



## *Hearing: China's Strategic Aims in Africa*

**May 8, 2020**

### **Opening Statement of Commissioner Andreas Borgeas**

Thank you, Vice Chairman Bartholomew, and good morning, everyone. Thank you, particularly, to our witnesses for the time and effort they have put into their testimonies.

Africa has been significant to Chinese foreign policy since the establishment of the People's Republic in 1949. Throughout the Cold War, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) actively promoted various nationalist and socialist movements in Africa as proxies to support its overall position on the continent, as well as to promote itself as a global leader. Over the last 20 years, China has again emphasized Africa as a cornerstone of its foreign policy, and has made a significant and sustained commitment of resources and focus on the continent.

The CCP has become increasingly confident that it can provide a political and economic model for Africa, as evidenced by its party-to-party training programs with African partners. China has shown a willingness to intervene in African domestic politics in order to protect its interests and shore up sympathetic elites. Beijing is also contributing to the growth of digitally enabled authoritarianism in Africa through the sale of advanced surveillance technologies, and is making a concerted effort to shape African media to promote pro-China narratives. China has even been able to garner African support for Chinese policies that have faced international criticism, such as Beijing's mass internment of Uyghurs and other Muslim ethnic groups in Xinjiang.

As Beijing's political and economic activities in Africa have increased, so too has its military engagement. In 2018, China hosted the inaugural China-Africa Defense and Security Forum in Beijing, a watershed moment in the context of Sino-African military ties. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) has been active in training the next generation of Africa's officer corps for decades. China is a leading contributor to UN peacekeeping operations—a fact not lost on African countries that prize the UN's role in settling conflicts on the continent. However, as our witnesses will attest today, it is notable that some of China's major peacekeeping contributions have happened where Beijing has significant economic interests, such as in South Sudan.

In 2017, China built its first overseas military base in Djibouti, despite having said in the past that it would never establish an overseas military facility. The question remains, as China's interests in Africa increase, when will it establish its next base?

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic presents new challenges for China-Africa relations and may alter China's relationships and image on the continent. In recent weeks, African leaders have spoken out against China in unusually frank terms for its reported mistreatment of Africans living in China, including actions forcing evictions of some Africans living in Chinese hotels and preventing Africans from entering

restaurants and shops—actions ostensibly taken to stop the spread of the virus. African leaders have also called for Chinese debt relief in light of the global economic slowdown caused by COVID-19. China has reacted by stressing themes of Sino-African solidarity, and has used the pandemic as an opportunity to enhance its image through relief efforts and public diplomacy. The ultimate success of this campaign remains to be seen, but it is clear that China cannot afford to allow COVID-19 to damage the reputation it has spent so long building in Africa and risk jeopardizing its economic investments on the continent as a result.

This hearing will explore these issues and assess the implications of Chinese activity on the continent for the United States.

Our first panel today will provide an overview of China's strategy towards Africa and the consequences of Beijing's political influence.

But before we begin, I wanted to let everyone know that today's testimonies and transcript will be posted on our website, [www.uscc.gov](http://www.uscc.gov). Also, our next hearing, on strategic competition with China, will be held on June 24.

Thank you, again, for joining us today. With that, we will proceed with our first panel.