
CONGRESSIONAL TESTIMONY

“China’s Strategic Aims in Africa”

Testimony before the
U.S.–China Economic and Security Review Commission

May 8, 2020

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I want to start by thanking the Commissioners for this opportunity to testify today. The views I express in this testimony are my own and should not be construed as representing any official position of The Heritage Foundation.

A Long History

Chinese security cooperation with African countries began from the early days of modern China’s existence as an independent country. Chairman Mao Tse-tung even then recognized Africa as an important potential source of support for his ambitions to win recognition as the mainland’s official government from the rival Nationalist government in Taiwan, and to position China as the leader of the developing world in opposition to “imperialist” countries such as the U.S. and USSR.¹ Despite China’s deep impoverishment at the time, Mao supported

some African revolutionary groups with training, exchange visits, and materiel.

Those historic ties are an important facilitator today of Beijing’s relationship with many African countries. Chinese officials frequently tout Beijing’s support for African liberation movements—though they frequently exaggerate the extent, consistency, and sincerity of that support²—and some of its strongest military relationships are with those countries whose liberation struggle they aided.

Despite this long history, Beijing’s military ties with African countries have been relatively weak compared to the intensity of its economic and diplomatic initiatives. For about the past decade, however, the Chinese government has begun to noticeably

¹ U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, “China’s Role in Africa: Special Report Weekly Review,” Washington, D.C.: GPO, February 25, 1972, <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CI-A-RDP08S02113R000100080001-0.pdf>.

² Joshua Meservey, “China’s Propaganda in Africa Hurts U.S. Interests—and the U.S. Must Counter It,” Heritage Foundation *Issue Brief* No. 4920, November 19, 2018, <https://www.heritage.org/sites/default/files/2018-11/IB4920.pdf>.

increase its military and security activities in Africa. Consider the following:

- Between 2005 and January 2020, Beijing increased the size of its troop contributions to U.N. peacekeeping operations (PKOs) from 1,059 to 2,544 personnel. Nearly all Chinese peacekeepers are deployed in Africa.³
- Three People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) vessels joined the international anti-piracy patrols in the Gulf of Aden in December 2008, the first time in the modern era that Beijing deployed naval vessels in a military operation that far afield.⁴
- The Chinese government arranged the evacuation of nearly 36,000 Chinese

³ “Troop and Police Contributors,” United Nations Peacekeeping, undated, https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/3_country_and_mission_16.pdf (accessed April 22, 2020).

⁴ Alison A. Kaufman, “China’s Participation in Anti-Piracy Operations off the Horn of Africa: Drivers and Implications,” CNA, July 2009, https://www.cna.org/CNA_files/PDF/D0020834.A1.pdf (accessed May 5, 2020).

⁵ Beijing insisted the troops were not intended for combat, but were rather “guard troops.” The distinction appears to center on the different missions assigned to the troops. The combat-capable troops deployed to South Sudan and Mali in 2012 and 2013, respectively, were tasked with guarding other Chinese peacekeepers. The battalion China deployed to South Sudan in 2014 that it ballyhooed as the “first [Chinese] infantry to participate in a United Nations peacekeeping mission” appears to have been operating under the U.N. mandate that had a robust authorization to protect civilians. Thus, the Chinese troops were not just guarding other Chinese peacekeepers, but were also greenlighted to use force to protect non-Chinese peacekeepers and civilians. Beijing was likely so scrupulous with its language on this issue because allowing Chinese combat troops to participate in offensive operations during a PKO would have violated official stated policy at the time of the 2012 South Sudan deployment. It was only later, in July 2013, that Foreign Minister Wang Yi signaled a change to allow Chinese combat troops to participate in kinetic action beyond safeguarding

from Libya in 2011 in an operation unprecedented in scale for China.

- In 2012 and 2013, Beijing for the first time deployed combat troops to a PKO when it sent small infantry units to South Sudan and Mali, respectively.⁵
- In July 2013, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi publicly announced that China would send “comprehensive security and peacekeeping troops” to Mali,⁶ signaling a shift away from China’s prohibition on sending combat troops to U.N. peacekeeping theaters to do anything other than protect Chinese nationals.
- In 2014, China sent an infantry battalion to the peacekeeping operation in South

other Chinese, when he publicly declared that China would send “comprehensive security and peacekeeping troops” to Mali, language that seemed to indicate China’s official stated policy had changed to allow Chinese combat troops to fully participate in U.N. peacekeeping operations. For a Chinese state media article describing the 2014 infantry battalion, see “China to Send First Infantry Battalion for UN Peacekeeping,” *China Daily*, December 22, 2014, https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2014-12/22/content_19142019.htm (accessed May 5, 2020). For Wang Yi’s remarks, see “Exploring the Path of Major-Country Diplomacy With Chinese Characteristics,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, June 27, 2013, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/wjbz_663308/2461_663310/t1053908.shtml (accessed May 5, 2020). For an examination of China’s 2012 deployment of combat-capable troops to UNMISS, see Daniel M. Hartnett, “China’s First Deployment of Combat Forces to a UN Peacekeeping Mission—South Sudan,” U.S.–China Economic and Security Review Commission, March 13, 2012, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Research/MEMO-PLA-PKO_final_0.pdf (accessed May 5, 2020). For Beijing’s insistence the infantry component of its 2013 Mali deployment were not for combat, see “China to Send Security Force for Peacekeeping Mission in Mali,” *Xinhua*, June 28, 2013, <http://en.people.cn/90786/8303006.html> (accessed May 5, 2020).

⁶ Wang Yi, “Exploring the Path of Major-Country Diplomacy With Chinese Characteristics.”

Sudan,⁷ the first time it deployed combat troops with a mandate allowing them to protect non-Chinese nationals.

- China's second Africa policy paper, released in 2015, included a section on African peace and security nearly twice as long as the same section in its inaugural 2006 Africa policy paper.⁸
- In 2017, China opened its first overseas military base in Djibouti.⁹
- In August 2017, Beijing for the first time deployed a helicopter unit to a PKO when it sent one to Darfur, Sudan.
- In 2018, China hosted the inaugural China-Africa Defense and Security Forum in Beijing.
- In November 2019, in another first, China, Russia, and South Africa held a joint naval exercise off the South African coast.

The Why

The unprecedented flurry of Chinese security activity in Africa is designed, as with everything the Chinese government does, to help the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) maintain power. Since the CCP does not derive legitimacy from the consent of the Chinese people, it must justify its stranglehold on power by convincing them it is ably leading the country.

This need manifests in the Chinese government's security activities in Africa, which are designed to:

- **Protect the large Chinese diaspora in Africa.** There is no reliable count of how many Chinese live on the continent, but one of the most common estimates puts their number at around one million. Chinese nationals are spread throughout Africa, sometimes in remote locations, including in notoriously volatile countries such as South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The 2011 Libya evacuation will almost certainly not be the last such operation Beijing must carry out in Africa.
- **Demonstrate to the Chinese people that, under CCP rule, China is being restored to its lost position of global prestige and prominence.** The 2011 Libya evacuation not only probably saved Chinese lives, but it also became a source of national pride. Chinese commentators hastened to explain how the operation demonstrated China's development into a global power deserving of the world's respect.¹⁰
- **Portray the Chinese government as a responsible global actor willing to shoulder the burdens of maintaining a peaceful world order.** Beijing's current, intense disinformation

⁷ "China to Send First Infantry Battalion for UN Peacekeeping."

⁸ "China's African Policy," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, November 20, 2006, <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/zflt/eng/zgdfzcc/t481748.htm> (accessed May 5, 2020), and "Full Text: China's Second Africa Policy Paper," *China Daily*, December 5, 2015, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/XiattendsParisclimateconference/2015-12/05/content_22632874.htm (accessed May 5, 2020).

⁹ This despite Beijing's assertion in a 1998 defense white paper that it does not establish bases on

foreign soil. "China Military Power," Defense Intelligence Agency, 2019, https://www.dia.mil/Portals/27/Documents/News/Military%20Power%20Publications/China_Military_Power_FINAL_5MB_20190103.pdf (accessed March 5, 2020).

¹⁰ Ding Ying, "Out of Libya," *Beijing Review*, March 6, 2011, http://www.bjreview.com/print/txt/2011-03/06/content_338897_3.htm (accessed May 5, 2020), and Shi Jiangtao, "Lessons to Learn from Libyan Evacuation," *South China Morning Post*, March 5, 2011, <https://www.scmp.com/article/739925/lessons-learn-libyan-evacuation> (accessed May 5, 2020).

campaign around the COVID-19 pandemic is a reflection of this preoccupation, and it manifests in its Africa policy as well. A theme of Chinese propaganda on the continent (and elsewhere) includes calls for reforming what Beijing sees as a global order dominated by the West, specifically the U.S., which, Beijing contends, is an undemocratic and unfair arrangement. The proper reforms will lead to a “multipolar” world and a “community of shared destiny” that is fairer and more just and which would, happily for Beijing, mean greater global influence for China.¹¹ A prerequisite to realizing this ambition is for the CCP to convince the world it is worthy to assume a more prominent position in global affairs.

- **Ensure African countries’ continued international diplomatic support.** African countries are among the most faithful supporters of Beijing’s international agenda, and China’s participation in security-related initiatives such as U.N. peacekeeping

operations, counterpiracy operations, and counterterrorism contributes to building the goodwill and sense of obligation that drives some of Africa’s support for Beijing’s foreign policy.

- **Support the Chinese economy.** China not only buys natural resources from Africa—it is the largest importer of sub-Saharan African minerals, for instance¹²—but the continent’s commanding position on maritime chokepoints such as the Bab el-Mandeb Strait makes it strategically important to China’s shipborne trade.¹³ Chinese security engagements may facilitate Chinese investment as well, as it signals to Chinese investors Beijing’s strong relationship with, and commitment to the security of, a particular country.¹⁴

Insecurity endangers the extensive Chinese investments on the continent as well. Chinese companies dominate South Sudan’s oil sector, for instance, and the civil war there stirred such concern in Beijing that it took an unprecedentedly

¹¹ At the inaugural Forum on China–Africa Cooperation in 2000, Chinese President Jiang Zemin spoke of the need for China and Africa to cooperate on “the establishment of an equitable and just new international political and economic order.” Beijing’s most recent Africa policy paper released in 2015 cheered the progress towards a “multi-polar world,” though it also lamented that the task was not yet finished. For Jiang’s remarks, see “China and Africa: Usher in the New Century Together—Speech by President Jiang Zemin of The People’s Republic of China at the Opening Ceremony of The Forum on China–Africa Cooperation,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, undated, <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/zflt/eng/zyzl/zyjh/t157712.htm> (accessed May 5, 2020). For China’s 2015 Africa policy paper, see “Full Text: China’s Second Africa Policy Paper.” For an excellent analysis of the CCP’s efforts to “reform” the global order, see Liza Tobin, “Xi’s Vision for Transforming Global Governance: A Strategic Challenge for Washington and Its Allies,” *Texas National Security Review*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (November 2018),

<https://tnsr.org/2018/11/xis-vision-fortransforming-global-governance-a-strategicchallenge-for-washington-and-its-allies/> (accessed May 5, 2020).

¹² Nellie Peyton and Richmond Tholley, “No Pot of Gold for Locals as China Mines Sierra Leone,” Reuters, August 22, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-leone-mining-rights/no-pot-of-gold-for-locals-as-china-mines-sierra-leone-idUSKCN1VCOIM> (accessed May 5, 2020).

¹³Thirty percent of the world’s shipping transits the Bab el-Mandeb Strait. Katrina Manson, “Jostling for Djibouti,” *Financial Times*, April 1, 2016, <https://www.ft.com/content/8c33eefc-f6c1-11e5-803c-d27c7117d132> (accessed May 5, 2020).

¹⁴In Djibouti, for instance, Chinese investment has increased since the opening of the PLA base there. Li Ruohan, “Investors Feel more ‘Assured, Confident’ by Presence of China’s base in Djibouti,” *Global Times*, July 5, 2018, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1109587.shtml> (accessed May 5, 2020).

active role in trying to mediate an agreement between the warring parties.¹⁵

Africa is an increasingly important market for Chinese arms as well. Between 2013 and 2017, the continent bought 21 percent of the arms exported by China, a 55 percent increase from 2008–2012. Beijing is capturing a growing share of African expenditures on weapons, from 16 percent of sub-Saharan African weapons acquisitions between 2008 and 2012, to 27 percent from 2013 to 2017.¹⁶ Not only do Chinese companies benefit from selling the weapons themselves, but the sales give them a lead position on providing servicing, training, and spare parts. The sales also make African militaries more interoperable with the Chinese military, and is yet another thread binding countries to China and its purposes.

- **Gain experience for its military operating far afield and in unfamiliar climates and geographies.** The People's Liberation Army (PLA)

conducts live-fire exercises in Djibouti to acquaint itself with its new operating environment, gain experience cooperating with African militaries, and hone its tactical skills.¹⁷ Its peacekeepers have operated on many parts of the continent, giving a cadre of Chinese servicemen operational experience and local knowledge, as well as the opportunity to gather intelligence on the tactics and materiel of other troop-contributing countries.¹⁸ The Chinese appear to be testing weapons as well, specifically a laser that on multiple occasions in 2018 it fired at U.S. airmen.¹⁹

- **Displace U.S. influence.** Even as Beijing has gained on or overtaken the U.S. in many measures of engagement with Africa, the U.S. remains many African countries' preferred partner in security cooperation. However, just as China has methodically targeted key nodes of American global influence elsewhere, its increased enthusiasm for security ties to African partners is likely designed in part to chip away at the great advantage

¹⁵Peter Fabricius, "Should China's New Approach to Africa be Labelled 'Non-Interference with Chinese Characteristics?'" Institute for Security Studies, November 6, 2014, <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/beijings-peace-making-efforts-in-south-sudan> (accessed May 5, 2020).

¹⁶Pieter D. Wezeman et al., "Trends in International Arms Transfers, 2017," SIPRI *Fact Sheet*, March 2018, https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2018-03/fssipri_at2017_0.pdf (accessed May 5, 2020).

¹⁷Zhoa Lei and Zhou Jin, "Live-Fire Exercises Conducted by PLA Base in Djibouti," *China Daily*, November 25, 2017, https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2017-11/25/content_34966883.htm (accessed May 5, 2020), and Mike Yeo, "Satellite Imagery Offers Clues to China's Intentions in Djibouti," *Defense News*, November 8, 2017, <https://www.defensenews.com/global/mideast-africa/2017/11/08/satellite-imagery-offers-clues-to-chinas-intentions-in-djibouti/> (accessed May 5, 2020).

¹⁸Mathieu Duchâtel, Richard Gowan, and Manuel Lafont Rapnouil, "Into Africa; China's Global Security Shift," European Council on Foreign Relations *Policy Brief*, June 2016, <https://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/Into-Africa-China%e2%80%99s-global-security-shift-PDF-1135.pdf> (accessed May 5, 2020).

¹⁹Chinese naval vessels and fishing boats have also fired similar lasers at U.S. and Australian military assets in the South China Seas. Aaron Mehta, "Two US Airmen Injured by Chinese Lasers in Djibouti, DoD Says," *Defense News*, May 3, 2018, <https://www.defensenews.com/air/2018/05/03/two-us-airmen-injured-by-chinese-lasers-in-djibouti/> (accessed May 5, 2020), and Euan Graham, "Australian Pilots Hit with Lasers during Indo-Pacific Exercise," Australian Strategic Policy Institute, May 28, 2019, <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/australian-pilots-hit-with-lasers-during-indo-pacific-exercise/> (accessed May 5, 2020).

the U.S. military's extensive partnerships on the continent give it.

An Integrated Approach

A distinguishing feature of China's engagement strategy for Africa is its integrated approach. Beijing's military, diplomatic, and economic activities all reinforce one another. Even though Beijing's surge in military initiatives on the continent is relatively recent, there are already examples of how it uses those activities to enhance its diplomatic and economic engagements, and vice-versa.

Djibouti is one of the best examples. China owns Djiboutian debt equivalent to about 75 percent of Djibouti's GDP,²⁰ and in 2017 China Merchants Port, a Chinese state-owned enterprise (SOE), opened the Doraleh Multipurpose Port, the largest terminal in Djibouti port. China funds about 40 percent of the major infrastructure projects in Djibouti as well.²¹ The extensive economic and diplomatic ties with Djibouti that Beijing spent years cultivating paid off when the Djiboutian government allowed China to build the base, despite American concerns.²²

South Sudan is another instructive example. During negotiations to expand the mandate

of the peacekeeping operation there—known as the U.N. Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS)—Beijing successfully lobbied to include the protection of civilian oil workers. South Sudan once supplied about 5 percent of China's oil imports, and Chinese companies own major stakes in the country's oil fields that Beijing wants protected—it even asked to have its peacekeepers deployed to the oil-producing areas. Furthermore, the new commitment effectively aligned U.N. peacekeepers with the South Sudanese government,²³ a Chinese ally.

There are many examples of Beijing leveraging its economic activities in Africa to further its political goals, a task we should expect its military engagements to support. One of those examples is currently ongoing in Mozambique, where the Chinese government is paying for the construction of an airport that has little prospect of ever being economically viable, but which is in the heart of the ruling party's support base.²⁴

A core tactic within Beijing's integrated approach in Africa is to build relations with the most senior African officials possible, and use those relationships to facilitate activity that serves its foreign policy goals. The Chinese government has consistently,

²⁰John Hurley, Scott Morris, and Gailyn Portelance, "Examining the Debt Implications of the Belt and Road Initiative from a Policy Perspective," Center for Global Development, March 2018, <https://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/examining-debt-implications-belt-and-road-initiative-policy-perspective.pdf> (accessed May 5, 2020).

²¹Erica Downs, Jeffrey Becker, Patrick deGatego, "China's Military Support Facility in Djibouti: The Economic and Security Dimensions of China's First Overseas Base," CNA China Studies, July 2017, https://www.cna.org/CNA_files/PDF/DIM-2017-U-015308-Final2.pdf (accessed May 5, 2020).

²²Contrast this episode with Djibouti's rebuff of a basing request from Russia, which had far fewer

meaningful ties with Djibouti than did China. Manson, "Jostling for Djibouti."

²³To top it all off, American taxpayers picked up part of the bill, as the U.S. is the world's largest financial contributor to U.N. PKOs. Colum Lynch, "U.N. Peacekeepers to Protect China's Oil Interests in South Sudan," *Foreign Policy*, June 16, 2014, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2014/06/16/u-n-peacekeepers-to-protect-chinas-oil-interests-in-south-sudan/> (accessed May 5, 2020).

²⁴"Mozambique News Reports & Clippings, number 482," The Open University, April 20, 2020, <http://www.open.ac.uk/technology/mozambique/news-reports-clippings-2020> (accessed May 5, 2020).

over many years, heavily invested in relationship building. The most recent iteration of its triennial Forum on China-Africa Cooperation in 2018 gathered more African heads of states than did the U.N. General Assembly two weeks later.²⁵ Between 2008 and 2018, China's three most senior leaders collectively visited Africa 79 times to call on their counterparts there.²⁶ Since 1966, Chinese companies have built or renovated at least 186 government buildings across Africa,²⁷ many of which were partially or fully funded by the Chinese government.

Furthermore, Beijing attaches no conditions, such as Western-style demands for governance reforms or respect of human rights that some African rulers find so vexing, to its aid and lending. This inaptly named "non-interference" policy²⁸ results in African rulers often using aid from Beijing to disproportionately benefit their home regions,²⁹ fueling the patronage systems that help them maintain power.

Its military engagements have followed the same blueprint. Beijing has hosted or trained senior African military leaders for decades, including men such as Sam Nujoma of Namibia and Laurent-Désiré Kabila and his son, Joseph Kabila, of the Democratic

Republic of the Congo, who went on to lead their countries. The new China–Africa Defense and Security Forum that hosted nearly 100 senior African defense officials—including 15 chiefs of general staff and defense ministers³⁰—and which ran for two entire weeks, is consistent with Beijing's philosophy on cultivating senior Africa leadership with an array of blandishments. The Chinese government will certainly maintain those relationships, and make use of them if necessary.

Is Another Chinese Base Looming?

Chinese–African military cooperation seems destined to continue and to expand. It is hard to predict whether that cooperation will include another permanent Chinese military base in Africa. My cautious analysis is that it is unlikely in the short term, barring an irresistible, easy opportunity, but that Beijing is setting the conditions for establishing one in the medium to long-term if it wishes to.

China's base in Djibouti was the result of a confluence of factors that currently does not exist anywhere else on the continent. No other African country has such a strong combination of strategic relevance to China, a willingness to host foreign military bases, and deep ties to Beijing. The Chinese

²⁵Abdi Latif Dahir, "Twice as Many African Presidents Made it to China's Africa Summit than to the UN General Assembly," *Quartz*, October 5, 2018, <https://qz.com/africa/1414004/more-african-presidents-went-to-chinas-africa-forum-than-un-general-assembly/> (accessed May 5, 2020).

²⁶Kemi Lijadu, "Chinese Leaders Visit Africa More Often than You Think and not Always the Places You Expect," *Quartz*, July 26, 2018, <https://qz.com/africa/1335418/chinese-leaders-visit-africa-more-often-than-you-think-and-not-always-the-places-you-expect/> (accessed May 5, 2020).

²⁷Forthcoming report by the author.

²⁸Joshua Meservey, "The U.S. Should Call China's 'Non-Interference' Policy in Africa What It Is—A

Myth," Heritage Foundation *Issue Brief* No. 4878, July 6, 2018, https://www.heritage.org/sites/default/files/2018-07/IB4878_0.pdf.

²⁹Axel Dreher et al., "Aid on Demand: African Leaders and the Geography of China's Foreign Assistance," *AidData Working Paper* No. 3, November 2014, http://docs.aiddata.org/ad4/files/wps3_aid_on_demand_african_leaders_and_the_geography_of_chinas_foreign_assistance.pdf (accessed May 5, 2020).

³⁰"Feature: Overview of 1st China-Africa Peace and Security Forum," Ministry of National Defense The People's Republic of China, July 17, 2017, http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2019-07/17/content_4846012.htm (accessed May 5, 2020).

government's growing security relationship with African countries may, in fact, be designed in part to obviate the need for a permanent base (while simultaneously paving the way for eventually building one if it becomes necessary). Beijing's interests are currently well served through its strong relationships across the continent that guarantee access for its forces, such as when PLA Air Force planes used Sudan as a waystop when evacuating citizens from Libya in 2011. Chinese companies also already have a strong presence in at least 46 African ports,³¹ likely ensuring access for Chinese naval or other military assets if necessary.

China may already have a military base on Africa's Atlantic coast. Namibia's coastal town of Swakopmund hosts a Chinese satellite tracking station as part of its civilian space program. Given China's commitment to dual-use technology and its aggressive militarization of its space program, the Swakopmund station may now be an asset of the PLA Strategic Support Force, the unit that oversees and integrates the PLA's cyber, space, and networking efforts.

Despite China's influence in Africa, many governments there would be reluctant to grant China rights to build a permanent base on their territory, given how controversial it would be with their citizens. Djibouti is an exception as its practice of granting foreign military basing rights is long-established and accepted. Beijing would have to pressure some African countries to accept a military base, an approach it usually abjures

³¹Judd Devermont, Amelia Cheatham, and Catherine Chiang, "Assessing the Risks of Chinese Investments in Sub-Saharan African Ports," Center for Strategic and International Studies, June 4, 2019, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/assessing-risks-chinese-investments-sub-saharan-african-ports> (accessed May 5, 2020).

in favor of subtler forms of persuasion, though, of course, the Chinese government would not hesitate to coerce a reluctant government if it was critical to its national interests.

If, and perhaps when, Beijing decides another African base is necessary, it might look for a location that would support the most Chinese interests simultaneously. In that case, Beijing would probably seek an economically important region with a large Chinese diaspora, and countries that are relatively stable, friendly, strategically located, and with good port facilities that already have a strong Chinese presence.

In this scenario, Indian Ocean states in East and Southern Africa would have much to recommend them. The Pacific and Indian Oceans are by far the most relevant bodies of water for Beijing's strategic calculations, given China's dependence on shipborne trade. There are also large diaspora populations in Southern Africa—particularly in Angola, South Africa, and Zambia. South Africa has by far the largest stock of Chinese foreign direct investment on the continent, while nearby Zambia has the third-largest stock.³² Angola, meanwhile, between 2000 and 2017 received more Chinese loans than any other African country, while Zambia received the fourth-most.³³

Given these dynamics—and assuming Beijing wishes to establish another African base that could serve as a multipurpose tool for achieving Chinese national interests—then Tanzania would be among the most

³²"Data: Chinese Investment in Africa," China Africa Research Initiative, undated, <http://www.sais-cari.org/chinese-investment-in-africa> (accessed April 22, 2020).

³³"Loan Database," China Africa Research Initiative, undated, <http://www.sais-cari.org/data> (accessed April 22, 2020).

attractive options. It enjoys comparative stability in an often turbulent region, and its position about halfway up Africa's eastern littoral puts it far enough north for assets stationed there to quickly reach the most heavily trafficked parts of the Indian Ocean, but also far enough south to be relevant to the Mozambique Channel. It as well borders the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Uganda, and Zambia, all of which are destinations for significant Chinese loans, investment, and other types of engagement.

Tanzania's military cooperation with China is among the strongest and longest-running on the continent. Under founding President Julius Nyerere, Tanzania accepted materiel, training, and weapons—including fighter jets and tanks—from China. In 1969, Beijing also built for the Tanzanian Army at a place called Nachingwea what was at the time Africa's largest training base.³⁴ A few years later, China built a Tanzanian naval base and airstrip—which it later renovated³⁵—in the

early 1970s.³⁶ China and Tanzania have also conducted joint naval training, and Chinese naval vessels have made port calls to Tanzania.³⁷ In 2018, current President John Magufuli inaugurated a military training center built with assistance from the PLA.³⁸

Tanzania has several ports with excellent potential, including in Bagamoyo. A 2013 deal between a Chinese company and the Tanzanian government to expand the port into Africa's largest deepwater facility recently stalled,³⁹ likely straining the country's relationship with Beijing. However, Chinese companies retain stakes in three other Tanzanian ports.⁴⁰

Namibia would be an option in Southern Africa. Like Tanzania, it has one of Africa's longest running, and most intensive, relationships with Beijing. It has at least 25 Chinese-constructed government buildings, by far the most on the continent.⁴¹ Beijing's military ties to Namibia date back to support

³⁴Gabrielle Hecht, ed., *Entangled Geographies: Empire and Technopolitics in the Global Cold* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), https://books.google.com/books?id=2svxCwAAQBAJ&pg=PA244&lpg=PA244&dq=nachingwea+barrack+s+tanzania+china&source=bl&ots=KbOUytPF_6&sig=ACfU3U01xxhExZY0m53mqhP92Nacm1bYxA&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKewikzd7lpOvoAhXalHIEHZ1hAm4Q6AEwBHoECACQOg#v=onepage&q=nachingwea%20barracks%20tanzania%20china&f=false (accessed May 5, 2020).

³⁵"Tanzania Inaugurate USD68.5m Military Airport," *Tanzania Invest*, March 12, 2017, <https://www.tanzaniainvest.com/transport/military-airport-ngerengere-morogoro> (accessed May 5, 2020).

³⁶"China's Role in Africa," and *Africa, Problems & Prospects: A Bibliographic Survey*, Headquarters, Department of the Army, December 1977, https://books.google.com/books?id=OrEAAOuDswC&pg=PA181&lpg=PA181&dq=china+builds+navy+base+and+airfield+for+tanzania&source=bl&ots=uv7elliBo1&sig=ACfU3U1iNKWVt5dq-UfPyK7PcdJ582DhRA&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKewiEnL_jm-voAhWag3IEHdWVAtsQ6AEwEHoECAkQLg#v=onep

<age&q=china%20builds%20navy%20base%20and%20airfield%20for%20tanzania&f=false> (accessed May 5, 2020).

³⁷James E. Fannell, "China's Global Naval Strategy and Expanding Force Structure: Pathway to Hegemony," *Naval War College Review*, Vol. 72, no. 1 (2019), pp. 10–55, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26607110> (accessed April 15, 2020).

³⁸"New Chinese-built Training Center for Tanzanian Army," *Army Recognition*, February 23, 2018, https://www.armyrecognition.com/february_2018_global_defense_security_army_news_industry/new_chinese-built_training_center_for_tanzanian_army.html (accessed May 5, 2020).

³⁹John Hursh, "Tanzania Pushes Back on Chinese Port Project," Center for International Maritime Security, December 2, 2019, <https://www.maritime-executive.com/editorials/tanzania-pushes-back-on-chinese-port-project> (accessed May 5, 2020).

⁴⁰Devermont, Cheatham, and Chiang, "Assessing the Risks of Chinese Investments in Sub-Saharan African Ports."

⁴¹Given the lack of comprehensive data, it is possible another African country has more of these buildings. However, the data I collected showed Namibia with

for the liberation movement there, and include extensive arms sales and trainings for Namibian military personnel.⁴² The CCP and Chinese companies lavish the ruling party, SWAPO, with gifts, including direct monetary support.⁴³ A Chinese SOE recently more than doubled the cargo-handling capacity of Namibia's Walvis Bay port as well.⁴⁴ An openly declared base in Namibia would give Beijing the prestige of having an Atlantic Ocean base, and, similar to Tanzania, easy reach to countries of economic importance to Beijing and with large diasporas.

Rather than searching for a base location that serves most of its interests, Beijing might try to establish one to address a specific concern. In this scenario, Beijing would probably focus on what it perceives to be China's national security interests, its great obsession. This would also likely translate into an Indian Ocean presence. Any open conflict China involves itself in would probably be maritime and develop in the Pacific or Indian Ocean, particularly in the Taiwan Straits, the South China Seas, or perhaps the Strait of Malacca. The first two are traditional areas of Chinese aggression, while the former is a chokepoint connecting

ten more such buildings than any other African country, which is such a gap that it suggests completely comprehensive data would still show Namibia with the most such buildings. Forthcoming report by the author.

⁴² Oscar Nkala, "Namibia Forced to Cancel Chinese Arms Contract," Defence Web, April 28, 2017, <https://www.defenceweb.co.za/joint/diplomacy-a-peace/namibia-forced-to-cancel-chinese-arms-contract/> (accessed May 5, 2020).

⁴³ David H. Shinn and Joshua Eisenman, *China and Africa: A Century of Engagement* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), and Howard French, *China's Second Continent* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2016).

⁴⁴ "Port of Walvis Bay's New Container Terminal," Ship Technology, undated, <https://www.ship-technology.com/projects/port-walvis-bays-new-container-terminal/> (accessed May 5, 2020).

the Indian and Pacific Oceans. The strait preoccupies Chinese military planners as it is critical to Chinese shipping but also highly vulnerable to disruption.⁴⁵ A maritime clash with China's closest great rival, India, would almost certainly occur in the Indian Ocean as well.

Beijing's military planners fear an open conflict cutting off its global supply chains to critical commodities and logistical and sea routes, often referred to as sea lines of communication (SLOCs). China is the world's largest importer of crude oil,⁴⁶ more than 90 percent of which is shipborne,⁴⁷ and its demand for liquefied natural gas (LNG) has skyrocketed since 2017 as well.⁴⁸ One of the world's largest natural gas finds in recent years came in Mozambique. If Mozambique reaches its potential as an LNG exporter, it could become part of China's supply chain, making Africa's eastern littoral even more important to Beijing.

If Beijing feels insecure about its ability to defend the SLOCs on which it depends, it could try to double down on its Red Sea and Bab el-Mandeb presence by trying to put a base in Eritrea. Such a base would make it extremely difficult for the U.S. to force open

⁴⁵ Shuang Wang, Jing Lu, and Liping Jiang, "Time Reliability of the Maritime Transportation Network for China's Crude Oil Imports," *Sustainability*, Vol. 12 No. 1, p. 198, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12010198> (accessed May 5, 2020).

⁴⁶ Jeff Barron, "China Surpassed the United States as the World's Largest Crude Oil Importer in 2017," U.S. Energy Information Agency, December 31, 2018, <https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=37821> (accessed May 5, 2020).

⁴⁷ Wang, Lu, and Jiang, "Time Reliability of the Maritime Transportation Network for China's Crude Oil Imports."

⁴⁸ Graeme Bethune, "Chinese LNG Demand Growth Tapers Off," *Petroleum Economist*, January 2, 2020, <https://www.petroleum-economist.com/articles/midstream-downstream/lng/2020/chinese-lng-demand-growth-tapers-off> (accessed May 5, 2020).

the Bab el-Mandeb if Beijing closed it during an open conflict. The government in Asmara does not have obviously warm relations with Beijing, but it does have a history of allowing foreign powers to use its territory for military purposes, including agreeing to a United Arab Emirates base in Assab.⁴⁹

The Comoros Islands, sitting where the Mozambique Channel opens into the broader Indian Ocean, is another good candidate. Beijing has assiduously cultivated excellent relations with the government there,⁵⁰ including constructing the National Assembly building and offices for the president on Anjouan and Moheli Islands.⁵¹ The China-based training for members of the Comoran military is so extensive that the Comoran government claims its entire army will be fluent in Mandarin soon.⁵² In 2018, one of China's large SOEs signed on to build a deepwater port in the capital, Moroni, as well.⁵³

Protecting American Interests

Despite the uncertainty of if, when, or where China might establish another base in Africa, it is certain that Beijing has a long-running, disciplined strategy to use Africa to advance its foreign policy goals. While the U.S. has for decades tried to cajole Beijing into being a responsible global actor, the Chinese Communist Party believes it is locked in a perpetual struggle with a vengeful America determined to thwart its rightful rise to global prominence.⁵⁴ Beijing behaves

accordingly, even in the midst of the current, unprecedented global pandemic that threatens all nations.

Protecting U.S. interests in the face of such an aggressive competitor requires an approach as determined and holistic as the CCP's efforts to reshape the global order. In Africa, the U.S. should:

- **Maintain and, where practicable, enhance security cooperation with African states.** The U.S. has a strong lead in this arena of competition, but Beijing seeks to make inroads. While it may currently seem inconceivable that China could ever overtake the U.S. as the partner of choice in security cooperation, two decades ago few people would probably have believed that China could overtake the U.S. as Africa's largest trading partner, could dominate entire industries in Africa such as infrastructure construction, and plant a major military base just a few miles from the U.S.'s only permanent military presence on the continent.
- **Speed up implementation of the Prosper Africa initiative.** The initiative's emphasis on increasing two-way trade and investment between the U.S. and Africa is the right strategic focus for American engagement with Africa. The U.S.'s unmatched private sector is an immense competitive advantage, and facilitating its deeper involvement in

⁴⁹Joshua Meservey, "The Saudi-Qatari Dispute: Why the U.S. Must Prevent Spillover into East Africa," The Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 3268, November 29, 2017, <https://www.heritage.org/africa/report/the-saudi-qatari-dispute-why-the-us-must-prevent-spillover-east-africa>.

⁵⁰Shannon Van Sant, "Why Is China Investing in the Comoros?" CBS News, November 12, 2014, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/why-china-is-investing-in-comoros/> (accessed May 5, 2020).

⁵¹Forthcoming report by the author.

⁵²Van Sant, "Why Is China Investing in the Comoros?"

⁵³"Ports," Association of Indian Ocean Islands Ports, undated, <http://apioi.net/countryports/3> (accessed May 5, 2020).

⁵⁴John Garnaut, "Engineers of the Soul: What Australia Needs to Know about Ideology in Xi Jinping's China," *Sinocism*, speech posted January 16, 2019, <https://sinocism.com/p/engineers-of-the-soul-ideology-in> (accessed May 5, 2020).

Africa will not only build American economic might, a pillar of overall national power, but will enhance America's standing on the continent. However, the Trump Administration has been slow to flesh out and roll out the initiative, and more urgency to do so is necessary.

- **Confidently advocate for American values** with the African public and its leaders. Most people yearn for representative government, rule of law, and individual freedom, and the U.S. should take every opportunity to advocate for democracy as the political system with the best record of protecting individual rights and delivering economic prosperity.
- **Focus on achievable goals.** The U.S. should not try to persuade African governments to abandon their relationships with Beijing as they are unlikely to do so. The U.S. should instead focus on assisting African countries in striking fair and productive deals with Beijing; ameliorating the negative effects of Chinese engagement in Africa; and providing a realistic alternative for African governments on the projects and in the sectors where the U.S. or its companies have a competitive advantage or strong strategic reason for competing.
- **Focus on governments with which a mutually beneficial and strategic partnership is possible.** Such governments should demonstrate a desire and capacity to meaningfully improve its governance, and should be strategically important enough to merit special engagement. Countries that are good candidates for an enhanced partnership should receive the full suite of U.S. engagements, such as consideration for a free-trade agreement, if practicable; fully staffed U.S. embassies, including with a commercial attaché; U.S. government-facilitated visits by U.S. business delegations; high-level U.S. official visits and interventions on behalf of U.S. companies; and mobilization of that country's U.S. diaspora to invest and engage in other constructive ways.
- **Create a strategic messaging initiative** that explains to African countries the benefits of partnering with the U.S. The initiative should refute the oft-heard canard that the U.S. is withdrawing from Africa.⁵⁵
- **Prioritize the fight against African corruption,** not least because it is a significant Chinese competitive advantage.⁵⁶ Ideas for doing so include promoting economic freedom, leveraging technology and the power of crowds, and elevating the fight against graft as part of U.S. development assistance.⁵⁷

⁵⁵The U.S. remains the largest investor by stock in Africa, is by far the continent's largest provider of overseas development assistance, has significant numbers of its major companies operating on the continent, and continues large, innovative initiatives—some now nearly two decades old—such as the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, the African Growth and Opportunity Act, the Millennium Challenge Corporation, Power Africa, and Feed the Future, that have saved and improved millions of lives across the continent.

⁵⁶Joshua Meservey, "Chinese Corruption in Africa Undermines Beijing's Rhetoric About Friendship with the Continent," Heritage Foundation *Issue Brief* No. 4895, August 8, 2018, <https://www.heritage.org/global-politics/report/chinese-corruption-africa-undermines-beijings-rhetoric-about-friendship-the> (accessed May 5, 2020).

⁵⁷Joshua Meservey, "The Impact of Corruption on Economic Development in Sub-Saharan Africa," in James M. Roberts and William T. Wilson, eds., 2017

- **Help African countries get the best possible deals from Chinese investment** by helping build their capacity to assess contracts and ensure compliance.
- **Encourage countries borrowing from Beijing to be transparent.** The terms of contracts struck between African governments and the Chinese government and Chinese companies are frequently kept hidden. That makes it difficult for Africans to hold their governments accountable to striking the best possible deal with Beijing, and for the U.S. and others to accurately assess

the full extent of Chinese influence in Africa.

- **Strengthen civil society in Africa,** which is critical to the development and maintenance of a responsive and honest government. Ways of doing so could include facilitating exchange programs for African civil society leaders within the continent, or to the U.S., to learn from one another.

Thank you again for this opportunity to testify, and I look forward to any questions you may have.

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