

# BELT AND ROAD TO AFRICA: Strategic Considerations for NATO on China's Power-Plays in Africa

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## INTRODUCTION

At the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) 2010 Lisbon Summit, a new doctrine of *Active Engagement, Modern Defence* was introduced as a strategic concept for NATO defence. The summit and doctrine were intended to reaffirm NATO's commitment to collective defence, as outlined in Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty. More than that, it was intended to reorient NATO's priorities in a new and rapidly changing geopolitical context, wherein NATO was looking to take an active role in security and stability both within and beyond its traditional area of responsibility (AOR).<sup>1</sup> In adopting *Active Engagement, Modern Defence*, alliance members agreed that NATO had a responsibility to manage international crises that may impact the alliance, and to facilitate cooperative security with non-NATO countries, so as to mitigate international instability.<sup>2</sup>

More recently, NATO has been facing challenges with regards to both internal unity and external rivals. Days before the December 4, 2019 London Declaration was signed, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg acknowledged for the first time the challenges and opportunities posed by China's rise, while also noting that the People's Republic of China (PRC) has pivoted West toward traditional NATO AOR. Specifically, Stoltenberg remarked that: "China's growing influence and international policies present both opportunities and challenges that we need to address together as an alliance," and, "China is coming closer to us in the Arctic, in Africa, investing heavily in our infrastructure in Europe, in cyberspace."<sup>3</sup> While Stoltenberg also asserted that NATO did not want to make a rival out of China, it is difficult to ignore Chinese bullish behavior in the South China Sea,<sup>4</sup> their robust partnership with Russia,<sup>5</sup> NATO's former primary rival, as well as many suspected European and American cyber exploitations, accused of attempted intellectual property theft.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, with Italy having joined China's flagship economic and diplomatic program, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), there is an increased risk of factionalism within the NATO alliance itself.<sup>7</sup> While the relationship between the NATO alliance and a rising China is not inherently adversarial, it is one which

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<sup>1</sup> "Active Engagement, Modern Defence: Strategic Concept for the Defence and Security of the Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization."

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Agence France-Presse, "Nato to Formally Recognise China 'Challenges' for First Time."

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Kempe, "NATO's China Challenge."

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> van der Eijk and Pandita Gunavardana, "The Road That Divided the EU."

requires strategic consideration and analysis. This paper presents such an analysis with regards to China's growing influence in Africa, closer to the traditional NATO AOR, and how this influence may impact NATO in Africa and beyond.

China has sought to expand the scope of its engagements in Africa. For the past decade, the People's Republic of China has been increasing its economic engagements, military presence, and cultural proliferation within Africa, in a coordinated effort to increase Chinese power, prestige, and legitimacy abroad as a global leader. The past ten years have been primarily driven by economic statecraft—investment, aid, and development in Africa. This was largely driven by Xi Jinping's flagship economic and diplomatic strategy, the Belt and Road initiative (BRI).<sup>8</sup> Having vested economic interests overseas precipitates the necessity for overseas security. This Chinese military buildup in Africa is currently being observed, with increased Chinese military presence on the continent, through the establishment of China's first overseas military base in Djibouti,<sup>9</sup> UN peacekeeping operations,<sup>10</sup> and security partnerships with the African Union (AU).<sup>11</sup> Not only does this military presence in Africa serve to protect Chinese interests in Africa, but it also demonstrates to African leaders and the world that China is a global leader and a great power. Lastly, with the presence of Chinese economic and military elements comes a natural Chinese soft-power spillover.<sup>12</sup> This has been hastened by Chinese cultural initiatives such as scholarly exchanges,<sup>13</sup> the spread of Mandarin across Africa,<sup>14</sup> the 10,000 villages project,<sup>15</sup> and the presence and relative dominance of Chinese media bodies within Africa.<sup>16</sup> This soft-power projection helps create socio-cultural conditions more favorable for Chinese interests and suitable for Chinese firms.

Many policymakers have warned of the risks of Chinese engagement in Africa to NATO and U.S. strategic interests. One such risk is the hypothetical shifting of the world order from an environment favorable for liberal democracies to a more Sinocentric world, wherein China commands greater influence and respect in Africa as a world leader than NATO, and NATO-aligned countries. With this influence and respect comes a privileged position in trade, military partnership, and many other aspects of international relations. These observations, however, mischaracterize the objectives of Chinese engagement on the continent as inherently malicious. From this mischaracterization, NATO-aligned nations have been misguided in their response to China's growing impact in Africa. Viewing the struggle for influence on the continent as zero-sum, the U.S. in particular has responded to the Chinese engagement not with increased engagement of their own, but with an attempt to curtail and contain China in Africa. This strategy may be successful in containing Chinese economic, military, and cultural influence, but does nothing to address the decay of NATO-aligned influences in Africa and will likely lead to poorer economic outcomes for African countries as a result.

While not inherently detrimental to the NATO alliance, there remain strategic considerations for NATO regarding China's increased presence in Africa. Specifically, these considerations within

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<sup>8</sup> Morgan, "Can China's Economic Statecraft Win Soft Power in Africa?"

<sup>9</sup> Wang, "China's Strategy in Djibouti."

<sup>10</sup> Benabdallah, "China-Africa Military Ties Have Deepened. Here Are 4 Things to Know."

<sup>11</sup> Zheng, "Security Forum Shows Chinese Military's Route to Africa."

<sup>12</sup> Morgan, "Can China's Economic Statecraft Win Soft Power in Africa?"

<sup>13</sup> Breeze and Moore, "China Has Overtaken the US and UK as the Top Destination for Anglophone African Students."

<sup>14</sup> de Vries, "Kenyans Are Saying 'Ni Hao' as Chinese Language Learning Booms"

<sup>15</sup> Mu and Saliu, "Chinese Company Completes China-Aided Digital TV Project for 1,000 Nigerian Villages."

<sup>16</sup> Kaimen, "China Has Conquered Kenya."

the Sino-African context include understanding better China's economic statecraft, military presence and ambitions, and exertion of soft power. This paper will examine these considerations at length and argue that the objective of this engagement is to present China to Africa and the world as a great power, capable of global leadership. In addition, this paper will theorize the potential high cost to NATO and the West of inaction, and present recommendations based on this analysis.

## ECONOMIC STATECRAFT

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In November 2006, the inaugural international summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) was held in Beijing. It was attended by the heads of state or government of the People's Republic of China and 48 African countries.<sup>17</sup> At the Beijing summit, former President Hu Jintao announced the creation of the China-Africa Development Fund, with initial funding of \$1 billion USD, and a planned increase to \$5 billion in the coming years.<sup>18</sup> The establishment of the FOCAC and the announcement of the development funds foreshadowed what was to come: greatly increased Chinese economic activity in Africa over the coming decades. This increased economic engagement has also yielded reputational gains; a third FOCAC summit was held in 2018, which was attended by nearly twice as many African heads of state or government than the similarity timed UN general assembly (51-27).<sup>19</sup> Many of the new Chinese economic activities in Africa are constituent components of China's broader strategy for international engagement and trade, which would in 2013 be rebranded as China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This strategy, particularly in Africa, is intended to reposition China as a global leader and an agent of responsible global development within the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### The Debt-Trap Narrative

China's increased economic activities in Africa have received varied responses from African countries and individuals, as well as external observers. Western analysts tend to purport that Chinese economic activity in Africa is predatory, and that it promotes loans which entrap the recipient country, allowing China to leverage this debt to extract African resources at extremely lowered costs, or annex territory and host country state assets such as the Sri Lankan port at Hambantota. Moreover, they often conflate and oversimplify Chinese investment, aid, and trade in Africa, while in practice each of these models of economic engagement yield different soft-power results.<sup>20</sup>

This "debt-trap" narrative, while compelling for Western governments who may view Chinese economic statecraft in Africa as detrimental for their own interests in the region, has been largely debunked among scholarly circles but persists in popular media.<sup>21</sup> Criticisms of BRI as a debt-trap have been especially popular with American politicians (Mike Pence, 2018; John Bolton, 2018, etc.), while a former prominent U.S. diplomat in China, Chas Freeman, dismissed it as a "snappy phrase invented by an Indian polemicist."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> "Declaration of the Beijing Summit Of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (Full Text)."

<sup>18</sup> Zhou, "CAD Fund to Boost Footprint in Africa."

<sup>19</sup> Dahir, "Twice as Many African Presidents Made It to China's Africa Summit than to the UN General Assembly."

<sup>20</sup> Morgan, "Can China's Economic Statecraft Win Soft Power in Africa?"

<sup>21</sup> Olander and van Staden, "The Blurry Lines Between Chinese Aid and Investment in Africa."

<sup>22</sup> Ma, "Assessing China's Most Comprehensive Response to the 'Debt Trap.'"

To this point, Chinese debt holdings in Sri Lanka accounted for only 10% of total Sri Lankan debt at the time of the Chinese takeover of the port at Hambantota; hardly enough to constitute a debt-trap.<sup>23</sup> Of this debt, 61.5% was preferential or concessional loans lower than international market interest rates.<sup>24</sup> In Africa, Chinese debt only accounted for 1.8% of the continent's overall external debt from 2000-2016, most of which was concentrated in infrastructure.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, many African perspectives on Chinese economic statecraft on the continent are not in line with the debt-trap narrative. Data from the Afrobarometer Round 6 survey (2016) show that Chinese aid and state-led infrastructure development projects are viewed positively in the regions in which they operate.<sup>26</sup> In addition, data from the same Round 6 Afrobarometer survey shows that in Uganda, 57% of those polled believe China has a positive impact on Uganda, compared to 7% of those who believe it to be negative. This is the fundamental mischaracterization of Chinese economic statecraft in the West: that it is entirely exploitative, to the ultimate detriment of the host country's economy, and that it erodes Chinese soft-power in the region through its unpopularity. In fact, the opposite is often true<sup>27</sup> with China using its economic statecraft as a method for generating soft power on the continent in addition to cultural programs and initiatives.

That is not to say that Chinese economic statecraft in Africa does not pose security and broader strategic considerations for African nations as well as NATO and the West, because it certainly does. Chinese economic statecraft on the continent is linked directly to their security interests in the region. According to the Chinese Communist Party's 2015 Africa Policy Paper, China hopes to promote "mutual assistance in security", an increase in the "representation and voice" of non-Western countries, and "solidarity and coordination in international affairs."<sup>28</sup> Additionally, the massive scope of Chinese economic statecraft in Africa is itself a consideration that NATO should consider when engaging with African countries and with China in the African context. Currently, China funds one-in-five infrastructure projects on the continent and is constructing one-in-three.<sup>29</sup> As of November 2019, Beijing has signed memoranda of understanding with 40 African countries to fund and construct infrastructure projects. While none of these factors are intrinsically in opposition to the goals or defence remit of the NATO alliance, there are still implications of a more Sino-centric Africa, or an Africa in which most countries share security or geopolitical interests with China.

The debt-trap narrative focuses heavily on China's ability to extract assets after a host state cannot repay its debts. However, two aspects of these economic deals requiring greater analysis and deserving of heavier scrutiny are the sustainability and transparency of the deals themselves. China has the potential to help Africa close its infrastructure gap with the median of the rest of the developing world, a step that the World Bank estimates will boost GDP per capita by 1.7 percentage points per year.<sup>30</sup> However, this is only possible if China engages without nurturing a dependency on its financial engagements, through reduced deal opacity and

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<sup>23</sup> Morgan, "Can China's Economic Statecraft Win Soft Power in Africa?"

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> "2018年8月31日外交部发言人华春莹主持例行记者会 (Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying's Regular Press Conference on August 31, 2018)."

<sup>26</sup> Morgan, "Can China's Economic Statecraft Win Soft Power in Africa?"

<sup>27</sup> Afrobarometer "China's Influence: Positive or Negative."

<sup>28</sup> Morgan, "Can China's Economic Statecraft Win Soft Power in Africa?"

<sup>29</sup> Chaudhury, "Kenya Risks Losing Port to China Casting Shadow over India's Outreach in Eastern Africa."

<sup>30</sup> Pham, Salam Bello, and Barry, "Chinese Aid and Investment Are Good for Africa."

strengthened debt sustainability regulations.<sup>31</sup> Otherwise, Chinese economic statecraft in Africa does run the risk of becoming a “new form of imperialism”, as described by Lamido Sanusi, the former governor of the Nigerian Central Bank (and now emir of Kano),<sup>32</sup> and as warned by hawkish Western observers. The economic outcomes for host countries, the reputational gains for China, and the strategic implications for NATO-aligned countries depend on the type of agreement: whether aid grants, concessional loans, or commercial investments, plus the agreements’ relative financial sustainability.

### **Aid and Investment**

The distinction between Chinese aid and investment is key to understanding the nuances of China’s economic statecraft in Africa. Particularly, understanding that China does not follow the same rules when providing aid and investment as liberal-democratic-capitalist states. The nature of the Chinese economy is one of integration, and blurred lines between private and public holdings.<sup>33</sup> This makes it difficult to resolutely claim, for example, that “China is building a port in Kenya.” Once examined more closely, examples show that Chinese economic activities often overlap with regards to private/public sector involvement. In an example provided by Cobus van Staden, Senior China-Africa Researcher at the South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA) in Johannesburg, a given Chinese project in Africa may be funded by China Exim Bank, constructed by a Chinese state-owned company, and intended to attract further commercial investment. In this way, a project may be both public and private, forwarding both state and individualistic political-economic goals.

In short, aid can be classified as any funding from the Chinese government to an African government in the form of grants or (more often) concessional loans.<sup>34</sup> Aid typically has some sort of developmental or political aim. Concessional loans are typically established with extended timelines and/or low interest rates, providing more favorable conditions for borrowing than a market loan.<sup>35</sup> Chinese aid, characterized by funding from the Chinese government to an African government, is generally viewed positively by the African communities in which they operate.<sup>36</sup> Investment is in the form of foreign direct investment, or as it is referred to in China, overseas direct investment.<sup>37</sup> Investment typically has a commercial motive and is typically led by private companies with the objective of turning a profit or creating the circumstances for profit in the future. For example, the Mombasa Container Terminal (Berth 19) of the Mombasa port was funded by China Exim Bank at concessional rates, constructed by the China Road and Bridge Corporation (CRBC), and intends to increase both Chinese and foreign business investment in the region. CRBC is a subsidiary of the fortune 500 company China Communications Construction Company (CCCC), which is a majority state-owned enterprise (SOE) and is publicly traded.<sup>38</sup> Chinese overseas direct investment, specifically investments from small scale, private Chinese firms without strong state oversight, are generally viewed less positively within African communities than state aid.<sup>39</sup> For most NATO-aligned countries, aid and

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Olander and van Staden, “The Rise of Chinese Private Sector Investment in Africa.”

<sup>34</sup> Morgan, “Can China’s Economic Statecraft Win Soft Power in Africa?”

<sup>35</sup> Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. “OECD Glossary of Statistical Terms - Concessional Loans Definition,”

<sup>36</sup> Morgan, “Can China’s Economic Statecraft Win Soft Power in Africa?”

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Bootwalla, “Shadow of Debt over Mombasa Port.”

<sup>39</sup> Morgan, “Can China’s Economic Statecraft Win Soft Power in Africa?”

investment are entirely separate concepts. In the Chinese context, these concepts are interlinked, which is the source of much confusion and generalization in Western analyses.<sup>40</sup>

Most of China's infrastructure projects abroad are executed by SOEs such as CRBC and CCCC with strong state oversight. While not technically government bodies, SOEs have strong connections to the government, and may be sympathetic to state goals.<sup>41</sup> The use of SOEs and their public/private sector overlap often creates regulatory challenges for both China and the host country.<sup>42</sup> Additionally, SOEs conducting aid or investment in Africa are often subject to oversight by Chinese Embassies and Economic and Commercial Counselor (ECC) offices, adding another layer of Chinese state accountability, and thereby making the commercial enterprises more sympathetic and in-line with the goals of the Chinese state.<sup>43</sup>

### **Debt Sustainability**

Chief among the grievances held by Western spectators and governments on China's BRI is the perceived lack of sustainability of the loan agreements. This conclusion assumes that China's lending practices are predatory, designed to incite host-country bankruptcy, thereby creating a debt-trap. However, upon further examination, the conclusion that the BRI overseas economic statecraft precipitates monetary vulnerability in its otherwise financially stable host countries is not supported by the research currently available.

Two recent reports analyse the debt-sustainability implications of BRI projects on African countries. The first was published by the Centre for Global Development and estimated the immediate marginal impact of BRI projects on host countries' debt to GDP ratio.<sup>44</sup> The second was published by China Africa Research Initiative at Johns Hopkins University (SAIS-CARI), and examined African countries' debts to China against their national debt profiles.<sup>45</sup> The results of both of these reports indicated that the percentage of national debt in BRI countries held by China is relatively low,<sup>46</sup> with the exceptions of Zambia and Djibouti, where China holds a significant portion of external debt. Additionally, the reports concluded in consensus that while debt-sustainability problems are likely to arise within the BRI, these problems are unlikely to be wide-scale.<sup>47</sup> More recently, the World Bank released an assessment of debt sustainability and fiscal risks under BRI, accounting for the potential income from BRI-related investments. The results of the report were that only two of the participating BRI countries may experience increased debt vulnerability due to BRI.<sup>48</sup>

Seemingly in response to the heavy international criticism of China's debt financing through BRI, the Ministry of Finance of People's Republic of China released a new BRI Debt-

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<sup>40</sup> Olander and van Staden, "The Blurry Lines Between Chinese Aid and Investment in Africa."

<sup>41</sup> Morgan, "Can China's Economic Statecraft Win Soft Power in Africa?"

<sup>42</sup> Zhang, Anran, and Wei Yin. "Chinese State-Owned Enterprises in Africa: Always a Black-and-White Role?"

<sup>43</sup> Morgan, "Can China's Economic Statecraft Win Soft Power in Africa?"

<sup>44</sup> Hurley, Morris, and Portelance, "Examining the Debt Implications of the Belt and Road Initiative from a Policy Perspective."

<sup>45</sup> Eom, Brautigam, and Benabdallah, "The Path Ahead: The 7th Forum on China-Africa Cooperation."

<sup>46</sup> Ma, "Assessing China's Most Comprehensive Response to the 'Debt Trap.'"

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Bandiera and Tsiropoulos, A Framework to Assess Debt Sustainability and Fiscal Risks under the Belt and Road Initiative.

Sustainability Framework in April 2019.<sup>49</sup> This document was released in English, likely to directly appeal to Western critics, and details the new framework by which Beijing determines debt eligibility in BRI countries. It is in-line with IMF/World Bank debt-financing regulations, with one large exception: if a project is deemed commercially viable, it may still be approved even if the host country is currently experiencing or likely to experience debt distress.<sup>50</sup>

*In general, a country rated at “low risk” or “moderate risk” means that the debt is sustainable. However, it should be noted that an assessment for a country as “high risk” of debt distress, or even “in debt distress”, does not automatically mean that debt is unsustainable in a forward-looking sense. In general, when a country is likely to meet its current and future repayment obligations, its PPG external debt and overall public debt are sustainable.<sup>51</sup>*

This difference from IMF/World Bank regulations has the potential to create significant debt-distress for countries already heavily indebted to China, such as Djibouti.<sup>52</sup> With China's sharp increase in global debt financing, they have indicated their intention to position themselves as a world leader and responsible economic actor. The newly released BRI Debt Sustainability Framework has also contributed to China's image as a responsible lender. The BRI has the potential to bridge the African infrastructure gap, thereby increasing the quality of life for millions of Africans—a move which would likely increase stability on the continent, in alignment with NATO's goals. However, without international regulation and further guarantees of truly sustainable (environmentally, economically, socially)<sup>53</sup> debt-financing, China faces significant challenges in positioning itself as a responsible global economic power, and may create greater instability as an unforeseen by-product of African economic statecraft.

### **Washington Consensus and Beijing Consensus**

China's approach to international development and economic statecraft differs in practice from NATO-aligned nations through their use of blended public/private interests, state owned enterprises, and loosened debt-sustainability regulations. However, there is a broader contextual difference in approach to development financing between China and NATO powers: this being the post-colonial context, and the difference between the Washington Consensus and the Beijing Consensus.

The Washington Consensus emerged as the American development model promoted through the Bretton Woods Institutions. It was characterised by liberal economic reforms, focusing on privatization, price stability, and a strong free market.<sup>54</sup> These reforms were imposed through Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs), through which developing countries had to apply for Western loans and aid. In contrast, the Beijing Consensus was termed to characterize the

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<sup>49</sup> “Debt Sustainability Framework for Participating Countries of the Belt and Road Initiative (一带一路”债务可持续性分析框架 (英文版)).”

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> “Debt Sustainability Framework for Participating Countries of the Belt and Road Initiative (一带一路”债务可持续性分析框架 (英文版)).”

<sup>52</sup> Olander and van Staden, “China Says It Believes in Debt Sustainability, Just Not the Way Everyone Else Does.”

<sup>53</sup> Ma, “Assessing China’s Most Comprehensive Response to the ‘Debt Trap.’”

<sup>54</sup> Jarso, “The Beijing Consensus versus the Washington Consensus.”

Chinese development model: a strong commitment to no political conditionalities on financing, and no claims of universal values or reforms.<sup>55</sup>

These two differing approaches are reflective of an attempt by Beijing to not repeat the development mistakes made by the West.<sup>56</sup> Whereas historically, NATO-aligned powers have invested millions of dollars into African development without compensatory improvements to African quality of life,<sup>57</sup> China is attempting to spur greater development via heavy investments in infrastructure and commercially viable construction projects. This is also in contrast with the traditional Western role, focusing more heavily on capacity building and education funding, as opposed to hard developments of infrastructure and construction.<sup>58</sup>

A final and important consideration to weigh regarding the difference between NATO-aligned and Chinese development approaches is the perspective of the African countries themselves, and the benefits of each development regime. This is summed up well by former democratically elected President of Senegal, Abdoulaye Wade, in an opinion piece about working with China versus working with the World Bank: "when bureaucracy and senseless red tape impede our ability to act—and when poverty persists while international functionaries drag their feet—African leaders have an obligation to opt for swifter solutions."<sup>59</sup>

In conclusion, China's economic statecraft in Africa and rise as a global leader poses several key considerations for the NATO alliance and NATO-aligned states. Much of the current discourse on China's economic activities and debt financing have been coloured by political objectives from both Chinese and Western perspectives. In truth, the massive increase in Chinese development funding to the continent pose both strategic and security implications for China, African countries, and NATO. An attempt to align Chinese and African security interests to promote "solidarity and coordination in international affairs"<sup>60</sup> is indicative of a broader Chinese objective to establish itself as a global leader and align international goals with that of the PRC. These economic activities in coordination with military and cultural initiatives in Africa have the potential to create an Africa that is more sympathetic to Chinese interests, and a more Sino-centric world order.

## MILITARY COOPERATION

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On July 9th, 2019, Rwandan troops marched in unison through Kigali's historic Amahoro Stadium to commemorate 25 years since the Rwandan genocide. World leaders from seven African countries were in attendance, including the presidents of Zimbabwe, Namibia, the Central African Republic, Somalia, Botswana, Sierra Leone, and Togo, in addition to the Rwandan President Paul Kagame. Remarkably, however, orders were not being given in English, French, or Kinyarwanda. Instead, orders were given in Mandarin.<sup>61</sup> For the first time, Rwanda's most important military parade was conducted using Chinese-style drills and slogans.

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Olander and van Staden, "The Blurry Lines Between Chinese Aid and Investment in Africa."

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Morgan, "Can China's Economic Statecraft Win Soft Power in Africa?"

<sup>59</sup> Wade, "Time for the West to Practise What It Preaches."

<sup>60</sup> Morgan, "Can China's Economic Statecraft Win Soft Power in Africa?"

<sup>61</sup> Zheng, "Rwandan Troops Trained by Chinese Mark 25th Anniversary of Liberation."

This is no coincidence; the Rwandan army (and many others across Africa) has been built upon largely Chinese military hardware, including a PCL-09 self-propelled howitzer system, a favored People's Liberation Army (PLA) artillery system.<sup>62</sup> President Kagame, formerly the chairman of the African Union, often speaks highly of Chinese economic and military presence on the continent, referring to the narrative surrounding the so-called "debt-trap diplomacy" as "anxiety by the West relating to China's involvement in Africa".<sup>63</sup>

These Chinese style drills, and the perspectives expressed by President Kagame and other African leaders, are indicative of a broader shift in the way that African states view China within a global leadership context. Increasingly, African leadership is looking to China for a new way forward, unaffiliated with the "first" or "second worlds" of the cold war era. This is a position upon which China and the PLA have capitalized. Moreover, with the chief ally of the NATO alliance (the U.S.) in strategic retreat in Africa,<sup>64</sup> countries have been forced to look elsewhere. This is an advantage which China has not squandered, as evident by their largely increased African military presence, with respect to capacity building operations, peacekeeping roles, and overseas power projection.

### **Blue-Water Ambitions**

Since the 12th Chinese Communist Party Congress in 2013, President Xi Jinping has expressed his ambition for the Chinese People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) to become a great maritime power. Chinese grand strategy as it relates to security and defense has shifted from an inverted pursuit of stability at home to an extraverted ambition to project Chinese power and secure Chinese interests abroad. To this point, Xi's speech to the 12th Party Congress was titled: "Let us continue focusing on maritime affairs and spare no efforts to secure more achievements in the construction of a maritime great power," and featured calls to develop a blue-water capacity, in order to both protect Chinese interests and project Chinese power abroad.<sup>65</sup> These objectives were confirmed with the public release of China's Military Strategy by the State Council Information Office, citing two of the main strategic objectives for China's military as: "To safeguard China's security and interests in new domains; [and] To safeguard the security of China's overseas interests."<sup>66</sup> China's goal to position themselves as a global leader depends on its ability to project power globally, and therefore maintain a blue-water navy.

In 2015, President Xi delivered a speech to the United Nations General Assembly signaling the next step in China's growing global leadership role. Xi announced that China would: establish a 10-year US \$1 billion China-UN peace and development fund; provide US\$100 million of free military assistance to the African Union; and, support the establishment of the African Standby Force and the African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crisis.<sup>67</sup> This signaled a major

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Benabdallah, "China-Africa Military Ties Have Deepened. Here Are 4 Things to Know." ; French, "How to Fix America's Absentee Diplomacy in Africa."

<sup>65</sup> "Xi Jinping: "Let us continue focusing on maritime affairs and spare no efforts to secure more achievements in the construction of a maritime great power. (习近平：进一步关心海洋认识海洋经略海洋，推动海洋强国建设不断取得新成就)"

<sup>66</sup> "China's Military Strategy."

<sup>67</sup> Xi, "Working Together to Forge a New Partnership of Win-Win Cooperation and Create a Community of Shared Future for Mankind."

increase in Chinese investment in and cooperation with the African Union, specifically within a security context, which is a sector formerly dominated by Russia and NATO-aligned nations.<sup>68</sup>

Chinese UN Peacekeeping contributions have risen substantially in the past 10 years, primarily in the UN missions in Mali and Sudan. Not only is China providing medical personnel and engineers, but now also combat troops for the first time.<sup>69</sup> This is especially significant given the fragile security environments in each of these countries at the time of the missions. China's willingness to provide combat troops to UN missions in unstable environments underscores their desire to be perceived as a responsible world leader.

Through these examples, it is clear that China has the ambition to position itself as a leader in global security, particularly within the African context. They have articulated the necessity for a blue-water navy to support objectives of overseas power projection and asset protection through President Xi's 2013 and 2015 speeches. Given the massive Chinese economic investment in Africa, this will require more bases and greater military presence across Africa. In light of these ambitions, the strategic consideration for NATO remains whether China will restrict its military role in Africa to defending its own economic and security interests, or if it will push beyond in order to boost its image as a great power—and if the latter, just how far will China push?

### **Integrated Approach to Defence Partnerships**

China has taken an integrated approach to defence partnerships and cooperation in Africa. Specifically, they have attempted to harmonize the delivery of their commercial and military partnerships across Africa;<sup>70</sup> where economic interests lie, military interests follow. Notable examples include the construction of China's first overseas naval base in Djibouti,<sup>71</sup> and the establishment of the China-Africa Defense and Security Forum.<sup>72</sup>

On August 1st, 2017, China opened its first military base beyond its borders in Djibouti. The base was completed only two months after the opening of the new Chinese commercial port at Doraleh, only a few minutes drive from the new base.<sup>73</sup> Doraleh is a key port for the BRI, China's massive plan to re-route international trade toward China, and a key port in a strategically important region of the world warrants a security presence to defend it. Observers speculate that the PLAN base and the port at Doraleh represent a strategy to use economic influence in Africa to advance Chinese security interests.<sup>74</sup> Moreover, from this new vantage point in Djibouti, China is able to monitor one of the busiest maritime routes on Earth: the Gulf of Aden, through which 12.5 to 20 percent of global trade passes every year. NATO and US analysts have also expressed concerns over the proximity of the new Chinese base to the US military Camp Lemonnier, which sits 8 miles away.<sup>75</sup> Nevertheless, China's strategy in Djibouti is a component of a larger plan to justify the expansion of Chinese military presence in the Gulf of Aden and East Africa. The US-based Council on Foreign Relations describes this circumstance:

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<sup>68</sup> Duchâtel, Gowan, and Lafont Rapnouil, "Into Africa: China's Global Security Shift."

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Wang, "China's Strategy in Djibouti."

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Zheng, "Security Forum Shows Chinese Military's Route to Africa."

<sup>73</sup> Wang, "China's Strategy in Djibouti."

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

*The BRI extended the maritime silk road through the Indian Ocean onto the African continent, thereby justifying the presence of a Chinese security enterprise to protect economic interests and maintain open commercial channels. At the same time, a more secure environment, especially with the military base in Djibouti, will conceivably attract more commercial entities to both land and sea.*<sup>76</sup>

Beyond China's military role via UN missions, the base in Djibouti allows China to host joint training exercises with allies across the continent, such as in Rwanda during the genocide commemoration. While NATO allies have scaled back their African operations,<sup>77</sup> China continues to strengthen partnerships with the AU and with individual African countries. In July 2019, China hosted the week-long China-Africa Security Forum, hosting defence ministers and military leaders from across Africa to discuss ways through which the Chinese and African countries' militaries may partner more closely.<sup>78</sup> In November 2019, NATO announced closer collaboration with the AU moving forward, citing "closer practical and political cooperation between the two organisations."<sup>79</sup> This deal replaces an earlier 2014 agreement and could be a sign that the NATO alliance is taking action to strengthen relations with the AU in response to this close Chinese partnership.

African researchers from the South African Institute of International Affairs in Johannesburg explain that the security/defence relationship between China and Africa is not one sided on the part of the Chinese. Instead, they argue that the push for greater Chinese military presence has been driven partially by the African countries' themselves, and that they were "eager for the training and intelligence sources cooperation with Beijing could bring."<sup>80</sup>

China aims to establish itself as a great power that contributes to global security, and to protect its interests abroad. Specifically, they have sought to increase the scope of their defence remit in Africa, by leveraging economic influence garnered through the BRI to advance military interests, such as the construction of China's first overseas base in Djibouti. China has also attempted to frame itself within Africa as a great power and a global leader through defence funding and capacity building with the AU and with individual African allies.

While not inherently detrimental to NATO interests on the continent, there are strategic considerations stemming from these ambitions for individual NATO allies and for the NATO alliance. One, that China hopes to supersede the dominant position of NATO-aligned nations as partial guarantors of security and stability across Africa—a role which was established through NATO's doctrine of *Active Engagement, Modern Defence*, and one which is already slipping, due to the strategic retreat of the US and Europe in this space.<sup>81</sup> Two, that China seeks to accomplish this not through pushing the West out of this role, but by filling a gap already created by NATO's absence. NATO should not ignore China's advance across Africa, but also should not view military influence on the continent as zero-sum.<sup>82</sup> African countries have much to gain from the combined efforts of China and NATO, and for NATO, cooperation is the ultimate objective on the continent over conflict.

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Cooper et al., "Pentagon Eyes Africa Drawdown as First Step in Global Troop Shift."

<sup>78</sup> Zheng, "Security Forum Shows Chinese Military's Route to Africa."

<sup>79</sup> NATO, "Cooperation with the African Union."

<sup>80</sup> Zheng, "Security Forum Shows Chinese Military's Route to Africa."

<sup>81</sup> Cooper et al., "Pentagon Eyes Africa Drawdown as First Step in Global Troop Shift."

<sup>82</sup> Pham, Salam Bello, and Barry, "Chinese Aid and Investment Are Good for Africa."

## SOFT POWER

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With the increased Chinese economic footprint in Africa, and thereby increased Chinese economic assets, a Chinese security presence has developed to secure these assets. Naturally, with this burgeoning Chinese population on the continent, cultural spillover has occurred. This spillover effect can be seen in Johannesburg's Cyrildene Chinatown, Casablanca's Quartier chinois, and other clusters of cultural diasporas across the world. However, China's cultural engagement with Africa is not limited to spillover from the diaspora. On the contrary, China has made very conscious and deliberate moves to increase its African soft power since 2000. Through assertive media conglomerate policy, educational outreach, inter alia, China has expanded the scope and capability of its soft power in Africa. In addition, China not only utilizes cultural initiatives to pursue its soft power goals, but economic as well (aid, investment).<sup>83</sup> The question for NATO remains: to what end?

With the establishment of the FOCAC in 2000, it had become clear that China hoped to establish itself as a global leader. One with which African states—many considered “third world”—could align themselves. Today, that legacy rings true, and Chinese and African cultural ties deepen each year. Facing a strategic retreat by NATO-aligned powers led by the United States, the soft power of NATO countries on the continent has waned. Meanwhile, China has risen to fill this gap and ensure that this and the next generation of African leaders view China positively. While economic statecraft and military partnership on the continent constitute much of China's “short-term” strategy for Africa, their cultivation of soft power and cultural familiarity is the long-term. With Africa's population being the youngest in the world, and with the potential for a future mass economic boom across a 1.2 billion person market,<sup>84</sup> China's soft-power investments have many analysts calling Africa “China's Second Continent”.

### Chinese Media Conglomerates

StarTimes, a privately owned, Beijing-based media firm, has been sweeping across Africa since 2002. Since then, it has overhauled much of the continent's broadcast infrastructure, and now broadcasts Chinese programming to many African homes at relatively low cost.<sup>85</sup> For example, the cheapest StarTimes package in Kenya, called “Novo”, costs approximately \$4 USD per month, and includes some Kenyan and Chinese channels. In Kenya, StarTimes has just over 1.4 million subscribers, which accounts for over half of Kenya's pay-tv subscriptions.<sup>86</sup> Currently, StarTimes has a presence in over 30 African countries, with over 10 million subscribers across the continent.<sup>87</sup> Some Western observers claim that StarTimes is broadcasting a steady stream of Chinese “propaganda” to African homes, through government-censored Chinese programming.<sup>88</sup> They argue that this is a method for the Chinese to generate cultural familiarity, and create an environment more sympathetic to Chinese interests on the continent. One reason for these accusations is that StarTimes, while privately owned, receives significant backing from the Chinese government, like many large-scale private Chinese firms.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Morgan, “Can China's Economic Statecraft Win Soft Power in Africa?”

<sup>84</sup> Marsh, “How China Is Slowly Expanding Its Power in Africa, One TV Set at a Time.”

<sup>85</sup> Kaimen, “China Has Conquered Kenya.”

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Marsh, “How China Is Slowly Expanding Its Power in Africa, One TV Set at a Time.”

<sup>88</sup> Kaimen, “China Has Conquered Kenya.”

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

At the Johannesburg FOCAC Summit in 2015, the Chinese government pledged to provide satellite television access for 10,000 African villages.<sup>90</sup> Conspicuously, satellite dishes and large Chinese flags painted on the sides of shops and homes can be seen across rural Africa (primarily East Africa) as a result of this initiative, titled the Access to Satellite TV for 10,000 African Villages project (known colloquially as the 10 000 villages project). These services, however, were made possible through Chinese state funding, and delivered through StarTimes.<sup>91</sup> This further confounds the already blurred lines between Chinese private and public sector investment and aid in Africa. In addition, the 10,000 villages project, while undoubtedly improving rural African quality of life, is a Chinese state-lead push to increase access to largely Chinese controlled media programming beyond its borders. This project, like the broader Chinese push for increased media presence in Africa, has faced criticism from Western analysts, citing it as a method for the Chinese government to increase the range of its propaganda.

Perhaps more critically from a collective security perspective, by funneling these development funds for 10,000 villages through Chinese company StarTimes, China has ensured that StarTimes is poised to dominate the African market of 1.2 billion people.<sup>92</sup> In Zambia and Kenya, StarTimes has such a dominant position in the satellite and telecommunications industries that local and Western observers speculate that the company could black-out millions of televisions, if it so desired.<sup>93</sup> These efforts each have the same objective: the development of an African socio-cultural environment more sympathetic to Chinese interests. Dani Madrid-Morales, a doctoral fellow at the City University of Hong Kong who was interviewed by the L.A. Times, explained that StarTimes program selection is quite deliberate, and that content is specifically chosen to showcase "an urban China, a growing China, a noncontroversial view of China."<sup>94</sup>

Beyond the ideological component of StarTimes' activities in Africa, it is irrefutable that they are improving the quality of life for millions of Africans by providing access to digital telecommunications infrastructure and programming. However, this quality of life comes with the cost of mass-projected Chinese state sponsored messaging in many African households. This state-sponsored media proliferation across Africa is not only being delivered through StarTimes. During 2018 interviews with The Globe and Mail, journalists and ex-journalists at the Africa branch of CCTV, the Chinese state television monopoly that owns China International Television, expressed concerns over censorship and Chinese interests in media.<sup>95</sup> Moreover, in 2013, China International Television and the China-Africa Development Fund, both Chinese government organizations, purchased 20 percent of one of the most powerful media groups in South Africa.<sup>96</sup> This media group (Independent News and Media) owns and operates daily newspapers in each of South Africa's major cities. Both CCTV and Chinese state news agency Xinhua are broadcast via StarTimes in Africa.

## Education

In addition to the presence in Africa of abundant and cheap Chinese media programming, China has an even more effective soft-power tool. This tool is education: the proliferation of Mandarin

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<sup>90</sup> Mu and Saliu, "Chinese Company Completes China-Aided Digital TV Project for 1,000 Nigerian Villages."

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Marsh, "How China Is Slowly Expanding Its Power in Africa, One TV Set at a Time."

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Kaimen, "'China Has Conquered Kenya.'"

<sup>95</sup> York, "Why China Is Making a Big Play to Control Africa's Media."

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

on the continent, the growing presence of Confucius Institutes, the availability of Chinese scholarships for young Africans, and the admission of more African students to Chinese universities. These Chinese educational offerings have proven to be effective soft-power tools in the short-term and promise to yield even greater results in the future. Africa is the world's youngest continent, with 41% of Africans under the age of 14 in 2015 according to the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa.<sup>97</sup> The heightened presence of Chinese educational incentives directed at African youth will reap rewards for Chinese soft power on the continent in 15-20 years, when these youth have become influencers in their own local communities and economies.

### **Confucius Institutes**

One method by which China is proliferating Mandarin and Chinese culture across Africa is through the establishment of over 50 Confucius Institutes across the continent.<sup>98</sup> These Confucius Institutes are funded and built by the Chinese government, who controls the curriculum. In Dakar, the Confucius Institute was recently renovated, costing the Chinese government US \$2.5 million.<sup>99</sup> The new Institute hosts 500 students with facilities including seven lecture halls, a multimedia hall, an amphitheatre, and a library.<sup>100</sup>

A student at the Dakar Confucius Institute was interviewed by the South China Morning Post, and explained: "In the beginning, we thought we were totally different from the Chinese. But we actually have a lot of things in common." Therein lies the key takeaway for NATO of this analysis: that cultural familiarity, spread through Confucius Institutes and funded wholly by the Chinese government, has the potential to create an African generation more sympathetic to Chinese interests. That is not to say that the proliferation of culture and education by the Chinese is in any way malicious or to the detriment of the NATO alliance, but rather that the Chinese government can see the value in these programs, and that there is likewise value in engagement for NATO allied countries.

In 16 years, China's state-run organization Hanban has opened over 515 Confucius Institutes across the world.<sup>101</sup> Although, some analysts claim that the institutes provide poor teaching quality, and that the true emphasis of Confucius Institutes in Africa are in soft-power projection. Falk Hartig, a postdoctoral researcher at Goethe University with a special interest in Confucius Institutes and China's public diplomacy, was quoted in Quartz Africa saying: "It's much more about numbers: big student numbers, and how many scholarships were given out to how many African countries."<sup>102</sup>

### **Scholarship Programs and Chinese University Recruitment**

In addition to educational offerings through Confucius Institutes, China is offering scholarships and educational programs directed at African students. As the US makes cuts to funding for international scholarship through the Fulbright US student program, China is putting more funding toward international scholarship opportunities than ever before.

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<sup>97</sup> United Nations, ed. *The Demographic Profile of African Countries*.

<sup>98</sup> Einashe, "Will Chinese Be Africa's Lingua Franca?"

<sup>99</sup> Einashe, "Will Chinese Be Africa's Lingua Franca?"

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Heever, "Confucius Institutes across Africa Are Nurturing Generations of Pro-China Mandarin Speakers."

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

Chinese scholarship programs directed at attracting African students to Chinese universities have been increasingly prioritized by the CCP. The 2018 FOCAC in Beijing included the announcement of 50,000 scholarships and 50,000 training opportunities to Africans over the next three years by Chinese President Xi Jinping, 66 per cent more than were awarded in 2015.<sup>103</sup> Analysts view this move as both an attempt to mitigate the reputational damage China has experienced due to the debt-trap narrative, as well as an opportunity to influence the next generation of African leaders. Data has shown that the number of African students studying in China has been spiking, from just 2,000 in 2003, to almost 50,000 in 2015.<sup>104</sup> This number rose further to 81,562 in 2018, according to Chinese government figures.<sup>105</sup>

One such student is Dickson David Agbaji, a Nigerian student studying at the prestigious Yenching Academy of Beijing (Peking) University. Agbaji discussed his Chinese educational experiences with Eric Olander, Managing Editor of The China Africa Project on the China in Africa Podcast.<sup>106</sup> Agbaji explained that China has “a huge role to play in the world in the coming years”, and that the 20th century was the American century, but that “the 21st century is the Chinese century.”<sup>107</sup> For a young African academic who had never been beyond the Nigerian border prior to this opportunity, this example illustrates the influence that Chinese opportunities and educational initiatives can have on the next generation of African leaders.

In the coming decades, as African students in China return to their home countries and enter the workforce, China will reap the soft-power rewards of these scholarships. “China wants to prepare the next generation of consumers and influencers,” says University of Nairobi School of Business associate professor XN Iraki.<sup>108</sup> “It’s soft power, reaching to the next generation,” Iraki explains. “The US did that before independence with the airlift,” referring to the 1960 scholarships for 800 African students to study in the U.S. One such student was US President Barack Obama's father,<sup>109</sup> demonstrating the impact that such programs can have on social mobility in later generations. China can harness the goodwill, cultural familiarity, and proliferation of Mandarin created by these scholarship programs. By offering young Africans the opportunity to advance their own career through China, they are developing within them a willingness to work with China and view China’s internal or external policies favourably in the future.

While not intrinsically oppositional or antagonistic to the NATO alliance, there remain strategic considerations for NATO regarding China’s increased presence in Africa. In the case of China’s soft-power capabilities, NATO must account for the growing presence of Chinese state media in Africa, and the impact these cultural programs have had on African perspectives of China and the West. Through these global education initiatives, China is framing itself to young Africans as a global leader, a by-product of which may be an Africa more sympathetic to Chinese interests. By building cultural familiarity through their use of soft power, China is attempting to paint themselves in a more favorable light and shift African perspectives to one that is more in-line with their own. As China’s expression of its soft power becomes increasingly bold and impactful, it will be imperative for NATO allies to deliver as one, with a unified purpose and a renewed intention to be a global leader.

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<sup>103</sup> Nyabiage, “Scholarship Offers Driving China’s Soft-Power Play in Africa.”

<sup>104</sup> Heever, “Confucius Institutes across Africa Are Nurturing Generations of Pro-China Mandarin Speakers.”

<sup>105</sup> Chen, “Students Follow Belt and Road Map to an Education in China.”

<sup>106</sup> Olander and van Staden, “Investing in African Students Is China’s Longterm Soft Power Play.”

<sup>107</sup> Agbaji, “The 21st Century: The Era of the Chinese.”

<sup>108</sup> Nyabiage, “Scholarship Offers Driving China’s Soft-Power Play in Africa.”

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

## FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS FOR NATO

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International relations in the past decade has been characterized by increasing isolationism, creeping McCarthyism, and a disregard for the liberal rules-based order. The United States, NATO's chief ally and the most powerful military force in the world, has signaled a strategic retreat from its established role as a global leader, not least in the African context. Since 2016, the US has reduced troop presence on the continent participating in counter-terrorism missions,<sup>110</sup> greatly reduced the amount of diplomatic resources being used to strengthen U.S.-African relations,<sup>111</sup> and most recently, the Trump administration has proposed cutting the foreign aid budget by 21%.<sup>112</sup> These actions, part of the Trump administration's "America First" policy, have not been without consequences. America's strategic retreat from its role as guarantor of current international systems and structures has created a gap which China has filled.

Alongside the deterioration of American and other NATO-aligned countries' influence in Africa, China has been establishing its own channels for developing influence. Presented throughout this paper, these influence-generating activities coordinate across sectors (economic, military, cultural) to deliver on a central strategic goal: the development of Chinese influence in Africa, and the presentation of China as a global leader.

In the words of NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg in December 2019, China is coming West, closer to the traditional NATO area of responsibility.<sup>113</sup> As established, this carries with it a set of consequences and strategic considerations for the NATO alliance. The alliance would be naïve not to acknowledge the challenges posed by China's rising economic and military power, plus their growing influence around the world. However, that is not to say that gains made by China in Africa and elsewhere should be viewed as zero-sum. Africa stands to benefit from Chinese engagement, and moreover, China is seemingly the only power that has expressed interest in and has the capability to bridge Africa's infrastructure gap.<sup>114</sup> Instead of viewing influence gained by China in Africa as influence lost by NATO and the West, NATO countries should focus on how to bolster and buttress their own influence with African countries, focusing on African countries themselves: the key stakeholder in NATO-African relations.<sup>115</sup>

Much of the focus of Western engagement with Africa has been framed through a strategic competition with China on the continent, focused on curtailing China's activities. An alternative with the potential to yield improved influence and development outcomes for all parties is to redirect Western efforts away from criticism of China, toward being more attentive to the needs and ambitions of African partners.<sup>116</sup> Instead of attempts to prevent China from filling the global leadership vacuum created by a U.S. in retreat, efforts should be put towards other NATO nations (Canada, Germany, U.K., France, and NATO partners Australia, New Zealand, and Japan) filling that gap themselves, increasing meaningful engagement with Africa, and seeking opportunities to cooperate and coordinate with China on the continent. This approach can be

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<sup>110</sup> Cooper et al., "Pentagon Eyes Africa Drawdown as First Step in Global Troop Shift."

<sup>111</sup> French, "How to Fix America's Absentee Diplomacy in Africa."

<sup>112</sup> Mason, "Exclusive: Trump Proposes 21% Cut in U.S. Foreign Aid in Budget Proposal."

<sup>113</sup> Agence France-Presse, "Nato to Formally Recognise China 'Challenges' for First Time."

<sup>114</sup> Pham, Salam Bello, and Barry, "Chinese Aid and Investment Are Good for Africa."

<sup>115</sup> Slayton, "Africa: The First U.S. Casualty of the New Information Warfare Against China."

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

characterized as the "run faster" response; meaning that the objective should not be to slow the spread of China's influence, but to hasten the spread of Western influence, and to collaborate with China to fill gaps in the Chinese development approach. This approach is to the benefit of regional security, regional development, African host countries, NATO, and China.

Currently, NATO is coordinating with the AU on counterterrorism, countering improvised explosive devices, the Women, Peace and Security agenda, building integrity, and support to AU peace-support operations. These efforts, and the broader NATO partnership with the AU, are noted as integral for NATO's projection of stability around the world.<sup>117</sup> Further areas of collaboration in Africa, including with China itself, have the potential to improve NATO, African, and Chinese security outcomes on the continent. This cooperation, as opposed to competition, has the potential to lead to greater outcomes for the continent with regards to economic growth, public safety and stability, and international cultural exchange.

Specifically, all parties stand to gain from strategic NATO-China partnership on counterterrorism and anti-piracy in the Afghanistan and Pakistan theater of operations (AfPak), similarly to engagements in the Gulf of Aden.<sup>118</sup> Though not in Africa, AfPak cooperation could be modeled on NATO-Chinese cooperation in the Gulf of Aden, and has the potential to build trust and improve the familiarity between NATO and Chinese militaries, and lead to additional cooperative partnerships in the future. Moreover, this approach will act to further legitimize NATO's post-cold war role as a global security forum for dialogue and cooperation with its global networks of partners.<sup>119</sup> Beyond this, there also exists potential to explore how China's engagement in African security can fit more closely with NATO's interests in the region, but this is only possible through a new approach to engagement with China in the African context characterized by open dialogue and cooperation, not competition.

Not only will this cooperation benefit African countries, but it will also benefit NATO allies as well. NATO presence and military cooperation has the potential to increase stability in conflict zones and reduce the likelihood of armed conflict moving north to NATO's traditional area of responsibility. Moreover, through increased meaningful engagement with African countries, NATO allies can begin to strengthen these international relationships and partnerships, winning over African "hearts and minds", and creating an Africa more sympathetic to NATO priorities.

## CONCLUSION

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In conclusion, China has been utilizing the coordinated efforts of their economic statecraft, military partnerships, and cultural initiatives to increase Chinese influence in Africa. These efforts are not inherently at odds with NATO's broader security goals for the region, but certainly pose strategic considerations for the Alliance and its approach to China, African countries, and China in Africa.

China is positioning itself as a world leader with global influence. However, the question remains whether China will be a responsible world leader, upholding the principles of a rules-based international order. China is not likely to support the proliferation of democratic governance, rule

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<sup>117</sup> NATO, "Cooperation with the African Union."

<sup>118</sup> Lin, Christina. "NATO-China Cooperation: Opportunities and Challenges."

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

of law, and freedom of speech—principles upon which NATO was founded and created to defend.<sup>120</sup> As China rises, a common purpose and unity within the alliance becomes ever more crucial. To that point, the crucial issue to consider is China’s intent and how will it use its newfound power and influence.

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<sup>120</sup> Kempe, “NATO’s China Challenge.”

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