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# China's New Security Strategy for Africa

JONATHAN HOLSLAG

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In December 2008, the Chinese Navy deployed three warships into the Gulf of Aden. This operation is not just a key moment in the development of China's blue-water navy, but also demonstrates China's growing willingness to secure its economic interests in Africa. The question is how successful this policy will be. The deeper China ventures into the resource-abundant African continent, the more it stumbles upon various security challenges. It is obvious that the People's Republic of China (PRC) desires to be Africa's most prominent economic partner. It is also unmistakable that the PRC is swiftly gaining diplomatic leverage. What is less clear, however, is how it will respond to the perils that lie ahead. Throughout history, most external powers for whom Africa's mineral wealth became indispensable to their industrial growth backed up their economic forays with a projection of military might, to suppress local resistance in their dominions or defend their realms from imperialist competitors. The dispatching of forces to Africa derived from the desire to reduce vulnerability while not having to rely on others.<sup>1</sup>

Now China has achieved a stage of economic development which requires endless supplies of African raw materials and has started to develop the capacity to exercise influence in most corners of the globe. The extrapolation of history predicts that distrust and uncertainty will inevitably lead the People's Liberation Army (PLA) to Africa in staggering numbers. In application of the self-help paradigm, China is expected to confront se-

curity challenges autonomously, while keeping other powers at bay. This article provides an overview of recent security challenges and the ways in which China has been adapting its security policy, then discusses what China's options are for the future and to what extent unilateral military action in Africa is feasible.

### *Security Challenges*

There are several sources of uncertainty regarding China's aspirations in Africa. Chinese mining activities often fall prey to endemic instability and violence in economic partner states. Since 2004, several Chinese companies have been in the frontline of internal conflicts. In 2004, rebels abducted Chinese workers who were working in southern Sudan.<sup>2</sup> In April 2006, a separatist movement detonated a car bomb in the south of Nigeria, warned that investors from China would be "treated as thieves," and threatened new attacks on oil workers, storage facilities, bridges, offices, and other oil industry targets. A spokesperson for the militant Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta condemned China for taking a \$2.2 billion stake in oil fields in the delta.<sup>3</sup> In July of that year, violent protests erupted at the Chinese-owned Chambisi copper mine in Zambia, resulting in five deaths and severe material damage. In November, Sudanese rebels launched three attacks on Chinese oil facilities and briefly seized the Abu Jabra oil field close to Darfur.<sup>4</sup> In January 2007, five Chinese telecommunications workers were kidnapped by gunmen in the oil city of Port Harcourt in southern Nigeria. Two weeks afterward, another nine Chinese oil workers went missing after being attacked by an armed group in Bayelsa state, Nigeria.<sup>5</sup> A month later, four assailants raided a Chinese stone plant in Kenya and killed one Chinese employee.<sup>6</sup>

In April 2007, nine Chinese and 65 Ethiopian oil engineers were killed during an assault on an oil exploration site operated by SINOPEC's Zhongyuan Petroleum Exploration Bureau in the Ogaden region of Ethiopia. The Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), an ethnic Somali group, kidnapped and later released seven Chinese men. The ONLF has repeatedly warned foreign oil companies to leave the region bordering Somalia. In 2008, the Chinese government organized the evacuation of 212

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compatriots from Chad to Cameroon after clashes in N'Djamena, Chad's capital. In the seas around Africa another risk looms. Chinese trawlers have been poached repeatedly when approaching the Horn of Africa. Between 2000 and 2006, seven incidents involving Somalian pirates were reported. In 2008, pirates targeted six Chinese ships in the Gulf of Aden.

Violence also threatens economic interests indirectly. Mindful of Deng Xiaoping's proverb, "safeguarding world peace to ensure domestic development," Beijing is investing an increasing amount of effort into branding itself a responsible actor on the international scene.<sup>7</sup> "The multifield, multilevel, and multichannel cooperation within the international community has become the realistic choice," Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing wrote in 2005. "The vigorous pursuit of peace, development, and cooperation by the people of all countries has formed a tide of history . . . . China's diplomacy has made bold headway, serving domestic development and contributing to world peace and common development."<sup>8</sup> Mayhem in the Sudanese province of Darfur, however, cast some doubt on these ambitions.<sup>9</sup> China was not only criticized for supporting Khartoum following the commission of war crimes, but the situation in Darfur also put Beijing in a bind between two diverging aspects of China's new diplomatic standards. On the one hand, there is the traditional emphasis on sovereignty and noninterference, principles that have proved to be lucrative in establishing economic deals in Sudan and elsewhere in Africa.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, the principle of constructive engagement as described by Minister Li is essential to maintaining good relations with nations and participating in multilateral organizations. In Sudan, China's traditional policy of noninterference was contrary to the expectation of other African nations that Beijing would contribute to the stabilization of Darfur. Domestic violence from China's point of view reduces its diplomatic maneuverability and ability to maintain the policy of noninterference which facilitated business with various countries.

The Chinese position became even more awkward when violence in Sudan started to spill over into Chad. Following the establishment of diplomatic ties with Chad in 2006 and the consequent oil deals, the government in N'Djamena made it clear to Beijing that the infiltration of rebels from Darfur into its own territory had to stop. During a visit to Beijing in April 2007, Chad's Minister of Foreign Affairs urged the PRC to pressure Khartoum into ending its support of the Chadian armed opposition. After the siege on N'Djamena in the early part of 2008, Chad's envoy to the United Nations stated, "China was a friendly country to both the Sudan and Chad," and he expressed the hope that "China would bring to bear more pressure on the Sudan to stop the process of destabilization in Chad."

The Sudan was trying to overthrow the legitimate government of Chad, in order to settle the conflict in Darfur. It was in China's interests to pressure the Sudanese.<sup>11</sup> When Li Zhaoxing visited the Central African Republic, President Francois Bozize joined Chad's appeal for exerting more pressure on Sudan. In April 2006, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs was asked by the Ethiopian government to take a more active stance on the crisis in Somalia, implying that China should condone the Ethiopian intervention in Somalia to drive out the Union of Islamic Courts.

Finally, China is concerned about the increasing military presence of other powers.<sup>12</sup> Between 2000 and 2006, the United States increased the number of its forces in Africa from 220 to nearly 1,000. The establishment of a new US Africa Command (AFRICOM), announced when Chinese President Hu Jintao was completing a tour of the region in 2006, raised eyebrows in Beijing. Although the Chinese government did not officially comment, state-controlled media reported that the American initiative stood for "Cold War balancing" and that this move was "rejected by African countries."<sup>13</sup> An official at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs interpreted the establishment of AFRICOM mainly in the context of the war against terrorism, but also recognized that "for the Americans, military diplomacy is a way to counterbalance China and to maintain a strategic edge."<sup>14</sup> Lin Zhiyuan, the deputy director of the Academy of Military Sciences, went further: "AFRICOM will surely facilitate coordinating or overseeing US military actions in Africa for an effective control of the whole of Africa," he wrote. "The United States has enhanced its military infiltration in Africa in recent years, with its military aid to the continent doubling and its weaponry sale skyrocketing continuously."<sup>15</sup> Chinese officials also tend to believe that, in the case of Sudan and Zimbabwe, Washington is not really concerned with human rights, but that it highlights such issues to constrain China and to eventually effectuate a regime state at the expense of China's influence.<sup>16</sup>

India is also expanding its military presence in the region. Along the East African coast, it has inked defense agreements with Kenya, Madagascar, and Mozambique and initiated joint training programs with Kenya, Mozambique, Tanzania, and South Africa. Its naval dominance in the strategic maritime shipping lanes around Africa in particular makes Chinese security analysts worry about the safety of Chinese supply routes. Delhi has convinced island states such as Madagascar, Mauritius, and the Seychelles to cooperate on maritime surveillance and intelligence gathering. India's fleet in the Indian Ocean is becoming one of the most powerful naval forces and includes state-of-the-art aircraft carriers, nuclear submarines, and other surface combatants.<sup>17</sup> "As one of the emerging powers in

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the world, India is now catching up with their involvement in Africa,” one Chinese expert asserted. “The maritime build-up of India along the African shores is one of these endeavors taken by India. The purposes are multifold: economically for market and resources, politically for international influence and support for possible permanent membership in the UN Security Council, and it may also involve competing with China for influence in Africa.”<sup>18</sup> Another scholar, Zhang Yuncheng, claims that “if some accident occurs or if the Strait [of Malacca] is blocked by foreign powers, China will experience a tremendous energy security problem.” This assessment is also shared by Zhu Fenggang, who points to the possibility of sea denial as a coercive measure against China.

Instability and geopolitical rivalry loom over China’s future supply of natural resources. Most of Africa’s energy deposits are located in the violence-plagued area that surrounds Sudan or in the Gulf of Guinea where the United States continues to step up its influence. In the east, India has begun converting the Indian Ocean into a sphere of influence. The most urgent need for Beijing is the protection of Chinese citizens and companies whenever they fall prey to instability overseas. The long-term risk is that local tensions and conflicts will entice external powers to interfere and to exploit this instability to gain clout at the expense of the People’s Republic. It is this double security challenge that Chinese experts and policymakers have started to address.

### ***China’s Current Security Policy***

In response to the attacks in Africa during the last five years, China has confronted the problem of nontraditional security threats in several ways. Two senior researchers of the State Council’s study department categorized nontraditional threats as a strategic economic challenge and called for including a series of new measures in the national security strategy, in congruence with China’s position as an “influential world power.”<sup>19</sup> Following the lethal attack on a Chinese oil facility in Ethiopia, *China Daily* headlined: “China needs to consider new channels to protect overseas interests.” The article stressed that “China must break through traditional diplomatic thinking . . . . The principle of self-restraint is insufficient to protect ourselves or to safeguard overseas economic interests and development.”<sup>20</sup>

The PRC's initial reaction is to work with local governments. "China will cooperate closely with immigration departments of African countries in tackling the problem of illegal migration, improve exchange of immigration control information, and set up an unimpeded and efficient channel for intelligence and information exchange," China's 2006 *Africa Policy* stated. "In order to enhance the ability of both sides to address nontraditional security threats, it is necessary to increase intelligence exchange, explore more effective ways and means for closer cooperation in combating terrorism, small-arms smuggling, drug trafficking, transnational economic crimes, etc."<sup>21</sup> Beijing has instructed its embassies in Africa to keep a close watch on local security. The swift and successful evacuation of Chinese citizens from Chad also demonstrated that China has developed operational scenarios to deal with these emergencies. The Chinese government has also started issuing travel advisories. In Sudan and Kenya, state-owned companies receive protection from local armed forces against attacks by rebels. Beijing has signed an agreement with South Africa to prevent the Chinese diaspora from turning into a target for armed gangs.<sup>22</sup>

Such measures are designed to help Chinese citizens and companies avoid some of the risks related to operating in Africa, but they do not provide any guarantee for safeguarding China's economic activities if the situation keeps deteriorating. In the case of Sudan, China learned the hard way that prodding instable governments can have drastic consequences. If problems start to occur at the regional level, supporting these emerging states might prove even riskier. Nor does this narrow security response address China's uncertainty about the military capability of African nations. The dilemma reverts back to the realistic supposition of self-help. Is the PRC trying to safeguard its interests by building up its own military presence in Africa?

Bilateral military exchanges are a first indicator to test whether this assumption holds true. According to the Chinese government, interaction with other armed forces expanded significantly, with 174 high-level visits in 2001 and more than 210 in 2006. This upward trend was not maintained in Africa, however, where such bilateral exchanges have remained stable at an annual average of 26. Beijing has established a permanent military dialogue only with South Africa. Interviews with European diplomats in ten randomly chosen African countries also reveal that the number of accredited military officers in Chinese embassies, i.e., military attachés and their support staff, has barely or not expanded at all in the last few years. In fact, only in 15 countries are Chinese military attachés assigned on a permanent basis.<sup>23</sup> China's military diplomacy in Africa remains modest, and it has



not kept up with the impressive number of Chinese trade officials posted in African nations to strengthen economic ties in the last few years.

Military aid is another indicator. Providing military hardware to partner nations can serve various objectives. In a context of competition, it helps to thwart defense cooperation with other states or to prevent other powers' attempts to alter the regional military balance. Defense aid might help a privileged political partner to safeguard economic interests. Whereas these three objectives are motivated by security issues and long-term economic interests, defense aid may well be the result of more short-sighted aspirations. There is no evidence that China's military aid successfully counterbalances other powers, such as the United States. Apart from Sudan and Zimbabwe, most countries that have received Chinese military aid in the last few years are also supplied by Washington. In 2007, Beijing temporarily froze the supply of heavy arms to Khartoum after pressure from the West.<sup>24</sup> When Nigeria's Vice President, Atiku Abubakar, announced that his nation would turn to China instead of the United States for arms, Beijing's response was reluctant, and no major supply operations materialized. China's military aid programs should not be considered as support for its forays into the mining industry. For instance, between 2004 and 2008, resource-rich Nigeria received only half as much military aid as Ghana or Uganda. During this period, China provided more military assistance to Angola than to Sudan, even though the security challenges in the latter were much greater. Although violence in Somalia has threatened China's oil exploration activities in both Ethiopia and Kenya, China only made a commitment to Kenya to help in protecting its border. China has, at times, provided military aid, but such assistance does not seem to be part of any coherent strategy related to protecting its security interests.

Finally, self-help would imply the deployment of military forces whenever China's interests are threatened, possibly in an attempt to train friendly armed forces and dissuade any challengers. Yet, such a Chinese military presence is negligible. China has no bases in Africa, as does the United States and France, nor has it trained African soldiers to counter threats to its national interests. In Sudan, Zimbabwe, Cameroon, and Gabon, China has employed teams of three to ten instructors, but they are assisting in the maintenance of equipment, rather than providing training for combat missions. In Zambia and Algeria, similar examples of cooperation exist but are limited to medical activities. Other major powers deployed naval vessels in an effort to combat piracy and to maintain the maritime supply lines surrounding Africa. During such operations, the Chinese Navy has rarely shown its flag. In 2000, China sent its newest *Luhai*-class guided missile destroyer and a supply ship to Tanzania and South Africa.



A 2002 fleet composed of a guided missile destroyer, the *Qingdao*, and a supply ship, the *Taicang*, visited Egypt.<sup>25</sup> These voyages were gestures of courtesy rather than a reaction to security challenges. They were limited in duration, and no actions were attempted against pirates or poachers. In December 2008, however, the Chinese government did deploy two destroyers and a replenishment ship in the Gulf of Aden to participate in the United Nations-backed mission against piracy. A mission that was only undertaken after receiving a positive signal from US Pacific Command chief Admiral Timothy Keating.

Instead of dealing with security threats unilaterally, China has resorted to bandwagoning. Although in the 1980s and early 1990s, Beijing opposed attempts by the international community to intervene in African security issues, nowadays it tends to join them. Beijing is increasingly recognizing the United Nations' role in resolving the numerous conflicts and safeguarding the sovereignty of developing nations. In the 1990s, China began supporting United Nations (UN) missions designed to implement peace agreements between rivaling parties, on the condition that a well-defined and restricted mandate was included. Traditional peacekeeping operations such as those in Somalia (UNSOM I), Mozambique, Rwanda, and Sierra Leone all were supported. When the UN Security Council decided to dispatch forces to Liberia in 2003, China offered to support the mission and gradually increased the number of its peacekeepers to 1,300 in 2007.

At the same time, however, failed states and national governments that had actively participated in atrocities challenged the efficacy of many of the traditional UN operations. China's focus on the primacy of sovereignty, requiring at a minimum the state's consent, collided with the willingness of other nations to intervene aggressively under the UN Charter's Chapter VII mandate. Beijing loudly opposed the move by European countries to push for Operation Turquoise in Rwanda, Washington's call to broaden the UNSOM mandate, or France's demand for a troop increase in the 2004 UN operation in Ivory Coast. Despite its strong concerns, China did not veto these interventions at the UN Security Council, but rather abstained and remained aloof from implementation. Sudan was the first instance where China actively lobbied an African government to permit a UN mission on its soil. Via active brokering and indirect pressure, China succeeded in neutralizing the incompatibility between its economic interests and the principle of noninterference on the one hand, and western appeals for intervening in Darfur and the need for long-term stability on the other.

That Beijing recognizes the importance of collective security became apparent in 2006, when China was the first nation to ask the UN Se-

curity Council for a peacekeeping mission in Somalia. In June that year, at a Security Council meeting in Addis Ababa, China's Permanent Representative to the UN, Wang Guangya, scolded other diplomats for neglecting Somalia and urged them to support the deployment of peacekeepers. "I was reluctant to take on this role," said Wang, explaining that African governments had been pushing China to raise the issue in the Council, "but there was a lack of interest by the other major powers." Initially, the proposal was tentatively received by Great Britain and the United States, but after various talks in New York, Beijing and Washington jointly sponsored a resolution for the deployment of a UN mission. In 2007, in early consultations with France, China supported a French draft resolution on Chad calling for the dispatch of mainly European peacekeepers under the auspices of Chapter VII. It was significant that China approved the "close liaising" with the Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID), where earlier it had objected to the development of links between UNAMID and UN missions. "Our support for the resolution on Chad shows that we are prepared to cooperate to tackle security issues at a regional level and that our awareness on the increasing complexity of violent conflicts in Africa grows," a Chinese diplomat explained.

China is also turning to African regional organizations to collaborate on security issues.<sup>26</sup> In the China-Africa Action Plan, approved in November 2006, Beijing vowed "to support Africa in the areas of logistics" as well as "to continue its active participation in the peacekeeping operations and demining process in Africa and provide, within the limits of its capabilities, financial and material assistance as well as relevant training to the Peace and Security Council of the African Union."<sup>27</sup> In June 2006, the Chinese government granted the African Union's Mission in Sudan \$3.5 million in budgetary support and humanitarian aid. Earlier, it provided financial and technical support to the Association for West African States.

Slowly but surely, China is showing itself ready to participate in international efforts to prevent conflicts, fueled by the easy availability of small arms and illegally exported natural resources. In 2002, for instance, Beijing revised its regulation on the control of military products for export and published the "Military Products Export Control List" supplying guidelines for the export of military-related products. In the same year, it signed the "Protocol Against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms," which committed the People's Republic to control the manufacturing, marking, import, and export of firearms, and to confiscate and destroy all illicit firearms.<sup>28</sup> In 2005, the government launched a national information management system for the production, possession, and trade of light arms, and it introduced a system to monitor end-users of Chinese-

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made weapons to prevent the arms from finding their way to “sensitive regions” around the world via third parties.<sup>29</sup> In 2006, China supported a draft UN resolution on the illicit trade of small arms and light weapons, in contrast to the United States.<sup>30</sup> In 2002, China joined the Kimberley Process, a joint government, international diamond industry, and civil initiative designed to stem the flow of conflict diamonds originating from Africa.<sup>31</sup> In 2005, China allowed a voluntary peer review of its support for the Kimberley Process.<sup>32</sup> Although these actions still have many flaws, they seem to prove that China wishes to do more than just put “boots on the ground” in response to Africa’s internal conflicts.

Despite the strategic importance of Africa, China does not try to safeguard its foothold in the region by unilaterally projecting military power. In Africa, its military diplomacy remains limited when compared with defense initiatives in other regions. If the PRC does pursue bilateral cooperation programs, these are more likely to be a part of its diplomatic charm offensive, rather than addressing threats to China’s economic and security interests. Instead of relying on a military presence to counterbalance other powers, the PRC tends to join collective security efforts within the framework of the United Nations and African regional organizations. Over the past few years, this strategy of joint ventures has evolved from passive support to active cooperation. Beijing has softened its devotion to noninterference. While maintaining the primacy of sovereignty, it has become willing to support interventions whenever regional stability is at stake.

Although China has become a revisionist power in terms of its economic aspirations on the continent, it is acting as a status-quo power in terms of security objectives. There are several explanations for this stance. First, China only recently began its economic focus on the African continent. For the past two decades, China concentrated on curbing the military and diplomatic influence of Taiwan; the focus on “economization” of its Africa policy only began in the late 1990s. Hence, the security challenges it is facing now are a recent phenomena, and solutions to these challenges are just starting to be explored. The PRC is going through the early stage of resecuritization of its Africa strategy, and joining with other nations in an allied strategy can be considered the easiest immediate response. Second, and related to this point, China has not developed sufficient means to

back up its security policy with military power. This is a matter of budgetary constraints. Building an independent and sustained military presence is a costly affair and would, at present, overstretch the PLA's capabilities, while Asia remains its primary focus. The PLA does not possess the logistical capacity to support sustained regionwide deployment in Africa. Its long-range airlift and sealift, as well as its intelligence and command capabilities, are not up to the task. Third, the Chinese government wants to avoid the People's Republic being perceived as a hegemonic power.

In the initial stage of its economic charm offensive, the PRC tried to pursue a business-as-usual approach, maintaining a low profile and steering clear of political entanglements. That approach is no longer possible now that China stands at the forefront of Africa's political scene, actively altering the economic balance of power. Beijing is well aware of the dichotomy between its weak and strong identities and is reluctant to demonstrate any independent military capacity. Such a show of strength might reduce its diplomatic maneuverability, increase resistance from African nations—just as Washington is now experiencing—and raise suspicions elsewhere regarding Chinese intentions. Yet, as interests, perceptions, and capacities are susceptible to change, the question remains whether China will stay on this track of cooperative security.

China's interests in Africa have changed over the past decades and will undoubtedly continue to evolve. The concept for its security policy in the region will depend on the role that Africa plays as a supplier of natural resources. Africa currently supplies approximately 30 percent of China's oil imports. Beijing and its African partners announced that they are preparing to increase bilateral trade to \$100 billion by the year 2010. Most of this increase will come from the import of raw commodities. In recent years, Chinese companies have laid the foundation for a substantial increase in the production of resource industries. Exploration in the Gulf of Guinea, Angola, and the Horn of Africa have the potential for an increase in oil exports to China of more than 80 percent in the next ten years. Chinese companies are just starting to tap the large mines that were recently acquired in Gabon, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Namibia, and elsewhere on the continent. Given the fact that other emerging markets such as India and Brazil are shifting the use of their raw materials from export to domestic consumption, the economic relevance of Africa to China cannot be overstated.

How necessary it is to back up these Chinese economic ventures with more overt security measures is yet to be seen. The incidents described in the first section of this article, the persistent instability in nations, as well as the weak position of amicable political leaders will undoubtedly position Africa

higher on Beijing's foreign security agenda and require a more complete approach. The question again arises whether it is in China's best interest to apply its African policy independently or in synergy with other nations. The short-term costs of any unilateral action would certainly exceed those of collective action, but long-term uncertainty about the intentions of other major players might influence any concerns related to cost-effectiveness. If Washington or Delhi decides to change course and contain China's expanding influence in Africa by pursuing a strategy of counterbalancing and sea denial, the repercussions for the People's Republic will be dramatic. The concerns of the national security establishments in India and the United States and their expanding military presence in Africa are not unnoticed in China, and they highlight the necessity for the PRC to build a legitimate capacity to deal with crises unilaterally.

China's diplomatic identity will help shape policy decisions in support of a more active and autonomous security strategy. Beijing is realizing that the comfortable cloak of frailty it previously presented to the world no longer fits. African partners do not attach much value to China's diplomatic schizophrenia and the complex image of an economic giant, political dwarf, and minor military player it projects. When mayhem erupts, China automatically ends up on the frontline, finding itself hounded by African governments asking it to exercise its leverage. The cases of Chad and Somalia are not the only examples of this. South Africa has accosted China regarding illegal immigrants from Zimbabwe.<sup>33</sup> Central Africa has carefully examined the violent incursions from Sudan.<sup>34</sup> The African Union has called upon China several times to play a more active role in promoting security. The possibility exists that individual countries may be compelled to form a closer alliance with China in order to reduce their current reliance on the European Union and United States for security. Nigeria's announcement that it would rely on China instead of the United States for military support hints at this direction. The ability of the PRC to keep a low military profile is diminishing.

On the other hand, China's self-perception is also in transition. The "Century of Humiliation" is far behind and is being replaced by a national attitude of confidence and assertiveness. Chinese leaders have built on the success of their policy of good neighbor diplomacy that resulted in fewer frictions and more influence in Asia. The People's Republic has drawn confidence from the successful launch of a number of new defense systems. As China sees its diplomatic leverage expanding geographically from the Strait of Formosa, via Asia to the rest of the developing world, its ability to deal with emerging security issues is likely to follow suit.

Finally, there is the factor of capacity. China is gearing its military for a greater deployment capability. Its large immobile army is gradually being converted into a highly specialized and flexible organization. Simultaneously, the PLA is launching new military systems that will enhance its capacity to transport these forces. In 2007, the Chinese government approved the development of large passenger jets, including military transport variants similar to the American C-17 Globemaster III. Beijing has also ordered several new ships in an effort to enhance its naval transport capacity. In 2006, the hull of the first T-071 vessel was laid. This landing-platform dock has a range that goes far beyond Taiwan, with the aim of providing sea-based support to operations on land, humanitarian aid, and assisting in evacuations and disaster management. These vessels will be supported by a new generation of large replenishment ships and could be escorted by advanced frigates and destroyers. The Chinese flotilla that was sent to Somalia demonstrates China's new blue-water capacity. The type 052C *Lanzhou*, for instance, is a showcase of the advanced detection capacity for China's Navy. Its multifunction, active phased-array radar has a detection range of 450 kilometers and is complemented with a long-range, two-dimensional air search radar that has a 350-kilometer range and three additional systems to detect incoming missiles and aircraft.<sup>35</sup> China is advancing its ability to pursue a more confident and independent security policy in Africa.

Will all this newfound military activity be sufficient to offset the antagonistic response it is likely to provoke? Probably not. If China decides to go solo and to pursue a more aggressive security policy in Africa, it is improbable that it will be able to overcome countermoves by India and the United States. As this article previously detailed, it will be difficult for China to safeguard maritime trade with Africa if India exercises its naval dominance in the Indian Ocean. The sheer geographical divide between the PRC and the African continent makes it extremely difficult to support military activities if the United States or India opposes them. Contrary to China's revolutionary phase of the 1950s and 1960s when trade and economic interests only played a small part, China's increasing reliance on Africa renders it highly vulnerable to sea denial operations or a *guerre de course*. The fragile Cold War balance between the United States and the Soviet Union that allowed Mao to meddle with America's interests in Africa without having to fear political or economic reprisals can no longer be counted on. These days China has much to lose if it provokes Washington or Delhi.



## Conclusion

There are several reasons to assume that China will abandon its security cooperation strategy in Africa. The persistence of the double security challenge, the growing strategic importance of Africa, and China's growing military might and diplomatic assertiveness may lead to a more strident and unilateral security policy. For the long-term haul, however, the geo-economics in question, specifically the vulnerability of its long supply lines, will prevent China from resorting to a unilateral diplomacy that a number of nations previously pursued. Despite changing interests, perceptions, and means, China is and will remain dependent on the good will and collaboration of other players to help safeguard its economic interests in Africa. As long as its economic stability relies on a supply of Africa's natural resources, China will stick to the path of security cooperation. In fact, it will be the main stakeholder in terms of maintaining peace, social stability, good governance, and equitable development in its partner countries. Beijing's only option is to avoid future friction with other world powers by not being drawn into national power plays and by preventing regional and domestic hostility. Unlike any other external power, it is in China's interest to turn regional actors into flexible and globally supported organizations, and by demonstrating strategic leadership and conflict management while doing so.

### NOTES

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