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14. ABSTRACT This thesis examines the challenges posed to US strategic interests by China's use of soft power in Africa and argues that the US needs to respond with its own soft power campaign while recognizing that it can actually benefit from China's deep engagement on the continent. More specifically, this thesis will assess the effectiveness of China's historical "narrative offensive," examine China's grand strategy in the context of aid to developing nations, evaluate America's response to China's Africa strategy, and consider implications and a way ahead for both nations. Africa represents multiple strategic interests for the US: HIV/AIDS, oil, global trade, armed conflicts, and terror. China enjoys over 60-years of uninterrupted activity on the continent. During this period, China created multiple soft layers of activity with African governance culminating with institutionalized diplomatic overtures and economic assistance through the recurring Forums on China-Africa Cooperation and Chinese banking institutions.					
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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

CHINA IN AFRICA: AMERICAS' SOFT POWER CHALLENGE

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Title: China in Africa: Americas' Soft Power Challenge

Author: Major Toby E. Merrill, CG-14

Thesis: China enjoys a six-decade head-start on the United States (US) with regard to developing and maintaining influential soft relationships throughout Africa that creates challenges to US strategic interests on the continent.

Discussion: The creation US Africa Command (AFRICOM) represents a long-term commitment to African nations as US strategic partners. Africa, from US strategic interests and military operational planning perspectives has, until recently, received limited attention. In 2009, the US Congress elevated the strategic focus on Africa by requesting detailed analysis of the "economic assistance and government-sponsored investment activities" of the People's Republic of China (PRC) on the African continent.

This thesis examines the challenges posed to US strategic interests by China's use of soft power in Africa and argues that the US needs to respond with its own soft power campaign while recognizing that it can actually benefit from China's deep engagement on the continent. More specifically, this thesis will assess the effectiveness of China's historical "narrative offensive," examine China's grand strategy in the context of aid to developing nations, evaluate America's response to China's Africa strategy, and consider implications and a way ahead for both nations. Africa represents multiple strategic interests for the US: HIV/AIDS, oil, global trade, armed conflicts, and terror. China enjoys over 60-years of uninterrupted activity on the continent. During this period, China created multiple soft layers of activity with African governance culminating with institutionalized diplomatic overtures and economic assistance through the recurring Forums on China-Africa Cooperation and Chinese banking institutions.

Conclusion: The long-term investments in African countries started in the 1950s by China with many of the 53 newly independent African nations remain in place. China's soft policies of non-interference create greater levels of sharing and trust between the PRC and sovereign African nations by providing aid absent of judgment. The US places conditions on engagement. For the US and China, Africa represents strategic interests for both requiring greater cooperation to create a secure environment.

DISCLAIMER

THE OPINIONS AND CONCLUSIONS EXPRESSED HEREIN ARE THOSE OF THE INDIVIDUAL STUDENT AUTHOR AND DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT THE VIEWS OF EITHER THE MARINE CORPS COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE OR ANY OTHER GOVERNMENT AGENCY. REFERENCES TO THIS STUDY SHOULD INCLUDE THE FOREGOING STATEMENT.

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PREFACE

Having become Marine starting in 1987, I am most proud to be a part of an organization rich in heritage and traditions going back to the creation of the United States of America. Throughout my career, I have had the opportunity to work with and be around some of the most amazing professionals in the world from Private to Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Each assignment provided an opportunity to develop professionally and personally. I am particularly thankful for the opportunity to attend the USMC Command and Staff College and to share my insights and concerns for the future US strategic interests in Africa with this research project. Getting to know members of the interagency, peers from the other US services, and sharing in the intellectual pursuits afforded me in this endeavor, is both humbling and inspirational.

There have been many great leaders who have guided me throughout my professional journey: Major General M.R. Regner, the finest Marine Officer I have ever known and superb mentor. Colonel Raymond Celeste, Jr., the epitome of class in a Marine officer. Colonel Henry T. Gobar, my first Regimental Commander, man of superior intellect and teacher of patience. Colonel M. Bodkin, who rarely says much, but demonstrates superior leadership by example. Lieutenant Colonel M. A. Singleton, my first Battalion Commander and proud "Son of the South" who taught me that cultural barriers were ridiculous mental constructs created by cowards to provide comforts to the insecure and tools to oppress underprivileged. Lieutenant Colonel John A. Van Messel, Timothy W. Nichols, Ricky Dunaway, David George, Ernie Robinson, and Bert Steele III. Majors Jim Sellers, Earl Clark and Jodie Moser you are my peers, friends, and leaders. Staff Sergeant McKenzie, my Senior Drill Instructor from Boot Camp. He saw something in me I was unaware of, forced me to develop leadership concepts, and provided me the freedom to articulate them publicly. Gunnery Sergeant R. L. Wilson, a superior Marine who provided me the honor of a first salute on the day of my commissioning and inspired me to train to a higher standard, April 3, 1998.

I would like to thank Dr. Jonathan F. Phillips for his patience and tutelage through this academic challenge, and allowing me the freedom to pursue this topic.

Most importantly, I want to thank my family for their lifelong love and support in all of my pursuits. My father, deceased, retired Army Non-Commissioned Officer. My mother, who always provided the love and encouragement, giving me the confidence needed to pursue my professional goals. My siblings: Tyrone, Tyra, Terry, and Letetia for making me laugh during those tough years in Michigan and the love you all hold dear in your respective hearts. My two oldest children, Aaron and Tobie whom I miss dearly each day wish great success. Claudia and William, my two youngest children, that I get the pleasure of seeing everyday. I also want to thank my two dearest friends: Melissa Hendricks and Roshelle VanZytveld for representing all that is good about friendship. Finally, I am forever grateful to my wife, Vonda, who has endured many sacrifices for my military career while being supportive along the way. Her patience with my piles of books, articles, and time spent researching and writing during this academic experience has allowed me to broaden my professional experiences and further expand my understanding of the world.

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INTRODUCTION

China enjoys a six-decade head-start on the United States (US) with regard to developing and maintaining influential soft relationships throughout Africa that create challenges to US strategic interests on the continent. Coming on the heels of colonialism, the People's Republic of China (PRC) established diplomatic relationships based on the concept of "soft power."¹ This concept uses culture, ideology, and institutions to influence behavior.² As part of this effort, China has crafted and reinforced historical narratives tying it to Africa through shared history and disdain for Western powers. Over the years, China has maintained these relationships by providing assistance to members of the developing world as part of its grand strategy.

China provides multiple forms of assistance to developing nations. It provides medical assistance to improve overall quality of life in many African countries. Training and scholarship programs to educate Africans are another form of assistance. Debt relief for impoverished nations, infrastructure improvement, technical assistance, and economic assistance serve as examples of assistance China provides to developing nations. China's "economic assistance," however, does not constitute "official development assistance" as measured by members of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development.³ Combining "China's commercial and concessional loans, technical assistance, and state-sponsored or subsidized investments," however, reveals a major difference between it and traditional donors making China "a major source of economic assistance" for African nations.⁴ Each measure taken by China creates favorable conditions for a long-term presence on the African continent to safeguard Chinese strategic interests.

The US has recognized and is taking measures to alter negative perceptions of its intentions on the continent by attempting to strengthen partnerships with African nations. The creation of AFRICOM is one effort to achieve this end. This command, however, also serves as

a point of friction with many African nations because it is seen by some as a form of neocolonialism. Several African leaders believe AFRICOM is nothing more than a “Trojan horse” designed to position the US in an advantageous location to dominate Africa’s wealth of natural resources. Lastly, some argue AFRICOM represents a measure employed by the US to thwart Chinese influence on the continent.

This thesis examines the challenges posed to US strategic interests by China’s use of soft power in Africa and argues that the US needs to respond with its own soft power campaign while recognizing that it can actually benefit from China’s deep engagement on the continent. More specifically, this thesis will assess the effectiveness of China’s historical “narrative offensive,” examine China’s grand strategy in the context of aid to developing nations, evaluate America’s response to China’s Africa strategy, and consider implications and a way ahead for both nations.

DEVELOPING SOFT RELATIONSHIPS

One of the first steps China takes when developing relationships with African leaders is to exploit the unfortunate aspects of African history, most notably slavery and colonialism, and emphasize the post-colonial desires of African nations to remain independent of the Cold War superpowers. The US with the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution, and several other Western nations abolished slavery in 19th Century, but this is where the Chinese narrative begins.⁵ Most important, China builds and maintains relationships with Africans that separate it from Western institutions by crafting a historical narrative around slavery and colonial rule.⁶ China employs the narrative during high-level engagements with African leaders to remind them that it is different from Western nations and played no role in the forcible removal and enslavement of African people in the colonization of the continent.

During a speech provided to Syracuse University at the Symposium on Africa-China Relations, Counselor Du Xiacong of the Chinese Permanent Mission to the United Nations highlighted the brevity of Africa's 'splendid ancient culture' due to "damages from exterior forces" interfering with and damaging African social and economic development, damages that still impact African nations through forms of "poverty and conflicts."⁷ The message contained multiple themes. It reminded Africans of slavery at the hands of Westerners, demonstrated China's sympathy to cultural ills still suffered by Africans, and created space between it and the West.

Regrettably, China's narrative, while certainly self-interested, is historically accurate. In the 19th Century, colonial powers determined that Africa would serve as extensions of colonial sovereignty, giving birth to the period of Colonialism (1880s – 1950s). In 1884 and again in 1885, colonial authorities gathered in Berlin to determine the outcome and use of Africa, creating the current map of the continent.⁸ Colonials reluctantly permitted limited self-governance in the

early part of the 20th Century, but even as late as 1948, colonials believed they were “a long way from having a plan to devolve power.”⁹ Colonials believed Africans were incapable of self-rule in the 1950s and that “hastily” conceived mechanisms used to “devolve” authority to Africans would not work.¹⁰ The prevailing attitude from colonials was condescending. European overlords feared that “Africa would become the world’s project for uplift and also a magnet for power politics and exploitative interests.”¹¹

European disdain for African religion, culture, and independence provided the recently created PRC with a wonderful foreign policy opportunity to make inroads into the continent. China wasted little time in crafting a narrative allowing it to claim the “moral high ground” by making it clear to the newly independent African nations that it had no affiliation with colonialism and that China had also suffered under the yoke of European exploitation.¹² As was the case during the speech at Syracuse in 2010, China continually uses anti-colonial sentiment to distance itself from Western nations during high-level engagements. In 2006, during the third Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), Chinese television broadcasts reminded visiting African leaders of the “atrocities” of colonialism while “juxtaposing examples of gracious aid provided, no strings attached, by China.”¹³

Thus, as Africa experienced the beginning of the end of colonialism in the 1950s, China was one of the first countries to enter the newly formed post-colonial vacuum carrying with it a discernibly anti-colonial narrative based in historical truth, a communist ideology, and the first of many forms of economic assistance.¹⁴ During the early part of the post-colonial era, China shaped the narrative along cultural lines drawing parallels to its “century of humiliation” (1840 – 1940) and the oppression of the African nations at the hands of “racist” Western cultures during colonial rule.¹⁵ China added to the historical narrative by demonstrating a long established

economic and cultural history between it and the African continent. Historical records indicate earlier Chinese-African economic relationships going back to the Tang Dynasty (618 – 907 AD).¹⁶

Slavery and Colonialism provided the historical narrative, but the vacuum created by the end of colonialism gave China the opportunity to intervene in Africa as a *fellow* developing country.¹⁷ During the early stages of contemporary Sino-African relations in the 1950s, the PRC openly declared itself a “shepherd of a flock of African nations moving toward a new democratic revolution.”¹⁸ China openly supported “liberation struggles” in multiple locations on the continent with small arms weapons sales along with financial assistance.¹⁹

Post-colonialism also witnessed the beginning of a shift in Chinese foreign diplomacy from one based on ideology to one of “pragmatism” when it supported non-communist forces in Angola to thwart Soviet threats on the Sino-Russian border in the early 1970s.²⁰ The key significance of post-colonial Africa (1950s-1990s) is that the continent served as a diplomatic proving ground for the People’s Republic of China. During this period, China developed and refined current long-term relationships with many non-aligned developing nations around the globe. In Africa, China took full advantage of the nascent and fragile democracies by packaging the institutional, cultural, and ideological components of soft power in historical narratives to build and maintain relationships that facilitate economic and military assistance with all but five of the fifty three sovereign nations on the continent.²¹

CHINA'S GRAND STRATEGY

The PRC has a grand strategy for creating national security designed around the concept of comprehensive security.²² The grand strategy also represents the foreign policy of China. The “focal point” for the grand strategy is “peace, development, stability, security, and national revitalization.”²³ Chinese leadership believes that the US seeks to “reshape China in its own image” by “slowing” China’s economic ascent to greatness, ‘depriving it of adequate supplies of energy’ and ‘inducing change in the Chinese Communist Party political system’ from within.²⁴ China’s grand strategy design presumes that by creating a “multipolar world,” where several countries compete for global dominance, it can undercut US dominance and secure its national security objectives.²⁵ The People’s Republic of China, under the leadership of Mao Zedong, took the first of many steps in the 1950s to implement its grand strategy by establishing diplomatic partnerships with the developing countries of the world.

Chief among these new diplomatic partners were several fledgling African nations attending the 1955 Bandung Conference in Indonesia where China promoted its diplomatic agenda, the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, explained subsequently, and helped create the Non-Aligned Movement.²⁶ The initial purpose behind these relationships was to spread communist ideology and to counter perceptions of Western imperialism. Chairman Mao believed that by employing the “countryside of the world (developing nations), China could “surround the cities of the world” (imperialist nations) to create liberty for all.²⁷ This foreign policy remained in effect from the 1950s to the 1980s when China amended its official foreign policy along pragmatic ideals and capitalist economic principles.²⁸

During the late 1970s, China took the first steps to amend its foreign policy to include using the developing world in a “anti-imperialist” capacity based on the Theory of the Three Worlds as a way to shape international systems to support the overall grand strategy.²⁹ The

essence of the theory, first mentioned publicly in 1974 by then Vice Premier of the PRC Deng Xiaoping, is that a “new international economic order” will develop if it is one based on the developing world.³⁰ The theory divides the world into three zones; zone 1: the US and Soviet Union—the principal agents that can cause a third world war, zone 2: the remaining industrialized worlds, and zone 3: the developing worlds—China being the leader of this zone. In the end, zones 2 and 3 join against the imperialist forces of zone 1 to end unjust economic conditions created by imperialists.³¹ China combined the Theory of the Three Worlds with the previously mentioned Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence in the 1980s and employs this new foreign policy as the basis for providing aid to the developing world.

A key component of the new Chinese foreign policy was the change from a policy based on the communist ideology, the Five Principles of Peaceful Existence to a policy based on pragmatic capitalist principles.³² The five principals of this policy are: (1) mutual respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, (2) non-aggression, (3) non-interference in internal affairs, (4) equality and mutual benefit, and (5) peaceful coexistence.³³ First mentioned in the 1950s under Mao Zedong, then modified by Deng Xiaoping, this new foreign policy stressing an “independent foreign policy of peace” remains the official “slogan” for international foreign policy when engaging leaders of the developing world.³⁴ Under this policy, China justifies providing support without condition under the principle of “non-interference” to countries with questionable human rights records and, in so doing, gains the support of many African nations.³⁵

During this same period, the PRC joined the International Monetary Fund and World Bank.³⁶ The significance of these two steps, the new foreign policy and entry into international banking institutions, demonstrate evolutions in thought with Chinese foreign policy from one based on ideology to one based on economic pragmatism. In the 1980s, China was a recipient of

developmental assistance, receiving billions in aid from international institutions to stimulate economic growth.³⁷ Today, China is the world's second largest economy, the focus of which is economic growth to facilitate comprehensive security.

Comprehensive security for the Chinese includes all the key components of political, economic, and military institutions.³⁸ Capitalist economic principals serve as the guide. According to testimony given by members of the Department of State to the Subcommittee on African Affairs of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, "small, private Chinese investors have invested millions of dollars into opening enterprises in Africa that operate in textiles, light manufacturing, construction and agriculture."³⁹ The previously mentioned military assistance Beijing provides to African nations also includes aid in developing weapons production facilities.

From the perspective of the People's Republic of China, "international exchanges" of natural resources between China and the developing worlds serve as enablers for development, but more important, hinder the spread of hegemony and power politics.⁴⁰ Thus hegemony—the "preponderant influence or authority over others" or "social, cultural, ideological, or economic influence exerted by a dominant group"—appears in virtually every facet of Chinese foreign policy, eschewed by every major Chinese official going back to Chairman Mao.⁴¹ Deng Xiaoping, quoted in *Chinese Views of Future Warfare*, provides zero ambiguity about the perceived evils of hegemony and how China will respond declaring, "the contention of hegemony is the cause of the current world's intranquility" and that "whomever practices hegemonism, we will fight against him, and whoever commits aggression, we will fight against him."⁴²

Equally reviled in Chinese culture is the concept of power politics—when countries seek to “infringe” on a nation’s “national sovereignty” by declaring its government irrational or illegitimate—using accusations of human rights violations or corrupt governments as the basis for overthrow or regime change.⁴³ Critical to highlighting the disdain the PRC holds for the concepts of hegemony and power politics is that many leaders of African nations share similar views as the Chinese. In 2000, the PRC and leaders from 40 African nations decided to hold the first of what would become recurring Forums on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). During subsequent meetings between 2000-2006, designed to formalize Sino-African political partnerships, Chinese leaders discussed the growing dangers and negative influences of “hegemonism” and describing “US foreign policy as hegemonic.”⁴⁴

From 2000-2009, the PRC cemented its presence on the African continent by either hosting or serving as guest to ministerial level forums where African and Chinese leaders formalized “political influence” in several government and private sectors.⁴⁵ The forums solidified China’s soft power influence on the African continent by institutionalizing diplomatic overtures, technical training, addressing grants, loans, and debt relief, as well as infrastructure projects.⁴⁶ These forums also allow the PRC and the African nations involved to share a common voice on political issues in international forums like the United Nations. Starting in 2000, FOCAC recur every three years.⁴⁷ Subsequent to the first FOCAC, high-level African delegates visit Beijing monthly.⁴⁸

On October 10, 2010, the PRC and African leaders from 48 African nations celebrated the ten-year anniversary of the FOCAC and the ‘narrative offensive’ remained a part of the official message. The “FOCAC represents a major strategic choice that China and Africa made in rising up to the challenges of globalization and seek common development with joint efforts.

This choice is deeply rooted in the historical experience and camaraderie the two sides share and a reflection of their common desire for development and strategic interests.⁴⁹ The FOCAC codify the methods of economic and diplomatic collaboration between China and African nations. At this point in the narrative, the focus now shifts to the technical nuances of China's economic assistance, the tools of the state that China employs to implement the collaborative efforts of the FOCAC and means to provide global economic assistance.

China implements economic programs designed to stimulate economic growth abroad while increasing profits at home through grants, low cost loans, and debt relief in Africa and other developing nations.⁵⁰ China believes that economic security includes "promotion of growth, access to global markets, and guaranteed supply of natural resources."⁵¹ From 2002 to 2007, economic assistance from China to the African continent grew from approximately \$51 million in 2002 to \$25 billion in 2007.⁵² These figures represent pledged assistance vice actual aid provided, however, the increases in pledged monies offer insights into the level of commitment China has to Africa.⁵³ In return for the economic assistance provided by China, many oil and mineral rich African nations provide China with the raw materials (oil, minerals, timber) it needs to enhance domestic security by using natural resources to pay for the economic assistance.

Previously noted, China's economic assistance does not constitute official development assistance as measured and provided by members the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development.⁵⁴ China offers "at least nine kinds of aid" (economic assistance) to the world: "medical teams, training and scholarship, humanitarian aid, youth volunteer, debt relief, budget support, turn-key or complete plant projects (infrastructure, factories), aid-in-kind, and technical assistance."⁵⁵ These forms of aid represent the foundations for the assistance that China provides to African countries. Chinese "foreign aid" comes directly from the "Chinese government

foreign aid budget.”⁵⁶ This form of aid represents funds “specifically issued to promote economic development and improve living standards in developing countries.”⁵⁷ In 1994, China created the “three policy banks”, the ‘China Development Bank, the China Export Import Bank (Eximbank), and China Agricultural Development Bank to act as official “tools of the government” that facilitate foreign aid to developing countries.⁵⁸

The China Eximbank and China Development Bank operate internationally to “accelerate development” of impoverished nations through the “deliberate use of state policies.”⁵⁹ One of the state policies for controlling the development of a nation is “control over finance.”⁶⁰ The “State Council” has oversight of the three central institutions for foreign aid provided by China, the Ministry of Commerce, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the China Eximbank.⁶¹ The China Eximbank, the “world’s largest export credit agency,” issuing approximately \$18 billion of buyer’s and seller’s export credits in 2007, is at the heart of the Chinese ‘going global strategy’ and represents a key instrument of power for China.⁶² These financial institutions created “centers for investment and trade promotion” to provide incentives for “business and consultation to Chinese enterprises on Africa that generated approximately \$1 billion in Kenya, Nigeria, and Zambia alone.”⁶³

Critics argue that China’s going global strategy seeks to create the impression of parity between it and the US through international and diplomatic foreign policies designed around fiscal mechanisms that creates a perception of need throughout the world for China.⁶⁴ Others criticize the Chinese describing their business practices as unethical by misrepresenting the economic means and methods employed to provide economic assistance to developing nations. Another criticism levied at China is that it lacks economic transparency when competing for development contracts and the actual methods of providing economic assistance to developing

countries throughout the world, but primarily on Africa because of competition for the continent's natural resources.⁶⁵ This last criticism is valid, but it distorts existing global practices by traditional donor nations.

As is the case with most Western donor countries, China does not provide outsiders with full access to its financial processes.⁶⁶ The institutions previously identified, the China Eximbank and China Development Bank, serve as the international economic instruments used by China to compete on the global economic stage. With regard to the criticisms of unethical business practices for the methods by which China provides economic assistance to developing nations, namely, the very means (type of loans and securities) it uses to deliver aid and receive payment for services rendered, this too is distorted. Most Chinese loans are lines of credit for specified projects not cash exchanges.⁶⁷ China primarily provides lines of credit, secured with natural resources called, "resource-backed concessional loans."⁶⁸ These two forms of economic assistance fund most of the infrastructure, telecommunications, and industry projects throughout Africa.⁶⁹

Resource-backed concessional loans allow recipient countries to pay for the value of the loans from donor nations with natural resources, a practice learned by the Chinese in the 1970s from the Japanese.⁷⁰ China emerged from its "Cultural Revolution" by selling its own natural resources to foreign powers to provide for its own economic growth and development.⁷¹ The Chinese refined these practices with Western powers in the 1980s, and exported the concepts learned to Africa in the 1990s as it changed from recipient nation to donor nation.⁷²

One method of economic assistance China employs that is different from traditional donor countries are "mixed credit mode" loans, a packaging of funds: concessional loans, buyer's and seller's credits, and lines of credit, used for "large overseas engineering projects."⁷³

These large projects are the ones appearing in US press reports describing efforts by the Chinese to buy their way into the good graces of African leaders. By way of example, the Nigerian Lagos-Kano railway project, reported as \$9 billion in “aid” from the Chinese by the *New York Times*, represents an example of “mixed credit” comprised of lines of credit, buyer’s credits, and grants.⁷⁴ This project was not \$9 billion in aid provided to Nigerian government officials for discretionary distribution. China is going global. It provides economic assistance to many developing nations that mirror most traditional donor nations. China packages economic assistance to maximize security on the monies loaned, but does so in plain site despite misrepresentations in news media.

The Forums on China-Africa Cooperation serve as the primary instrument for codifying Chinas influence on the African continent and places the US at a marked diplomatic disadvantage. It represents a culmination of 60-years of soft power development between China and the continent of Africa. The US lacks any sort of similar apparatus to counter the recurring ‘us versus them’ message routinely delivered by top-level Chinese leadership and should consider conceiving and designing a similar diplomatic apparatus to counter the existing Chinese narrative. China believed then (1950s) and now that it is a developing country even though it is the number two economy in the world, it will continue employing the described narratives to maintain its position in African countries.⁷⁵ Despite criticisms of business practices, means and methods, China provides economic assistance to 48 African nations, but does so in accordance with international banking practices.

US STRATEGY IN AFRICA

In 2004, “Africa experts” indicated, “HIV/AIDS, oil, global trade, armed conflicts, and terror” as factors shaping increased US interest in the continent of Africa.⁷⁶ These factors remain unchanged to the present and serve as guiding principals for developing policies for engaging African nations. In February 2007, US President George W. Bush, announced the creation of AFRICOM, one of six US geographic combatant commands.⁷⁷ In 2009, the US Congress further elevated the strategic focus on Africa by requesting detailed analysis of the “economic assistance and government-sponsored investment activities” of the PRC on the African continent by the Congressional Research Service.⁷⁸

Africa, from US strategic interests and military operational planning perspectives has, until recently, received limited attention. The creation of AFRICOM represents a long-term commitment to African nations as US strategic partners. ‘According the United Nations, 67 percent of all known worldwide cases of positively testing HIV/AIDS victims are Africans.’⁷⁹ Africa also represents a continent rich with oil and other natural resources of strategic interest to the US and its competitors. The US ranks as the number one consumer of African oil, with China ranking as number two.⁸⁰ Multiple sources indicate that Nigeria has the potential of producing enough oil to meet as much as 25 percent of all US oil needs in the future.⁸¹ According to the Congressional Research Service, “deep water drilling in the Gulf of Guinea” will facilitate the aforementioned 25 percent oil threshold by 2015.⁸²

Factors affecting achievement of this milestone are the current maritime security challenges along the western coast of Africa. To date, many coastal African nations lack the capability to adequately police these coastal waterways that serve as global trade shipping lanes. The Gulf of Aden alone accounts for 8 percent of the world’s trade to and from the Indian Ocean.⁸³ Maritime security deficiencies, namely the threat of piracy, will only decrease

“maritime commerce and off-shore oil production” thereby obstructing global commerce.⁸⁴

Additionally, the reality of transnational terrorist network operations in countries of limited governance on the African continent represent a threat to US strategic interests.⁸⁵

Countries of limited governance provide transnational terrorists with potential bases of operation and recruitment centers for potential future terrorist operations. Transnational terrorists use ungoverned areas and failed states as bases of operations for internationally recognized crimes such as: ‘smuggling, drug and human trafficking, proliferation of small arms, illegal immigration, and piracy.’⁸⁶ Former Director of National Intelligence Dennis Blair testified before the US Congress that ‘Al-Qa’ida in the Islamic Maghreb and Al Shabaab are increasing their capabilities of in East Africa.’⁸⁷

In 2006, Sada al-Jihad (“Echo of Jihad”), an online media source, indicated that Al-Qa’ida is moving to Africa and that the African region is significant in the “campaign against the crusaders.”⁸⁸ In 2010, the AFRICOM Commander, testified before the US Congress that there is a link between the “threat posed by terror groups” and “regional conflicts.”⁸⁹ Each of these continent wide security threats: maritime security, countries of limited governance, transnational terrorist network operations, represent areas of mutual strategic interests as well as opportunities for security cooperation partnerships between the US, African nations, and China.

The first area of concern with regard to these continent wide security threats for the US, African, and Chinese strategic interests, however, is addressing the recurring theme of securing ungoverned spaces to protect national interests and global commerce. For the US, a key component of the AFRICOM mission statement provides for promoting “a stable and secure African environment in support of US foreign policy.”⁹⁰ Providing for security on the continent is one of the biggest challenges moving forward but it also presents opportunities to alter negative

African perceptions of the US and AFRICOM and to engage China on mutually beneficial ways to create a stable operating environment.

The overall AFRICOM mission, as defined, “in concert with other U.S. government agencies and international partners, conducts sustained security engagement through military-to-military programs, military-sponsored activities, and other military operations as directed to promote a stable and secure African environment in support of U.S. foreign policy.”⁹¹ Its responsibilities also include “coordinating military-to-military relationships between the US and 53 African nations.”⁹² Despite the mission statement, several critics argue that AFRICOM is nothing more than a “Trojan Horse” whose true purpose is the ‘militarization of US foreign policy’ to achieve overall US strategic interests.⁹³

One major criticism at the time of the announcement of AFRICOM’s creation was that US leaders failed to consult or engage African leaders on the rationale behind creating this new military organization and that it “represents a neocolonial effort to dominate the region militarily.”⁹⁴ This translates into perceptions by Africans as exploitation of Africa’s natural resources through military measures. Additionally, African leaders also accuse US officials of avoiding discussions of potential locations of the command headquarters on the continent with African leaders.⁹⁵ In 2007, the African Union, discussed subsequently, “voted in favor of a motion” within its legislative architecture that would prevent any union member from serving as host to the AFRICOM headquarters anywhere in the African continent.”⁹⁶

The US must be mindful that since the beginning of the post-colonialism era, it conducted 42 military operations on the continent creating the perception of militarization of US foreign policy previously articulated.⁹⁷ While the US did establish and maintains diplomatic relations throughout the continent, the general perception from Africans is that US involvement

with Africa is through the military and during crises. The general perception for China, however, is that Africans and Chinese share similar histories and they are there to help uplift Africans. Protection of US strategic interests on Africa represents the number one priority for US foreign policy for Africa, however, to achieve this, the top priority for AFRICOM is changing perceptions of African nations to create the necessary conditions for a secure environment. When President Bush announced the creation of AFRICOM, many claimed the task of AFRICOM was to establish an “American Empire” on the continent.⁹⁸

Equally undesirable, that AFRICOM represents “another sign that the US seeks to re-assert American power and hegemony.”⁹⁹ Hegemony carries extremely damaging connotations for Africans as the term symbolizes a US foreign policy of interference with national sovereignty.¹⁰⁰ Still others claim AFRICOM will hamper the development of the African Union, an organization formed in the early 1970s that in 2004 became the lead for continental “defense and security policy.”¹⁰¹ One primary function of the African Union is to create a “continent-wide multinational security architecture.”¹⁰² Critics argue that AFRICOM disrupts the overall design of this continent wide endeavor, as it will take away influences of the African Union throughout the continent. A more dire perception of AFRICOM is that it represents the “single issue or event in recent decades in Africa” that provokes “unified hostility and opposition.”¹⁰³

While most African nations are against AFRICOM’s presence on the continent, some African nations embrace the idea of a larger US presence. The president of Liberia openly supports AFRICOM in addition to indicating interest in Liberia serving as host for the AFRICOM headquarters.¹⁰⁴ Other nations acknowledge that a greater US footprint on the continent brings with it greater security and larger revenue streams. While perceptions of African nations remains at the forefront of concerns for AFRICOM success, a greater challenge

to US strategic success in Africa is the countering People's Republic of China's established soft power influence and reshaping the narrative to provide a positive light on the US role on Africa.

The US and China acknowledge the instability on the continent and realize that security on the continent is paramount to overall global commerce. Both share competitive interests in securing Africa's natural resources. Both will benefit from a secure African environment. The difference between the two competing nations is perception. The diplomatic relationships between China and African nations span six decades and generally receive positive praise by most influential Africans. The US lacks such positive historical narrative. The US was involved in the African slave trade and supported South African government during the Apartheid era in the 1980s to secure precious metals. The carryover of these facts along with several military operations on the continent since the 1950s creates sparse praise and suspicion from African leaders.

The US needs to cultivate genuinely constructive sentiments in Africans to achieve strategic objectives. One persistent observation about the US is that it views Africa as "anything but a source of extractive resources and a perpetual conflict-ridden region with few business opportunities."¹⁰⁵ Previously indicated, HIV/AIDS, oil, global trade, armed conflicts, and terror are factors shaping increased US interest in the continent of Africa. US publications making such blunt declarations of the African continent only validate the existing destructive perceptions of the US by Africans in that it continues to see Africa as anything but a source of disease, place for material exploitation, and safe-haven for terrorists.

These are but two criticisms of the US foreign policy for Africa but they indicate that there is a significant gap between how Africans distinguish the US and China. One method to amend negative perceptions is maintaining and enhancing current US military assistance and

security cooperation programs to demonstrate that African and US priorities mirror each other.¹⁰⁶

The primary programs of note include the Combined Joint Task Force - Horn of Africa and Security Assistance, Trans Sahara/Trans Sahara Counter Terrorism Partnership, and the Global Peace Operations. These programs represent efforts to thwart the spread of terrorist operations.¹⁰⁷ The International Military Education and Training and the African Contingency Operations Training and Assistance Programs also represent existing US African partnerships that provide training and education opportunities to facilitate greater collaboration between US and African nations.¹⁰⁸ Each of these programs address creating and maintaining a secure African environment that mutually benefits all vested partners.

Another method for adjusting damaging opinions of US intentions aimed at Africa and function of AFRICOM is highlighting the amount and nature of US aid to the continent. In 2007, total US “financial flows” to Africa was approximately \$15 billion.¹⁰⁹ The fiscal year 2009 (FY09) US budget requested \$800 million in “military, security cooperation, and security assistance programs.”¹¹⁰ \$500 million of the FY09 budget was for equipment and training programs, \$200 million was for security and stabilization assistance programs, and \$100 million was for the AFRICOM Combatant Commander Initiative Funds—funds for command designated “relief and reconstruction projects.”¹¹¹ These figures, along with the increases requested in the FY10 budget demonstrate that economic assistance the US seeks to offer Africa is decidedly non-military and focuses on enhancing security throughout the continent. The support also serves as examples of US soft power when engaging African leaders through a traditionally hard power source, the US Department of Defense.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

SUMMARY

China enjoys a six-decade head-start on the US with regard to developing and maintaining influential diplomatic relationships throughout Africa. Over the years, China has maintained these relationships by assisting members of the developing world as part of its grand strategy by providing multiple forms of assistance to developing nations. China's economic assistance does not constitute official development assistance, however, each measure taken by China creates favorable conditions for a long-term presence on the African continent to safeguard Chinese strategic interests.

The US is taking measures to alter negative perceptions of its intentions on the continent by attempting to strengthen partnerships with African nations. The creation of AFRICOM is one effort to achieve this end. Many African leaders, however, believe that AFRICOM is nothing more than a "Trojan horse" designed to position the US in an advantageous location to dominate Africa's wealth of natural resources and thwart Chinese influence.

Africa represents strategic interests for both US and China. China's soft power influence on the continent represents a threat to US strategic interests so long as Beijing refuses to employ this soft tool to aid in the creation of a secure operating environment for all. Tacit approval of negative perceptions by African leaders toward the US presence in Africa provides indications to US leaders that China is a formidable force on the continent. China is in a position to offer private counsel to African leaders on the true nature of a growing US presence on Africa, thereby easing negative perceptions, but up to this point has remained silent on the matter.

CONCLUSION

China is not a military threat to the US, however, the long-term soft power investments in African countries starting in the 1950s by China provide significant economic and diplomatic

dividends moving forward. Employing a soft power policy of non-interference, the Chinese maintain relationships with 48 of the 53 African countries by providing economic assistance irrespective of human rights records. Unlike many donor countries providing economic assistance to African nations that routinely place conditions on aid, China provides assistance without conditions.¹¹² The policy of non-interference works; China remains attractive to African nations seeking developmental assistance while simultaneously seeking to remain free of Western domination.

This non-interference policy creates greater levels of sharing and trust between China and the sovereign African nations it provides with economic, military, and material assistance by offering no judgments of how African leaders rule. These ongoing relationships between the PRC and African nations serve as points of friction with the US, China, and African nations because they limit US influence on reducing human rights violations and stifles the creation of governed spaces that enhance security throughout the continent.

The Chinese “roll out the red carpet” every three years during the FOCAC where they treat African dignitaries and heads of state like royalty. The US lacks such a diplomatic soft power apparatus. Chinese leaders like President Hu Jintao routinely travel to the African continent multiple times a year. Between 2006 and 2009, Hu Jintao made three trips to the continent visiting fifteen African nations.¹¹³ This is not the case for equivalent executive US leadership. To date, President Obama has visited the continent twice as president in 2009. The first visit was to Egypt in June 2009 to give a speech to the Muslim world. President Obama then traveled to Ghana in July 2009.¹¹⁴

Going forward, the US should consider creating a similar diplomatic apparatus as the FOCAC and dramatically increase the frequency and duration of senior-level visits on the

continent. By making these modifications to its foreign policy, the US can potentially reshape the existing anti-US militarization narrative associated with AFRICOM by highlighting the greater diplomatic purpose of the command while demonstrating to Africans that senior US leaders are genuinely concerned with the continent's overall wellbeing. At a minimum, the visits by the President must increase. His presence on the continent could alter longstanding negative beliefs in many Africans about America. Failure to influence the narrative in a pro US manner is unacceptable and requires near-term attention.

Part of modifying the narrative includes employing positive strategic communications when publicly addressing African challenges. The Chinese offer negligible criticism of African circumstances. They highlight adverse conditions, but limit negative interpretation of the message. The issue of continental security and the public perceptions of Africa offered by the US and China is a good example of messaging. The US defines Africa as a disease-ridden continent and area of high-threat consisting of ungoverned spaces. This is a slap in the face of every African leader and African citizen living in areas where such challenges exist. The Chinese, however, describe Africa as a "continent boasting the largest number of developing countries and the world cannot prosper without the development of Africa."¹⁵ Both actually speak to the overall needs of the continent—a clean, safe, and secure environment for all to prosper. China, however, succeeds in doing so without offending anyone.

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¹⁶ Michel, 63. (Records show that China sold “porcelain in North and East Africa” in addition to the discovery of Tang Dynastic coins “found in Kenya and Zimbabwe” in addition to nautical technology and trade contracts “bringing Chinese merchandise on a significant scale” to Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe during the Song Dynasty (960 – 1276). The most famous historical highlight of the new narrative being the African-Ming Dynasty relationships formed in the 15th Century where Africans and Chinese forged “tributary relationships” with mutually “economic benefits.” The narrative follows that Admiral Zheng, under the direction of Emperor Yongle, third Emperor of the Ming Dynasty, landed on the east coast of Africa, modern day Ethiopia and Somalia, with approximately thirty thousand men tasked with bringing back “chiefs and dignitaries to an “international summit.” While the historical accuracy of the details contained in this narrative remains questionable, the undeniable fact remains that the newly packaged diplomatic narrative, the anti-colonial narrative, and communist ideology served Chinese diplomatic interests well during the 1950s.)

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²¹ Michel, 12, 269. (Burkina Faso, Gambia, São Tomé and Príncipe, and Swaziland maintain relationships with Taiwan)

²² Russell Ong, *China's Security Interests in the 21st Century* (Routledge, 2007; New York: Routledge, 2010), 130. (Comprehensive security views “military and political clout combined with a vibrant economy as indispensable for China to drive towards global power status and to defend its sovereignty and territorial integrity.”)

²³ Pillbury, 9.

²⁴ Bergsten, 123-124.

²⁵ Bergsten, 128.

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³⁶ Eisenman, 17.

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⁴² Pillsbury, ed., 23-24.

⁴³ Pillsbury, ed., 34.

⁴⁴ Eisenman, 34-35.

⁴⁵ Eisenman, 35.

⁴⁶ Eisenman, 35.

⁴⁷ Senate Committee on Foreign Relations. *China in Africa: Implications for US Policy: Hearing Before the Subcommittee on African Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, 110th Cong., 2nd sess, June 2008, 4-5.*

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⁵¹ Ong, 17.

⁵² Lum, 6.

⁵³ Lum, 6.

⁵⁴ Lum, Summary.

⁵⁵ Brautigam, 109.

⁵⁶ Brautigam, 114.

⁵⁷ Brautigam, 114.

⁵⁸ Brautigam, 79.

⁵⁹ Brautigam, 80.

⁶⁰ Brautigam, 80.

⁶¹ Brautigam, 112.

⁶² Brautigam, 112-113.

⁶³ Eisenman, 46.

⁶⁴ Terrill, 255.

⁶⁵ Brautigam, 310.

⁶⁶ Brautigam, 311.

⁶⁷ Brautigam, 177.

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- ⁶⁹ Eisenman, 47.
- ⁷⁰ Brautigam, 46.
- ⁷¹ Brautigam, 46.
- ⁷² Brautigam, 46-50.
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