

**Testimony Before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission Hearing on:  
“China’s Military Power Projection and U.S. National Interests”**

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Chairman Cleveland, Commissioner Fiedler, Commissioners of the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission. Thank you for giving me the great honor of testifying before you today. I will discuss the People’s Republic of China’s (PRC) military power projection and influence in Africa.

At the 2018 Forum for China Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), China and Africa pledged to build a Sino-Africa Community of Common Destiny by expanding the One Belt One Road strategy.<sup>1</sup> This would lay the foundations for a Community of Common Destiny, China’s vision of a world order that reflects its norms and models. Such a system is seen by China’s leaders as conducive to their longstanding quest to restore China as a great power. The vision is linked to China’s “two centenary goals” of achieving a “moderately prosperous society” by 2021, and a “modern, socialist, prosperous, powerful, culturally advanced, and harmonious country” by 2049.<sup>2</sup> The Community of Common Destiny and One Belt One Road were written into the state and party constitutions in 2017 as “strategic priorities for the new era” to quote China’s foreign policy chief, Yang Jiechi.<sup>3</sup> While the Community of Common Destiny provides broad theoretical guidance, One Belt One Road, China’s ambitious program to connect itself to the globe through crisscrossing ports, railways, oil and gas pipelines, power plants, and digital infrastructure, is the means by which China hopes to make it a practical reality.

The assumption is that as countries become more connected with each other—through Chinese architectures—they will be supportive of China’s norms and models and even participate in accomplishing them. Africa and China took a step in this direction in April 2019 by co-launching the China-Africa Institute in Beijing. It is tasked with two interrelated missions: to “develop new models and mutual learning in governance and development” and to “facilitate policy synergy between the African Union’s (AU) Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want and FOCAC.”<sup>4</sup> At the launch, General Secretary Xi Jinping said that China would work through this institute to help African countries “choose their own governance models.” China’s involvement in actively shaping the African governance environment represents a continuing shift from “non-interference” to an approach that affects how Africa’s political systems operate, including the security sector. African countries on the other hand are demanding greater Chinese involvement in improving their national security, as well as in closing their infrastructure gaps and achieving economic growth.

Domestically, China feels prosperous and stable enough to pursue an ambitious foreign policy. In 2019, the Africa Center for Strategic Studies participated in a strategic review of Chinese influence around the world conducted by the five Department of Defense Regional Centers for Strategic Studies. Its survey found that China-Africa relations grew during periods of domestic stability and slumped when turmoil set in.<sup>5</sup> The first high point was during the Tang dynasty (618-907 AD), when the first African contacts with China were recorded. After these collapsed due to turmoil caused by the Huang Chao rebellion, the next high point came during the Ming Dynasty (1338-1644), which extended the Silk Road to East African coast and Sofala in Mozambique, and was followed by another slump when intrigue in the Ming court led to the burning of its entire maritime fleet. This ebb and flow continued through the collapse of the Qing dynasty in 1912. Relations rebounded in the 1950s when China stepped in to mentor Africa’s anti-colonial movements before receding in the 1990s.

The current upward trajectory started under Jiang Zemin's Going Out policy that facilitated the expansion of Chinese companies to developing and emerging markets. This trend continues under Xi Jinping's One Belt One Road, signifying a break with Deng Xiaoping's cautious policy of "biding our time, never claiming leadership, and keeping a low profile," or *taoguang yanghui*.<sup>6</sup>

### **Africa in China's Global Ambitions**

China's Africa policy is anchored on the principle that "big powers are the key; China's periphery is the priority; developing countries are the foundation; and multilateral platforms are the stage."<sup>7</sup> Indeed, China's 2015 Africa Policy underscores Africa's role as a foundation of China's quest to build a Community of Common Destiny to achieve "comprehensive reform of the current international system."<sup>8</sup> In 2018, State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi said that China and Africa were "natural allies" in this quest due to shared grievances over the current global power structures. This sentiment, according to him, is reinforced by common experiences of colonialism.<sup>9</sup> Africa's position on international system reform is set forth in the AU's 2005 Ezulwini Consensus.<sup>10</sup> While it is much narrower than the vision of the Community of Common Destiny, the AU supports China's ideological views on international relations and at the global level. This was recently evident in July 2019, when the 43-member Africa Group at the World Trade Organization joined China en masse in a crucial vote that saw 114 countries voting to cancel the U.S. veto over appointments to the World Trade Organization's trade court.<sup>11</sup>

At the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva, African members supported China's introduction of a record 65 formal interventions between 2014 and 2015. China introduced its first-ever resolutions in 2017 and 2018 that enshrine language from the Community of Common Destiny on human security, human rights, and governance into UN texts for the first time. Both resolutions passed easily with near-unanimous African support despite U.S. opposition.<sup>12</sup> In the past decade, the African Group at the UN General Assembly has played a major role in helping Chinese nationals secure leadership of four of the 15 UN specialized agencies (American nationals head only one).<sup>13</sup> Through African backing, Chinese nationals also hold the Deputy Force Commander post in the UN Mission in South Sudan; the deputy heads of the International Court of Justice and International Monetary Fund; and the Secretary General's Special Envoy to the African Great Lakes Region. And since 2007, the UN Undersecretary General for Economic and Social Affairs, a powerful office that coordinates international development, has gone to a Chinese national.<sup>14</sup> China beefed up its UN credentials in 2016 by creating a UN Peace and Development Trust Fund, a decision African countries unanimously supported.

On the ground, many African countries have incorporated Chinese development, security, governance, and economic growth models into their strategic blueprints, giving practical effect to the *Sino-Africa Community of Destiny* and legitimizing China's quest to promote alternative models around the world. Some of these blueprints include Kenya's Vision 2030, Rwanda's Vision 2050, Uganda's Vision 2040, and South Africa's National Development Plan 2030.<sup>15</sup> They all prioritize special economic zones, strong state-led development, rapid expansion of public works and infrastructure, and trade connectivity. These policies align with China's white papers on foreign aid (2014), human rights (2019), and China's role in the world (2019).<sup>16</sup> The AU's Agenda 2063 and its Program for Infrastructure Development in Africa envision Chinese inputs and models as key catalysts. In 2017, China and the AU signed an agreement to direct Chinese development assistance and One Belt One Road projects to priorities laid out in these two documents.

## **China's Military Presence**

China's deepened engagements with Africa have generated sufficient political will on the continent for the establishment of a Chinese military presence should Beijing choose to do so. African countries called for more Chinese involvement in their security sectors at the inaugural China-Africa Security and Defense Forum in July 2018 and the inaugural China-Africa Peace and Security Forum in July 2019.

The question as to what kind of basing arrangements China will choose can be deduced from its operational patterns of behavior and ideological orientation.

The Chinese presence in Djibouti is an attractive precedent in this regard. It started with the construction of a commercial port. Later on, dual-use facilities were set up to support China's peacekeeping, humanitarian, and maritime security operations. China, through this strategy, reinforced its image as a "responsible great power" (*zeren daguo*), while downplaying its geostrategic intentions. It therefore has a strong incentive to replicate this model elsewhere if need arises. China's 2019 Defense White Paper makes it clear that China is at pains not to be seen using Western models. China, it claims, will "never seek hegemony or spheres of influence." Furthermore, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) "will be strengthened in the Chinese way" and will "serve the goal of building a community of common destiny."<sup>17</sup> A dual-use model is more consistent with this outlook.

With respect to where additional bases could be located, here are three strategic criteria:

### ***Level of Importance in China's Partnership Rankings***

China will likely opt for partners with whom it enjoys the highest strategic-level relations. Beijing uses five tiers to rank its partnerships. The highest three levels are comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership, comprehensive strategic partnership, and strategic partnership relations. Thirteen African countries enjoy partnership relations with China across these levels. Ethiopia, Guinea, Kenya, Mozambique, Namibia, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe are in the first category; Algeria, Egypt, Nigeria, and South Africa are in the second; and Angola and Sudan are in the third. With the exception of Ethiopia and Zimbabwe, these countries are all maritime states, a key criteria given that One Belt One Road runs along a maritime belt. All 13 countries play host to major Chinese investments in ports and other critical infrastructure that support dual-use purposes. In addition, China has space programs in nine countries—Angola, Algeria, Ethiopia, Egypt, Namibia, Mozambique, Nigeria, South Africa, and Sudan,—from which it launches their satellites, trains their space agencies, and, in the case of Kenya and Namibia, manages their ground-based satellite tracking stations. China is building a continental satellite data receiver station in Ethiopia and ground facilities in Egypt as part of a wider effort to integrate Africa into the Belt and Road Space Information Corridor.<sup>18</sup>

In 2015, rumors surfaced in the Namibian press suggesting that the state-of-the-art Walvis Bay Expansion Project, one of China's most sophisticated port projects in the developing world, would pave way for a dual-use military logistics facility along the lines of Djibouti.<sup>19</sup> This was refuted by the authorities. Tanzania has also routinely captured media attention as a potential basing partner. In 2014, it hosted a month-long naval exercise with the PLA Navy, the first of its kind in Africa.<sup>20</sup> The two countries enjoy deep and multifaceted military relations. In 2018, Tanzania inaugurated a large Chinese-built military training base in Bagamoyo a few miles from the site of the proposed Bagamoyo Megaport Project.<sup>21</sup> The suggestion that Tanzania and Namibia might offer basing options is not far-fetched, despite the lack of hard evidence. Both have high-value Chinese civilian, military, and dual-use assets. In Namibia, the Chinese-built Swakopmund satellite ground station has been operated by the Xi'an Satellite Control Center in Shaanxi since 2000.<sup>22</sup>

Tanzania's Bagamoyo port will be the biggest deep water port in Africa when completed. Chinese firms also built Tanzania's Defense Headquarters, its Military Academy at Monduli, and the National Defense College in Dar es Salaam. Besides Namibia and Tanzania, China has planned or existing investments in ports and other dual-use infrastructure in 46 other locations, including Angola, Cameroon, Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Ghana, Guinea, Mauritania, Mozambique, Nigeria, Togo, Sudan, and South Africa, giving it a wide choice of potential basing partners.

### *Ideological Affinities*

Ideological affinities will likely play an important role in future discussions about basing. Although China has a wide range of African partners, its most enduring and reliable ones are the leftist movements it mentored and trained from inception. They include the Former Liberation Movements of Southern Africa (FLMSA), a regional grouping of ruling movements from Angola, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe.<sup>23</sup> Their Maoist heritage and shared traditions offer China familiarity, predictability, and dependability on which it can craft strategically focused relations. Moreover, all of them occupy the highest levels in China's partnership rankings and their ruling parties have been in power since independence. China has strong incentives to help keep them in office.

In 2018, the Communist Party's International Liaison Office cemented these ties by extending a \$45-million grant toward building the Mwalimu Nyerere Leadership Academy in Tanzania, an ideological school that will train around 400 civilian and military leaders and cadres from the FLMSA countries annually.<sup>24</sup> China has used these ideological ties to expand its influence in other areas. In Angola for instance, Chinese state-owned firms are constructing a \$600-million deep-sea port in Cabinda on the Atlantic coast to link Angola and Namibia to Chinese port clusters from Cameroon to Guinea. In Mozambique, Chinese firms are constructing road networks connecting the port city of Beira to land-locked Malawi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.<sup>25</sup>

On the political side, the Communist Party School has maintained robust technical and institutional exchanges with FLMSA members since the 1950s, contributing significantly to their political governance, and the evolution of their militaries. Such deep engagements are not restricted to FLMSA. Ruling parties from Cabo Verde to Uganda, and South Sudan to Ethiopia all have extensive political and ideological exchanges with China. China moreover extends governance and leadership training to politically neutral groups and even opposition parties.<sup>26</sup> Around 1,000 leaders across the party divides in Africa participate in these programs annually at China's various political schools.

On the military side, China's African partners train at three levels of China's Professional Military Education (PME) system. First are the regional academies for cadets and junior officers, including Nanjing Military Academy, Dalian Naval Academy, and the PLA Air Force Aviation University. Next, the command and staff colleges, including Army Command College in Nanjing and the Command and Staff Colleges of the PLA's service branches, train mid-career officers. Senior officers train at China's National Defense University, National University of Defense Technology, and the International College for Defense Studies and National Security. China's PME combines military and technical subjects with ideological and political training. By extension, African students receive instruction at the PLA's ideological colleges such as Pudong Cadres College, Nanjing Cadre College, and Kunming National Cadre Academy. The PLA's Political Work Department, through the Chinese Peoples Friendship Association with Foreign Countries, supports several political party schools, including Uganda's National Political School in Kyankwanzi and the Oliver Tambo Leadership School in Kaweweeta; Ethiopia's Political School in Tatek; Namibia's ruling Swapo Party School in Windhoek; and South Africa's planned African National Congress Party School in Venterskroon.

In 2018, China offered 50,000 new training opportunities to Africa over and above the 10,000 scholarships issued annually for Belt and Road countries. This represents a 66 percent increase from its 2015 commitments. Of these, up to 5,000 are likely to be offered to African military professionals annually—a 150 percent increase from FOCAC’s 2015 commitments.<sup>27</sup> This is part of China’s commitment to increase its intake of military students, including training 2,000 peacekeepers by 2020.

These expanded training opportunities have deepened China’s involvement in African security sectors. Indeed, in June 2018, China’s State Administration for Science, Technology and Industry for National Defence reported that Beijing had defense industry, science, and technology ties with 45 African countries.<sup>28</sup> These strong military foundations mean that China is unlikely to elicit controversy if it decides to develop additional basing arrangements.

### ***Regional Clout***

China’s most important strategic partners in Africa tend to wield wider regional influence in their respective regional organizations and in the AU. Algeria, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa, all of whom have strategic partnerships with China, come to mind. \Algeria, Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa play major roles in Africa’s security landscape. Algeria has held the AU Peace and Security Commissioner post since its inception, while Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa hold sway in the AU’s administrative, political, and peacekeeping organs. China sends only its best diplomats to serve in their capitals. For instance, China’s ambassadors to Ethiopia, Egypt, and South Africa are at the Director-General level. The Chinese ambassador to the AU is at the Vice-Ministerial level, the same ranking as his counterpart in Washington—China’s most important posting. Such countries have the capacity and clout to mobilize broader African support behind Chinese positions in Africa and the global level. They are all likely to play a role in Beijing’s future strategic moves in Africa, including basing arrangements.

### **How Does China Orchestrate Its Military Diplomacy?**

China pursues a comprehensive approach that combines different tools of statecraft while downplaying its military engagements. This is evident in how China uses its military diplomacy. The PLA’s first ever exercise with Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) navies in May 2018, coincided with an agreement by China to build the ECOWAS headquarters in Nigeria.<sup>29</sup> The following month, the PLA Navy’s 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> Anti-Piracy Task Forces visited Cameroon, Ghana, and Nigeria shortly after they joined the Belt and Road.<sup>30</sup> The first ever China-Russia-South Africa naval exercises were held in South Africa in November 2019, one month after China and South Africa agreed to elevate their relations to the “comprehensive strategic cooperative relations” level. The prior month, a senior ANC team visited China on a political and ideological exchange program.<sup>31</sup> China uses its cooperation platforms in similar ways. In 2017, it established the China-Africa Peace and Security Fund to deepen its commitment to the Africa Standby Force (ASF). The following year it disbursed \$25 million from this fund to equip the ASF’s logistics base in Cameroon weeks before the PLA Navy visited Cameroon, Gabon, Ghana, and Nigeria. A separate agreement to build a logistics base in Botswana for the Southern African Standby Force coincided with visits around Southern Africa by the PLA Navy hospital ship, the Peace Ark, providing free on-shore medical services.<sup>32</sup>

### **How Does China Approach Force Projection?**

China largely takes an indirect approach on three levels: multilateral, bilateral, and unilateral. UN-mandated peacekeeping operations are at the top of China’s force projection options. China initially viewed peacekeeping as an extension of western security strategies.

Today, peacekeeping operations closely align with its political, ideological, and strategic goals. Peacekeeping operations are multilateral and therefore less politically sensitive for Beijing. They also bestow Chinese troop activities with international legitimacy, reinforce China's image as a provider of public goods, and support China's national interests without creating the impression that Beijing throws its weight around in Africa. All these factors support China's ideological narratives and strategic messages.

China's peacekeeping capabilities have evolved in the past two decades from small, mainly non-combat contributions to more troop contributions than all its peers on the UN Security Council combined. China is also the second largest contributor to UN peacekeeping budget and the overall UN budget. Chinese peacekeepers serve in Darfur, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, and South Sudan. Through these missions, PLA troops have gained experience in hostile environments, in line with the policy on "training under realistic conditions."<sup>33</sup> This is something that goes to the heart of the Chinese Communist Party's worries about the PLA's capabilities, as China has not engaged in combat operations since 1979.

Peacekeeping contributions also improve the PLA's intelligence, surveillance, and situational awareness through troop rotations and lessons learned. With this experience, China hopes to modify established peacekeeping doctrine and introduce new concepts that meet Chinese interests. Accordingly, China combines its troop contributions with an active effort to influence peacekeeping mandates and rules to shape the environment in which Chinese troops could be deployed.<sup>34</sup> For instance, the mandates given to PLA forces in the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, Sudan, and Mali—where China has significant commercial investments—include protecting Chinese citizens, assets, and critical infrastructure, thereby indirectly supporting Chinese security interests.

China's counterpiracy patrols in the Gulf of Aden, its first deployments outside the Western Pacific, evolved in a similar fashion. They grew over the past two decades from one naval task force in 2008, to two task forces most of the time consisting of advanced warships equipped with helicopters, Special Forces, and supply ships. While these are UN-sanctioned missions, they are conducted directly by the PLA, helping it pursue military, commercial, political, and diplomatic goals as its leaders see fit. These operations have deepened China's military engagements in Africa and increased its overseas power projection in line with the PLA Navy's "near seas, far seas" strategy and "new historic missions." China's naval deployments played a major role in supporting the PLA's first major combined arms exercise in Djibouti in November 2018.<sup>35</sup> In terms of soft power, the PLA Navy has developed several capabilities, from evacuating 35,000 Chinese citizens in Libya in 2011 and 240 from Yemen in 2015, to supporting year-round medical and good will visits to various African countries.

Africa has offered China a path of least resistance in amplifying Beijing's influence in global security because not only do 78 percent of all UN peacekeepers serve in Africa, but nearly half are African. With this increased clout, China has set its sights on leading the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations.<sup>36</sup> This is an important objective for China because UN forces constitute the world's second largest expeditionary force of more than 100,000. China wants a greater say on where and how they are deployed. This ambition received a further boost in 2018 when China placed an 8,000-strong Standby Force at the disposal of the UN to respond to crisis situations, a move that would have been unthinkable even 10 years ago.<sup>37</sup>

At the continent level, China is investing heavily in the African Standby Force and its regional Standby Brigades. China hopes these capabilities will contribute to its mix of security options once fully operational. At the bilateral level, China works with local partners to improve their ability to collect intelligence, monitor, and proactively defend Chinese interests.

Fifty new security programs focused on this were established in 2018 through the China-Africa Peace and Security Forum and the China-Africa Law Enforcement and Security Forum. In 2019, Uganda became the first African country under these new arrangements to deploy its military to protect Chinese interests throughout the country after a series of attacks on Chinese assets. In Kenya, China's People's Armed Police (PAP) trained an elite Kenyan police unit to protect the Mombasa-Nairobi railway.<sup>38</sup>

African countries signed loans worth \$3.56 billion for policing, law and order, and dual-use (civilian and military) purposes from China between 2003 and 2017, according to the China Africa Research Initiative. This includes aircraft, military facilities, national security telecoms, patrol ships, closed circuit television systems, and artificial intelligence.<sup>39</sup> The activities of Chinese telecom giant Huawei are particularly relevant in this regard. Algeria, Botswana, Kenya, Mauritania, Nigeria, Sudan, Uganda, and South Africa currently use its artificial intelligence capabilities. In June 2019, Huawei signed a three-year memorandum of understanding with the AU covering several areas, including artificial intelligence and 5G networks. Over half of the continent's 4G systems run on the Huawei network.<sup>40</sup>

At the unilateral level, China is increasingly employing private security contractors. Since 2013, private Chinese firms like DeWe Security, China Overseas Protection Group, and Frontier Services Group have proliferated, eager to seize business opportunities created by One Belt One Road. Over 3,000 mostly demobilized PLA and PAP personnel are employed by such firms globally in places like Angola, Ethiopia, Ghana, Nigeria, South Sudan, Sudan, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and more recently, Somalia.<sup>41</sup> They face significant controversies as they are not allowed to bear arms under Chinese and African laws, yet they do. This was highlighted in October 2018 when two Chinese security guards were jailed in Zimbabwe for shooting and injuring the son of a former high-ranking member of the ruling party.<sup>42</sup> Since 2007, China has had a robust legal assistance program that harmonizes Chinese and African laws in investment and dispute resolution. This is coordinated through the China Law Society and its African counterparts, the Ministry of Commerce, and bodies like the China-Africa Legal Cooperation Forum and the Africa Young Legal Professionals Exchange Program.<sup>43</sup> It is still unclear whether these programs will be used to push for laws that regularize the activities of Chinese private security firms.

### **Implications and Recommendations**

China is employing a multifaceted strategy that seeks to shape the environment in which Africa's security sectors and governance systems are unfolding, something that goes to the heart of how the African state operates. The aim is to secure Africa as a firm foundation on which China can realign global governance across several dimensions including politics, security, development, and economics. China wants a conducive environment for its resurgence as a great power, and Africa, for ideological reasons, is seen as a natural ally in this quest. As such, China-Africa engagements form part of the alternative structures China is building around the world, and the norms, models, and values that go with them. China frames its ideas on world order in opposition to Western ideas and values. It is this, not Communist ideology, that represents China's ideological challenge to the West at this stage. It is unclear whether China's massive investments in civilian, military, and dual-use assets in over 40 African countries might one day deny the U.S. access in Africa. What is clear is that Africa plays an increasingly important role in China's grand strategy and this will have global ramifications in the decades ahead.

#### **Recommendations:**

Recognize that China's Africa strategy is part of a broader effort to realign global governance, and implement alternative political, economic, and security models that challenge Western systems.

Pursue a values-driven strategy, identifying niche U.S. competencies, forging common values with African partners, and responding to African challenges as defined by them.

Account for the multifaceted, comprehensive and multi-layered nature of Chinese security engagements in Africa, recognizing that they reinforce other instruments of statecraft.

Develop contingencies to ensure continued and assured American operational access on the continent.

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