



U.S. Africa Command partner from Gabon participating in Africa Endeavor 2017 sits in on briefing during weeklong event in Lilongwe, Malawi, August 21, 2017 (U.S. Navy/Dominique Shelton)

U.S. Africa Command and Its Changing Strategic Environment

By William Robert Hawkins and Brenda Jeannette Ponsford

On March 6, 2018, General Thomas D. Waldhauser, USMC, commander of U.S. Africa Command (USAFRICOM), testified before the U.S. House Armed Services Committee.¹ He hailed the decade of work his organization had done since it was established in 2008. He reported

that “On any given day, up to 7,200 U.S. uniformed personnel, Department of Defense civilians, and contractors are in Africa representing all services, career fields, and specialties, protecting our national security and working tirelessly to tackle the many challenges on the African continent.” He continued,

“U.S. Africa Command, with partners, strengthens security forces, counters transnational threats, and conducts crisis response in order to advance U.S. national interests and promote regional security, stability, and prosperity.” In his lengthy prepared statement, however, he did not mention how the nature of American interests have changed over the years. These changes, primarily related to trade with the continent, have greatly reduced American ties to Africa and call into question how much money and personnel are

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allocated to USAFRICOM given the many challenges the United States is facing in other theaters where the stakes are higher.

Two weeks later, the chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, Representative Mac Thornberry (R-TX), took a 7-day trip through East Africa. He stopped in Djibouti, Somalia, Kenya, Sudan, and Ethiopia, meeting with U.S. commanders and troops and local African political and military leaders. In his return press release, he tried to carry strategic concerns from other regions into Africa to justify increased American efforts there. In particular, he noted, “I saw evidence of China stretching its influence across the region. Anyone who believes that China is only concerned about the Indo-Pacific region is ignoring the clear evidence in Africa and elsewhere.”²

Thornberry’s reference to China is at the center of trending events on the continent. China’s President Xi Jinping visited Africa during his first overseas trip after being reelected in March 2018, just like he did in 2013 after he was first elected as president. Indeed, he has visited the continent four times in the last 5 years. As the state-run *China Daily* reported upon President Xi’s return from his most recent trip to Senegal, Rwanda, South Africa, and Mauritius in July 2018, “China and Africa have formed a community of shared interests featuring win-win cooperation.”³ In addition:

China remains committed to helping Africa clear its development bottlenecks in infrastructure, capital, and talents while helping African countries explore a development mechanism and path that suit their own conditions. . . . Sino-African cooperation has also provided Africa with an alternative to Western development philosophy and path, and has had a positive effect on African people’s ideas, development philosophy, and perception of the world.⁴

In early September, the Beijing Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) attracted leaders from all 53 African nations. According to state-run Chinese media, “Leaders exchanged views on such issues as

promoting China-Africa relations, deepening cooperation in all areas, building a China-Africa community with a shared future, and jointly building the Belt and Road as well as global and regional issues of concern to all sides.”⁵ The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is Beijing’s bid for global control of infrastructure, resources, and markets. President Xi pledged \$60 billion in development funds to the continent.⁶ The summit supposedly resolved to “firmly safeguard the open global economy and multilateral trading system, [and] oppose trade protectionism and unilateralism.” Preventing foreign nations from taking actions to control (protect) their own economic destiny will ensure Chinese industrial dominance in trade and investment. This is the renewed doctrine of “free trade imperialism” practiced by the British Empire two centuries ago and which the Chinese learned about from the other end.

That the People’s Republic of China (PRC) sees itself in competition with the West in Africa has prompted many American foreign policy experts to argue that the United States should do more in Africa to counter the spread of Beijing’s political influence and control of the continent’s resources. Part of this argument rests on an exaggerated view of U.S. material interests in the region, both now and in the future. What is real is the need to prevent China from using its increasing economic ties to gain political influence, thus mobilizing the continent to increase Beijing’s clout in world affairs.

At the 17th Annual Sub-Saharan Africa Trade and Economic Cooperation Forum last July, Deputy Secretary of State John Sullivan made the usual claims: “Africa is the major market of the future,” and “the United States, as the largest economy in the world, sees boundless opportunities for Africa.”⁷ Yet, rhetoric aside, few material interests exist that can undergird USAFRICOM.

In 2008, when U.S. Africa Command was stood up under General William E. Ward, USA, the United States was running a \$65.7 billion trade deficit with Sub-Saharan Africa, importing roughly four times as much as its domestic producers were exporting. The main cause of

this imbalance was oil. The 2008 financial crisis and resulting recession brought imports and the deficit down for a few years, but by 2011 imports were back up to \$74.3 billion, generating a deficit of \$53.2 billion. The U.S. trade deficits in goods with the four largest African suppliers of oil in 2011 were \$28.9 billion with Nigeria; \$12.1 billion with Angola; \$3.1 billion with Chad; and \$439 million with the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). According to the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR), Nigeria was only the 44th largest market for U.S. exports; Angola ranked 69th, and the DRC was 136th on the list. Exports to Chad were so low the USTR did not bother to rank them.⁸ African states prefer to import goods from Europe or China rather than from America.

By 2017, the goods deficit with Africa had dropped to \$10.8 billion. This was due entirely to a reduction in imports, from \$93 billion in 2011 to \$24.9 billion in 2017. U.S. goods exports to Africa had actually decreased over these years, down from \$32.9 in 2011 to \$14.1 in 2017. The cause for the change can be seen more succinctly regarding the three largest oil suppliers of 2011; by 2015 imports from Nigeria, Angola, and Chad had dropped a total of \$44.6 billion. Thanks to the rapid increase in domestic oil production in the United States because of fracking and offshore wells, America no longer needs African oil.

Appropriately, General Waldhauser’s testimony was much more about improving conditions in Africa than in linking events there with U.S. economic interests. He told the House committee, “Our first strategic theme is that U.S. Africa Command activities directly support U.S. diplomatic and development efforts in Africa. Working with our interagency partners—primarily the Department of State and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)—is a core tenet of our strategic approach in Africa.”⁹ He continued:

African nations—their people, their increasing appetite for democratic principles, their growing economic impact and potential in global markets—remain an enduring

*interest for the United States. U.S. Africa Command supports our African partners in building the capability and the capacity to develop local solutions to radicalization, destabilization, and persistent conflict. By making targeted investments and maintaining strong partnerships, we can set the basic security conditions needed for good governance and development to take root. Africa, our allies, the United States, and the world stand to benefit from a secure, stable, and prosperous Africa.*¹⁰

The Marine commander thus represented the same approach that has long characterized U.S. policy—the development of Africa for the Africans, with Americans playing a benevolent role rather than a self-interested “imperialist” role. The mission statement of the State Department’s Bureau of African Affairs takes the same tone, making no mention of advancing any explicit American material interest.¹¹

The Failure of Trade Expansion

On July 1, 2013, President Barack Obama announced a new Trade Africa initiative. According to the White House fact sheet, the program “seeks to increase internal and regional trade within Africa, and expand trade and economic ties between Africa, the United States, and other global markets.”¹² Its focus was the East Africa Community (EAC) comprising Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda. The accompanying description of the EAC fit an export-oriented policy:

*The EAC is an economic success story, and represents a market with significant opportunity for U.S. exports and investment. The five states of the EAC, with a population of more than 130 million people, have increasingly stable and pro-business regulations. They are home to promising local enterprises that are forming creative partnerships with multinational companies. And EAC countries are benefiting from the emergence of an educated, globalized middle class . . . and the region’s GDP [gross domestic product] has risen to more than \$80 billion—quadrupling in only 10 years.*¹³

However, no estimate was given as to how much American producers might benefit from the initiative. Instead, most of the detail was about using “trade as aid” to boost the EAC economies. The White House stated, “In its initial phase, Trade Africa aims to double intra-regional trade in the EAC [and] increase EAC exports to the United States by 40 percent.” Another priority was “Exploration of a U.S.-EAC Investment Treaty to contribute to a more attractive investment environment.” This would lead to the export of U.S. capital rather than goods to the continent, expanding African production rather than American production.

Speaking at the U.S.-Africa Business Forum on August 5, 2014, in Washington, President Obama proclaimed, “I’m proud that American exports to Africa have grown to record levels, supporting jobs in Africa and the United States, including a quarter of a million good American jobs.”¹⁴ But this situation would not last.

Exports to Tanzania and Uganda peaked in 2013, and those to Kenya—the largest trade partner—peaked in 2014, and were down 72 percent by 2017. Only in Rwanda were exports higher in 2016 than in 2013. For the EAC as a whole, U.S. exports in 2016 were less than a third of what there were in 2013 when Trade Africa was launched and less than half what they had been in 2005. Even in the aggregate peak year of 2013, total exports amounted to just over \$1.2 billion, hardly a significant amount in the larger context of U.S. world trade and its national deficit.¹⁵

The Nature of the U.S.-China Rivalry

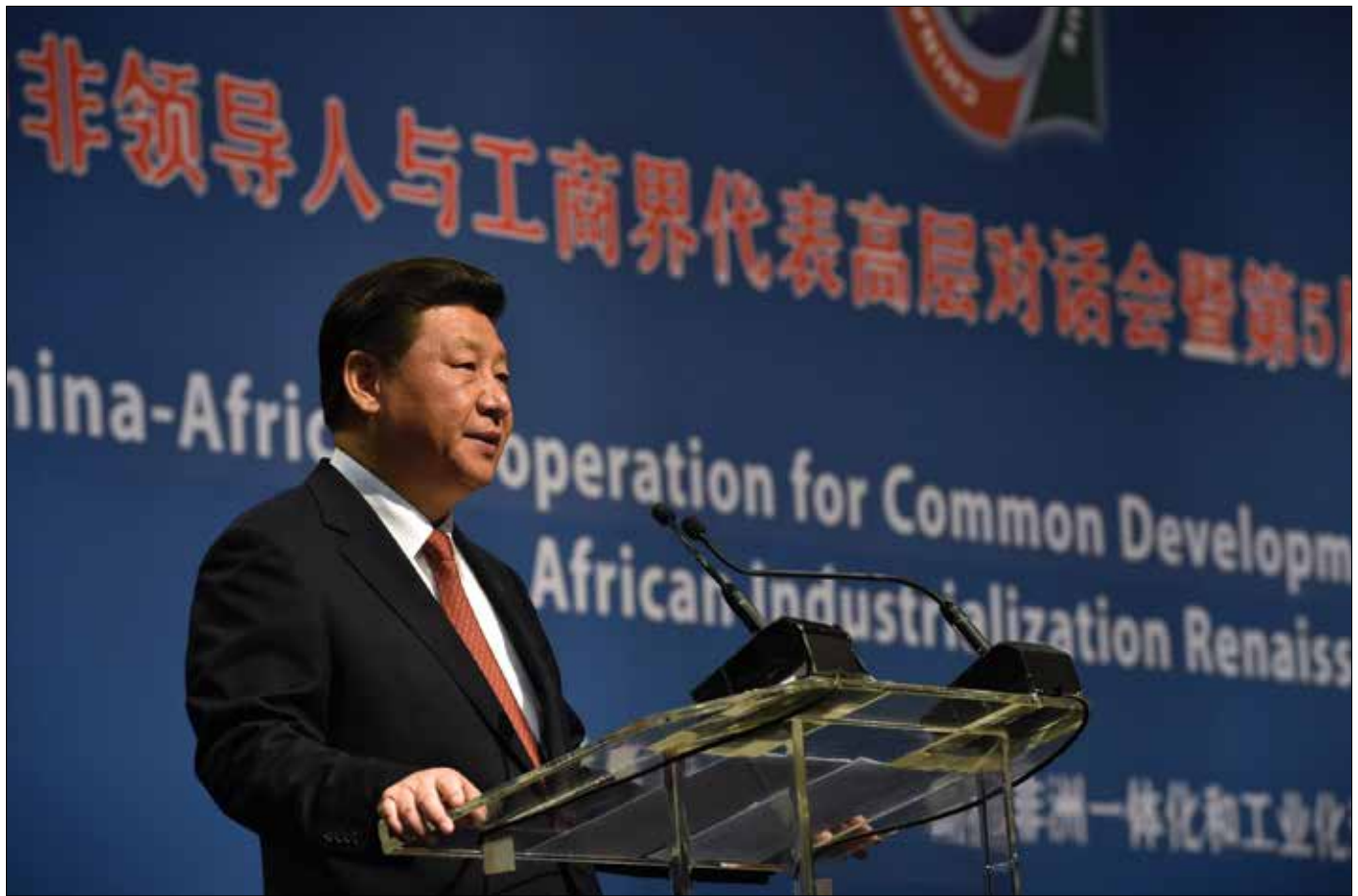
The U.S. Chamber of Commerce, in league with its affiliated chambers in Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia, sent a letter to Capitol Hill in 2011 stating that economic engagement “represents an overwhelmingly positive tool of soft power on the continent. This goodwill is felt on a daily basis by U.S. companies on the ground.”¹⁶ It argued, “If the United States is to continue to play a

leadership role in the global economy, it is imperative that it dedicate significant attention to making inroads in frontier markets. . . . U.S. companies are presently at risk in Africa.” But where does the risk come from? The Chamber warned, “Last year China surpassed the United States and assumed America’s long-running status as Africa’s single largest trading partner.” Since then, China has taken a much more aggressive policy toward expanding its trade with Africa with a keen eye to boosting exports to cover what is still a large import flow of oil and minerals.

Though couched in commercial terms, the Chamber’s letter presented the concept of strategic competition between the United States and China, which foreshadowed the National Defense Strategy (NDS) drawn up by the Trump administration.¹⁷ The NDS identified “Great Power” competition with Russia and China as the major challenges facing the United States, superseding the primacy of counterterrorism, which had dominated thinking since 2001. This change in strategic focus affects USAFRICOM directly and in a major way. Its security cooperation programs have concentrated on combating terrorism and insurgency. While these threats remain, the command must now raise its sights to recognize a Chinese presence that is far more pervasive and influential. One of the strategic approaches the NDS sets is to “Counter coercion and subversion”:

*In competition short of armed conflict, revisionist powers and rogue regimes are using corruption, predatory economic practices, propaganda, political subversion, proxies, and the threat or use of military force to change facts on the ground. Some are particularly adept at exploiting their economic relationships with many of our security partners. We will support U.S. interagency approaches and work by, with, and through our allies and partners to secure our interests and counteract this coercion.*¹⁸

This should apply to China and Africa. The ability of Beijing to subvert the integrity of local governments and



President Xi Jinping addresses Forum on China-Africa Cooperation Business Summit, April 12, 2015, in Sandton, Johannesburg (Elmond Jiyane, Government Communication and Information System)

even change their diplomatic orientation away from the West far exceeds the menace of radical groups that do not have the resources of a major power behind them. Unfortunately, the NDS does not mention Africa in this context. In its list of regions where the United States is concerned about maintaining a favorable balance of power, Africa is the only region not on the list. Later, a section is devoted to the continent, but its priority is to “Support relationships to address significant terrorist threats in Africa.” While mention is also made of stopping human trafficking, transnational criminal activity, and illegal arms trade, the Chinese threat is not explicitly cited. A final mission in the Africa section of the NDS, however, is to “limit the malign influence of non-African powers,” which should certainly apply to China as a “revisionist power.”

On November 15, 2018, the Pentagon announced a “realignment of

Counter-Violent Extremist Organization personnel operating in U.S. Africa Command to support priorities outlined in the National Defense Strategy. Over the next several years, the realignment projects a reduction of less than 10 percent of the 7,200 military forces serving in Africa Command.”¹⁹ The press release also stated that “Optimization preserves the majority of U.S. security cooperation partnerships and programs in Africa.”²⁰

While the campaign against Islamic terrorist groups and insurgents such as Boko Haram, the so-called Islamic State, al Shabaab, and al Qaeda needs to continue, consideration must be given to the potential for China to back its own proxies to pressure or even overthrow governments that will not grant the concessions Beijing wants to advance its interests. Given that USAFRICOM is already under-resourced for the counterterrorism mission, it will be difficult to expand its range in this direction unless

it can make the case that its role is vital in the larger global context. However, since the aim of staying competitive with China in Africa is more a political than a military operation, it need not be abandoned in the name of force optimization.

China’s Strategy

In 2009, the Congressional Research Service reported that

*China’s foreign aid is difficult to quantify. The PRC government does not release or explain Chinese foreign aid statistics and much of PRC foreign aid does not appear to be accounted for in the scholarly literature on foreign aid. . . . China is a relatively small source of global aid. However, when China’s concessional loans and state-sponsored or subsidized overseas investments are included, the PRC becomes a major source of foreign assistance.*²¹

According to then PRC President Hu Jintao, speaking at the 5th FOCAC held July 2012 in Beijing, the Chinese government had built more than 100 schools, 30 hospitals, 30 anti-malaria centers, and 20 agricultural demonstration projects in Africa.²² Beijing has also successfully rolled out \$15 billion in preferential lending, trained close to 40,000 Africans in various sectors, and provided more than 20,000 scholarships to students from African countries to study in China.

In addition to becoming Africa's largest trading partner, its loans have made China Africa's largest financier, ahead of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (though as a legacy of their imperial pasts, the United Kingdom, India, and France still hold larger shares of direct foreign investment in the continent). Hu stated the move was designed to stop "the big bullying the small, the strong domineering over the weak and the rich oppressing the poor," a thinly disguised slap at America and Europe. The loans will go toward supporting infrastructure, manufacturing, and the development of small businesses. However, the general practice of Chinese state-owned banks is to finance Chinese firms in building the roads, ports, factories, mines, wells, power plants, and shops that will be counted as African growth.

In Beijing, economics is tied to broader strategy. The final FOCAC document proclaimed, "We believe that the development of the new type of strategic partnership between China, the largest developing country, and Africa, the largest group of developing countries, is of great significance for the peace, stability, and development of the world and serves the fundamental and strategic interests of both sides."²³ The phrase *balance of power* was also used.

At the 2014 FOCAC, however, Vice Foreign Minister Zhang Ming had talked about "South-South cooperation" in terms of the same division of labor within the international economy that characterized past patterns of imperialism:

China-Africa cooperation offers a model of mutual complementarity. China and Africa are both at a critical stage of

development. With different features and advantages, our economies are cut out for each other. China has mature, applicable technologies and equipments and relatively abundant capital. Africa, on its side, boasts great strengths in market size, labor cost, and resources. Our cooperation is constructive in nature as it expands shared interests and leads to win-win results. It is cooperation between brothers that fosters common development by leveraging our respective strengths.²⁴

Within the pattern of importing oil and minerals from Africa and paying for them with manufactured goods, China-Africa trade continues to expand. In 2013, total trade topped \$200 billion, nearly the equal of the trade carried on with Africa by the United States and European Union (EU) combined. And by 2015, China-Africa trade neared \$300 billion, with Beijing setting \$400 billion as its goal by 2020.²⁵

Yet it is loans to African states that present the greatest threat to their stability and independence. China holds at least 14 percent of the continent's sovereign debt, having lent more than \$100 billion to governments and state enterprises since 2000, according to the Brookings Institution, and the Belt and Road blitz has just started. "We're seeing countries at 50 percent, 100 percent, and in one case 200 percent of GDP debt, based on concessionary loans from China," stated U.S. Ambassador to Somalia Donald Yamamoto, when he was the acting Assistant Secretary of State for African affairs.²⁶ Rwanda, Angola, Zambia, Kenya, and the DRC have started to ask questions about the debt burden that has come from partnering with China. Concerns over what Beijing might demand if debts go bad have increased since Sri Lanka was coerced into turning over its port of Hambantota (built by a Chinese state-owned firm) and 15,000 acres of land to China for a lease of 99 years—a financial transaction with a strategic yield.²⁷

David Zweig, a professor at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, has stated, "In the past, if a state wanted to expand, it had to take territory. You don't need to grab colonies

any more. You just need to have competitive goods for sale."²⁸ Chinese goods sell at prices that are only a fraction of what comparable goods cost from Europe or America. Nor are they all low-end items. The proportion of machinery and electronic products accounts for more than half of China's exports to Africa. America no longer makes inexpensive consumer goods, having conceded that market to China. Chinese telecom giants Huawei and ZTE are pushing Western firms out of new networks, providing less expensive service in over 30 Sub-Saharan African countries.²⁹ China is also expanding the export of automobiles to Sub-Saharan Africa. French journalists Serge Michel and Michel Beuret argue that "Cheap goods can be an even more habit-forming drug in poor countries than they are in rich ones."³⁰ Yet this can slow local growth not only in manufacturing but also in the formation of a business class, as Chinese merchants handle the distribution and sale of Chinese goods often down to the retail level so as to extract every Yuan from their exports. Indeed, many Chinese are moving to Africa not only to start small businesses but also to become farmers.

Pushback Against Chinese Imperialism

There is, however, pushback in Africa against a trade pattern that suppresses local industrial development, compounds national debts, and often brings in Chinese workers rather than provide more skilled jobs to Africans. Chinese interest in African agriculture is also strong, setting off concern about food security on the continent as the Chinese buy up farm land and export harvests. As the *Economist* has reported:

Africans are increasingly suspicious of Chinese firms, worrying about unfair deals and environmental damage. Opposition is fueled by Africa's thriving civil society, which demands more transparency and an accounting for human rights. This can be an unfamiliar challenge for authoritarian China, whose foreign policy is heavily based on state-to-state relations, with little appreciation of the gulf between African rulers and their people.³¹



Djiboutian army commander of elite military force Rapid Intervention Battalion listens during course graduation, taught by U.S. Soldiers with 1-26 Infantry Battalion, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne, at training location near Djibouti, March 7, 2019 (U.S. Air Force/Shawn Nickel)

Beijing's push to imbed its own interests in the assistance offered to others often backfires. On January 26, *Le Monde Afrique* reported that the Chinese government's gift of a \$200 million headquarters building and computer network for the African Union in Addis Ababa contained a back door that could allow the transfer of African Union files to servers in Shanghai.³² Beijing has denied this charge, but feels the heat from critics. These dangers will only increase. As part of the BRI, China is developing a "digital Silk Road" of fiber optic networks across the developing world, including Africa. These projects will undoubtedly include overt mechanisms for censorship and covert means of surveillance and data collection. USAFRICOM needs to develop ways to assist local governments to safeguard themselves from the threats emanating from Chinese-provided cyber infrastructures. This new capability will not be cheap in either money or personnel, but the Trump administration is making cyber security a high priority. The case must be made for Africa to receive its proper share of these new resources in light of the Chinese effort on the continent.

Global Times, a media outlet of the Chinese Communist Party, has struck back at those claiming Beijing is engaged in imperialism. In 2014, it ran an op-ed

by a Kenya-based journalist blaming African leaders for keeping their people poor by balking at Chinese extractive resource development projects. He concluded, "Clearly, the actual battle in Africa is not between external players. It is between Africa's leadership and its people."³³ This lays the groundwork for changing these leaders in favor of those more willing to partner with Beijing for the good of the people.

The targets of the op-ed were democratic governments responding to public concern about Chinese influence: "It is time for Africa to stop aping the democratic systems championed by Western powers."³⁴ Though the Chinese do business all across the continent, they feel more comfortable dealing with authoritarian regimes. Indeed, one of their selling points is that, unlike the United States and EU, they do not push democracy and human rights on host governments. Indeed, these values run contrary to the principles that underlie China's own Leninist regime. Beijing made this connection explicit in its 2011 white paper *China's Peaceful Development*. In its foreign policy section, the official document states:

The Chinese people adhere to the social system and path of development chosen by

*themselves and will never allow any external forces to interfere in China's internal affairs . . . nor does it use social system or ideology as a yardstick to determine what kind of relations it should have with other countries. China respects the right of the people of other countries to independently choose their own social system and path of development, and does not interfere in other countries' internal affairs.*³⁵

The BRI is expanding Beijing's circle of friends as the project is delivering significant benefits in the short term.³⁶ Most of those benefits, however, are intended for China in the long term, where the program is spearheaded by firms that are either state owned or closely tied to the Communist regime. President Xi signed numerous BRI agreements during his recent African trip. And as Beijing's media reported, the FOCAC summit in September 2018 was "expected to align Africa's natural resources, population dividends and market potential with China's investment, equipment and technology."³⁷ Another restatement of the imperialist model.

Expanded Mission

While U.S. economic interests in Africa are waning, China's interests will continue to expand. Analysts believe that by 2020, nearly 65 percent of the oil consumed in China will have to be imported. China's oil dependency reached 45 percent in 2006 and 52 percent in 2014. It became the world's largest oil importer in 2015, passing the United States, whose imports were falling. In addition to fueling continued economic growth, Chinese demand is being reinforced by a rapidly growing private auto market and the government's policy of using low global oil prices to fill (and expand) its strategic petroleum reserve. Domestic oil production in China is also declining as the country lags behind the technological progress made in the United States. Chinese strategists are looking at ways to control its import dependence, from developing more protected oil resources in Central Asia that can be delivered by pipeline to meeting the demands of

the world's largest automobile market with electric cars.³⁸ Yet there seems to be little chance for oil imports to be brought down, and thus no way China's campaign to expand exports to pay for African oil can slacken.

China's heavy investment in Africa and dependence on its oil and other resources make it vulnerable. Political volatility and pushback against Beijing's greed, exploitation, and explicit rejection of human rights will raise the political price of its investments and risk drawing in substantial security forces.³⁹ A report released in August by EXX Africa Business Risk Intelligence found that

*China is actively positioning itself as a major supplier of arms to the African continent. Beyond the commercial objective of increasing sales of Chinese manufactured weapons and military equipment, China . . . seeks to control a greater share of the weapons trade in Africa in order to protect its extensive infrastructure investments on the continent. On the back of the One Belt, One Road initiative, China has made massive investments in East Africa, including railway lines, hydropower dams, and new port projects in countries such as Kenya, Sudan, and Ethiopia. Central to this strategy is China's military logistics base in Djibouti.*⁴⁰

According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, China exported more military equipment to Africa in the 2012–2016 period than the United States and France combined, though less than Russia, which is the largest provider of weapons to the continent.⁴¹ American policy has been to discourage African states from spending scarce resources on weapons when there are so many more important development goals. However, when African governments choose to improve their military capabilities, the United States should make a stronger effort to be the source of any desired equipment and the training that goes with it. This is a critical field of political competition with China and Russia.

USAFRICOM is well positioned to provide political support to African

national governments that want the confidence to constrain Chinese ambitions and guard their own freedoms. That USAFRICOM represents a whole-of-government approach, with personnel from more than 10 U.S. Government departments and agencies, including the State Department and USAID, gives it the depth and scope to partner with a multitude of local authorities. USAFRICOM can serve as a coordinated reinforcement to Ambassadors and Embassy staffs from multiple departments. This will require improved cooperation between the Department of Defense and State. Bureaucratic rivalry must lessen in the face of a growing common adversary playing for very high stakes.

While Africa needs economic investment and foreign development assistance, its leaders must be able to channel growth to benefit their own people and resist becoming victims of a new imperialism. The United States may not be able to confront China economically in Africa, but its military and other public agencies can compete with China in influence across the continent by presenting itself as a genuine friend of local authorities in their desire to maintain national independence and to root out the corruption Chinese money will breed. This is nation-building at the institutional level. While the American message in aid and training programs has long emphasized democracy and human rights (values the rejection of which Beijing tries to sell as an advantage in dealing with Africa), it must also build a sense of national consciousness and higher loyalty that can recognize and resist the pressures to abandon the common good to the benefit of foreign interests. A professionalism based on "honor, duty, country" over avarice.

The strong ties that USAFRICOM has made with African militaries based on facing common insurgent and smuggling threats can be broadened to face another truly existential danger. One example of USAFRICOM's success in developing professionalism in the ranks of Africa's armed forces is in Malawi, where it has partnered with the Malawi Defense Force Sergeants Major course. This course is

based on the Noncommissioned Officer Leadership Center of Excellence at Fort Bliss, Texas. First offered in 2014, it has produced over 240 African sergeants major, both male and female, from 18 African countries. Its July 2018 graduating class included 45 noncommissioned officers from Botswana, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.⁴² This kind of training is an important element in the human infrastructure of national independence.

China is also involved in Malawi, but in ways that present a stark contrast to American efforts. It has invested in the country's economic development, but to its own benefit. Research by Theodora C. Thindwa, a lecturer at Mzuzu University's Centre for Security Studies in Malawi, found "no relationship between investment levels and employment created. This suggests the importation of Chinese labor into Malawi, which leads to economic losses for the Malawian workforce."⁴³ China has provided help in some fields such as medicine, leading Thindwa to conclude, "China comes out as both a neo-colonialist in some areas and as a development actor in other areas." This kind of tension is common across the continent. The small African states cannot stand alone against China ("a force to reckon with in the 21st century," as Thindwa calls it). USAFRICOM can, however, provide enhanced capabilities and foster coalitions to strengthen their hands.

Even if Beijing is able to safeguard its material interests on the continent, it can still be prevented from expanding its political clout. And it must move its coveted supplies of energy and other resources from Africa through waters currently controlled by the U.S. and Indian navies, reinforced by other allies being pulled into alignment to contain China's ambitions. An asymmetrical strategy that supports local opposition to Beijing's imperialism and authoritarianism while controlling the commercial/logistical sea routes that link China and Africa is a cost-effective approach that puts USAFRICOM at the center of the action as America's lead element on the continent. JFQ

Notes

¹ Thomas D. Waldhauser, “National Security Challenges and U.S. Military Activities in Africa,” U.S. Africa Command Posture Statement Before the U.S. House Armed Service Committee (HASC), March 6, 2018, available at <<https://docs.house.gov/meetings/AS/AS00/20180306/106953/HHRG-115-AS00-Wstate-WaldhauserT-20180306.pdf>>.

² “Thornberry Returns from East Africa Tour,” HASC press release, March 29, 2018, available at <<https://armedservices.house.gov/news/press-releases/thornberry-returns-east-africa-tour>>.

³ Zeng Aiping, “Xi’s Africa Visit Fosters Shared Future,” *China Daily* (Beijing), July 26, 2018, available at <www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201807/26/WS5b5902afa31031a351e90293.html>.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ An Baijie, “Belt, Road Aligns with African Nations,” *China Daily* (Beijing), September 5, 2018, available at <www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201809/05/WS5b8ed947a310add14f38999a.html>.

⁶ Lina Benabdallah and Winslow Robertson, “Xi Jinping Pledged \$60 Billion for Africa: Where Will the Money Go?” *Washington Post*, September 17, 2018, available at <www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/09/17/xi-jinping-pledged-60-billion-for-africa-where-will-the-money-go/?utm_term=.2f3bcf8f54be>.

⁷ John J. Sullivan, “Remarks at the AGOA [African Growth and Opportunity Act] Forum,” Department of State, July 11, 2018, available at <<https://www.state.gov/s/d/2018/284018.htm>>.

⁸ “2012 National Trade Estimates Report on Foreign Trade Barriers,” Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, available at <www.ustr.gov/about-us/press-office/reports-and-publications/2012-1>.

⁹ Waldhauser, “National Security Challenges and U.S. Military Activities in Africa.”

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ See “Bureau of African Affairs: Our Mission,” Department of State, available at <www.state.gov/p/af/mission/index.htm>.

¹² “Fact Sheet: Trade Africa,” The White House, July 1, 2013, available at <<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/07/01/fact-sheet-trade-africa>>.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ President Barack Obama Speaks at the U.S.-Africa Business Forum, Mandarin Oriental Hotel, Washington, DC, August 5, 2014. The forum was part of a larger summit that brought some 50 African leaders to the U.S. capital.

¹⁵ “U.S. Trade in Goods by Country,” U.S. Bureau of the Census, available at <www.census.gov/foreign-trade/balance/index.html>. Data are given for the period 1997–2016 and includes regions as well as individual countries.

¹⁶ U.S. Chamber of Commerce, “Multi Industry Letter Regarding Opportunities for Growth in Africa,” October 17, 2011, available at <www.uschamber.com/issues/letters/2011/multi-industry-letter-regarding-opportunities-growth-africa>.

¹⁷ *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States: Sharpening the American Military’s Competitive Edge* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense [DOD], 2018), available at <<https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>>.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

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