

China's growing security role in Africa: Views from West Africa, Implications for Europe

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Executive summary

In step with its emergence as a global security actor, China is deepening its peace and security role in Africa, from arms provision and peacekeeping, to conflict mediation and its first overseas military base, located in Djibouti. This study examines China's growing role through the case of West Africa, based on over 60 interviews with security practitioners and other stakeholders in eight West African states.

In seeking a greater role in African security, Beijing is responding to the growing need to protect its burgeoning economic interests and over one million citizens on the continent. But more political motives are also central. Beijing is hoping to deepen its relations with African nations, rebalancing them away from purely commercial exchanges. It is also looking to demonstrate that China is a 'Responsible Great Power', boosting its international credibility and standing. China's frequently advertised emergence as the second largest financial contributor to UNPKOs and largest troop contributor of the Security Council's P5 adds to its political capital at the UN, which its diplomats are looking to cash in for reshaped international norms and political outcomes in line with Chinese Communist Party (CCP) preferences. Meanwhile, greater participation in African security aids the military modernisation that is an important element of the CCP's 'Centenary Goals'.

China's leaders and diplomats emphasise that its African security role is focused on limited, multilateral intervention and building African capacity to pursue 'African solutions to African problems'.

Hardware is one dimension of this capacity building. China has become the second largest arms supplier to Africa. Small arms and light weapons are central but China increasingly exports larger, more sophisticated systems, including tanks, aircraft, and combat drones – all at highly competitive prices. Chinese arms provision is not purely commercial; Beijing has made numerous donations of lethal and non-lethal military equipment to its West

African partners. However, according to African military interviewees, recurring quality problems limit the potential for China to reliably enhance African militaries' capabilities.

Beijing is also looking to develop African militaries' 'software' through training exchanges. China's activities in this area differ notably from Africa's other international partners, including Europe and the US. Beijing focuses heavily on a large and growing military scholarship programme for African officers to study in China. In contrast, although China has made first steps into these areas, joint-exercises and on-the-ground training for enlisted ranks remain more marginal, suggesting the priority is influence building among Africa's future military commanders.

While China remains averse to direct military intervention in Africa, it has been stepping up its indirect, multilateral intervention through UNPKOs. In West Africa, China has steadily expanded the number and types of personnel it contributes to UNPKOs, from military observers (Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire), to medics, engineers and police (Liberia), and finally armed infantry in the ongoing MINUSMA mission in Mali. Though it has suffered casualties, China's contribution to MINUSMA is perceived by interviewees in Mali as principally symbolic, marking a new willingness to deploy combat troops (demonstrated more strongly in South Sudan, where Chinese commercial interests are considerable). Chinese peacekeeping experts and practitioners call for Beijing to leverage its UNPKO influence to promote a 'Chinese approach' to peacekeeping that prioritises regime stability and economic development, and eschews interventionism and democratisation activities within missions.

For West African interviewees, China's security role is clearly expanding – but remains fundamentally limited. Chinese weapons are appreciated as economical, but technical failings have caused considerable frustration. China's military education programme is large and well received, though West African officers stressed Beijing was just one among many such partners, and not the most prestigious. Enthusiasm for other forms of training (such as joint exercises and in-country combat training) is limited by doubts

that the PLA has relevant experience and expertise to share, most importantly in the priority area of counter terrorism. Crucially, Beijing's resistance to interventionism and reticence to put boots on the ground – unlike other partners – limits China's relevance as a leading security partner. Interviewees nonetheless expect China's security role to continue to grow, as a further element of Beijing's deepening influence in the subregion.

For European stakeholders, China's growing African security role presages the emergence of an influential new security actor in a region of strategic importance. Positively, this may point to Beijing making substantive contributions to African security commensurate with its resources and influence. However, Beijing's privileging of unilateral activities that raise its own profile as a security actor suggest that it is in deepened Chinese political influence that the effects will most keenly be felt, both in Africa and at the UN.

Author's Foreword

As it emerges as a global security actor, China is deepening its peace and security role on the African continent – where booming economic ties have already bought it considerable influence. China's emergence as a security actor in Africa has significant implications not only for African states but also for their existing security partners, including in Europe. This report – based on extensive fieldwork – examines China's security activities in one of Africa's subregions, West Africa, shedding light on West African views of this new dimension of China's presence and drawing out the implications for Europe.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Mikko Huotari of the Mercator Institute for China Studies for his early backing of this project and to the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung for its generous support. At the Foundation, I would especially like to thank Dr. Stefan Friedrich for giving the project his blessing; Anna Lena Sabroso-Wasserfall for her considerable assistance throughout; and the Foundation's country representatives (namely Burkhardt Hellemann, Florian Karner, Thomas Volk, Thomas Schiller, and Dr. Vladimir Kreck) and their staffs in all countries visited, without whom the project's fieldwork would not have been possible. My thanks go also to participants of a workshop held in Berlin in March 2020, who provided valuable feedback on the draft report.

Foreword of Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung

Discussion around Sino-African relations is still strongly dominated by its economic policy aspects and China's ambitions within the framework of the "Belt and Road Initiative". However, the People's Republic has been working to establish itself as a serious security policy actor on the African continent for more than a decade now, and has been making some remarkable progress in this arena. The fact that peace and security cooperation has been named a priority area of the current 2018-2021 cycle of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation demonstrates that China is intent on further intensifying its efforts in this context.

Just how serious Beijing is about this prioritization can be underlined by a couple of basic facts and numbers. It has not only established itself as the second-largest arms supplier to Sub-Saharan Africa, but has also expanded its financial and personnel involvement in UN peacekeeping operations in recent years to such an extent that it's now the largest Troop Contributing Country of the UNSC's permanent members. These efforts are being complemented by intensified military diplomatic relations and an active involvement in the training and schooling of African security forces. Taken together, all of the above suggests that China is pushing a systematic and holistic Pan-African approach in its security-related ambitions.

Although these developments have, of course, not gone unnoticed and have attracted the interest of politicians, experts and think tanks all over the world, there is still relatively little primary data that displays and analyses the Chinese security policy involvement on the continent. In view of this fact, the study at hand is a timely contribution shedding more light on this specific aspect of Sino-African relations as well as on its background and objectives.

As the European Union, too, increasingly establishes itself as a credible global actor in security-related challenges and, in that context, puts a strong emphasis on peace and stability in Africa as a necessity for sustainable development (as also highlighted in the recent Joint EU-Africa strategy), it seems likely that Europe will have to take China increasingly into account in this field. Shared interests in a peaceful and prosperous (Western) Africa raise multiple questions around possibilities for cooperation. At the same time, they also highlight existing differences and gaps in regards to respective approaches as well as guiding principles and values. For this reason, the study takes a broader perspective, looking past Sino-African relations and discussing the possible implications for European stakeholders as well as attempting to outline different paths forward through a series of policy recommendations.

This is also done against the background of the immense importance of the European perspective in the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung's security-related work. From the beginning, we have regarded our international activities as an active contribution towards peace and security worldwide. Since then, the field of security policy has increasingly developed into a core theme within the Foundation's activities. With the growing complexity of global security challenges and their increasingly cross-border nature, we too are increasingly focusing on approaches of networked security and the fact that internal security factors can no longer be considered in isolation from external influences.

Against this background, it is our endeavour to keep the European level constantly in mind and to highlight the potential role of the European Union as an international security actor. This applies not only, but especially, in the Western Africa context, with the region being one of Europe's immediate geographical neighbours whose development is closely tied to that of the European continent. Therefore, we hope that this study will contribute in shedding light on current developments in the region's security policy dynamics as well as on China's role as an emerging actor in this context, and present the base for further research and discussion.

Lastly, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all those that have made a contribution to the realisation of this study. This includes first and foremost the author of the study, Mr. Tom Bayes, who combined his own professional interest in the topic with the overall research interest of KAS in a perfect manner. Furthermore, I would like to thank the KAS colleagues in our offices in Côte d'Ivoire (Mr. Florian Karner), Senegal (Mr. Thomas Volk), Mali (Mr. Thomas Schiller), Ghana (Mr. Burkhardt Hellemann) and Nigeria (Dr. Vladimir Kreck) as well as the numerous experts and security actors in the region and in Europe who agreed to be interviewed during the data collection process. Their insights and information form the very cornerstone of this study. Thanks also go to Mrs. Anna Wasserfall, desk officer at the department of Sub-Saharan-Africa, for all her organisational and editorial work related to this study project. Final thanks are also due to our partner Mercator Institute for China Studies (MERICS), who have accompanied the genesis of this study with their expertise and institutional support from the very beginning.

With this, I want to conclude and hope that you find this report insightful and a thought-provoking read.

Dr. Stefan Friedrich

Head of department Sub-Saharan Africa
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Abbreviations

AU	African Union
AFL	Armed Forces Liberia
APSA	African Peace and Security Architecture
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CASEVAC	Casualty Evacuation
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CSDP	European Union Common Security and Defence Policy
CT	Counter-terrorism
COIN	Counter-insurgency
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
ESF	ECOWAS Standby Force
EUTM	European Union Training Mission
FOCAC	Forum on China-Africa Cooperation
G7++ FOGG	G7++ Friends of the Gulf of Guinea
HADR	Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Response
IMATT	British-led International Military Advisory & Training Team, Sierra Leone
MINUSMA	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali
MOD	Ministry of Defence
MOFA	PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MOND	PRC Ministry of National Defence

NEO	Non-combatant Evacuation Operation
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PLAN	People's Liberation Army Navy
PLAAF	People's Liberation Army Air Force
PRC	People's Republic of China
REC	AU Regional Economic Community
RSLAF	Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces
SALW	Small Arms and Light Weapons
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organisation
SIPRI	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
SLOC	Sea Lines of Communication
TCC	Peacekeeping Troop Contributing Country
UAV/UCAV	Unmanned Aerial Vehicle, Unmanned Combated Aerial Vehicle
UNAMID	United Nations-African Union Mission in Darfur
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNMIL	United Nations Mission in Liberia
UNMISS	United Nations Mission in South Sudan
UNPKO	United Nations Peacekeeping Operation
UNROCA	United Nations Register of Conventional Arms
UNSC	United Nations Security Council

Introduction

China is an emerging global security actor. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) has acquired its first overseas military base and has begun deploying military assets abroad to protect Chinese citizens and interests. The unfurling of its Beidou global satellite navigation system and the launching of its first aircraft carriers give Beijing greater global reach to independently assert its interests. And a professionalised military wielding the products of a modernising military industry – from the Chengdu J-20 stealth fighter to the DF-26 'carrier-killer' missile – enable it do so in more sophisticated ways. The PLA increasingly engages in joint military exercises abroad, including with Russia in the Mediterranean. Beijing's diplomats are taking more autonomous positions in the UNSC and increasingly participating in conflict resolution efforts. With boosted financial and troop contributions to UNPKOs, Beijing claims the status of 'backbone of UN peacekeeping', winning it new influence in the central forum of global governance.

Changes in self-identity and strategic thinking undergird this more expansive stance. In Xi Jinping's 'New Era', a 'rejuvenated' China – with a reinvigorated, ideologically assertive Chinese Communist Party (CCP) at its core – is shouldering the responsibilities of a great power and protecting its ever-expanding global interests.

These developments are reshaping China's presence in Africa. Where hitherto images of China-in-Africa remain dominated by commercial exchange, infrastructure building, and resource extraction, Beijing is increasingly determined to supplement this with the image of China as an active contributor to African peace and security. This has been evident in the growing prominence of security cooperation in the proceedings of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), the triennial diplomatic centrepiece of the Sino-African relationship. In 2019, Beijing hosted the first China-Africa Peace and Security Forum and is working to expand and institutionalise its security relationship with the AU. It is also pursuing more active security ties with the AU's members: selling arms, providing training, and boosting military diplomacy. China has demonstrated a new willingness to deploy military assets in Africa to protect its interests, in anti-piracy patrols and civilian evacuations. In 2013, China for the first time contributed combat

troops to a UNPKO and, in 2017, Beijing located its first overseas military base on the African continent, in Djibouti, drawing a new international focus on China's expanding peace and security activities in Africa.

This report examines that growing role in the specific context of West Africa.¹ Based on extensive fieldwork, it seeks to understand the nature and scope of China's role as a security actor in West Africa, now and into the near future. Specifically, it considers China's substantive impact on West African security dynamics and the views of West African political and military decision makers on China's emergence as a security partner. It also seeks to delineate the implications of this emergence for an existing major West African security partner: Europe, in the shape of the European Union and its member and associated states.

Why West Africa?

China is actively expanding its presence in West Africa. For Beijing, the subregion features a diversity of partners: from 'traditionally friendly countries' (传统友好国家), such as Mali, to states that have only recently ended recognition of Taiwan in favour of Beijing (The Gambia, Burkina Faso); from countries with a deep Chinese economic presence (e. g. Ghana) to rapidly emerging economic partners (Côte d'Ivoire); and 'strategic fulcrum countries' (战略支点国家) such as regional giant Nigeria, and Senegal, identified by Beijing as a gateway to Francophone West Africa and selected to host the next FOCAC. The subregion also represents a varied testing ground for an emerging security actor. West Africa features diverse security environments – from stable security exporters (Ghana, Senegal), to post-conflict zones (Liberia, Sierra Leone), and areas facing ongoing, acute insecurity (the Sahel, Lake Chad basin). Operating in these environments are a multiplicity of security actors with which China can choose to interact: West African armed forces and the historically activist ECOWAS; novel groupings such as the G5 Sahel; the UN, including deployed PKOs; and established security partners such as France and the US. (Indeed, growing disenchant-

1 The report employs a 'strict' definition of West Africa as comprising the member states of the Economic Community of West African States, namely Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, The Gambia, and Togo. However, where appropriate – as is increasingly the case in a region of transnational security threats – it also considers Mauritania, Chad, and Cameroon.

ment in some West African societies with these traditional actors, and the Trump administration's mooted drawdown of the US' African military engagement may provide emergent security actors a strategic opening.)

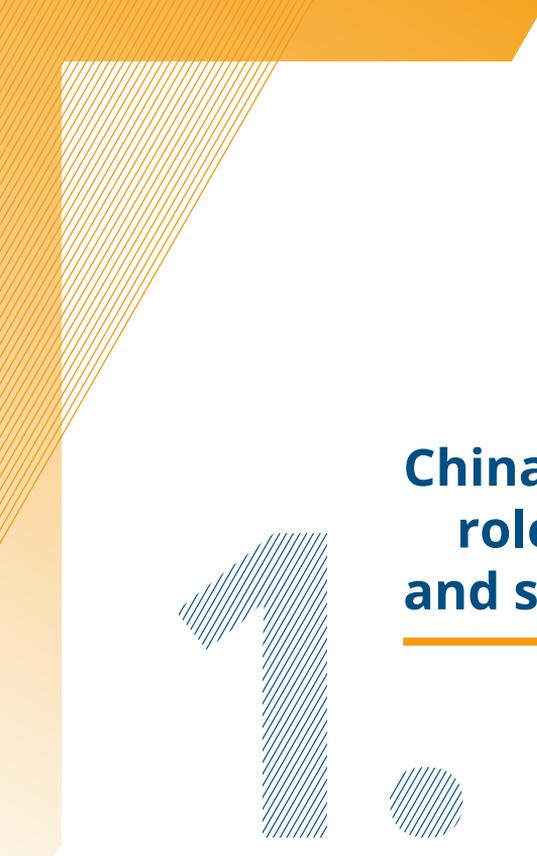
A further, important factor in the choice of West Africa is the subregion's salience for European interests. Situated in the EU's 'wider neighbourhood' and with close cultural, economic, and diaspora ties to Europe, the subregion's security challenges have long attracted European attention. This interest has only deepened – as well as broadened to a wider range of European countries – in recent years, notably in the context of concerns over terrorism, transnational crime, and irregular migration. The Sahel in particular has been identified as a 'strategic priority' for the EU, and the new 'geopolitical' Von der Leyen Commission has pledged to make Africa a major focus, and the EU's 2020 Comprehensive Strategy with Africa identifies peace and security as one of five priority areas.¹ European interest in West African security has found expression in a proliferation of security and peace-building interventions, in autonomous, EU, and UN frameworks. France has deep security ties in West Africa, including a large permanent military presence and ongoing deployments such as Operation Barkhane; numerous European countries are deployed in the UNPKO in Mali; and the EU, as well as being a preeminent development and economic partner, has deployed CSDP missions to undertake large-scale military capacity building and security sector reform. China's emergence as a security actor in West Africa may offer Europe an opportunity for cooperation and division of labour with a strategic partner – or a new area of rivalry with an increasingly strident 'systemic rival'.²

Methodology

In addition to analysis of official, academic, and journalistic textual sources and relevant databases (notably UN ROCA, UN Comtrade, and SIPRI), this report is rooted in over 60 semi-structured interviews conducted in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Nigeria, and Senegal between October 2019 and February 2020. Interviewees included senior West African former and currently serving military officers; West African government officials and politicians; AU, ECOWAS, and G5 Sahel officials; diplomats and military attachés of European and other non-African countries posted in West Africa; African and international researchers; civil society and other relevant practitioners; and Chinese economic operators

in West Africa. Traditional sensitivity around defence and security affairs limited access in some instances; most notably no Chinese officials were available for interview. Interviews were conducted in English, French, German, and Chinese. Quotations from these and textual sources have been translated into English by the author; original language versions have been provided where considered useful to the reader.

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 - 2 European Commission, 'European Commission and HR/VP contribution to the European Council: EU-China – A strategic outlook', 12 March 2019. <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/communication-eu-china-a-strategic-outlook.pdf>



1. China seeks a greater role in African peace and security

Beijing is actively seeking a greater peace and security role in Africa. As Chinese interests – and thus exposure – have grown on the continent, security issues have become steadily more important within FOCAC interactions and outcomes. The 2012 FOCAC established the China-Africa Cooperative Partnership for Peace and Security, while the 2018 FOCAC elevated peace and security to one of the eight ‘major initiatives’ to be pursued in Sino-African relations between 2018 and 2021.³ The FOCAC 2018 Action Plan pledged that ‘China will increase defence and security assistance to Africa, and the two sides will enhance cooperation and strategies and experience sharing’. The Action Plan also announced the launch of 50 ‘security assistance programmes’, including a China-Africa Peace and Security Fund. In 2018, China hosted the first China-Africa Defence and Security Forum, relaunched the following year, with a subtle name change as the first China-Africa Peace and Security Forum.⁴ The week-long forum included military representatives from 50 African countries and the AU, as well as 15 defence ministers, and is intended to be a recurring format sustaining focus on Chinese engagement with African security issues.

China’s leaders have long identified its economic presence in Africa as a contribution to African security, boosting the continent’s development and tackling the root causes of conflict. This emphasis on China’s positive input

to a development-security nexus has been given new impetus in the context of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the sprawling programme to rebrand and dramatically expand China's worldwide investments, economic diplomacy, and political influence. However, China's indirect, developmental contributions to African security are not the subject of this report. Instead, the focus is Beijing's drive to expand its explicit security activities in Africa. (It is nonetheless important to recognise that many of these are identified as part of the BRI, underscoring the fact that the initiative goes well beyond a simple bridge-building infrastructure 'Marshall Plan'.)

Chinese strategic and military thinking has shifted to a greater emphasis on non-traditional security threats – where previously it focused overwhelmingly on traditional, inter-state security issues in East Asia.⁵ This shift is particularly relevant to Africa, as demonstrated by statements in China's 2015 Africa policy paper and FOCAC outcome documents. Chinese researchers note that 'such non-traditional security threats as terrorism and piracy are still rampant in Africa [and] China's enterprises, investments, citizens and shipping are becoming more and more exposed'.⁶¹¹

China's push for a more prominent role in African security is taking place within broader shifts in Chinese foreign and security policy. In 2017, Xi Jinping declared that China had entered a 'New Era' of global confidence. In fulfilment of Xi's 'Chinese Dream' of a 'Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation', China will become 'a mighty force' and global leader by 2049. To do so, Xi declared in 2015, China must pursue a 'global vision of national security policy' and actively shape an international environment favourable to China's emergence.⁷ Beijing has shifted from its earlier 'keeping a low profile' to a new 'striving for achievement' (奋发有为).⁸ Chinese diplomats have stated that 'it is essential to be action-driven, empty rhetoric is no solution to any problems, we must provide tangible assistance[to Africa]', and the FOCAC 2018 Action Plan repeatedly commits to delivering 'real' and 'tangible results'.⁹ This new aspiration to a global leadership role and focus on delivering results informs this report's exploration of the substantive impact of China's security activities and status as a security actor in West Africa.

11 Some Chinese thinkers also embrace a more expansive conception of security to include 'human security' issues such as environmental and humanitarian crises and pandemics. The PLA's growing involvement in overseas Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Response – notably deployment of its medics to West Africa to combat Ebola in 2014 – is relevant to this expanded conception of security but is not a focus of this report.

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- 3 PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Forum on China-Africa Cooperation Beijing Action Plan (2019–2021)', 12 September 2018. https://www.focac.org/eng/zywx_1/zywj/t1594297.htm
 - 4 'China-Africa defence, security forum opens in Beijing', Xinhua, 26 June 2018. http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-06/26/c_137282618.htm
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 - 6 Shen, Z., 'On China's Military Diplomacy in Africa', Shanghai Institutes for International Studies. <http://www.sis.org.cn/Research/EnInfo/1702>
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 - 8 Yan, X., 'From keeping a low profile to striving for achievement', *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol.7, Iss.2, Summer 2014, pp.153–184.
 - 9 Mu, X., 'Chinese envoy calls for supporting growth of young people in Africa', Xinhua, 3 October 2019. http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-10/03/c_138444946.htm



2

The drivers of China's greater role in African peace and security

On a fundamental level, China's pursuit of a greater role in African peace and security is aimed at achieving the Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation – like all major policy efforts in Xi's New Era. Indeed, in the view of some Chinese and international thinkers, a greater role in African security is a 'natural' result of China's wider global re-emergence – and there is a sense in which China's 'going global' as a security actor is a 'normalisation' and a catching-up with other already globalised dimensions of Chinese power and influence. However, as the following sections show, specific drivers of a greater African security role can be drawn out as distinct elements of the wider 'Great Rejuvenation' project.

2.1 Protecting economic interests

China's dramatically expanding economic presence in Africa is a powerful pull factor into African security issues. As China's economic development – and thus regime legitimacy – has become dependent on international economic flows, Beijing's foreign policy has had to adapt to the new task of protecting overseas economic interests. The 2013 Defence White Paper observed that 'overseas interests have become an integral component of China's national interests' and the 2015 follow-up enshrined 'safeguarding the security of China's overseas interests' as one of the PLA's eight 'strategic tasks' – thus clearly recognising a role for military force abroad.¹⁰

Key landmarks in China's emergence as an African security actor have clearly been motivated by economic interests. When PLAN vessels joined Gulf of Aden anti-piracy patrols, rear-admiral Zhang Zhaozhong observed 'our ships are going out to defend our Chinese economic interests'.¹¹ Similarly, the economic drivers behind deployment of PLA combat forces to UNMISS were underscored by Beijing's request they be allowed to guard Chinese oil workers and installations under the UN flag.¹²

China's economic penetration of West Africa – it is now the top trading partner of all countries in the region, which have all signed up to the BRI – motivates security engagement.¹³ Although West African interviewees stated China remains principally an economic partner, they expected its economic presence to increasingly draw it into security questions. Nonetheless, economic motives alone do not explain Beijing's growing African security presence. Beijing's deployment of its first UNPKO combat troops is a case in point. Although ties with Mali are one of China's oldest African relationships, Sino-Malian trade flows are modest and China had no major economic interests in the country to protect. As Cabestan rightly judges: 'China did not decide to take part in MINUSMA to protect its own economic interest but rather to play a bigger role in Africa's security'.¹⁴

2.2 “Remember, at your back there is a great and powerful motherland!”: Protecting Chinese citizens

Deepening economic ties have brought ever greater numbers of Chinese citizens to Africa – a common estimate is one million, though no authoritative statistics are available. Protecting these citizens has become a foreign policy priority, reflected in the FOCAC 2018 Action Plan's calls for better protection of Chinese nationals in Africa. The 2011 Libyan civil war was a major turning point when, in its largest NEO to date, Beijing for the first time deployed PLA assets (including the frigate *Xuzhou* and PLAAF aircraft) to extract more than 35,000 PRC citizens.¹⁵

Growing numbers of Chinese citizens have fallen victim to violence in Africa, including in political or ideologically-motivated attacks.¹⁶ For example, in 2015, three Chinese were murdered by Islamist terrorists in Bamako, and another in a 2017 attack.¹⁷ Although survey data suggest China continues to enjoy a positive reputation across Africa, discontent in some African societies at Chinese activities, China's high visibility on the continent, and perceptions of its global power and assumed influence in African

2. The drivers of China's greater role in African peace and security

politics will likely make Chinese actors attractive targets in some conflicts.¹⁸ Indeed, interviewees in predominantly Muslim areas of West Africa reported popular anger at Beijing's mistreatment of Muslims in China, which may make Chinese nationals targets for Islamist armed groups.

The CCP increasingly leverages its role as protector of Chinese citizens worldwide to boost regime legitimacy at home and demonstrate to domestic audiences China's renewed global power. Having previously faced netizens' anger at failures to protect Chinese citizens in Africa – 'if it was the United States or Russia, they would have airdropped in special commandos by now'¹⁹ – Beijing has stepped up domestic propaganda highlighting actions such as 'the great Libya evacuation'.²⁰ The 2017 propagandistic box-office hit *Wolf Warrior 2* pushed this message further. After the heroic Chinese soldier protagonist has defeated a unit of European mercenaries and freed their Chinese and African victims, the film's closing shot is a PRC passport, overlaid with the words: 'Citizens of the People's Republic of China: when you encounter danger overseas, do not give up! Remember, at your back is a great and powerful motherland!'.²¹

Beyond reassuring Chinese of their protection in Africa, impressing domestic opinion with evidence of China's rise is an important dimension of Beijing's push for an African security role. PLA participation in UNPKOs is particularly highlighted, including in the 2019 Tiananmen Square parade marking the PRC's 70th anniversary, and the Hollywood-style dramatization of PLA peacekeepers' heroism in films backed by the PLA Political Department.²² Though it is not apparent that there is widespread public demand for overseas military engagement (indeed, propaganda promoting UNPKO participation can be interpreted as preparing an otherwise reticent public to tolerate the resulting sacrifices, rather than satisfying an existing demand), there are clearly sections of Chinese public opinion – encouraged by a patriotic education campaign suffused with militarism – that welcome demonstration of Chinese military vigour commensurate with its emergence as a great power.

2.3 Building a 'Sino-African Community with a Shared Future'

Beijing is also determined to highlight its growing African security role to international audiences – with consequent diplomatic rewards.

One target is Africa itself. Beijing is seeking to expand and rebalance its offer to African capitals away from purely economic exchanges. This helps mitigate pushback in some African countries at elements of China's commercial presence, and, for some Chinese writers, competes with the influence of Western countries that retain sizeable security roles in Africa.²³ As foreign minister Wang Yi has claimed, 'African countries ... not only hope to enhance economic cooperation with China but also expect China's ... bigger role in Africa's peace and security'.²⁴ This claim of African demand was borne out by some, though not all, interviews in West Africa. One security-focused parliamentarian was typical of a number of interviewees: 'China has a responsibility to respond to insecurity given its economic interests', whereas others felt a positive Chinese security contribution was welcome but not yet expected or demanded.

Chinese leaders and diplomats highlight security cooperation as an integral part of building a 'Sino-African Community with a Shared Future' (中非命运共同体), a Sino-African variant of one of the key international political slogans of Xi's New Era. This Africa-specific variant upgrades the more commercially-focused 'win-win' rhetoric and builds on Beijing's traditional appeal to Africa as a fellow developing nation and victim of colonialism.²⁵ The goal is to secure the political support of Africa's 54 states – valuable votes in international fora and, in the words of a Chinese analyst, 'an ally in [China's] competition with the United States'.²⁶

2.4 Becoming a 'Responsible Great Power', gaining global influence

Beijing is also using its contribution to African security to appeal to the international community with proof of China's rise as a 'responsible great power' (负责任大国) – balancing out actions elsewhere suggesting a more assertively revisionist power, such as in the South China Sea. For Shen Zhixiong, 'Africa is an arena for China to exhibit and build [its] national image'.²⁷ State media make this explicit: 'These [African security] efforts show that ... China is taking on the responsibility of a great power that matches its status and the expectations of the international community'.²⁸ A greater contri-

2. The drivers of China's greater role in African peace and security

bution indeed responds to such 'expectations', given earlier accusations that China was freeriding on the security efforts of others, profiting economically from stability without contributing to sustaining it. That demonstrating its 'responsibility' is central to its West African security decisions was made clear by China's ambassador to Mali: 'China sent peacekeeping forces [to MINUSMA] first and foremost to display China's good image as a responsible great power'.²⁹ Indeed, Chinese writers have highlighted a distinctively Chinese approach to 'responsibility'. On African security, a 'responsible' China is contrasted with an interventionist West imposing inappropriate forms of democracy through regime change and the 'liberal peace'.³⁰

Beijing is especially looking to draw dividends on its African security role in the UN, where it is leading a sustained campaign to deepen its influence. China is positioning itself as a leading UN peacekeeper, buying it political capital in New York. In 2015, Xi pledged USD 1 billion to a China-UN peace and development fund; the establishment of an 8,000-strong PKO standby force; and the training of 2,000 foreign PKO troops over five years.³¹ In 2016, Beijing unsuccessfully sought the UN Under Secretary General for Peacekeeping Operations role and increased its financial contribution to UN peacekeeping to overtake Japan for the first time. Chinese leaders frequently highlight its status as the second-largest funder and the largest TCC among the P5. State media now describe China as 'the backbone of UN peacekeeping'.³²

Beijing is seeking to use this influence to shape norms and determine political outcomes within the UN system. On the one hand, this is defensive – to ward off criticism of the CCP's domestic policies – but it is also increasingly proactive. With China's rising global status, its strategic community has become focused on the country's 'discourse power' (话语权), its ability to influence others to adopt its norms. In 2016, Xi declared China must 'enhance its ability to participate in global governance ... and formulate rules and set agendas'.³³ At a basic level, this has meant winning UN endorsement of CCP slogans and projects. In 2017, state media celebrated the first inclusion of 'Community of Shared Future for all Humankind' in a UNSC resolution, and Chinese diplomats have ensured the BRI has been publicly praised by UN Secretary General Guterres.³⁴

But Chinese diplomats are also seeking more substantive changes to UN policies, for example cuts to human rights funding within UNPKOs, ostensibly as a money-saving measure.³⁵ Chinese writers have criticised the 'liberal peace' as an 'illusory peace' (虚幻和平) and 'democratic peace' as 'a

tool for international intervention by the US-led West', and thus opposed the shift in UNPKOs towards 'multidimensional' operations, calling for Beijing to offer a 'Chinese solution on UNPKOs', for instance 'developmental peace' (发展和平), focused on limited intervention, regime preservation, and prioritisation of economic development.³⁶ As China's global power and UN influence grow, Chinese thinkers expect it to reshape UN policy in the CCP's favour. As prominent scholar Zhang Weiwei observed: 'today's global governance calls for a new political discourse that transcends Western logic ... as a responsible power, China should put forward its own ideas ... and provide the world with an alternative'.³⁷

2.5 Into Africa to modernise the PLA

Deeper participation in African security also strengthens China's own military capabilities. The CCP's armed forces are in the midst of a major modernisation effort to create a 'modernised' military by 2035 and a 'world-class military' (世界一流军队) by 2049.³⁸ The PLA is shifting from a low-tech, personnel-heavy force focused on mainland defence to a more technologically sophisticated and coherently commanded force capable of at least limited expeditionary operations. Beijing is modernising the Chinese arms industry to become self-sufficient in all grades of military equipment – and is boosting overseas sales to pursue this goal.³⁹ Crucially, many Chinese weapons systems are largely untested in actual combat. With expanding defence budgets and militaries engaged in active combat, West Africa offers promising markets for China's arms exporters and the chance to hone their products through combat testing – as researcher and former diplomat Wang Hongyi notes, 'overseas practical combat testing can help Chinese military enterprises to obtain customer feedback, improving the performance and quality of weapons in a targeted manner'.⁴⁰ Meanwhile, the PLA has not seen major engagement since China's unsuccessful invasion of Vietnam in 1979, and according to its official newspaper it has been infected by 'peace disease', eroding its war-fighting abilities.⁴¹ Deployment in Africa – including anti-piracy patrols, NEOs, HADR, UNPKOs, and joint exercises – allows the PLA to alleviate this peace disease and hone its capabilities with active experience in hostile environments.

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3

Mapping China's growing role in West African peace and security

China has no permanent military bases and no history of direct military intervention in West Africa. Instead, the leitmotifs of its security role in the subregion are indirect intervention within UNPKOs; building military-diplomatic ties with West African partners; and a strong emphasis – in rhetoric and deed – on security capacity building to enable West African states to pursue 'African solutions to African problems'. Contrary to some Chinese claims, this centring of African agency and building of African capacity is not unique to China. But as the following sections show, China's approach differs in notable aspects from European and other security actors in West Africa.

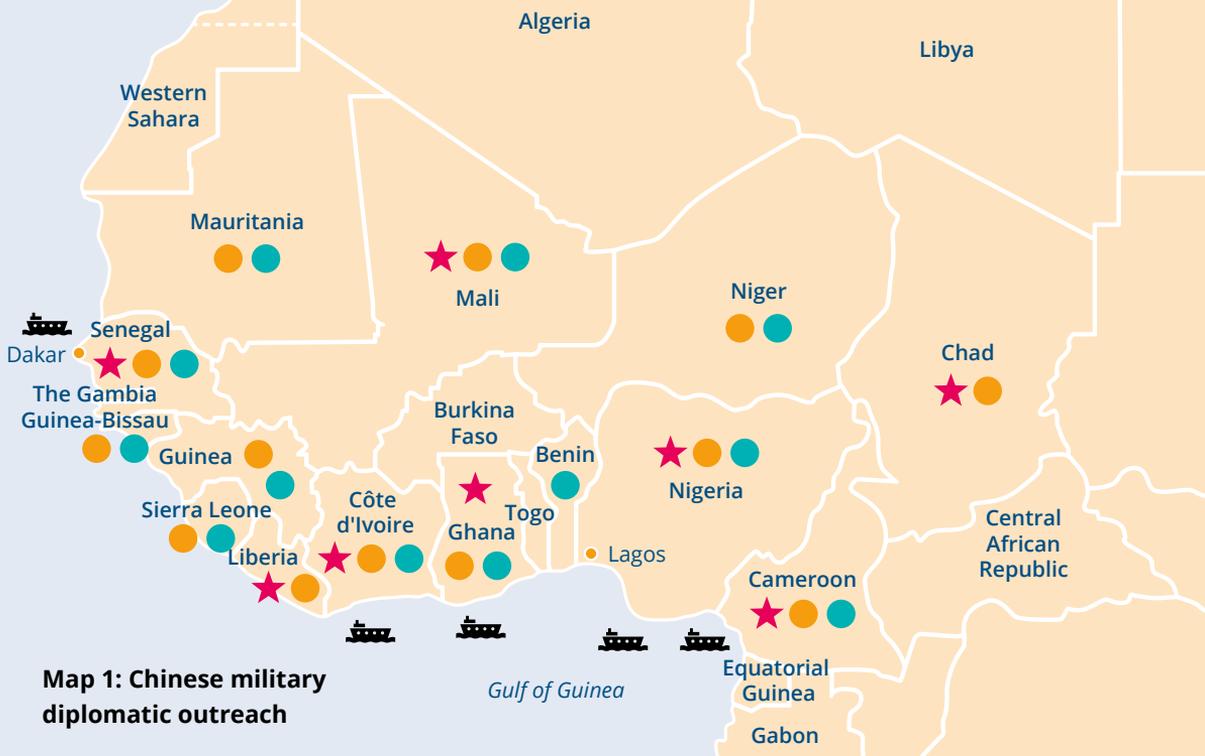
However, there are inherent challenges in fully assessing China's security role, including gaps in international reporting regimes; traditional secrecy around military and security activities; and the CCP party-state's habits of opacity. Regrettably, Chinese officials in the subregion were not available for interview. The following mapping cannot therefore be claimed with confidence to present all details of China's growing security role in West Africa.

3.1 Military diplomacy and security funding

Beneath the FOCAC-level, continent-wide effort to raise the visibility of China's African security role, Beijing is also boosting military diplomatic ties with African states. This is part of a wider, global surge in Chinese military diplomacy brought on by Xi's 2015 declaration of a 'new phase of military diplomacy' (军事外交新局面).⁴² China has stepped up the flow of high-level military diplomatic visits between West Africa and China, and increasingly uses other diplomatic interactions, including presidential and ministerial visits, to highlight growing security cooperation.⁴³ China has increased the number of its military attachés in Africa to 27, up from 16 in 2011; it has military attachés in six ECOWAS member states, as well as Cameroon and Chad, while there are 10 West African military attachés in Beijing (See Map 1).⁴⁴ China has used deployment of naval taskforces to the Gulf of Aden to conduct port visits around Africa. In West Africa, PLAN vessels visited Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Senegal, Nigeria and Cameroon in 2014 and 2018.⁴⁵ Such outreach is 'an important adjunct' to mainstream diplomacy – adding a further dimension to ties – while building trust and patterns of cooperation that can be activated in a crisis, for example facilitating NEOs.⁴⁶

In recent years, China has signed a series of MOUs on defence and military cooperation with West African states. These are generally assistance packages, including equipment donations, loans, and financial grants, some of which relate to contracts for Chinese firms to construct infrastructure for West African armed forces. Examples include barracks, training facilities, military housing, naval shipyards, maintenance facilities – and in the case of Ghana, the Ministry of Defence itself.⁴⁷ According to Ghanaian military officers, such projects have improved personnel living and working conditions and generated goodwill toward China – though the wisdom of the MOD project was questioned by some interviewees on security grounds.⁴⁸ Chinese telecommunications companies are also important providers of military communications infrastructure, notably in Mali.⁴⁹ While the role of Chinese telecommunications companies in sensitive communications infrastructure is a subject of growing concern in some African states, this was not highlighted by West African interviewees. The creation of the China-Africa Peace and Security Fund, dispensing funding via the AU, creates a new stream of Chinese financial support for such projects.

However, China does not take a prominent role in shaping agendas on the detail of African security in multilateral settings. An African diplomat commented 'they are in listening mode, they take notes. But they do not



 Port visit

 Resident Chinese military attaché

 Military attaché resident in Beijing

 High-level military visits (e. g. defence minister) in Beijing or in country

Source: Author's research

offer much [to discussions], they do not try to shape discussions'. Beijing's approach to the Dakar International Forum on Peace and Security in Africa is a case in point: providing funding and a senior diplomat for a plenary session but not participating in working-level panels. In many West African capitals, Chinese embassies do not participate in donor coordination and similar frameworks. As an interviewee in Bamako commented, China is 'absent from all those pressing, technical questions Mali is facing in the security sector'. This is consistent with Chinese diplomats' statements such as that of the ambassador to Nigeria: 'we obviously want to do more but [are] still learning how to be a better partner in promoting peace and security in Africa'.⁵⁰ With a growing number of practitioner-researchers, including with UNPKO experience, China is developing expertise on African security and will become more active in such settings in the future.

3.2 Arms supply

Arms supply, by sale or donation, is a central element of China's security role in West Africa. In tandem with its global trade ascendancy and military-industrial modernisation, China has stepped up arms exports to West Africa. According to SIPRI, Chinese arms exports to Africa rose by 55 percent in 2013–2017 relative to 2008–2012, representing one-fifth of China's global arms sales, and China has risen to become the second largest supplier to the continent.⁵¹

Table 1: Chinese arms provision by value, excluding SALW, 2008–2018

Country	Total value of Chinese arms sales 2008–2018 (US\$M)	Total value, all suppliers, 2008–2018 (US\$M)	Chinese arms as % of total, by value	China's rank among suppliers
Benin	0.5	23	2%	4
Burkina Faso	0	53	0%	
Cape Verde	0	12	0%	
Cote d'Ivoire	4	39	10%	3
Ghana	112	241	46%	1
Gambia	0	16	0%	
Liberia	0	0	0%	
Mali	4	104	4%	6
Mauritania	34	78	44%	1
Niger	4	39	10%	4
Nigeria	271	959	28%	1
Senegal	36	156	23%	2
Sierra Leone	4	5	80%	1
Togo	0	17	0%	
Total	469.5	1742	14	

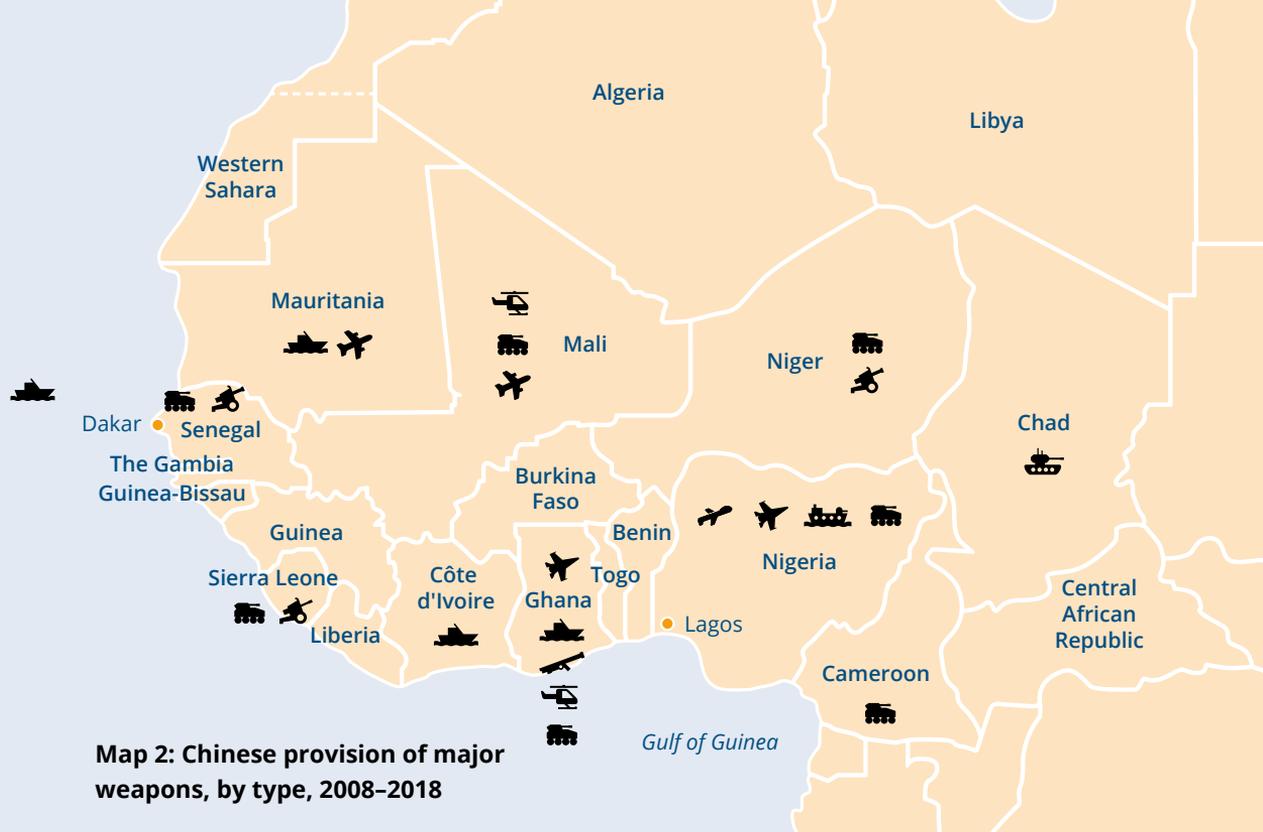
Source: SIPRI Arms Transfers Database

Nigeria and Ghana are China's largest arms customers in West Africa, with Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Niger and Mali also acquiring major Chinese arms (See Table 1). The leading exporters to West Africa are the state-owned arms companies Poly Technologies Inc, a subsidiary of the diversified SOE China Poly Group Corporation (中国保利集团公司), and Norinco – China North Industries Group (中国北方工业集团有限公司), the world's eighth largest arms producer by sales.⁵²

West African interviewees reported active Chinese efforts to generate further arms sales, both in existing and emerging markets. MOD procurement officials described ongoing, recent procurement tours to China. In Côte d'Ivoire, which has not previously purchased major Chinese arms, interviewees reported active lobbying for market share. Similarly, Chinese arms exporters have moved quickly since the re-establishment of Sino-Burkinabé relations in 2018 to seek sales. In August that year, Burkinabé President Kaboré's maiden trip to China included a visit to China Poly Group's headquarters.⁵³ Burkinabé politicians interviewed in Ouagadougou reported meeting with Poly representatives on the subject of arms sales.

(i) Small Arms and Light Weapons

Small arms and light weapons (SALW) have long been a major element of China's arms exports to Africa. However, in SIPRI's judgement, 'it is also among the least transparent' exporters of such weapons.⁵⁴ Without full disclosure on both the Chinese and, in many cases, the West African side, the size of flows is difficult to assess – and these are not included in the data presented in table 1. Occasional media reports provide some insights into the types of weapons provided by China, including assault rifles, rocket launchers, mortars, and associated ammunition.⁵⁵ Further insights have been offered by other ad hoc sources, including a video released by the jihadist armed group Boko Haram following an attack on an army base in Niger in which the group captured Chinese SALW, including Type 77 heavy machine guns and QLZ-87 automatic grenade launchers.⁵⁶ West-African Military officers and officials confirmed substantial acquisitions of Chinese SALW, with the Type 56 and Type 81 assault rifles, Norinco's Kalashnikov imitations, particularly widely used. According to Malian interviewees, Chinese versions of Soviet designs are useful continuity products given Mali's history of Soviet procurement, and make up a significant proportion of Mali's armouries. Where available, UN Comtrade data confirm sizeable SALW exports to multiple West African states, including Ghana, Liberia, Niger, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and Togo.⁵⁷

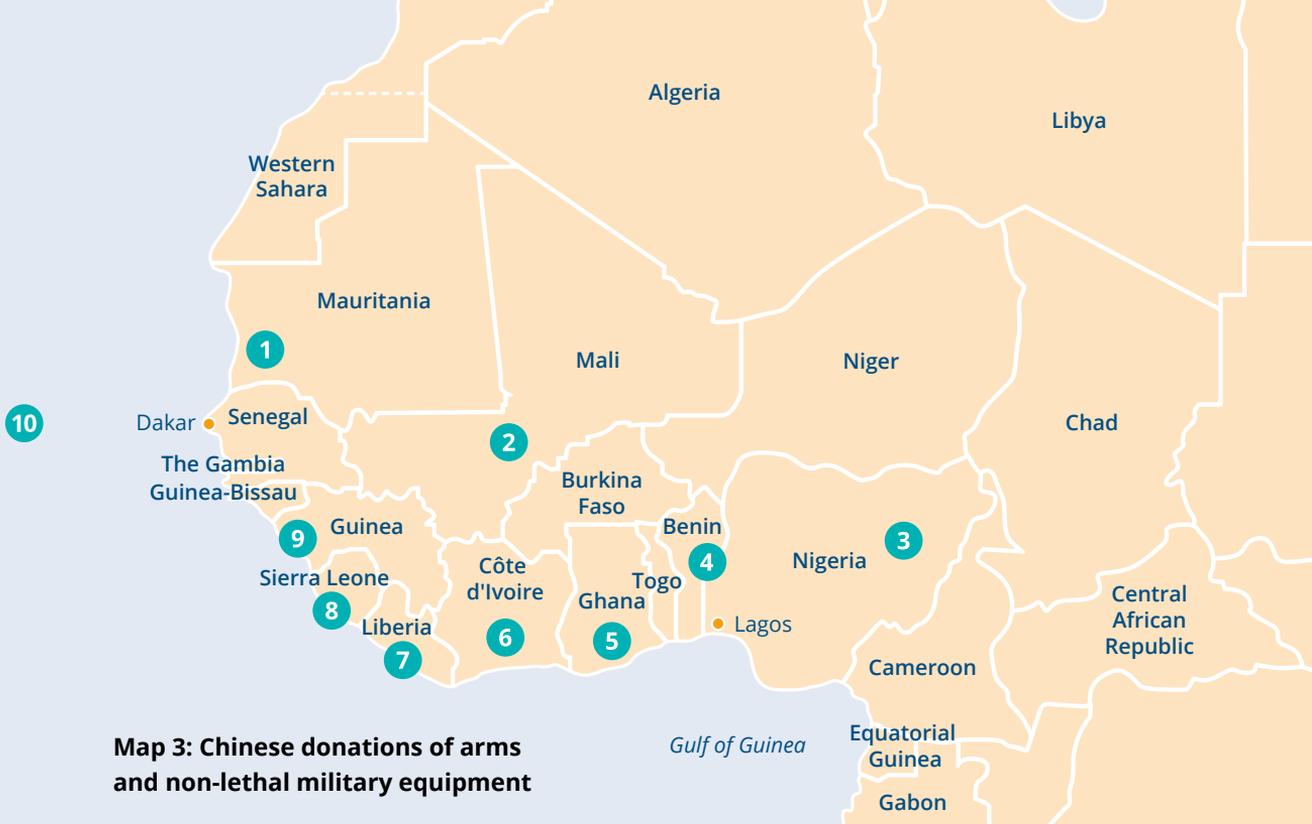


- | | |
|---|--|
|  Battleship |  Armoured vehicle |
|  Offshore Patrol Vessel |  Battle tank |
|  MANPADS (Man Portable Air Defence System) |  Jet (combat/trainer) |
|  Helicopter |  Transport aircraft |
|  UCAV |  Large artillery |

Source: SIPRI Arms Transfers Database

(ii) Major weapons and increasingly sophisticated platforms

While SALW remain a major – if difficult to quantify – share of Chinese arms exports to West Africa, China is also an important supplier of major systems, including increasingly sophisticated platforms. China has provided patrol vessels to Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Nigeria; two 95-metre P18N Class vessels sold to Nigeria in 2014 and 2016 represent the largest and most advanced vessels in the Nigerian navy. As map 2 shows, China has provided MANPADS to Ghana; fighter and trainer jets to Nigeria and Ghana; helicopters to Ghana and Mali; and artillery and armoured vehicles to Ghana, Senegal, Niger, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone. Many of these systems have been deployed by their recipients, notably against Islamist armed groups in the



Map 3: Chinese donations of arms and non-lethal military equipment

1 G5 Sahel

2019: €1.5 m Secretariat budget support
 2019: \$7 m-worth of arms & equipment pledged to each member

2 Mali

2013: Equipment worth €7.6 m
 2014: Uniforms, boots, etc worth €2.4 m
 2016: Parachutes, counter-IED & communication equipment worth €2.7 m

3 ECOWAS

2016: Protective vests, tents, IT and communications equipment, & vehicle worth \$5 m

4 Benin

2011: 1 Patrol boat, worth €4 m

5 Ghana

2008: Ministry of Defence headquarters, worth \$5 m
 2017: 4 Patrol boats, machine guns & ammunition worth \$7.5 m
 2019: 100 Police vehicles

6 Côte d'Ivoire

2017: 1 Patrol boat, worth \$4 m

7 Liberia

2012: Military engineering equipment worth \$5 m
 2014: Military engineering equipment worth \$4 m
 2015: \$3.3 m Cash grant for procurement
 2016: 20 Trucks, two graders, 10 000 uniforms & 40 tents, worth \$3 m

8 Sierra Leone

2010: Funding for six howitzers
 2011: AK47s, rocket launchers, anti-aircraft guns, mortars worth \$2.5 m
 2016: \$7.2 m Donation to MOD

9 Guinea

2016: Tents, helmets, bulletproof jackets, computers, photocopiers, worth \$3 m
 2017: Military engineering equipment worth \$3.8 m
 2019: Agreement to donate \$16 m worth of equipment

10 Cape Verde

2010: Logistics and military communication equipment worth \$1 m
 2013: 2 Patrol boats, 4 military gyms, uniform factory worth €5.3 m
 2018: Agreement to donate €3.8 m of equipment over 5 years

Source: Author's research

Sahel and Lake Chad regions. Unbound by the export controls that restrict other international suppliers, notably the US, China has become an important international supplier of UCAVs. In 2014, Nigeria acquired five CH-3 UCAVs produced by China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation, one of which crashed bearing two missiles in northern Nigeria the following year, apparently while deployed against Boko Haram.⁵⁸ Nigerian interviewees stressed the need for more high-tech platforms, notably drones and helicopters, to effectively combat Boko Haram, and stated that China was a highly attractive source of such platforms.

(iii) Lethal and non-lethal equipment donation

In addition to sales, China has made numerous donations of weaponry and non-lethal military matériel to several West African states, suggesting China's arms provision motives are not purely commercial. As map 3 shows, these donations have often focused on the subregion's smaller states, notably the Mano River countries. This includes some of ECOWAS' least developed members and, in the cases of Sierra Leone and Liberia, post-conflict states engaged in extensive security sector reform, suggesting Chinese donations are need-driven. Interviewees in Liberia stated such donations made a valuable impact as the country's armed forces were rebuilt following the civil wars.

In contrast, donations to Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, while responding to anti-piracy needs, point to the diplomatic motives of strengthening ties with a traditionally friendly partner and with an emergent economic partner, respectively. Interviewees in Ghana suggested China's 2017 donation of patrol boats and other weapons may have been intended to encourage goodwill following frustration at technical problems with earlier, commercial acquisitions (see below). Meanwhile, Ivorian interviewees noted that a similar donation to Côte d'Ivoire had successfully raised awareness of China as a potential security and procurement partner at a time of highly visible, rapidly expanding Chinese economic presence in the country. Côte d'Ivoire had not previously acquired Chinese major weapons systems and this first acquisition may lead to further purchases. In all cases, local media reporting of handover ceremonies has boosted the public diplomacy impact of these contributions.

(iv) Illicit and problematic arms flows

While Chinese arms provision, by sale or donation, may in many cases build West African security capacity, Chinese suppliers have on multiple occasions been implicated in problematic or illicit weapons flows in Africa.⁵⁹ This has included violations of Beijing-backed international arms embargoes, as in Libya in 2011, and of Beijing's stated foreign policy – most notably in South Sudan in 2014, even as Chinese diplomats were actively facilitating peace negotiations and PLA forces were deployed in UNMISS. Chinese arms – particularly SALW – have been supplied to non-state conflict parties, including combatants in the Sierra Leonean and Liberian civil wars, and Delta rebels in Nigeria. The illicit flow of SALW represents a major security challenge in West Africa. However, security and arms control practitioners interviewed in Ghana and Senegal suggested that although these flows include Chinese weapons, China is not considered a principal source of such weapons.⁶⁰ In recent years, China has gradually improved its arms control processes, and in September 2019 Beijing announced that it would join the Arms Trade Treaty (after Donald Trump announced the US signature would be withdrawn).⁶¹

(v) Quality concerns

In April 2019, General Stephen Townsend, commander of US Africom, told the US Senate Armed Services Committee that 'endemic quality concerns' limit the utility to African forces of weapons provided by China.⁶² Evidence gathered in the course of this project largely supports this assessment with regards to Chinese major weapons. According to Nigerian interviewees, of the 15 jets acquired in 2008 (12 F-7NI fighters and three FT-7NI trainers), the majority were not operational following a series of crashes, technical problems, and lack of spare parts. Similarly, of four K-8 trainer jets acquired by Ghana in 2002, reportedly 'one never flew and two fell apart', and artillery pieces and armoured vehicles had also failed.⁶³ Offshore patrol vessels bought by Ghana also malfunctioned following attempted scrambles. In 2019, one of two Harbin Z-9 helicopters acquired by Mali crashed, while the second was reportedly no longer operational, though it is not apparent that this was caused by technical fault.⁶⁴ Similarly, the cause of the 2015 crash of one of Nigeria's three CH-3 drones has not been disclosed, though no information has suggested it was due to enemy fire.

These quality concerns have been reported in Ghanaian media, quoting Ghanaian soldiers as saying 'our armoury mainly consists of cheap Chinese weapons' not meeting the country's security requirements.⁶⁵ One Ghanaian interviewee reported that some in the military opposed further Chi-

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nese acquisitions but, as procurement was a political process not handled by the military directly, these would likely continue. Quality concerns were most prevalent in countries with extensive acquisitions of major weapons, whereas recipients principally of Chinese SALW reported no such concerns. Moreover, interviewees in several countries reported that problems were at least in part due to engineering and maintenance capacity gaps on the West African side.

In his testimony, General Townsend averred that 'low cost and short delivery timelines entice African partners to purchase Chinese equipment'. This was confirmed by West African military officers and defence ministry officials involved in procurement. A Senegalese government official stated: 'African armies are not well equipped. We need more [weapons] and we welcome cheaper prices'.

Moreover, multiple interviewees stated that top-grade quality was not always the principal criterion for forces grappling severe security crises. According to one military officer 'the quality might be a bit below the West but it gets the job done and arrives quickly ... It's not so much a question of the long term. We need them to face a crisis now'. Frustrated with delays in US supplies, due to stricter US conditionality on human rights and legitimate use, Nigerian interviewees particularly highlighted the speed of China's no-questions-asked delivery. Government officials elsewhere noted that though some of these acquisitions were not top-of-the-range by global standards, they represented an improvement on existing capabilities.

Chinese arms sales to West Africa will continue to grow in the foreseeable future as armed forces expand their capabilities to meet pressing security concerns. Government officials and military officers nonetheless stressed that procurement policies were and would remain calibrated to avoid China (or others) becoming a dominant supplier (see table 1). For European suppliers servicing similar market segments, Chinese rivals will present significant competition, though quality concerns may undermine Chinese sales. Moreover, in some cases West African militaries' deployment of Chinese systems may reduce interoperability with European counterparts, or be incompatible with tactical approaches taught in Europe's extensive military training programmes in the region. However, Chinese arms provision may represent a net benefit to European interests where it enables West African militaries to acquire more sophisticated capabilities at accessible prices and thus outmatch armed groups in the subregion.

3.3 Training and military capacity building

China is stepping up training of West African militaries, already a major component of its engagement, in line with the focus on building African capacity highlighted in China's 2015 Africa policy paper and the 2018 FOCAC Action Plan. The latter indicates 'the two sides will ... step up cooperation in joint exercises and training, [...] China will continue to step up training for African service personnel. The two sides will continue to deepen academic exchanges and cooperation among military academies'. However, it is important to note China's uneven presence across different dimensions of military training and capacity building, and how its offer differs from that of West Africa's other security partners, notably the US and Europe.

(i) Training in the use of Chinese weapons and equipment

A first area is directly connected to Chinese arms provision: 'after-sales service' training in the use of acquired Chinese weapons, typically provided in-country by small PLA teams. For example, in 2011 China donated Type 56 (AK 47) rifles, rocket launchers, anti-aircraft guns and mortars worth EUR 2.5 million to Sierra Leone and dispatched a six-man team to train RSLAF personnel in their use.⁶⁶ Interviewees in multiple countries confirmed similar training associated with Chinese procurement.

(ii) In-country training: engineering; drill; combat skills

Small teams of PLA instructors also provide some West African militaries in-country engineering and medical training. The most notable example is Liberia. In 2012, China began a multi-annual programme to train and equip the AFL's sole engineering brigade. This was conducted by PLA engineering units deployed in the context of UNMIL and the fight against Ebola, who together with the newly-formed AFL engineering brigade undertook road and bridge construction projects.⁶⁷ Liberian peace and security practitioners and researchers interviewed in Monrovia noted these efforts made a tangible contribution to the country's post-civil war reconstruction and, alongside other major Chinese construction projects, contributed to a positive image of substantive – and above all visible – Chinese contributions to Liberia's development.

Other forms of in-country training are much more limited – or at least more difficult to track. Elsewhere in Africa, China has reportedly provided training to presidential guard units (strategically privileged in a number of countries to the detriment of the mainstream armed forces to prevent coups d'état and prolong individual regimes⁶⁸). However, no evidence of this training was

found within West Africa. Similarly, elsewhere on the continent PLA honour guard trainers have trained personnel in military drill, notably resulting in Rwandan troops marching in PLA goose-step to orders and call-and-responses in Chinese at the 2019 Liberation Day parade in Kigali.⁶⁹ Again, no examples of this were found in West Africa, though it may be seen in the coming years.

However, in 2010 Amnesty International reported, based on leaked documents and interviews, that in 2007–8 Chinese instructors gave a nine-month in-country commando training course to the Kindia commando battalion in Guinea, featuring small arms training, martial arts, hand-to-hand and knife combat. According to Amnesty International, the unit used these skills to suppress protests against military rule in 2009, killing 157 and injuring 1,253 civilians.⁷⁰ The unit, known as the *Commandos chinois* ('Chinese commandos'), continue to perform PLA-style drill.⁷¹ (Other units involved in the killings had earlier been trained by the US.⁷²) Interviewees elsewhere in West Africa stated that their militaries have not received comparable in-country combat training from Chinese instructors. Given the sensitivity of such activities, existing or future training of this sort may not be publicly disclosed.

(iii) Military education in China

A much more substantial element of China's capacity-building is military education in China, aimed at officers and funded by Chinese government scholarships. More than 20 Chinese military colleges are engaged in foreign military training, most notably the National Defence University in Beijing, and have taught over 10,000 personnel from 130 countries since 2012. China conducts tours of its academies for the heads of African military academies to encourage African interest. A participant of one such tour, interviewed for this project, was impressed by the 'scale [and] sophistication' of the institutions visited and the tour led to more officers from his academy training in China.

The scale and scope of China's offer is unmatched by West Africa's other partners. Military officers from all West African countries – across the Anglo/Francophone divide – have participated in such training. Courses range from a few weeks to a year and more, targeting all ranks of officers, and cover a broad range of tactical, strategic, and technical subjects. Interviewees reported that curricula were not overtly ideological but nonetheless frequently included presentation of party-state policies, highlighting their potential as a channel for influencing. According to fieldwork findings, par-

ticipation across different course types, lengths and subjects varies country-to-country. For example, a Ghanaian officer involved in military instruction reported that approximately 30 junior and cadet officers go to China annually as the international 'comparative' element of their training. In contrast, Nigerian officers reported that Nigerian participation typically involves more senior ranks participating in shorter courses focused on strategic defence subjects. In other countries, notably Liberia, Senegal and Mali, more technical courses, such as aviation and engineering training, are the principal focus.

Precise numbers are difficult to assess; recurring annual programmes range from approximately 10 participants (e. g. Cape Verde, Liberia, Senegal, Sierra Leone) to over 30 for Ghana, whereas participation in shorter, ad hoc courses fluctuate. For example, approximately 50 Ivorian officers receive training in China per year but this number includes both short- and longer-term courses.⁷³ Interviewees were, however, clear that numbers had grown appreciably in recent years and they expected this trend to continue. For example, the Chinese embassy in Sierra Leone announced in 2019 that the number of annual scholarships would increase to 30, while a military interviewee reported that the number of Nigerian officers trained in China has 'doubled' in the last five years.⁷⁴

Interviewees reported positive perceptions of the quality of Chinese training courses. For example, an Ivorian interviewee reported 'training in China is seen increasingly positively. It is more and more valuable for an officer's career' – due principally to wider perceptions of China's rise rather than the course content per se. However, the same interviewee and multiple other officers in both Francophone and Anglophone West Africa stated that training in China still lacks the cachet of attending major Western academies; as one officer stated: 'China is clearly less prestigious'. In the words of one Ghanaian interviewee: 'our boys want to go to [UK Royal Military Academy] Sandhurst. This is our tradition'. His counterparts in Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire expressed similar sentiments regarding the French equivalent, Saint-Cyr. Moreover, some interviewees noted the limitations of instruction conducted in Chinese through interpreters at some institutions (though the International College of Defence Studies at the National Defence University in Beijing provides courses in French and English). A Nigerian officer, involved in military instruction, nonetheless commented: 'these courses add to our expertise – we want to learn from as many partners as possible'.

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These training exchanges are a valuable opportunity for China to build influence with West African elites and future military leaders – and it is notable that such exchanges dominate over other forms of security sector reform and capacity building. However, West African interviewees reported no systematic Chinese ‘alumni association’ to develop a coherent cadre of friendly officers. One general trained in China in the early 1980s nonetheless reported that China had maintained connections, with recurring official visits to China throughout his career. Some interviewees noted limited integration between visiting and local students during studies and training in China, often exacerbated by language barriers, and suggested this may lessen the long-term influence and soft power impact of these activities.

Importantly, China is seen as ‘just one among many’ options for international training. In a recent report based on survey data of (principally West African) officers, more than a third of respondents identified overseas training as the most influential experience shaping their service (the largest share) and fully 97 percent had a positive view of international training.⁷⁵ However, China was only the fourteenth most preferred training partner, behind major European countries but ahead of India and Russia (the US, AU, and UN were the top three). Nonetheless, 83 percent preferred training with a wide diversity of partners – and this preference for diversity, into which Chinese training can fit, was repeatedly stressed by interviewees across the subregion in the present project. As well as highly active exchanges within Sub-Saharan Africa, West African officers notably train in Egypt, Pakistan, and India. A senior Nigerian officer described the level of Nigerian training in China and India as ‘about equal’. However, in the judgement of a Malian officer, the scale and generosity of China’s offer gives it an edge: ‘China offers more places and more diverse training ... [and] it pays for almost everything’.

(iv) Joint exercises

China has dramatically increased its participation in international joint military exercises in recent years. In West Africa, China has taken first steps in participating in such exercises, though this dimension of its engagement remains limited. In 2014, PLAN vessels, fresh from anti-piracy patrols in the Gulf of Aden, for the first time participated in anti-piracy exercises with the Cameroonian and, separately, Nigerian navies.⁷⁶ In 2018, a further PLAN escort taskforce visited the subregion and conducted exercises with the Ghanaian and Nigerian navies. Notably, the latter included participation in the Nigerian-led multinational Eku Kugbe exercise, alongside vessels from Cameroon, Ghana, Togo, Portugal and France.⁷⁷

However, China has yet to participate in joint exercises in West Africa outside the maritime domain. This differs from other regions, where China has, for example, conducted aerial exercises with Russia, and land-based CT exercises with SCO members. Indeed, elsewhere in Africa, in Tanzania, China has begun joint exercises of land forces.⁷⁸ Moreover, China's existing maritime joint exercises in West Africa have been 'opportunistic' (i. e. tangential to PLAN anti-piracy patrols off the Horn of Africa) rather than regular and programmatic. They also remain small-scale. Regarding the 2018 joint exercises with Ghana, a Ghanaian military interviewee stated they were 'small, just the traditional things you do alongside a port visit'. Certainly China does not participate in or offer anything comparable to US Africom's annual Flintlock exercises, which bring together special forces from the countries of West Africa as well as international militaries, including European, Canadian and Japanese personnel, or, in the maritime domain, US Africom's annual eight-day Obangame Express exercise involving 28 European and African nations, and Turkey and Brazil.⁷⁹

Nonetheless, China's recent first moves into West African joint exercises have raised its visibility as a security actor in the countries involved. These first steps, alongside China's growing participation in joint exercises worldwide, including elsewhere in Africa, suggest China may expand this area of activity in the coming years. West African assessments of this prospect were mixed. Most interviewees would welcome joint exercises 'if China has something useful to offer'.⁸⁰ However, multiple interviewees questioned whether China had appropriate skills and experience on counter-terrorism, the principal concern of many countries in the subregion. (The PRC's definition of 'terrorism' is problematically broad and domestic policies it identifies as 'counter-terrorism' are largely irrelevant, and unwelcome, in the West African context.⁸¹)

Similar arguments can be extended to a further element thus far apparently lacking from China's security engagement in West Africa: military advisers within presidencies, ministries of defence, or the upper echelons of the military. In this China differs both from the US and a number of European states, as well as, in a limited number of cases, Russia.

China's military training engagement with West Africa is thus extensive and growing but also heavily balanced towards more academic training of officers in China – which notably are as likely to build Chinese influence as West African capacity. This may represent significant competition to Euro-

pean countries offering similar programmes. Indeed, the number of places and generous funding offered by China was directly compared to smaller European programmes by interviewees. Moreover, the breadth of China's engagement in this area, including all countries of the subregion, across the significant Anglo-Francophone divide, sets it apart. This large-scale cultivation of future military leaders may in time provide Beijing with considerable influence in West Africa.

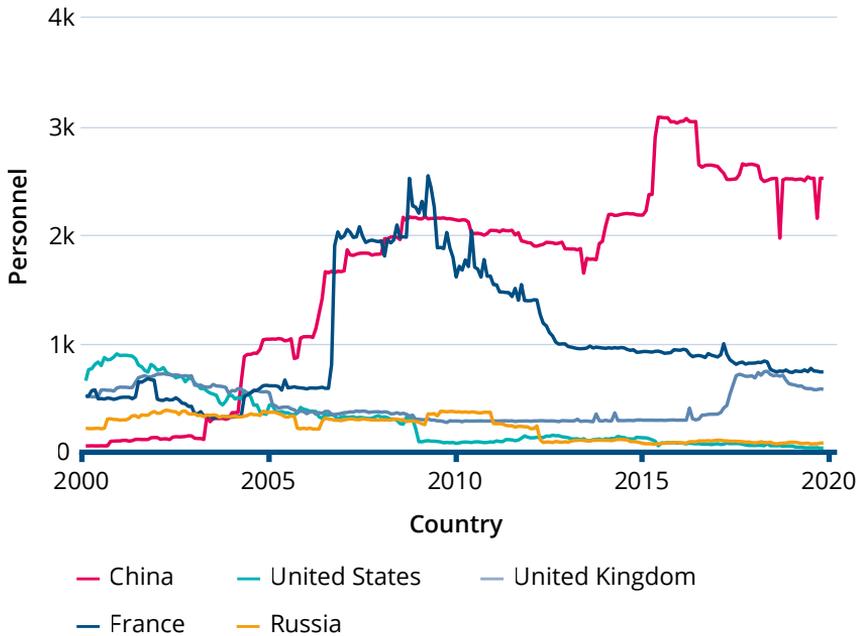
However, the minor scale of China's engagement in other areas of military capacity building limits its impact as a security partner. China does nothing to match the EUTM in Mali, which has provided basic training for 10,000 personnel (one-third of the Malian armed forces); or the large-scale, multidimensional joint exercises led by the US and including European forces; or specialist programmes such as the British IMATT and jungle warfare training in Sierra Leone.⁸² As such, China is not a peer competitor to European actors in West Africa in military capacity building. Chinese training may nonetheless positively enhance capacities in the subregion, and this may be complementary to European activities and interests.

3.4 Peacekeeping

Participation in UNPKOs is the centrepiece of China's engagement in West African security. Peacekeeping deployments build the PLA's capabilities while strengthening China's image as a 'responsible great power'. Xi Jinping's high-profile 2015 pledges and China's self-identification as the 'backbone' of UNPKOs mark a significant transition from earlier opposition to UNPKOs as imperialist-sponsored intervention.

This evolution has seen China gradually accept UN peacekeeping norms – but the embrace is incomplete. Beijing remains fundamentally ill at ease with the 'responsibility to protect' and 'robust peacekeeping'. Chinese thinkers are critical of 'multidimensional' peacekeeping and its 'primacy of politics', seen as the product of overweening Western influence and based on the flawed democratising goals of the liberal peace.⁸³ For Beijing, PKOs should be preconditioned on host-government permission. Strikingly, though Chinese leaders often claim this anti-interventionism as a principle shared with African partners, in West Africa it goes against the grain of ECOWAS' robust interventionist norms (see Section 4).

Graph 1: Peacekeeper contributions, UNSC P5

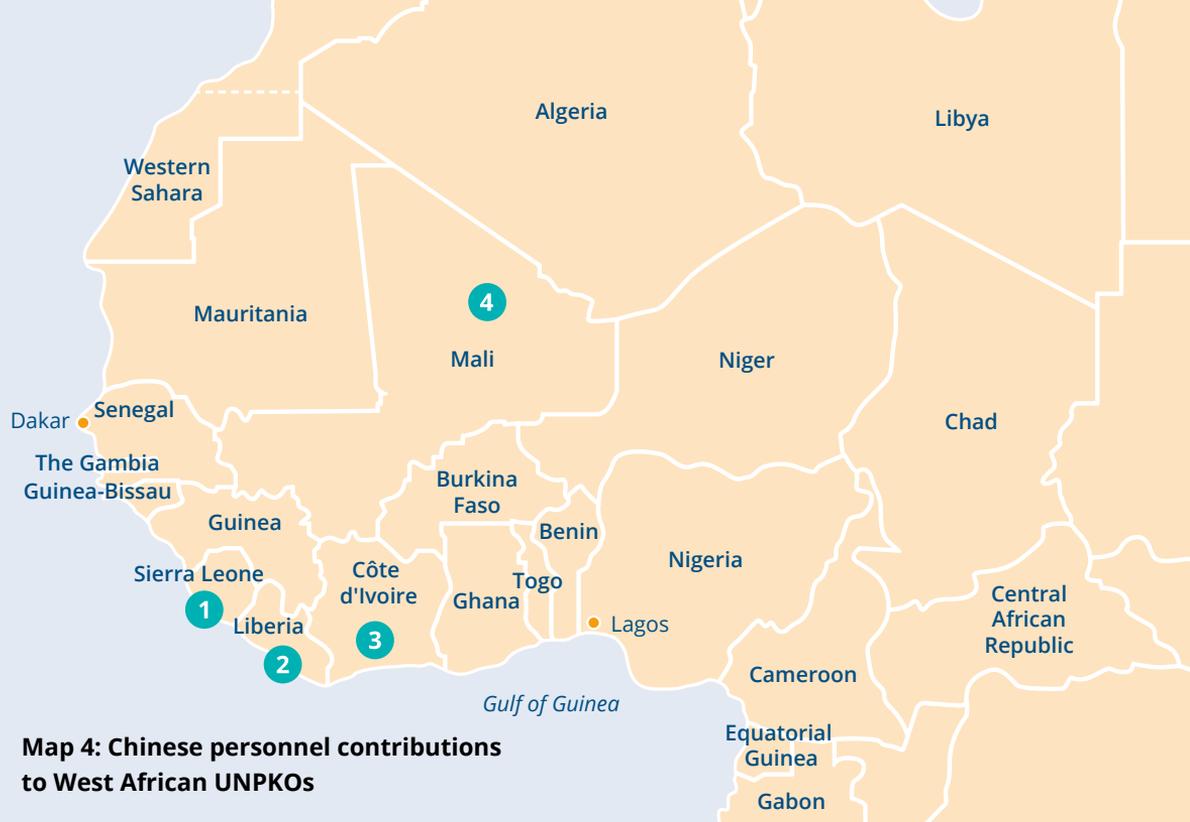


Sources: CSIS China Power Project; UN IPI Peacekeeping Database

China's deployed peacekeepers have increased from 52 in 2000 to 2,437 in July 2019, making it the 11th largest TCC globally and the largest of the permanent members of the UNSC. Importantly, its personnel contributions are diverse: medical, engineering, police, and combat units, as well as a helicopter unit. It is also the second-largest funder of UNPKOs, contributing 15.21 percent of the total (compared to the US' 27.89 percent and an aggregate 23.85 percent for the EU's members).⁸⁴

China has contributed personnel to all West African UNPKOs since 2000.^{III} Its changing contributions to these missions have tracked the broader trends of its shifting UNPKO policies.

III UNAMSIL in Sierra Leone (1999–2005), UNMIL in Liberia (2003–2018), UNOCI in Cote d'Ivoire (2004–2017), and MINUSMA in Mali, the only ongoing UNPKO in West Africa, deployed since 2013.



1 UNAMSIL (1999–2006)

9 military observers

2 UNMIL (2003–2018)

Transport Company (240 personnel)
 Engineering Company (275 personnel)
 Formed Police Unit (140 personnel)
 Level II Hospital

3 UNOCI (2004–2017)

7 military observers

4 MINUSMA (2013–)

Security Unit (170 personnel)
 Engineering Company (155 personnel)
 Level II Hospital (70 personnel)

Source: United Nations Department of Peace Operations.

(i) UNMIL: engineering hearts and minds

China’s UNMIL deployment marked a major expansion of its peacekeeping contributions, while its composition was typical of a Chinese pattern since seen in UNPKOs elsewhere – and represented a supposedly typically ‘Chinese’ approach to peacekeeping. However, its deployment only followed China’s successful leveraging of its support for the mission to encourage Liberia to end diplomatic relations with Taiwan; deployment began a month after Monrovia complied. The Chinese contingent initially included three principal components: a Transport Company (240 personnel); an Engineering Company (275); and a Level II Hospital. From 2013, China also provided a 140-strong police team. With approximately 550 troops at any one time, China in total contributed more than 9,000 personnel to UNMIL.

During the mission, Chinese units 'transported 780,000 tons of cargo, rehabilitated and repaired over 6,000 km of roads, built and maintained 69 bridges, and treated more than 46,000 patients'.⁸⁵ China leveraged this highly physical and visible contribution to soft power effect. In tandem with Chinese companies completing construction projects in the country, this generated considerable goodwill towards China among Liberians, as attested by Liberian interviewees. Chinese writers claim this approach to represent a Chinese 'developmental peace', differing from a 'Western' 'liberal peace'. Developmental peace's guiding principle is preservation of political stability as the cradle of economic development, which should be privileged as the means to eradicate the root causes of conflict, whereas liberal peace forces political change and promotes civil society, allegedly undermining the national government's 'leading role'.⁸⁶ Indicative of this 'Chinese peace' is Beijing's contributions to each thematic pillar of Liberia's post-war reconstruction Poverty Reduction Strategy: 77 percent went to infrastructure, 16 percent to economic revitalisation, and 0 percent to governance and the rule of law.⁸⁷ Although one of its leading proponents has said developmental peace and liberal peace can be complementary – 'developmental peace making up for liberal peace's insufficiencies' – PRC diplomats' efforts to cut funding for human rights activities in UNPKOs suggests a more proactive shaping to CCP liking of what UNPKOs do on the ground.⁸⁸

(ii) MINUSMA: deploying combat troops for the first time

Soon after Xi Jinping took power, Beijing sent its first combat troops to a UNPKO. As then UN Under-Secretary General for Peacekeeping Lad-sous declared, this was 'a major evolution that needs to be recognised and saluted'.⁸⁹ The 170-strong security unit deployed to MINUSMA was soon followed by 1000 contingent troops to UNMISS. As noted above, the decision to provide such troops for the first time to MINUSMA was striking given the absence of major Chinese economic interests in Mali. However, the relative size of China's MINUSMA and UNMISS contingents underscores the role economic interests nonetheless play in China's African security actions.

The PLA security unit is deployed at Gao, where it principally defends the Gao Super Camp. It also undertakes two daily patrols within Gao and performs frequent live-fire exercises. It is thus not engaged in major combat operations, though it has sustained casualties, including one fatality in 2016 (in keeping with Beijing's leveraging of UNPKO participation for domestic propaganda, Shen Liangliang's repatriation and funeral were presented by state media as a major national event).

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The security unit is joined by 155 engineering and 70 medical personnel, indicating that the paradigm demonstrated in UNMIL has not been discarded. These units have undertaken engineering tasks, such as road rehabilitation, and provided medical services to the local community. With a total of 426 personnel as of January 2020 out of a total of over 10,000 personnel, China is the ninth-largest MINUSMA troop contributor (behind e. g. Chad, Bangladesh, and Burkina Faso, each with over 1,000 troops⁹⁰).

China's MINUSMA contingent was described as 'low profile' by interviewees in Mali, including military officers, diplomats and UN personnel. However, it has received positive public feedback from UN officials for its professionalism. Chinese troops are perceived as disciplined and notably well equipped. However, China's emergence as a leading TCC has not been without challenges, especially in combat settings. A West African officer previously deployed alongside the PLA in UNMISS noted the PLA's 'professionalism' but also that 'their lack of international experience showed', as they 'struggled to adapt to the socio-cultural reality' on the ground. Chinese analysts have pointed to limited language and intercultural communication skills as a significant impediment, a fact corroborated by interviewed officers with experience of UNPKO deployment alongside the PLA.⁹¹

The PLA's performance under fire in UNMISS has demonstrated the learning curve it faces. According to reports based on eye-witness testimony, including of UNMISS officials, in an outbreak of fighting in 2016 that killed two PLA peacekeepers, PLA troops fled their positions, leaving some weapons, and refused to provide protection to civilians and aid-workers under attack.⁹² (As a report by the NGO Centre for Civilians in Conflict notes, the PLA contingent was not alone in doing so, and failures in UNMISS planning, especially concerning provision of appropriate medical care and CASEVAC, were significant factors.) These episodes have demonstrated to the PLA the challenges of operating in volatile and kinetic situations, especially within a UNPKO context, and by inflicting casualties have raised the potential costs of Beijing's UNPKO strategy. Like other TCCs, although Beijing has taken the important step of providing combat troops, it has shown limited willingness to put its forces in harm's way. However, as the PLA gains experience it may grow in confidence in such operations. As an African diplomat commented: 'the PLA lacks experience operating in the African terrain but [UNPKOs] can change that'.

Notably, MINUSMA has seen the PLA deployed alongside multiple European contingents for the first time, including German, Dutch, and Swedish forces.^{IV} However, this has brought only limited cooperation between the PLA and its European counterparts, notably with Dutch troops previously deployed close to the Chinese medical contingent. As Cabestan has noted 'the PLA's military culture of independence and secrecy makes cooperation with other countries' militaries difficult'.⁹³ On the European side, concerns over PLA intelligence gathering have also tempered the wish for greater interaction with the PLA. These challenges will need to be overcome or mitigated to ensure effective co-deployment in future UNPKOs.

Deployment in MINUSMA and other UNPKOs is also an opportunity for China to build relations and interoperability with West African TCCs. Twelve of the 14 ECOWAS members not including Mali have provided personnel to MINUSMA, including five of the top 10 contingents by size. Chinese peacekeepers in MINUSMA and elsewhere are perceived to be more comfortable engaging with troops from developing countries.⁹⁴ However, interviewees from relevant West African militaries reported that MINUSMA had not led to significant engagement with the PLA on the ground. China has nonetheless provided weapons and other matériel to some West African TCCs specifically for use in MINUSMA, suggesting some use of UNPKOs as a setting to boost military ties.

Similarly, Beijing has used its new prominence in UNPKOs to offer peacekeeping-focused training to African partners, both within China (at the UN-recognised China Peacekeeping Police Training Centre and the Ministry of National Defence Peacekeeping Centre) and at a proposed Chinese peacekeeping training centre in Africa. African states already host a network of UN-recognised peacekeeping training centres, including the Ecole de maintien de la paix Alioune Blondin Beye in Bamako and the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre in Accra. Notably, interviews at these institutions indicated that China is not a financial supporter of either and has sought only limited interaction. This contrasts with sizeable financial and expertise support from Europe, Japan, and others. Beijing's approach to peacekeeping training is a further example of its preference to create identifiably Chinese contributions to African security rather than joining existing, multilateral structures.

IV In total, 19 European countries have provided personnel to MINUSMA, leading to discussion of a 'European return to peacekeeping'.

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Beijing's contribution of combat troops to MINUSMA represents a significant step in its peacekeeping evolution. However, evidence from MINUSMA supports Cabestan's assessment that Chinese peacekeepers play 'a rather modest and, above all, symbolic role' in Mali.⁹⁵ While valuable, the size of China's contribution to MINUSMA relative to UNMISS points to the prioritisation of protecting Chinese economic interests, as well as Chinese scepticism at the 'multidimensional' nature of the MINUSMA mission. Some Chinese analysts even suggest their Western counterparts have 'over-interpreted' (过度解读) the significance of Chinese participation.⁹⁶ Indeed, interviewees in Mali noted that PLA deployment in MINUSMA had not been accompanied by high-level Chinese engagement with the mission or the security situation in Mali more generally. As a Malian MOD official observed 'one doesn't sense a real boom in security cooperation with China as a result of the Sahel crisis'. Senior Chinese leaders have not visited Chinese troops, in contrast to multiple visits by European defence ministers to their contingents. The fact that the PLA contingent's activities and rotations are nonetheless prominently reported by Chinese state media indicates Beijing's determination to draw international and domestic propaganda value from their presence there. As a Ghanaian peacekeeping specialist commented: 'China is good at presenting its role in UNPKOs to win hearts and minds'.

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4

China's peace and security cooperation with ECOWAS

Chinese leaders consistently emphasise 'African solutions to African problems' and are deepening Beijing's support for the AU's peace and security activities, including APSA. Given APSA is structured around Africa's RECs – ECOWAS in West Africa – the FOCAC 2018 Action Plan pledges to support AU and REC capacity building, and Chinese diplomats have stated that RECs 'enjoy unique advantages in solving African issues, and ... deserve the international community's support'.⁹⁷ As ECOWAS is arguably the most advanced and active REC in peace and security affairs – having deployed PKOs since the 1990s – China's engagement with it sheds light on the substance of China's preference for 'African solutions'.

China has courted ECOWAS as it has built its West African presence. Most strikingly, China is gifting a new USD 32 million-headquarters for the ECOWAS Commission in Abuja.⁹⁸ (Some interviewees expressed security concerns about this, citing allegations of Chinese espionage at the similarly Chinese funded and built AU headquarters in Addis Ababa.⁹⁹) However, peace and security cooperation remains limited. A strategic consultative mechanism established in 2014 has not remained regularly active.¹⁰⁰ China has pledged 'personnel training, joint exercises and material assistance' to the ECOWAS Standby Force (ESF) and provided EUR 3 million budgetary support in 2015 and USD 5 million of non-lethal military equipment in 2016.¹⁰¹ While

some interviewees in Abuja questioned whether this equipment responded to the ESF's principal needs (and not simply a chance to offload surplus), ECOWAS officials stated the donation followed a request for appropriate, non-lethal enabling equipment. However, the equipment remains unused in storage in Abuja, mainly due to delays in constructing an ESF depot in Sierra Leone, its intended destination, but also owing to difficulties interpreting the Chinese-language instructions accompanying the equipment.

In 2017, ECOWAS Commission president Marcel de Souza called on China to provide more security assistance.¹⁰² China's reticence is perhaps explained by discomfort with ECOWAS' interventionist approach to R2P and democratic norms, for example intervening militarily in The Gambia in 2017. ECOWAS also notably supports civil-society-led peacebuilding efforts, an area where China is entirely absent.¹⁰³ Interviewees from relevant West African NGOs highlighted that China is not a partner or funder of their work – though any such support would be welcome. However, as one West African security specialist observed in relation to civil-society led conflict prevention, 'China can't provide what it doesn't even have at home'. The antipathy towards civil-society-led peacebuilding frequently expressed by Chinese commentators in the context of critiques of 'Western' liberal peace suggests China is indeed unlikely to develop an interest in this area of peace and security work.

Nonetheless, with ECOWAS demand for further international support strong, the Sino-ECOWAS security partnership may grow in the coming years, at least in Beijing's preferred areas of equipment and training provision. China's deepening security partnership with the AU may encourage this trend, given the dynamics of the APSA. Its role will nonetheless remain small compared to other international partners more closely aligned with ECOWAS values.

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5

China and the G5 Sahel

China's engagement with the G5 Sahel offers insights into its approach to an important recent trend in African security: the use of groupings outside existing RECs, and therefore APSA, to respond to security challenges (the Lake Chad Multinational Joint Task Force being a further example).

China has voiced diplomatic support for the G5 Sahel and called for international funding for the organisation – which, comprising some of the world's least developed nations, has struggled to raise sufficient resources.¹⁰⁴ Nonetheless, China's own contributions have remained limited – and were initially delayed by Beijing's conditioning its support on Burkina Faso's ending recognition of Taiwan.¹⁰⁵ After Ouagadougou complied in May 2018,^v China provided an initial EUR 1.5 million of budgetary support to the G5 secretariat in Nouakchott.¹⁰⁶ However, China has not provided funding for the G5's joint force.¹⁰⁷

v Burkinabé politicians interviewed for this project confirmed that China's withholding security support was one factor in the decision, notably as it led to indirect pressure from other members of the G5 Sahel and ECOWAS.

China is increasing its support to the G5 – but prefers bilateral military assistance to individual members.¹⁰⁸ In December 2019, the Chinese ambassador in Nouakchott announced that China would donate USD 7 million of military equipment to each G5 member.¹⁰⁹ Tellingly, the announcement came at an independent press conference, rather than in a multilateral setting such as a donors’ roundtable. As an African diplomat commented, ‘China wants its role clearly identifiable and separate. It wants to keep its flag on things’.¹¹⁰ Indeed, China has not joined the Sahel Alliance or other multilateral donor structures engaged in Sahelian security. (China also pledged further financial support to the G5 secretariat and, significantly, to the joint force, though no further details were given.)

Strikingly, G5 officials reported disappointment in their hopes of winning Chinese BRI funding for the G5’s economic development and infrastructure building programme (otherwise a major Chinese strength and priority). In part this is due to a misapprehension regarding the BRI as recipient request driven and administered by a single, identifiable bureaucratic entity. However, it also points to Chinese reticence to multilateralise its activities in ways that may obscure Beijing’s role or reduce its control.

China’s engagement on Sahel security is limited but growing – but as interviewees noted, it is hindered by a perceived lack of CT expertise. Numerous interviewees nonetheless stressed that they would welcome a greater Chinese role as they struggled to combat the insurgency – indeed, one senior West African military officer judged ‘they could do more, they should do more, given all their resources’.

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China and the Gulf of Guinea: Another overseas base?

China has shown sustained interest in the growing issue of Gulf of Guinea piracy, for example twice organising debates on the subject while president of the UNSC and pledging at FOCAC 2018 to assist Gulf of Guinea countries in tackling the problem.¹¹¹ As state media have noted, China's own interests are exposed.¹¹² Chinese sailors and vessels have been amongst the gangs' victims and China trades a host of natural resources and, in the other direction, Chinese manufactures through the Gulf's ports.¹¹³

Beijing's interest also suggests a desire to replicate the success of its participation in Gulf of Aden anti-piracy patrols^{VI} – which have been a valuable experience for the PLAN and cited as a positive Chinese contribution to African security. This supposition is supported by the 2018 FOCAC Action Plan, drafted by Chinese diplomats: 'The African side applauds China's escort missions in the Gulf of Aden ... and encourages China [to] do more to support Africa's anti-piracy efforts in the Gulf of Guinea'. However, although regional states have considered joint patrols, the Gulf of Aden model of

VI Between 2008 and 2018, Beijing dispatched 31 escort fleets, totalling 100 ships, 67 shipboard helicopters and over 26,000 personnel, escorting over 6,600 Chinese and international ships.

major international operations is unlikely to be replicated, given lower strategic salience in global trade and, above all, the threat's concentration in the waters of a Nigeria leery of any encroachment on its sovereignty.

Absent international patrolling efforts to join, Beijing has focused on capacity building through financing, arms supply and joint exercises. China has donated and sold patrol vessels and helicopters to Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Benin, Nigeria and Cape Verde.¹¹⁴ Given the small size of many regional navies, these contributions can have a significant impact. China has also conducted joint exercises with the Cameroonian, Nigerian, and Ghanaian navies. Interviewees reported they would welcome further exercises where China had real expertise to share, noting the PLAN's experience in the Gulf of Aden.

However, in light of the Djibouti precedent and Beijing's stated aim of becoming a 'maritime great power', this sustained interest in the Gulf of Guinea has stimulated speculation about Chinese plans for a further base, on Africa's Atlantic coast – focused on Chinese port projects in São Tomé e Príncipe, Cape Verde, and Namibia.¹¹⁵ In the latter case, Namibian media reported in 2015 that discussions had begun between Namibia's Beijing embassy and the PLA regarding a naval base at Walvis Bay.

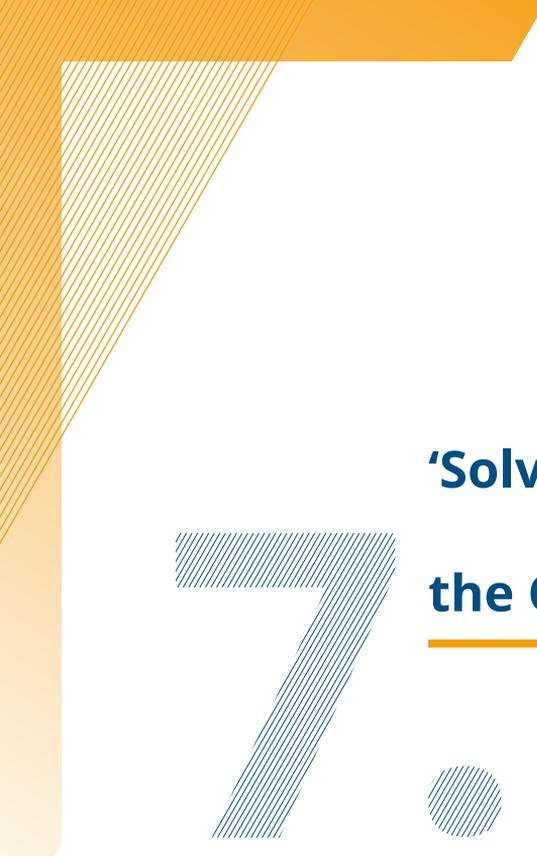
Chinese thinking on overseas bases has shifted strongly in the years around the Djibouti acquisition. Where previously foreign military bases were opposed as the work of hegemonic imperialists, redolent of China's own colonial victimhood, they have become, in foreign minister Wang Yi's words, 'necessary infrastructure'.¹¹⁶ A Chinese naval commander quoted by state media said Djibouti provides China 'experience of building overseas military bases' and is 'just the first step'.¹¹⁷ This shift has required a degree of casuistry, with euphemistic terms such as 'strategic strong point' (战略支点) and 'overseas protection hub' (海外保障支撑点) in preference to 'overseas military base' (海外军事基地). Chinese writers and state media claim the difference is more than rhetorical, as China's bases will benefit their hosts and are 'reasonable and legitimate' as they are to be used for UNPKOs and 'maintaining the common security of the international community'.¹¹⁸

China has yet to establish such a base in West Africa and – publicly – has no plans to do so. Chinese companies are indeed engaged in numerous harbour projects in the Gulf of Guinea, which may include dual-use facilities providing replenishment infrastructure short of being fully-fledged military bases. This possibility is suggested by Chinese behaviour in the Indo-Asia-Pacific and Chinese thinkers' calls to 'reduce the sensitivity' of its actions 'during the expansion phase'.¹¹⁹ Wang Yi has stated that a criterion for Chinese bases was 'regions with a concentration of Chinese interests' (在涉及中国利益集中的地区).¹²⁰ It is not yet apparent that West Africa meets this criterion, while the subregion lacks the large Chinese presence in UNPKOs and naval patrols that justified the Djibouti base (which already provides the PLA air access to the whole of Africa). However, given growing West African interests and despite international sensitivities, Beijing's leaders may in the coming years conclude this is in fact the case.

In the meantime, China's engagement in the Gulf of Guinea remains limited and firmly bilateral, and it has declined to join the G7++ FOGG.^{VII} China's contributions remain limited compared to other actors, notably the EU and its members. Indeed, it is striking that in interviews from Nigeria to Mauritania, discussion of a Chinese presence in the Gulf of Guinea most frequently raised the issue of large scale, illegal overfishing by Chinese trawlers, a major source of discontent in the region with a significant impact on local livelihoods and thus security.

VII The G7++ FOGG comprises Germany, Canada, the United States, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, France, Belgium, Brazil (observer), South Korea, Denmark, Spain, Norway, the Netherlands, Portugal, Switzerland, the European Union, UNODC and INTERPOL

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'Solving African hotspot issues the Chinese way'

Chinese leaders and diplomats increasingly talk of a 'Chinese way to solve hotspot issues' – conflicts and security crises – (中国特色热点问题解决之道) in Africa and elsewhere. Wang Yi told the 2019 UNGA that China would pursue a Chinese approach to 'hotspot issues' by playing 'a constructive role in upholding international peace and security'.¹²¹ Where much of China's peace and security role in West Africa is precautionary – focused on capacity building through training and arms provision – this recent preoccupation with a Chinese solution to 'hotspot issues' points to a role as a security provider responding to security crises – a role strongly implicit in Chinese 'Responsible Great Power' rhetoric and, as Chinese analysts note, a particular responsibility of a P5 member. However, this 'Chinese way' remains far from a comprehensively delineated policy.

In the first instance, China privileges African-led responses to African crises. As Wang Yi told his African counterparts in 2019, 'African nations and people know best about the problems in the region, and have both the capacity and wisdom to solve all the problems' – and as seen above, China is aiming to boost this capacity with arms, training, and funding for the AU.¹²²

However, in many crises African positions and responses are not predetermined – and frequently there is no single ‘African’ solution. Chinese researcher and former diplomat Wang Hongyi suggests Beijing finds it increasingly difficult to determine African positions due to African divisions in the face of complex security challenges. Importantly, Wang also notes normative divergence between Beijing and some African partners – as suggested above, a particular challenge in ECOWAS.¹²³ As a West African analyst observed, this can motivate and enable China (and others) to ‘forum shop’ for an ‘African’ position more in line with its preferences. Moreover, an increasingly powerful and influential China is able to shape African positions.

Where African solutions alone are not sufficient, Beijing calls for the international response to be channelled through the UN – though still in close coordination with African actors (in 2018 it established a ‘three-plus-one’ coordination mechanism with African UNSC members). Chinese leaders and diplomats consistently call for peaceful conflict resolution but where military action is required, this should be by the UN, rather than unilaterally; only UNPKOs are ‘authoritative and just’ (有权威性和正义性).¹²⁴ However, as noted above, Beijing’s acceptance of ‘interventionist’ UNPKOs remains circumspect; its support for individual missions is conditioned on host-country agreement and generally more likely to be motivated by a ‘responsibility to protect’ its own citizens and economic interest than by ‘R2P’ norms, while Beijing is increasingly keen to shape mission mandates away from ‘liberal peace’ norms.

In recent years, Beijing has shown greater willingness – and ambition – to participate in conflict mediation. The FOCAC 2018 Beijing Declaration states: ‘in light of the need of Africa, China will continue to play a constructive role in providing good offices and mediation of African hotspot issues’.¹²⁵ Since 2007, Beijing has appointed a Special Representative on African Affairs, with a lead role in Beijing’s mediation efforts. Beijing’s role in Sudan and South Sudan saw it break new ground, taking on a more visible role, including shuttle diplomacy and publicly pressuring conflict parties. Such activism has to date not been replicated in West Africa. In part this may be due to lack of opportunity – though Beijing has not sought a prominent role in negotiations in the Sahel since the outbreak of the Malian crisis in 2012.

More importantly, it points to a lack of concentrated interests of the type that pulled China into Sudanese and South Sudanese mediation. As China’s economic interests in West Africa continue to grow, this may change.

Already, West African interviewees suggested growing expectation of some Chinese role. For a Nigerian security expert, China's economic presence means 'they are involved'; a senior Senegalese officer judged 'China has its word to say, its role to play'. This raises the question of whether Beijing would be welcomed and accepted as an honest broker in the sub-region. Some interviewees expressed doubts given controversies around China's economic role in some West African countries and within some sectors of society. In contrast, others noted that China had successfully built up trust and a positive image. In some cases, China benefits from disenchantment with Western powers – most notably France in the Sahel but also scepticism at US 'ulterior motives' suspected by some in Nigeria and elsewhere.¹²⁶ This positive comparison owes something to the novelty of China's involvement, which may be a double-edged sword: in the words of an African diplomat, 'they are still learning Africa' and lack the expertise to mediate potentially complex conflicts. The fact that 'China's presence at the non-state level is negligible' on security and peacebuilding issues, in the view of a West African peacebuilding NGO, may leave Beijing ill prepared to mediate civil conflicts. The view of a Senegalese parliamentarian was, however, widely held: China is 'powerful and influential' in Africa and so could play a role in shaping events.

Beijing's non-interference and promotion of stability and state-centric solutions was widely seen by interviewees as limiting the likelihood of proactive engagement in political crises and conflicts. Its 'business as usual' approach – for example in Guinea in 2008 and Côte d'Ivoire in 2010–2011 – has had diplomatic costs in the subregion.¹²⁷ As China's weight in the sub-region continues to grow this business-as-usual approach may become harder to sustain – especially given ECOWAS' interventionist norms.

Chinese leaders and analysts criticise 'Western interventionism' in Africa as an attempt to maintain Western hegemony that undermines 'African solutions to African problems'.¹²⁸ West African interviewees not unjustifiably see little prospect of Chinese intervention of the type undertaken by France in Mali in 2012–2013 or the UK in Sierra Leone in 2000 (both with UN endorsement and intended to protect existing governments). For a number of West African interviewees, though extra-regional intervention is not a first preference, this severely limits China's role as a security actor. As a Nigerian security specialist observed, 'China is risk averse on security ... its inability to deploy troops [to the region] limits how seriously it can be taken'. The result, as a Malian military officer commented, is that 'one doesn't necessarily think of China' when responding to a security crisis. This is already seen

on CT and COIN, the subregion's principal security concerns. Here, an African diplomat judged, 'China offers nothing better than France, [or] the US'. While it is true that disillusion with France's Operation Barkhane is growing, interviewees in Mali and Burkina Faso pointed rather to Russia as an alternative, in light of its adventurism in Syria and the Central African Republic, suggesting the reported concerns of some in the US strategic community that its mooted West Africa troop drawdown will allow China 'to fill the gap' on CT are misplaced.¹²⁹

Direct military intervention by China in West Africa thus remains highly unlikely in the near future. However, China's 2017 registration of an 8,000-strong peacekeeping standby force within the UN's Peacekeeping Capability Readiness System points towards a possible scenario. In circumstances similar to the genesis of France's Operation Serval in Mali in 2012–2013 – i. e. delayed or slow deployment of a wider UN or AU PKO – China could provide some or all of this force, under a UN flag, as a spearhead to provide stability before handing over to a full UNPKO. The conditions for this scenario would be a UN mandate and – for Beijing's agreement – almost certainly also host government approval and a concentration of Chinese economic interests and Chinese citizens. In such an event, the UN's dependence on China's rapid deployment capability would grant Beijing considerable latitude to prioritise protection of its own interests, as it sought to achieve with the UNMISS mandate in South Sudan. A strong push factor towards China taking such an action would be disillusionment or loss of trust in existing UNPKOs to protect Chinese citizens or interests – for example, were a UNPKO to fail to protect Chinese citizens, leading to deaths and a backlash at home. A further factor would be the extent of Beijing's determination to expedite development of effective expeditionary capabilities – an ongoing process, the likely timeframe of which is the subject of debate. The CCP will require advanced expeditionary capabilities if it is to annex Taiwan by force, as it has stated it is willing to do. Deployment of the PLA's peacekeeping standby force to Africa may be an attractive opportunity to develop such capabilities: far from the sensitivities of operating in East Asia and readily presentable as the act of a Responsible Great Power. However, in the foreseeable future this eventuality appears remote. As a senior Senegalese officer observed, registering the difficulties of military operations in Africa, 'the Chinese are in a phase of observation and learning'.

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Conclusions

China: what kind of security actor in West Africa in 2025?

The findings of this report suggest that China is likely to have the following characteristics as a security actor in West Africa in 2025:

- **Limited – but not marginal.** China's security role in West Africa will grow to 2025 and beyond. But it will remain limited – notably in comparison to other extra-regional actors. Even in areas of relative Chinese strength (e. g. training), China's role will remain qualitatively limited, even as it expands quantitatively. As such, there is no prospect of Beijing displacing Europe and America as West Africa's principal extra-regional security partners. However, efforts by Beijing's diplomats and state media to advertise China's growing security role will ensure an outsized visibility for China's contribution. Moreover, with its presence across a range of security activities and its wider economic and geo-political weight, China will stand out amongst other emergent security actors in Africa. Sharply different approaches to African security will limit comparisons but perhaps not cooperation between China and an adventurist Russia.
- **An important arms supplier.** Chinese arms exports to West Africa will continue to grow. While proliferation risks will remain, China's ability to provide advanced weapons systems at accessible prices may help upgrade West African militaries' capabilities, and so their ability to face down the subregion's security threats. To do so, China's arms manufacturers will have to overcome doubts regarding their products' reliability. Chinese arms developers hope that increased exports – and combat exposure – will feed back into the steady improvement of their products.
- **A supplementary trainer ...** China will significantly increase its training provision. This will remain focused on scholarships for a range of short, medium and long-term programmes in China, aimed at the officer corps. China will likely participate in – and perhaps lead – joint exercises, principally in the maritime domain. Lacking relevant expertise and experience, the PLA will be unable to provide impactful, value-adding joint exercises on the scale of the US, especially on CT. It will nonetheless identify its activities as CT capacity building, and may pro-

vide smaller-scale CT training and exercises, which will be prominently advertised by PRC diplomats and state media. Chinese training and exercises in other areas – e. g. engineering, disaster response, military medicine – may add more value.

- › **... with friends in high places.** The focus within China's capacity building on educating African officers in China will enable it to cultivate influence with the next generations of African military leaders. In addition, the China-Africa Peace and Security Forum will be used to cement ties with Africa's top military commanders.
- › **Bilateral, not multilateral.** China will continue to privilege bilateral cooperation with West African states, notably in capacity-building efforts aimed at members of novel groupings such as the G5 Sahel. Its security engagement with ECOWAS – and other RECs – will grow as it deepens its partnership with the AU. However, cooperation with ECOWAS will remain limited to physical capacity-building and some financing, rather than participation in ECOWAS' more politically forward-leaning security and peacebuilding activities. Beijing will remain reticent to multilateralise its efforts in coordination with extra-regional security actors, though scope remains for deeper coordination and even collaboration. Above all, Beijing will continue to pursue independent activities that are identifiably China's.
- › **A peacekeeper ...** Beijing's reticence to multilateralise its security role will not apply to UNPKOs. China's domestic and international political leveraging of its UNPKO role underscores its commitment to UN peacekeeping and there is little prospect of this declining to 2025. However, Beijing will look to shape UN peacekeeping policy to its liking, likely drawing on the promotion of its nationals to leadership positions within the UN Department of Peace Operations and in individual UNPKOs, potentially including the Under-Secretary-Generalship. Beijing will draw on political capital gained in its support for UNPKOs to exert influence elsewhere in the UN system.
- › **... but not a peacebuilder.** China will remain absent from civil-society-driven peacebuilding efforts, which are at odds with the CCP's political worldview. Beijing will nonetheless continue to identify its economic role – most notably the BRI – as building peace and security, and will focus on economic development within UNPKOs as its contribution to peacebuilding.

- › **Conservative.** China's engagement with West African security issues will remain fundamentally conservative and state-centric, with a very limited embrace of intervention. This may put it at odds with some subregional states and ECOWAS actions. China is unlikely to intervene militarily in the subregion, though deployment of its peacekeeping standby force under a UN flag provides a pathway to this.
- › **Free to choose.** Though China's interests will continue to expand in West Africa, potentially pulling it into some future crises, the subregion will ultimately remain marginal to the PRC's existential national security interests, leaving it free to choose its level of participation in given West African security issues. Its choices will be dictated by alignment with CCP norms and opportunities for international political benefits from performing an expanded, visible security role. Moderate West African expectations and demand will remain only a limited pull factor. China will not be West Africans' first-choice security partner. However, some West African governments may seek to leverage security engagement with China to extract diplomatic returns vis-à-vis other partners, notably in the event of continued deterioration of Sino-American relations.

The implications for Europe

For Europe, the trends outlined in this report presage the emergence of an influential new security actor in a region of strategic importance to European interests. As such, European stakeholders will increasingly have to take China into account in responding to insecurity in West Africa.

Europe and China – along with their West African partners – have a clear shared interest in a peaceful and prosperous West Africa. This suggests that some cooperation, or at minimum coordination, on West African security may be possible. Indeed, Sino-European cooperation on African affairs, including security, has been mooted in a number of EU China policy documents – often as a means for substantiating the EU-China strategic partnership. However, despite exchanges including an EU-China Africa political dialogue (at the level of the EEAS Africa managing director), no substantial habit of partnership has emerged on the ground.

China has shown no great enthusiasm for such collaboration – and as this report has noted, Beijing has a strong preference for autonomous activities that are readily identifiable as China's, often deliberately contrasted

with the actions of Africa's 'traditional' partners, Europe prominent among them. Trilateral Africa-China-Europe cooperation offers a promising path, and already some instances exist, such as the non-governmental Africa-China-EU Expert Working Group on Conventional Arms. China may be less reticent about such formats than previously. As Zhang has written, in the 2000s, Beijing was wary of trilateral cooperation, seeing it as an attempt by Europe (and the US) to socialise it into Western modes of interaction with Africa, whereas a more powerful and confident China is now more willing to engage in such cooperation without fear of succumbing to Western influence.¹³⁰

On the European side, shifting perceptions of the PRC, driven by the changes of Xi's New Era, are likely to lessen the appeal of deeper cooperation with China on African security. The already substantial gulf in values is only widening. Political changes within the PRC are increasingly, deliberately shaping the Party-State's actions abroad in ways that cannot be disregarded. The drive for a greater African security role is itself an indication of Beijing's ambitions. These developments suggest any instrumentalisation of African security cooperation as a means for strengthening Europe-China relations is no longer appropriate, especially in its more military dimensions – not least given the impact this may have on the PLA's own development, with consequences for East Asian security.

However, as this report has highlighted, even as China's security role in Africa grows, it remains limited, in nature and in size. China is and, for the foreseeable future, will remain principally an economic partner to West Africa (though, as Beijing's diplomats will argue, in at least some cases with justification, this will have a positive, indirect impact on security). Beijing is neither recognised in the subregion as a major provider of international public security goods, nor as a preferred security partner. China's peace and security activities are not comparable in scale or scope with those of European actors; in this sense it is not a peer competitor to Europe, at least in aggregate. China's activities do not appear poised to substantially reshape security dynamics in West Africa; they do not clearly show a 'striving for achievement' (奋发有为), and in this regard Beijing may remain open to accusations of security freeriding. Instead, China's activities suggest a strong focus on appearance and visibility, with identifiably Chinese contributions designed to raise Beijing's profile as a security actor – as well as a pursuit of other goals, such as China's own military modernisation.

For Europe, therefore, the greatest impact of China's growing security role in West Africa will in the near future not be in the security domain. Instead, the effects will be felt principally in the diplomatic and (geo-) political realms. Beijing's pursuit of a larger African security role is to a large degree driven by diplomatic and political goals. A role diversified beyond purely economic interactions will deepen Sino-African ties. Beijing's focus on elite training and arms provision, couched in rhetoric of capacity building and 'African solutions to African problems', will strengthen relations with African governments and further boost China's image among African publics. Crucially, even where China's security contributions in Africa in fact remain limited, they will be more than the sum of their parts, coupled as they are with Beijing's rapidly growing economic and diplomatic clout, and undertaken by a country widely perceived in the subregion as a rising global superpower. Perceptions of China's security role may therefore outstrip the reality.

Meanwhile, Beijing will deploy its expanding African security footprint, especially its growing contributions to peacekeeping, to boost its international image, win political capital and gain influence within the United Nations. Beijing shows every intention of leveraging this influence to shape norms and political outcomes in its favour – and in ways that impact European values and interests.

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Policy recommendations

- › **Strengthen messaging:** China's growing security role in West Africa does not demand restructuring or expansion of European actors' own security activities in the subregion; at least in aggregate, these still far exceed Beijing's contributions, and any competitive dynamic with China is likely to be counterproductive. Nonetheless, effective coordination and unified messaging is required to emphasise the value of Europe's contributions. Public and diplomatic messaging should emphasise European actors' building of West African capacity, as well as its defence of values shared with much of the subregion.
- › **Maintain European influence in UNPKOs:** European members of the UN, especially of the UNSC, should be attentive to Beijing's efforts to leverage its expanding contributions to African security and UNPKOs for political advantage. China's growing contribution to UNPKOs should be welcomed. However, European members should be vigilant of attempts to weaken UN peacekeeping norms. This is best supported by a sustained, substantive European contribution to UNPKOs, both through financing and provision of high-end capabilities to individual missions.
- › **Seek exchange backed by effective internal coordination:** Given China's growing activism on African security and its substantial influence on the continent, European stakeholders must continue to seek exchange of views with China on African political and security affairs. Summitry such as the postponed 2020 EU-China summit in Leipzig is an important opportunity for high-level exchanges – but opportunities for ongoing, working-level exchanges must be sought and exploited, including within individual capitals, at the AU in Addis Ababa, and at the UN in New York. The aim of such exchanges should be to enhance mutual comprehension and trust to enable better global coordination in response to African security crises as they emerge. Crucially, this must be buttressed by effective European coordination and information-sharing on China's role in Africa by China- and Africa-facing teams within EU and member state services and ministries.
- › **Take high-level strategic decisions:** Any move to actively deepen Sino-European cooperation on African security on the ground, especially in more military dimensions, should be subject to high-level European strategic decisions, weighing the risks and benefits of such cooperation,

in the context of the broader picture of Europe-China relations; China's role and goals in Africa; and China's developing global behaviour. Preparations for the postponed Leipzig Summit, if and when it or a similar format takes place, are an opportunity for such reflection.

- ▶ **Devise European guidelines for engagement with the PLA:** While there are opportunities for more active security exchange and cooperation (including exchanges in the context of co-deployment in UNPKOs, notably MINUSMA; pre-deployment peacekeeping training; and joint exercises relating to HADR, NEOs, and anti-piracy, notably in the Gulf of Guinea), military cooperation should not be pursued for its own sake or without reference to risks and costs. China has already demonstrated its interest in such exchanges with European militaries – and some forms of joint training have already taken place. However, the decision to engage in these exchanges with the PLA must account for the possible risks to European values and interests, and those of Europe's like-minded partners in Africa and East Asia. European stakeholders, most likely coordinated by the EU Military Staff, should therefore urgently devise a code of European guidelines for engagement with the PLA, delineating acceptable exchanges – and those that are counterproductive. Though optional (given member state sovereignty in such matters), these guidelines would calibrate a coordinated level of engagement with the PLA acceptable to European interests and values.
- ▶ **Urge China to uphold transparency and international norms:** China can make positive, substantive contributions to African security and these should be welcomed. However, European stakeholders should encourage China to do this in a transparent manner, in multilateral coordination with African stakeholders and the international community. China should be strongly encouraged to participate in multilateral formats such as the G7++ FOGG. China should also be encouraged to deploy its existing strengths by providing financing and support to the G5 Sahel's infrastructure development activities. Such support would not be incompatible with Beijing's preference for activities that raise its own visibility but must be conducted in line with international, multilateral norms.
- ▶ **Strengthen coordination with African partners:** It will remain imperative to work in close coordination with African partners, in ways that emphasise African agency and autonomy of action. The EU's 2020 Comprehensive Strategy with Africa should be fully leveraged to strengthen Europe's role as a leading partner in Africa's peace and security.

Afterword

China's peace and security role in Africa will continue to grow in the coming years. Alongside its considerable economic and diplomatic clout, Beijing will be positioned to help shape political and security developments on the continent. As noted here, its often limited security role will be more than the sum of its parts – not least as Beijing's diplomats and state media work assiduously to highlight China's contributions, and views of China's activities become politicised in the context of renewed geopolitical competition in Africa. The reality of China's impact may be more difficult to pinpoint – demanding continued analysis and research.

Images of China's role in Africa continue to be dominated by its economic activities. But the People's Republic is working to establish itself as a serious actor in African security policy – and has made significant progress. As a stated priority of its Africa policy, Beijing is stepping up military diplomacy, arms supply, training and capacity building, and its contributions to peacekeeping on the continent. In doing so, it is boosting its own military capabilities and building its influence – both in Africa and in global affairs. While this important development is attracting considerable attention from analysts and policymakers, primary data remain limited. Responding to that gap, this Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung-MERICCS joint report, based on extensive fieldwork, sheds light on China's growing security role in Africa, how it is viewed in West Africa, and what it means for Europe.