability and protect US interests.

China's interests and assets in the HOA prompted the PLAN to begin patrolling the Gulf of Aden in December 2008 as part of the International Maritime Organization and United Nations (UN)-sanctioned anti-piracy resolutions to tackle the piracy threats in Africa. The Gulf of Aden is a strategic sea line since an average of 20,000 vessels transporting nearly 12% of the world's daily oil supply and 80% of international maritime trade with Europe transit annually.<sup>22</sup> From 2008 to 2009, a total of 322 actual or attempted acts of piracy occurred in the vicinity of the HOA, Gulf of Aden, and southern Red Sea, accounting for 46% of all incidents (actual or attempted acts of piracy) recorded in the world.<sup>23</sup> On December 26, 2008, China dispatched three naval ships, including two destroyers (DDG-171 Haikou and DDG-169 Wuhan) and a supply ship, to conduct escort operations in the Gulf of Aden.<sup>24</sup> This particular naval deployment to Somalia was China's first operational deployment outside of Asia, which demonstrated a shift in China's perception of security from traditional to non-traditional security; non-state actors such as terrorist networks, drug cartels, and maritime piracy networks, rather than militaries pose non-traditional security threats to states.<sup>25</sup> China's government claimed that the naval escorts ensure the navigation security of Chinese-owned and foreign ships on their mission to deliver humanitarian supplies to support the World Food Program (WFP) and other multilateral agencies. China's Defense Ministry stressed this point when it declared that, "as of July 2016, China dispatched sixty-eight ships in twenty-three sorties on escort missions, providing protection for over 6200 ships sailing under Chinese and foreign flags."<sup>26</sup> Reports and the positive compliments from the WFP who applaud China's commitment to provide food for the citizens of Africa substantiate the ministry's claim.<sup>27</sup>

A concrete demonstration of China's new interest in African security is its growing involvement in UN peacekeeping operations on the continent. China is now the eighth largest troop contributor to UN peacekeeping, and since 2007 it has been the top among the five permanent members of the Security Council.<sup>28</sup> Between 1990 and 2006, China's military contributed over 50% of its troops reserved for peacekeeping operations to Africa; 3,000 peacekeepers served in Mali, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, Western Sahara, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Sudan, Eritrea, and South Sudan.<sup>29</sup>

The People's Liberation Army (PLA) has also taken on a new role in attending to a humanitarian crisis. China's military led the government's response to the recent Ebola outbreak, particularly in Sierra Leone. The PLA deployed a mobile laboratory and three military medical teams, including doctors and staff from a military hospital in Beijing to set up an Ebola treatment center.<sup>30</sup> Between October 1, 2014 and March 22, 2015, the 215-member team treated 773 suspected cases and 285 confirmed cases of Ebola with a 51% success rate.<sup>31</sup> Additionally, the PLAN deployed the "Peace Ark" hospital ship around the world to provide free healthcare in developing countries. This particular vessel, which was originally designed to support troops during war, visited Djibouti, Tanzania, Kenya, and the Seychelles on its very first mission.<sup>32</sup>

China now actively combats terrorist threats in Africa since terrorist organizations have targeted Chinese nationals. Even though they were initially skeptical, China contributed military engineers, medics, and a 200 personnel force protection unit to northern Mali in support of the 2013 French intervention to combat Islamists who threatened Bamako.<sup>33</sup> When militants killed three Chinese nationals in the Bamako hotel attack in 2015, President Xi Jinping announced that China would "strengthen cooperation with the international community, resolutely crack down on violent terrorist operations that devastate innocent lives and safeguard world peace and

security.”<sup>34</sup> After Xi’s announcement, China immediately began transferring arms and providing training to the Nigerian and Cameroonian militaries for operations against BH; China also began supporting the African Union (AU) with financial donations towards the AU’s counter-terrorism and stabilization mission against Al-Shabaab in Somalia.<sup>35</sup> China does not conduct unilateral military activities in Africa outside of the AU, UN, or other regional frameworks.<sup>36</sup>

China usually supports the AU’s positions in debates over security issues at the UN, and it continually offers strong rhetorical support for the AU. Furthermore, China also financially invests in the AU. China built the AU’s headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and has made multiple donations of about \$1 to \$2 million to the AU’s counter-terrorism and stabilization mission in Somalia.<sup>37</sup> In 2015, President Xi pledged \$100 million in military aid to the AU’s rapid response mechanisms: the African Standby Force (ASF), and its blueprint, the African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crises (ACIRC).<sup>38</sup> As part of China’s effort to strengthen the AU-led African Peace and Security Architecture, it also directs a significant part of its military assistance (funds, transfer of equipment, and training missions) towards sub-regional organizations, such as the Economic Community of West African States and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development in the HOA.<sup>39</sup>

### **Analysis and Discussion of China’s Military Activities in Africa**

This paper does not ignore the fact that the United States should proceed with caution when dealing with China in Africa. Both the pessimists and the optimists should continue the debate as to whether China’s rise in Africa has implications for the United States. Unfortunately, there is a dominant narrative that, “China’s presence in Africa is bad for the United States.”<sup>40</sup> Typically, China is described as an aggressive power, seeking material resources in exchange for

infrastructure projects and loans, at a great disadvantage to the receiving African country.

According to scholars such as Mohamed Chemingui and Mohamed H. Bchir Bah who fall under the pessimist school of thought, China's presence in Africa is negative, particularly with regard to the consequences for the African economy.<sup>41</sup> Michael Swaine and Ashley Tellis fully suspect that China will continue to be assertive and continue its military expansion in Africa to protect its economic interest.<sup>42</sup> The two authors do not expect this to be a surprise since assertive behaviors from China are fairly consistent.

China's assertiveness and military activities in Africa are diverse and include counter-terrorism operations, anti-piracy operations, bilateral military aid, peacekeeping, and humanitarian missions. China's rise as a global power has made the country an important stakeholder in Africa. Naturally, the increasing economic and strategic interests are closely tied to peace and security of Africa. In other words, China's overseas interests are at risk in countries or regions where there is instability due to African states' inadequacies to quell disputes, civil wars, piracy, and terrorism. Therefore, China's determination to deepen security ties with Africa has been driven first by the urgent need to safeguard its national interests.<sup>43</sup>

The pessimists have a valid argument especially when viewed through the lens of realism. For realists, the world is anarchic where states worry about their self-interest, so they focus on their own survival.<sup>44</sup> As China continues to act in its self-interest, African citizens pressure their leaders to regulate China in the following areas; financial indebtedness, hiring practices that favor Chinese nationals over locals, and the proliferation of Chinese private security contractors.<sup>45</sup> However, despite the mounting debt, trade deficits, and negative messaging about China in Africa, African leaders used phrases such as "deeply transformational, satisfied, inspired, and unique" to define and defend China's growing relationship with Africa.<sup>46</sup>

This positive support for China happened during the September 2018 Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) where nearly fifty African leaders met in China for the Sino-African conference. FOCAC is an official forum between China and most of the states in Africa. Sino-African experts like Ambassador David Shinn and Paul Nantulya from Africa Center for Strategic Studies predict this tension between African citizens and their governments will likely grow as China continues to engage in Africa.

Africa is a unique and dynamic continent; therefore, it is important to thoroughly assess situations before recommending solutions. Miwa Hirono and Shogo Suzuki argue that when it comes to Sino-African relations, the narrative on Chinese foreign policy “remains heavily influenced by Western states’ policy interests, resulting in an impoverished debate that is primarily concerned with the idea of a China threat.”<sup>47</sup> A valid proposition came from Daniel Large who points that the majority of the literature on Sino-African relations in English “is written by US and European scholars who work on Africa, security and development, and international relations, with a heavy reliance on English-language materials.”<sup>48</sup> Large’s solution is to diversify further research that reflect more African perspectives rather than Western strategic anxieties.

The optimists portray China in Africa more positively. Deborah Brautigam demonstrates that “much of China’s allegedly pernicious political influence is greatly exaggerated, and that its aid can, at times, actually deliver real benefits to the recipient states.”<sup>49</sup> Shinn discusses the interests of the US and China in Africa in books, speeches, and a 2011 Congressional Testimony, concluding that they are similar despite popular opinion that they are not. Shinn suggests that the similarities between US and Chinese interests in Africa create a base for broader cooperation.<sup>50</sup> Similarly, on February 7, 2019, General Thomas Waldhauser, the current Commander of US

Africa Command (USAFRICOM) was cautious not to describe China's activities in Africa as a "militarization." Waldhauser told the Senate Armed Service Committee, "...at this point in time, it's too early to make that leap."<sup>51</sup> With objectivity, Ambassador Shinn and General Waldhauser adopt the optimistic, yet realist view that China is merely a rational competitor for economic opportunities in Africa and there is room for cooperation. Christopher Yung is another pragmatic Sinologist who share this view. Yung believes both the pessimists and the optimists have reasons to be concerned, therefore, he neither acquiesces that China's rise has negative implications, nor does he concede that the United States has no cause for concern.<sup>52</sup> Similarly, RAND researchers, Larry Hanauer and Lyle J. Morris conclude that "the US and Chinese goals in Africa do not necessarily conflict, and the engagement of both economic powers could be advantageous to Africans."<sup>53</sup> Shimelse Ali and Nida Jafrani, economists for Carnegie's International Economics Program, propose that the "United States should engage China in areas of potential collaboration and complementarity, such as education and agriculture projects."<sup>54</sup> Duchâtel et al, also advise that the West could do the following: cooperate more closely with China on peacekeeping, explore how China's engagement in African security can fit more closely with the West's interests in the region, and ensure they oppose China's problematic behaviors.<sup>55</sup>

The United States is fixated on China's activities in Africa, but there are other countries operating in the region. The Center for Strategic and International Studies observed that "in the past eight years, China and Japan have opened military bases in Djibouti; Turkey established a presence in Somalia; the United Arab Emirates (UAE) placed troops in Eritrea and Somaliland; and India acquired land in the Seychelles to develop a naval base. Meanwhile, Russia has increased its defense support and arms sales to Angola, the Central African Republic, Nigeria, and Uganda."<sup>56</sup> Countries forge closer partnerships with Africa because they see the potential for

trade and investment, despite the transnational security threats in Africa. Rather than properly analyzing the situation and find sound solutions that will maintain US influence in Africa, policy makers in the United States spend a lot of time complaining about China.

With a topic so complex, where there is a need for more analysis and explanation of a fairly new paradigm—China’s rise in Africa, perhaps the best course of action is to exercise the concept of perspective taking. Perspective taking in this case could help opposing sides understand who China is, China’s grand strategy, and what China wants.<sup>57</sup> Although it stills fall under the realm of realism, China’s interest in Africa is mostly economical<sup>58</sup> and the rise in military activities should be seen as the natural result of China’s growing footprint in an unstable continent, and China’s need to protect its people and investments since many African states cannot fulfil that task.<sup>59</sup> A country’s grand strategy offers an informative framework to analyze and understand how countries behave in the international system. A grand strategy is the integrated and coherent set of ideas about a state’s ultimate objectives in the international system, and the ways it plans on achieving them.<sup>60</sup> Grand strategy should essentially establish the state’s objectives, the threats against those objectives, and the ways the state plans to direct all of its resources to deal with both challenges and opportunities as a player on the world stage. As China continues to expand, it is important to understand China’s intensions in Africa, and one of the best places to start is to first analyze China’s grand strategy. Timothy Heath asserts that China does have a grand strategy. He further explain how to discern the strategy by reviewing authoritative pronouncements made by China’s top leadership, which usually align with the Chinese Communist Party (CPC) Constitution and Congress Work Report; these two documents “link changes in the party’s theory and are endorsed by the Central Committee at a Party Congress.”<sup>61</sup> Although China’s grand strategy has evolved overtime, it currently aims to attain

three interrelated objectives: first, China seek to restore itself as a great power; second, China is on a quest for regional and global leadership; and third, China seeks to build on and expand its financial reach beyond its borders through increased investments by private and public entities.<sup>62</sup>

The “One Belt, One Road” (OBOR) initiative, a multibillion-dollar program that involves infrastructure development and investments in countries across Asia, Europe, and Africa is central to the third objective, and China sees Africa as a key player in the accomplishment of these goals.<sup>63</sup> The base in Djibouti is connected to China’s OBOR initiative. China claims the OBOR is a vast international network of sea infrastructure aimed at securing its trade routes, ensuring the undisturbed travel of China-bound raw materials and energy vessels, as well as its refined products back to Europe through the Gulf of Aden. As Africa’s main trading partner, China is also interested in securing a long-term foothold on the continent in order to conduct business and ensure the security of its citizens. China recognizes Africa as an emerging market with high dividends despite the security risks. Naturally, the increasing economic and strategic interests are closely tied to peace and security of Africa.

The search for security is a significant concern for actors in the international system. There are millions of Chinese citizens living abroad who need China’s protection. This means China’s national interests must now extend beyond its borders. China’s new thinking of securing its national interests overseas is consistent with its deeper engagement in Africa for peacebuilding. Historically, China relied on host governments to protect its nationals and projects. However, the weak governance of many African governments makes them ill equipped to prevent extremist groups such as BH, AQIM, and Al-Shabaab from attacking UN peacekeepers and foreign nationals. This puts Chinese peacekeepers, Chinese workers, and Chinese interests in jeopardy. Chinese firms operating in Africa have generally demonstrated

willingness to accept higher security risks for their employees than their Western counterparts, but as attacks on Chinese nationals increased, Beijing decided that the risks were unacceptable. The evacuation in 2011 of 36,000 Chinese from Libya and loss of huge contracts was a wakeup call.<sup>64</sup> Between 2007 and 2013, there were thirteen documented cases of Chinese citizens getting robbed or kidnapped by African rebels; additionally, rebels in Sudan's South Kordofan captured twenty-nine workers from the Sinohydro Corporation in January 2012, and one person died after days of rescue efforts.<sup>65</sup> These attacks pose increasing threats to Chinese citizens and interests in Africa. This is one reason why the Chinese government saw fit to adjust its security policy in an effort to tackle the issue more effectively. Recognizing such overseas interests as an integral part of its national interests while attaching great importance to safeguarding and promotion demonstrates China's renewed perception of its national interests.

Along with the redefining of its national security and interests, China has also re-identified itself as a responsible major power in the global arena. This new identity demonstrates China is willing to contribute positively to the international system. When China resumed membership in the UN and signed a *détente* with the United States in the early 1970s, China embarked on the long process of returning to the international community. First, China changed its self-identity from a steadfast opponent of the Western-dominated international system to an indifferent bystander. Then China changed from an inactive participant, and eventually to an enthusiastic system participant and supporter. Aside from material motives, China tightening its security ties with Africa has also been motivated by its internationalist view to support developing countries. Seemingly, China is combining liberalist views, which stress cooperation among states, and communist ideologies, which emphasize the unification of the oppressed for self-improvement to shape its African policy. China's military and security relations with Africa

offer the best of all worlds for China. For now, African governments view China's active engagement with militaries in Africa and participation in peacekeeping and anti-piracy operations favorably.<sup>66</sup> Notwithstanding, some are increasingly getting wary of China's lending practices, and its neglect of labor and environmental norms.<sup>67</sup>

Since the United States and China have interests and objectives in Africa, a wise course of action would be for the United States to use what Joseph Nye terms "smart power" to counter China's aggression. Smart power is the ability to blend hard power, such as a nation's military might, and soft power to gain an advantage over competitors or adversaries.<sup>68</sup> There is a semblance that the United States is taking this smart power approach in Africa. The United States recently announced that it would downsize its military footprint in Africa by cutting USAFRICOM's staff by 10% in order to shift resources to prepare for potential future conflicts against Russia or China.<sup>69</sup> China's military threat does exist in other parts of the world, but it is less so in Africa and the United States must use the right instruments in the right places to respond efficiently.

Although this paper views China's activities in Africa in a more positive light, some of the opposing viewpoints are valid and must be considered. The United States is not the only nation concern about China's activities in Africa. There must be good reasons why other world powers, such as France, have similar concerns about China in Africa. The United States and France have vast capabilities to determine threats to their national security. The United States acknowledges China's influence in Africa as a key priority, but according to the Pentagon, the threat would be better addressed with soft power. Concurrently, in an effort to use soft power to counter China's expansion and reestablish French influence in Africa, the President of France

recently pledged to invest \$2.8 billion in Africa by financing and supporting startups and small-to medium-sized enterprises by 2022.<sup>70</sup>

The concern about China's non-interference policy is also valid. China's non-interference policy states that the country will not impose explicit political conditionalities on its aid recipients.<sup>71</sup> This philosophy of noninterference in the internal affairs of other nations fits well with the policy preferences of many African governments, but it undermines Western influence. African countries can ignore the West's stipulations on issues like corruption and good governance when they know China will provide loans, aid, and arms if western powers threaten to withhold the same. A good example of this was at the 2018 FOCAC where, because China pledged \$60 billion for development projects at the conference, African leader's still praised China despite valid concerns from their citizens and the West regarding China's bad practices.<sup>72</sup>

Although the optimists do not see China's Djibouti base as threatening, the pessimists have a valid reason to raise an alarm. In May of 2018, the chief Pentagon spokesperson, Dana W. White, confirmed that the United States protested to China after repeated instances of lasers interfering with US military aircraft landing in Djibouti.<sup>73</sup> Incidents like this certainly prevents peace and erodes trust in a region where trust, peace, and cooperation must occur. As Christopher Yung asserts, the PLA is not just a national army; it serves as the guardian and guarantor of the survival and viability of the CPC.<sup>74</sup> The pessimists will rightfully point out that the base in Djibouti is a Dual Use Logistics Facility, which means China can quickly transition its use from strictly commercial to military if necessary. Some optimists advocate against Yung's assertion. Rather than generalizing China's instruments of national power (diplomatic, informational, military, and economic) globally and concluding that the implications are negative, optimists propose the United States assess the instruments separately and regionally.

This separation is particularly necessary on the continent of Africa where each country must balance alliances for its self-interest. China's military activities in other parts of the globe, such as the South China Sea, might threaten the United States, but this does not mean the same conclusion is true for China's military activities in Africa. Furthermore, Africa is made up of fifty-four independent countries; therefore, activities must be viewed and assessed independently for better understanding and good decision making.

### **Areas Where the US and China Could Cooperate**

Both the pessimists and the optimists have valid reasons for taking an opposing stance regarding whether China's military expansion in Africa has negative implications for the United States. Although rarely identified and discussed, there are areas where the United States and China have similar policy goals in Africa. Both countries seek to reduce or eliminate those issues that create instability, such as terrorism, piracy, drug trafficking, and international crime. While the United States and China often disagree on the tactics and strategy for dealing with these issues, the fact that some overall goals are aligned should increasingly persuade both countries to find ways to work together to achieve positive results. General Waldhauser titled his 2019 USAFRICOM posture statement to Congress, *A Secure, Stable, and Prosperous Africa is an Enduring American Interest*.<sup>75</sup> In the document, Waldhauser describes one area where China and the United States already collaborate. While Djibouti is small country, it has strategic maritime importance. France, Germany, Japan, and China maintain bases in Djibouti; therefore, they must compete for access and airspace. Waldhauser works closely with the United States Ambassador to Djibouti and his initiative to coordinate with the host nation, China, and other countries based in Djibouti to de-conflict operations, ensure the safety of forces, and maintain appropriate access for military activities.<sup>76</sup>

In October of 2018, the United States and China collaborated in Africa when a mixed team of American, British, Norwegian, and Chinese experts, along with Czech and Russian contractors removed highly enriched uranium from a research reactor in Nigeria. Moving the reactor out of Nigeria was a long-sought objective for the United States and nonproliferation advocates to dissuade terrorists such as BH from making attempts to weaponize radiological and nuclear materials. The removal operation cost roughly \$5.5 million, with the United States contributing \$4.3 million.<sup>77</sup> Although the Chinese government did not contribute money, China transported the nuclear waste to process in China, thereby preventing terrorist in Nigeria from coming into contact with radiological materials and averting a potential disaster.

These threats cannot be solved by a single country and require cooperation, especially when existing international institutions sometimes fall short. Leaders in the United States and China should recognize the imperative self-interest in working together on hugely consequential transnational issues. As the two largest economies, the United States and China can set the tone for overarching issues, as well as other transnational issues like pandemics, terrorism, cybersecurity, and nuclear counterproliferation. Although these issues will require some yielding of long-standing positions by both sides, cooperation between the two countries must increase.

There are three other areas where the United States and China could cooperate to meet their objectives and still maintain their individual approach to foreign affairs. These areas include peacekeeping, counter-piracy, and capacity building. The PLA has contributed a significant amount of assets to peacekeeping operations around the world. Eight out of the ten PLA peacekeeping missions are deployed to Africa. The mere fact that China contributes more troops than its counterparts in the UN Security council is significant. It is also significant that the United States contributes the most funds to this same cause. Additionally, the US contributes

significantly to peacekeeping training in Africa. Since both countries acknowledge the importance of peacekeeping operation through troops contribution, funding, and training, the United States and Chinese militaries could exchange experiences in troop deployment, rules of engagement, security awareness, and logistic support.<sup>78</sup> The two countries could also provide support and training to peacekeepers of the AU who are usually ineffective due to lack of funds, equipment, and expertise.

Today, joint efforts of the international navies, which include the navies of China and the United States have primarily contained piracy activities in the Gulf of Aden and the Somali basin. However, the same issues now exist in the Gulf of Guinea where there is an increase in piracy and armed robbery. The Gulf of Guinea is a vital source of oil import for China. A recent hijacked of a Chinese merchant vessel, the *Yue Liangwan* prompted the PLAN to act; from late May to mid-June 2014, the 16th Task Force of PLAN held bilateral exercises with Cameroon, Nigeria, and Namibia.<sup>79</sup> The United States already conducts operations within these countries. The US and China could lead joint exercises with the African navies and other international navies to demonstrate collective resolve and enhance interoperability in order to stabilize the region—an end state that is in the best interest of all involved parties.

The United States and Chinese militaries are already supporting, but could do more in the area of capacity building of African countries. In May 2014, Premier Li Keqiang made the following pledge. Li pledged that “China will provide assistance to the ASF and quick response forces, support collective security...cooperate with the African countries in training, intelligence sharing...strengthen their capabilities in peacekeeping, counterterrorism, and counter-piracy.”<sup>80</sup> Since USAFRICOM has these same objectives, as stated in its mission statement and

reemphasized in the 2019 posture statement, there is room for the United States and China to collaborate, coordinate, and synchronize efforts.<sup>81</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Africa is important to the United States for many reasons including the continent's population and economic growth, vast mineral resources, and energy production. Regardless of the causes, instability in Africa affects the United States. There is no doubt that China has taken more of an active role and is expanding its military presence in Africa. From all accounts, the military activities are necessitated by the need for China to protect its citizens and economic interests in the continent. Both the US and China need to protect vital interests in the region, but as President Trump declared in the NSS, competition does not mean hostility, nor does it inevitably lead to conflict.<sup>82</sup> This statement supports the way optimists view and explain China's military activities in Africa, where there is space for cooperation between the two countries.

Just like China, the United States participates in piracy operations, military exchange programs, UN peacekeeping, nuclear counterproliferation, and counter-terrorism operations. Militarily, the United States is already a juggernaut in the region; therefore, a proper response requires balancing unmerited fears with realistic assessment of where US interest lies. The United States must recognize that much of China's appeal in Africa is its willingness to respond to African development priorities, such as infrastructure, and to look at Africa as a promising area for investment. As two nuclear-armed superpowers, the United States must find ways to work with China in Africa and manage this new relationship. The United States already adjusted its African strategy to use smart power, which if followed, is sufficient to quell any unforeseen nefarious shift in China's military posture. Rather than seeing China's military activities as a

threat, as pessimists do now, the United States should lead efforts to collaborate with China especially in areas of security and stability. This can be done through the already established organizations in Africa such as the AU, to ensure US objectives align with the objectives of African nations. If executed genuinely, African nations will certainly abandon China and make the United States the ally of choice.

China's security interests in Africa are mostly defensive and aimed at protecting its existing economic interests and citizens.<sup>83</sup> Currently, China's military presence in Africa is not a serious threat to the United States, but this does not mean the US should not take active and cautious steps when dealing with China in Africa. China's engagement with African countries will continue to operate within the broad confines of the principle of non-interference. That China has started to show some willingness to play a more proactive role should be strongly welcomed by those with an interest in Africa's peace and security. Fear mongering, scare tactics, and hysteria on the part of pessimists is unnecessary, especially since the US foothold in Africa is solidified through the establishment of USAFRICOM, which is the hub for the 3Ds: diplomacy, development, and defense approach to US foreign policy in Africa.<sup>84</sup> Although the United States and China will disagree in their fundamental foreign policy approach to Africa, both countries must find areas where they can cooperate in order to secure mutual interests.

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