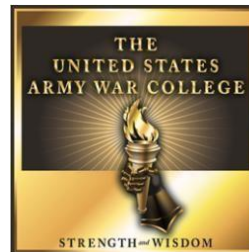


A Grand Strategy of Encirclement: Strategic Competition and the Rise of China

by

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Abstract

This paper explores the dynamics of an emerging grand strategic competition between the United States and China over the future of the norms and institutions underpinning the liberal world order as we know it. By comparing China's behavior in the South China Sea and Africa, we can begin to see the elements of a political-military "encirclement" strategy, designed to gradually advance China's aims without resorting to direct armed conflict. It concludes with policy recommendations for the United States to begin countering China's encirclement strategy.

A Grand Strategy of Encirclement: Strategic Competition and the Rise of China

A holistic approach will be taken... lay[ing] stress on farsighted planning and management to create a favorable posture, comprehensively manage crises, and resolutely deter and win wars.

—Ministry of National Defense of the People's Republic of China ¹

President Obama, in November 2011, declared that “the United States is turning [its] attention to the vast potential of the Asia Pacific region,” heralding the so-called “pivot” or “rebalance” to Asia. According to one of the key architects of the policy, the pivot is “premised on the recognition that the lion’s share of the political and economic history of the 21st century will be written in the Asia-Pacific region.”² The rationale for believing so is understandable: history suggests that the rise of major powers can be a destabilizing – if not disastrous – occurrence; it is with this in mind that G. John Ikenberry writes that the rise of China “will undoubtedly be one of the great dramas of the twenty-first century.”³ The strategic question is: will China prove to be a coercive, cooperative, or competitive actor on the global stage?

Scholars and practitioners have dedicated volumes to discerning some kind of answer to that key question for global order in the 21st century. In so doing, many have focused on China’s behavior as a regional power, and lately, the South China Sea in particular. While the South China Sea is undoubtedly of crucial strategic importance to China – and therefore worthy of considerable analysis and scholarship – a fresh analytic starting point may be required to help make better sense of China’s behavior: Africa. As this paper will argue, comparing Chinese behavior in its near and further abroad helps illuminate trends that are not immediately evident through exploring one theater or the other. Put simply, a much better appreciation for China’s involvement in Africa is

essential in order to fully comprehend its behavior in Asia and the international security environment broadly.

Accordingly, this paper proceeds along the following lines. It first briefly explores the contours of the debate surrounding China's rise and the "rebalance" to Asia, ultimately positing that China seeks to recast international law and norms in a manner more appropriate to its preferences. It then explores how it is going about doing so in the South China Sea. Next, it turns to the case of Africa, and explores the manner in which China may be using both military and non-military instruments to achieve its global objectives. The paper concludes with policy recommendations to deal with the challenges illuminated by the Africa case. It is important to note that this paper does not seek to be authoritative on these questions; such an exercise is well beyond the scope of this paper. Rather by illuminating a different perspective on the challenge – and raising provocative questions accordingly – it is to be hoped that policymakers may be able to creatively approach the challenge posed by the rise of China.

The Rise of China

Particularly since the end of the Cold War and the demise of the Soviet Union, the rise of China – the next major power contender that could challenge the United States – has been interpreted and analyzed by a variety of international relations and policy scholars. The overall parameters of the debate stem from the intellectual starting positions of their respective advocates. On the one hand, realists tend to argue that China's rise and strategic ambitions are inherently destabilizing.⁴ Within that paradigm, therefore, countering China's military rise through military and economic means in order to dissuade China from behaving aggressively is the recommended strategy. On the other hand, proponents of economic interdependence theory maintain that China's

integration into the global economy - and with the U.S. economy specifically – has powerfully incentivized Beijing to behave cooperatively; to do otherwise would risk its own economic interests.⁵ Proponents of interdependence theory therefore tend to argue that ensuring China’s peaceful rise requires further integrating it into the global economy.

These intellectually polar opposite starting points, are of course, caricatures of the debate in international relations; in reality, most scholars and practitioners generally advance some mixture of the two schools of thought, attempting to blend the carrots and sticks into a coherent approach. Moreover, the pivot to Asia itself can be seen a culmination of this debate. The U.S. is already the dominant military power in the region; through the pivot, it is repositioning more of its assets into the Asian theater – notably at Darwin, Australia and Singapore. Further, it is doing so while increasing its bilateral and multilateral diplomatic and economic engagements⁶ around the Pacific.⁷ As the theory goes, through the combination of strong alliances, as well as military and diplomatic means, it is to be hoped that China’s energies and activities can be channeled into its peaceful rise as a constructive player on the international stage. This theory of a constructive rise becomes all the more plausible when China’s international actions are viewed against the backdrop of its domestic concerns, which some maintain are China’s real concern. As the Ripon Forum notes in its article for the Council on Foreign Relations, “[T]he single issue that keeps [China’s leaders] up at night is the fear that the growing discontent of rural farmers and migrants could metastasize into a revolutionary force that topples them from power.”⁸

While there is nothing inherently wrong with this “middle ground” strategic approach to China’s rise, analysts have generally assumed that, all things being equal, China *wants* to be part of the international order that the U.S. established after World War II – albeit with a diminished U.S. presence in the world, and around the Pacific specifically.⁹ Another frequently maintained assumption is that American alliances in the Pacific theater are a durable and sound basis for containing China if necessary.¹⁰ And that while China may clash with the United States on issues such as human rights, these are navigable issues that when geopolitical push comes to shove, lessen in priority relative to economic interests.

Unfortunately, there are emerging signs that these assumptions may not, in fact, hold true. This is because the norms and values underpinning the Western-created liberal world order are deeply threatening and destabilizing to authoritarian regimes like China’s. Indeed, as Walter Russell Meade writes, “until recently there wasn’t much they could do but resent the world order; now, increasingly, they think they have found a way to challenge the way global politics work.”¹¹ Noah Feldman, in his book *Cool War*, amplifies on this point by articulating why, beyond naked geopolitics, the Chinese might be interested in doing so:

Many in the West believe that policy toward China should be structured around the goal of making democracy, human rights, and the rule of law into China’s governing norms. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that many Westerners, including Western political leaders, believe that China’s present governing system is illegitimate...Think of it from the Chinese leaders’ point of view: they must engage with opposite numbers who would like to see their whole governing structure crumble. Their Western negotiating partners think they hold their place at the table unjustly. Given this reality, they must accept that any deal made by their Western interlocutors is meant as a step, however small, toward their own destruction.¹²

In 1995, China scholar Wang Gungwu argued that, “the Beijing government believes that the United States, by its very nature as a superpower, will interfere globally wherever it can.”¹³ And, for better or worse from the standpoint of Sino-American relations, since then the United States has not shied from interference in affairs that China considers its own domestic affairs. Wang Jisi writes that U.S. support for the Dalai Lama and Uighur separatists, as well as continued support for Taiwan, including arms sales are all examples of U.S. dissatisfaction with the Beijing imposed order on the people of China.¹⁴

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that one of China’s five foreign policy principles is non-interference in the domestic affairs of its interlocutors¹⁵ – in stark contrast with the United States’ policy of advancing democracy globally. At a grand strategic level, therefore, a competition for the ideas and norms that shape relations between states is beginning to take shape. The question is not merely about China’s rise into the pre-existing global order; the question is becoming whether China can reshape the global order – predicated on the principle of non-interference and underpinned by its regional, if not global power.

The second point is critical. Hegemonic stability theory tells us that dominant global powers have a fair degree of latitude when it comes to establishing the rules governing the international order, but that it must secure the buy-in of other states for the rules it advances (and its position as hegemon overall), and be able to enforce those rules through economic and military means.¹⁶ Applied to China, if Beijing seeks to recast the liberal, democratic norms and principles underpinning the global system, it

must secure the support of other states, and must have the military and economic power to enforce its rules.

At first glance, these preconditions would seem to preclude China's ability to meaningfully shape the global order. After all, the United States has maintained strong alliances across the Asia Pacific for over sixty years, and it remains the dominant military power in the region. Yet closer examination suggests there may be some reasons for concern. To understand why, we must first look to China's recent behavior in the South China Sea.

China's Near Abroad – The South China Sea

In 1996, Gungwu wrote, “[China] does not have the wherewithal to restrain the United States everywhere, but it can try to limit interventions in its own region, East and Southeast Asia.”¹⁷ Since that time, China has steadily worked to do so, at least militarily. As Anthony Cordesman writes, “China's actions on its borders, in the East China Sea, and in the South China Sea have shown that China is steadily expanding its geopolitical role in the Pacific, and having a steadily increasing impact on the strategy and military developments in other Asian powers.”¹⁸

Presently, nowhere is China's muscle-flexing more evident than in the South China Sea. Since 2014, China has undertaken a massive – and rapid – coral reef reclamation effort in the South China Sea.¹⁹ This island building – through dredging sand from the sea bed and piling it onto existing underwater coral reefs – has resulted in the creation of seven new islets in the Spratly and Paracel Islands, in territorial waters claimed by Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, and Taiwan. While other nations with territorial claims in the region have also engaged in reclamation efforts, none have with the scale and speed with which China has done so.²⁰ According to U.S. estimates,

China constructed upwards of 3,000 new acres of land since early 2014; Vietnam, by contrast, has built 60 acres of new land, in fewer places.²¹ And while Beijing initially stated its intention was to use these “reclaimed” islands for peaceful purposes, there is now ample publicly-available evidence that China has militarized the reclaimed islands,²² while deploying surface to air missiles on Woody Island in the disputed Paracels.²³ All this has prompted U.S. officials, to include President Obama to condemn China’s aggressive activities in the South China Sea.²⁴

In addition to strengthening its claims to mineral resources and fishing rights within the disputed areas, China is also able to better enforce what it calls the “nine-dash line” – a maritime boundary that extends hundreds of miles south and east of Hainan island. The “nine-dash line” is adjacent to, and in some instances crosses, neighboring maritime claims; should China solidify its claims to these waters, it would be in control of shipping lanes that see \$5 trillion in traffic annually.²⁵

Yet there are already significant and evident drawbacks to its recent maritime activities, especially given that China has gone to considerable lengths to reassure its neighbors that its rise on the global stage will be peaceful. The majority of the states in the region view China’s behavior as deeply provocative;²⁶ this response has, in turn, challenged the United States to increase naval patrols in the region in order to assure its allies that freedom of navigation in the region’s international waters will be maintained.²⁷

Given the strategic importance of the region from a resource and trade perspective, there is a strong case to be made that sheer geopolitics are driving China’s calculations. Nor is it a particularly new ambition; as Cordesman points out, Chinese

naval strategists started articulating strategies for dominating the South China Sea as early as 1982.²⁸ Yet the risks and drawbacks of China's behavior suggest that there may, in fact, be something deeper at play. Once again, insights from *Cool War* are instructive. Feldman argues that Chinese military dominance vis-à-vis the United States is not necessary to accomplish Beijing's objective of reshaping the strategic balance in Asia. Rather, China merely needs to unobtrusively build enough military capability over time to convince the United States that acting on behalf of allies is not worth the risk. As Feldman puts it: "much better to advance as quietly as possible for as long as possible, then emerge with increased military might as a fait accompli."²⁹

In an article for *The National Interest*, Alexander Vuving describes China's behavior as less like chess, and more like the game "Go" in which the object of the game is not conflict, but encirclement. He writes:

The campaign to achieve this goal relies on creeping expansion, rather than major battles. This creeping expansion is a protracted undertaking that is played out in decades. In accordance with this strategy, salami slicing and small-stick diplomacy are the preferred tactics. The underlying logic is to gradually shift the propensity of things in favor of Chinese dominance by unobtrusively maneuvering the strategic configuration of the region.³⁰

Henry Kissinger³¹ and Noah Feldman agree: China's preferred method of advancing its objectives is encirclement rather than direct confrontation. Which, of course, makes it difficult for a strategic planning community focused on scenarios leading to warfare and orders of battle rather than gradual salami tactics. Yet these are, arguably, the circumstances more likely to fundamentally reshape the dynamics in Asia than an all-out war. The alliance relationships that Washington maintains across Asia are predicated on the assumption that the United States will defend its allies' security interests, using military force if necessary. The political fault lines of Asia will therefore

significantly shift if allies doubt the credibility of U.S. commitments and alliances obligations. Again, Feldman writes, “these nations would perceive U.S. abandonment of Taiwan as a signal of America’s potential future abandonment of their defense.”³² While it is focused on Taiwan, one can easily imagine its applicability to recent developments in the South China Sea. And viewed in this light, all China needs to do behave provocatively enough (but not *too* provocatively) in order to cause doubt in Allies’ minds whether the United States will, in fact, come to their defense in the event of a crisis.

In other words, there is good reason to believe that China is playing a game of diplomatic and military encirclement in the South China Sea in order to advance its objectives. And it is doing so in a manner that could exploit political fault lines between the United States and its allies; if successful, China could fundamentally reshape the security dynamics in the Asian theater. Yet the grand strategic contest over international norms and law – pitting the U.S.-led construct of western liberalism against China’s non-intervention policies must, by necessity, take place on the global stage. Looking at China’s recent activities in Africa, one cannot help but wonder whether China’s next game of encirclement against the United States – this time with implications for the overall global order – is now underway.

China in Africa

Many of the studies on China’s behavior in Africa have focused on Beijing’s economic activities, debating the relative morality of its policies of resource extraction and elite bribery at the expense of ordinary Africans. Examples of its exploitative practices include Beijing’s purchase of Zambian copper mines for pennies on the dollar³³ and its practice of importing Chinese workers rather than relying on local Africans for labor. Still, some maintain that on balance, China’s activity in Africa is

improving the livelihoods of ordinary Africans, and therefore that Chinese investment in the continent is a win-win.³⁴ Certainly, all these developments are occurring in the context of China's "Go Global" strategy, which, as RAND scholar Lloyd Thrall notes, is "intended to increase outgoing Chinese investment and commercial presence."³⁵

China's presence in Africa is not new; it has invested in infrastructure on the continent for decades as part of its resource extraction activities. What is new is the scale of bilateral trade between the continent and China, which now exceeds \$200 billion. Over the past decade, China doubled its financial support for Africa every three years (\$5 billion in 2006; \$10 billion in 2009, \$20 billion in 2012). In late 2015, China announced it would issue \$60 billion in loans to African countries, as well as \$156 million in emergency food aid and another \$60 million in support to the African Union.

Beijing appears to be doubling down in Africa, and is making significant strides due to its checkbook diplomacy combined with its foreign policy principle of non-interference. The Zimbabwean government, led by the internationally ostracized Mugabe government recently converted its currency to the Chinese yuan,³⁶ possibly opening the door for other countries to follow Zimbabwe's lead. Additionally, the Chinese have spent billions on the construction of infrastructure all across the African continent. The Chinese built the new headquarters building for the African Union in Ethiopia as a gift for approximately \$200 million,³⁷ and has invested in a host of other projects such as a light-rail system in Addis Ababa,³⁸ copper and coal mines in Zambia,³⁹ railway projects in Mali,⁴⁰ and infrastructure projects in Nigeria.⁴¹ Most recently, in December 2015, China signed ten agreements with African countries, including a \$1.2 billion power project.⁴² Resource extraction to feed a hungry Chinese

economy is vitally important to Beijing; the construction of additional infrastructure is, ostensibly, to assist with this extraction and to strengthen its influence in strategic-level “choke points.”

However, recent events, suggest that there is more at play than the advancement of economic interests. In November of 2015, the People’s Republic of China announced that it would build a military base outside the Asian theater in Djibouti.⁴³ This announcement, in and of itself, is controversial as it is the first time that China has had a significant extended presence in Africa since the 15th century and marks a significant departure from China’s prior policy against “emulating” the United States by having bases overseas.⁴⁴ However, two additional developments are worth noting. First, the positioning of the Chinese is curious: it is being constructed in a crowded neighborhood – with French and Japanese bases nearby – and located within close proximity to Camp Lemmonier, a key installation hosting approximately 4,000 American service members on the African continent out of which the United States prosecutes a variety of counterterrorism missions. And second, plans for the base in Djibouti were announced after the promulgation of the 2015 Chinese defense White Paper⁴⁵ which, according to the New York Times, “unveiled a sweeping plan to reorganize its military into a more agile force capable of projecting power abroad.”⁴⁶

The Chinese government has stressed the non-threatening nature of the Chinese military presence in Djibouti. Its rationale for establishing the base: protection of commercial and infrastructure investments in Djibouti and its environs, including port expansions; fuel and water pipelines; natural gas liquefaction plants; government buildings; and proposals for two new airports.⁴⁷ Increasingly, these facilities – and the

Chinese nationals who construct and operate them – are coming under threat across Africa. Kidnappings of Chinese workers and business owners are on the rise. Al Qaeda of the Islamic Maghreb and Nigerian militants have pledged to attack Chinese businesses due to Beijing's treatment of its Muslim Uighur population.⁴⁸ A forward-positioned presence in Djibouti might help China better respond to these threats to its investments across Africa.

Yet, the proximity of China's new installation to the U.S. base is cause for concern, not least from a counter-intelligence perspective. Perhaps more disconcerting: reports from on the ground that there is a "shifting balance of influence" in Djibouti as a result of the enhanced Chinese commercial and military presence. As John Lee writes in *Foreign Affairs*, "money talks, especially in small and underdeveloped states run by authoritarian governments such as Djibouti—and soon Beijing, not Washington, may have the strongest voice."⁴⁹

Still, if resource extraction was Beijing's sole interest, then the above activities - could be reasonably explained in terms of resource extraction and economic advancement. Yet there is an additional factor at play: the increased participation of China in United Nations peacekeeping activities, particularly those in Africa. As President Xi announced at his first address to the United Nations:

I wish to announce that China will join the new UN Peacekeeping Capability Readiness System and has thus decided to take the lead in setting up a permanent peacekeeping police squad and build a peacekeeping standby force of 8,000 troops. I also wish to announce that China will provide a total of US\$100 million of free military assistance to the African Union in the next five years to support the establishment of the African Standby Force and the African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crisis.⁵⁰

Since 2000, China has positioned itself as the largest contributor of UN peacekeepers of all the permanent members of the UN Security Council. Growing from an average of 67 personnel contributed to UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations in 2000, today China fields 3,045 troops across 10 missions (by contrast, the United States fields 80; France fields 934 as of February 2016).⁵¹ Six of those missions are in Africa. In 2009, China also opened its first international peacekeeping training center in rural Beijing.⁵²

On the surface, peacekeeping appears to contradict China's policy of non-interference in the foreign affairs of states. Why would Beijing engage in this apparently contradictory behavior – and in Africa, specifically? Some observers maintain that Beijing's greater involvement in peacekeeping operations is proof of its peaceful rise, and its intention to be a responsible exporter of security. Indeed, as “the most self-conscious rising power in history,” China has gone to considerable lengths to assert that it is trying to enhance, rather than destabilize the global order.⁵³

Others, however, posit slightly different theories. By participating in peacekeeping operations, particularly on the African continent, China “increases its strategic presence in regions, particularly within Africa, whose resources may prove crucial for meeting China's energy needs.”⁵⁴ This would be consistent with its need to improve security to ensure smooth resource extraction from the continent.

But perhaps more importantly, China has used its accumulating influence on the African continent to enhance its status on the UN Security Council while also convincing African leaders to support Beijing's “One China” policy and reject Taipei's assertions of Taiwanese independence.

Currently, the 54 African states account for more than one-quarter of U.N. member states and votes. China has relied on African countries' support

at the U.N. for its political agenda... Today, on issues ranging from human rights to U.N. reform, from regional security to China's core national interests, China looks to Africa to be on its side.⁵⁵

In fact, China decided to participate in the U.N. Mission in Liberia – and authorized a generous aid package to Monrovia – once it agreed to switch its relations from Taipei to Beijing.⁵⁶ And as for the grand strategic contest – advancement of the principle of non-interference – China's participation in U.N. peacekeeping operations has not necessarily contradicted its principles of non-interference. Moreover, China has chosen to participate in operations that have carefully circumscribed mandates that involve host nation acquiescence and often explicitly limit the use of military force to the defense of U.N. civilian and military personnel.⁵⁷ On balance, China has been able to participate in peacekeeping operations while upholding its principles of the inviolability of sovereignty and non-interference.

In other words, much like the South China Sea, there are solid economic and commercial reasons for this expansion of activity in Africa. Yet it is probably not a coincidence that the architect of the Djibouti-China Security and Defense Agreement concluded in 2014 was Defense Minister Chang Wanquan who was also the person behind China's aggressive conduct in the South China Sea.⁵⁸

The astute strategist therefore cannot help but make rough comparisons between China's behavior in the South China Sea and its increased presence on the African continent. In China's near abroad, Beijing used a narrative of a peaceful rise, that is not threatening to its neighbors. Simultaneously, China pursued an encirclement strategy underpinned by a quiet military buildup through its island building close to, if not adjacent to, the territorial waters of U.S. allies in the region. And it is doing so in a manner that could call into question the alliance structures that characterize the Asia-

Pacific strategic balance as we know it. With respect to Africa, China is once again articulating this narrative of a peaceful rise, and that it is using its forward presence in Africa to strengthen international norms and enabling China to ensure smooth resource extraction. But a closer examination of China's motivations suggests deeper forces may be at work. China is, in fact, enhancing its standing within the United Nations while at the same time buying international political support for its principle of non-interference. China's participation in African peacekeeping operations – as well as its new military base in Djibouti – could be evidence of the military dimension of an international political encirclement strategy. In other words, China's increased involvement on the African continent could be a manner through which Beijing is attempting to recast international norms in its favor using a methodical, salami slice approach. This strategy serves to encircle the United States diplomatically on the international stage – and militarily on the African continent. If this is the case, will the West – and the United States in particular – be able to grapple with and counter this grand strategic challenge before it is too late?

This paper cannot, of course, answer these questions; such an examination is well beyond the scope of this limited exercise. Still, there appears to be enough evidence to suggest that a deeper analysis is needed of China's strategic objectives and whether encirclement games are being played outside the Asia-Pacific theater, not only in Africa, but in Latin America as well. Further, even if the thesis advanced by this paper – that China's behavior in Africa is another example of a Chinese encirclement strategy – proves accurate, none of this suggests that in the long-term, China will be successful. Being a client state to Beijing has its drawbacks. As a consequence of its interaction with elites and its policy of non-interference, ordinary locals rarely see the

benefits of increased economic activity with China. This, combined with local corruption, can fuel grievances and perpetuate cycles of corruption. Indeed, one cannot help but wonder whether increases in violence against Chinese businesses and individuals in Africa is a consequence of the locals being unable to reap any economic rewards from their countries' partnerships with Beijing. Without meaningful ground-level support for Chinese businesses and enterprise, one cannot help but wonder if China's Africa policies will collapse under their own weight.

Policy Recommendations

While the comparison between China's behavior in its near abroad and Africa is certainly imperfect, there's enough similarity in the contours of the situations to warrant further investigation. And it behooves the United States to pay more attention to the challenge of China's rise in grand strategic terms, placing greater emphasis on understanding Beijing's policies as a three-dimensional 'Go' board. It is likely that a competition between the United States and China for the future of global order has been going on for some time. Nonetheless, we are only now beginning to see some of its key features. It is with this in mind that the United States ought to consider adopting a policy of *de facto* global counter-encirclement, with at least the following components:

First, increase U.S. engagement within the United Nations system, and in particular, the U.N. Department of Peacekeeping Operations. One of the primary vehicles through which China is expanding its influence is through the United Nations. Yet in an emerging strategic era characterized by ideological conflict between China and its allies and the West, as Noah Feldman illustrates, the United Nations is likely to play an increasingly important conflict mitigation and dispute resolution role among the great powers. Further, since the end of the Cold War, the United States has

deprioritized its participation in the United Nations, creating a leadership vacuum that China is attempting to exploit. Greater international political engagement with the United Nations is therefore becoming increasingly important. With respect to U.S. participation in U.N. peacekeeping operations, a little more investment, particularly in terms of personnel, could go a very long way towards building military-to-military relationships and interoperability between the United States and other partners that may be vulnerable to Chinese influence.

While not explored within this paper, given the above arguments it stands to reason that the United States should treat Beijing's establishment of the Asian Development Bank with seriousness. The ADB is a direct competitor with the International Monetary Fund, an organization the U.S. helped establish. The U.S. should find ways to minimize the ADB's ability to displace the IMF as a driving force in the international economy.

Related, through the U.S. Agency for International Development, the U.S. should increase its economic assistance to African and other countries vulnerable to Chinese influence. If China is working with elites in these countries to extract resources, the U.S. can play a positive role by directly working with locals on the ground to strengthen their own capacity, improve education systems, and tackle corruption. Ideally, conditions should not be placed on this assistance, so as to begin countering any narratives that the United States has ulterior, exploitive motivations for engaging with local communities. While geopolitical realities will likely necessitate the United States' working with some unsavory governments, it can do so while simultaneously strengthening civil society.

The U.S. should also shore up its alliances through visible demonstrations of military strength, including bilateral exercises, with key allies in order to force Beijing to rethink the risks it is willing to take as it advances its interests. The United States ought to further engage in activities designed to strengthen the defensive capabilities of its partners that have a demonstrated track record of transparency and legitimate government in order to better enable them to meet any challenges from China.

These are mere starting points for a strategic conversation, and it is likely that these will be necessary but not sufficient to meeting the Chinese challenge—more will need to be done. However, enacting these recommendations should help the United States shore up the international political and military fault lines that enable China to contest the norms and values underpinning the Western liberal order – and U.S. leadership within it.

In conclusion, it is clear that China's increasing influence on the African continent can serve as a roadmap for understanding Beijing's plan for its global rise. China's policy of non-interference and practice of military and diplomatic encirclement suggests real challenges to the United States. In fact, China's slow, methodical and determined approach has seemingly lulled the West into a false sense of security. By focusing solely on China's military buildup, strategists can miss their grand strategy at work: increased power within the United Nations, access to commodities and markets, expansion of the Chinese yuan as a global currency of choice, and the advancement of non-interference as a principle for international interaction. All of these dynamics are at work on the African continent. Enactment of the above policy recommendations could serve to keep the United States competitive diplomatically, economically and ultimately,

militarily. To be sure, China is not an enemy of the United States. But failing to recognize its grand strategic ambitions could contribute to the decline of the hegemonic power of the United States.

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