The United States engages with far more African security chiefs than China does. The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) has developed an open-source database measuring Chinese and U.S. engagement with 454 current and former African security chiefs.

The United States and China privilege different security services and regions, presenting a potential challenge to U.S. influence. The United States courts naval leaders more than any other service (after chiefs of defense staff) and concentrates its activities in West Africa, whereas China’s interactions are more evenly distributed across services and occur more in southern Africa.

Chinese engagement with senior leaders may be at an inflection point, presaging a shift in activities, subregions, and the frequency of its interactions. This is in part a response to Beijing's evolving ties with African counterparts, as well as the requirements of intensifying competition with the United States in general and in the South China Sea in particular.

The United States is poised to build on decades of personal engagement as long as it pursues its full spectrum of objectives, not just strategic competition with China. It should prioritize engaging with African army and police chiefs; investing in high-impact fields such as education; improving media outreach; courting both young security officials and retired security chiefs; and broadening its partnerships with African institutions and non-African governments.
chiefs. While U.S. interactions are far more numerous, both countries overwhelmingly invest in “low-impact” engagements, though they privilege different security services, regions, and countries. It may be satisfying to seek comfort in head-to-head comparisons, but the United States should not rest on its laurels. It should seize this new era of strategic competition to reaffirm its objectives, revisit its approach, and seek new opportunities to deepen ties with African security chiefs.

It may be satisfying to seek comfort in head-to-head comparisons, but the United States should not rest on its laurels. It should seize this new era of strategic competition to reaffirm its objectives, revisit its approach, and seek new opportunities to deepen ties with African security chiefs.

THE STATE OF CHINESE ENGAGEMENT WITH AFRICAN SECURITY CHIEFS

China, like the United States, uses military engagement to advance its strategic objectives in Africa and the wider world. Its military activities are part of—not separate from—its broader goals in the region, including achieving economic ascendency, building an expansive global logistics network, and exerting influence in multilateral bodies, including at the United Nations. China’s financial commitments to African militaries are part of this strategy, including Beijing’s offer of $100 million in free military aid to the African Union (AU) between 2017 and 2022.  China’s courtship of current and former security chiefs is another critical dimension, although it is not always possible to draw a straight line between specific engagements and goals in the region. According to CSIS senior associate Lina Benabdallah, Beijing takes a comprehensive approach to advance its objectives, fusing trade and investment deals and cultural exchanges with arms sales, medical assistance, anti-piracy drills, and other programs. This blended approach underscores the centrality of Chinese personal and professional ties to individual security chiefs but also suggests that China pursues its multiple objectives in Africa both through and separately from its courtship of African security chiefs.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS AND KEY ASSUMPTIONS

This study is based entirely on open-source reporting in English, French, Arabic, Spanish, and Portuguese, including U.S. government websites and statements, Chinese government websites and official media, and international and African news outlets. It includes interactions between African officials and Chinese and U.S. militaries, as well as diplomats and representatives from other government agencies. The first engagement identified by CSIS occurred in 1977, when a Malian security leader attended a celebratory reception in China before his tenure as chief of defense staff.

Several research limitations preclude this study from representing the totality of Chinese and U.S. interactions with current and former African security chiefs. First, a small percentage of engagements may have been hidden from public view for foreign policy reasons. Second, the region’s journalists may not have had the capability or inclination to cover every engagement, and some fail to identify senior security chiefs by name. Media strength and freedom vary across the 53 countries, and some of the outlets with fewer resources have a more limited presence online and weaker search engine optimization. Third, Chinese, U.S., and African governments, as well as their respective media, may publicize an interaction without identifying the individuals involved. In sum, the data presented in the study and their associated charts almost certainly do not represent a comprehensive list of U.S. and Chinese engagement. Despite these research shortcomings, the study’s merits are based on the following assumptions.

- China and the United States prioritize engagement with African military chiefs to fulfill security-related (and other) objectives.
- U.S. and Chinese officials may invest more time and energy with certain counterparts that seem incongruous with priority countries and services.
- China and the United States recognize a strategic value in showcasing their engagements with African security chiefs and therefore generally publicize them whenever possible. While both governments engage at all levels, including with enlisted soldiers and non-commissioned officers, official and press coverage disproportionately focus on the senior ranks.
China engages with top African security chiefs at less than half the rate of the United States, with engagements peaking in 2019 followed by a sharp decline in 2020. China has engaged less than one-fifth (19 percent) of current and former African security chiefs, while the United States has engaged almost half (43 percent).

- While there is no definitive explanation for China’s low overall engagement, Beijing’s preference for multilateral security partnerships may explain its limited activity relative to the United States. Over the past two decades, China’s engagement has become increasingly multilateral, not bilateral, privileging cooperation with the United Nations and the African Union. China has become a major contributor to UN and AU peace operations, deploying more peacekeepers to African missions than any other UN Security Council permanent member and becoming the second largest financier after the United States.

China’s engagement with African security chiefs peaked in 2019 before declining by almost 50 percent in 2020. Activity may have hit a high point due to celebrations for the 70th anniversary of Chinese communist rule, held in Beijing in October 2019. The shift of resources toward combating Covid-19 is almost certainly one explanation for the subsequent dip, while experts consulted by CSIS also pointed to China’s sharpened focus on events in its near abroad as a possible factor.

- At the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, China quickly began using its access to personal protective equipment (PPE) to bolster ties with African militaries. However, Chinese engagement fell in 2020 despite multiple public donations of PPE to African security officials.

- In early 2020, China ramped up its tactics in the South China Sea, shifting from primarily economic and diplomatic measures to more military means, including aiming weaponry systems at Philippine targets, launching new defense silos and military-grade runways, and sinking Vietnamese shipping boats. China’s military escalation in the South China Sea—driven in part by the U.S.-China trade war and opportunities presented to challenge Beijing’s growing influence on the continent.

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**CHINESE AND U.S. ENGAGEMENT OVER TIME**

Source: Authors’ research, comprising sources listed in endnotes.
by a world distracted by Covid-19—appears to coincide with a significant downturn in engagement with African security chiefs. In addition, in 2020 China faced escalating border tensions with India and increased its pressure campaign against Taiwan.

STICKING WITH LOW-IMPACT ENGAGEMENTS

China and the United States disproportionately invest in low-impact engagements, with China displaying a clear preference for ceremonial activities such as official visits, phone calls, and dinners. Beijing probably opts for these engagements because they are relatively inexpensive compared to large-scale training exercises and are culturally compatible with China’s prioritization of deal making and person-to-person ties. Beijing may also view these engagements as less alarming to the United States.

- A majority (52 percent) of China’s engagement with African security chiefs consists of ceremonial activities. Of these activities, 41 percent are African delegations to China and another 38 percent are Chinese delegations to Africa, with the remaining 21 percent split among ceremonies, receptions, and celebrations. In 2017, for example, Tanzanian navy commander Richard Mutayoba Makanzo toured a Chinese naval hospital ship, and in 2018 Ghana’s then-chief of police bid farewell to the outgoing Chinese ambassador at a private reception.9
- China does not engage nearly as much through conferences, which comprise only 6 percent of Chinese engagement with African security chiefs, compared to 22 percent of U.S. engagement. However, China drew numerous security chiefs to its China-Africa Peace and Security Forum in Beijing in 2019, including Uganda’s then-chief of defense staff, David Muhoozi, and the Republic of Congo’s navy chief of staff, Rene Nganongo.10
- While African security chiefs have attended China’s recurrent FOCAC, Chinese and local African media have focused most of their coverage on participating heads of state. That said, there are commitments before and after the forum that shape China’s sales, donations, education, and ceremonial activities with African security chiefs. In 2018, China held two weeks of activities for African attendees on the sidelines of FOCAC.11

Less than half (approximately 40 percent) of Chinese engagement with African security chiefs is high impact, a rate comparable to that of the United States. China focuses most of its high-impact engagements on donations, sales, and education. These activities further Beijing’s economic ambitions, including through arms transfers, and deepen personal ties through education.

- China dedicates about a third of its engagement to donations and equipment transfers. Chinese officials sold a patrol ship to Togo’s chief of navy in 2016, donated a “Community Policing Kit” to Lesotho’s Ministry of Police and Public Safety in 2018, and sold patrol vessels to Malawi’s chief of defense in 2019.12

DEFINING HIGH- AND LOW-IMPACT ENGAGEMENTS

Both China and the United States overwhelmingly invest in low-impact engagements, comprising nearly 60 percent for each country. Specifically, Beijing prioritizes ceremonial activities, while the United States privileges ceremonial activities closely followed by conferences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HIGH-IMPACT ENGAGEMENTS</th>
<th>LOW-IMPACT ENGAGEMENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active, meaningful initiatives that result in lifelong memories and allegiances between participants.</td>
<td>Passive, superficial activities where bonds of affinity are unlikely to be formed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training</td>
<td>Conferences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A participatory engagement involving hands-on skills transfer—on the field or in the classroom.</td>
<td>A passive-learning engagement with information exchange, such as a symposium, seminar, conference, or summit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donations/Purchases</td>
<td>Ceremonial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The acquisition or underwriting of materials, equipment, buildings, etc., involving change of possession from one entity to another.</td>
<td>Public engagement between senior officials of the two countries demonstrating cooperation and correspondence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance at some form of military academy, institution, or college in the United States or China, as well as professionalization courses.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: Authors’ own analysis.
These activities reflect increased sales and donations of arms and equipment. Between 2017 and 2020, China transferred almost three times as many arms to sub-Saharan Africa than the United States did (in terms of both quantity and quality), according to CSIS analysis of data compiled by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). Six African countries—Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Namibia, the Seychelles, Tanzania, and Zambia—each received more than 90 percent of their arms from China.

- Education accounts for only 10 percent of China’s overall engagement, falling behind the United States at 15 percent. The Burundian, Namibian, and Nigerian naval and air chiefs have received degrees from China’s University of National Defense. More junior officers also have access to these professionalization courses, providing China an opportunity to invest in individuals early and maintain engagement throughout their careers. A 2015 RAND study indicated that “every African Army has at least one colonel or brigadier” who has graduated from China’s University of National Defense. (The education of officers who do not ascend to chief level is outside the scope of this study.)

- A mere 1 percent of Chinese engagement with African security chiefs takes the form of security training, signifying a major difference compared to the United States. The only instance identified by CSIS was the training of Uganda’s chief of police and Ugandan detectives in advanced criminal investigations in 2017. Between 2003 and 2016, China only conducted 13 military exercises with African countries overall, whereas the United States stages multiple training exercises every year.

**FOCUSING ON MOST SERVICES AND KEY SUBREGIONS**

China engages across security services more equally than the United States does and it privileges different African subregions, presenting a potential challenge to U.S. influence. While both countries disproportionately interact with chiefs of defense staff, China spreads its engagements across army, navy, police, and air force chiefs. In contrast, the United States courts naval leaders more than any other service after chiefs of defense staff.

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**CHINESE AND U.S. ENGAGEMENT BY SERVICE, REGION, AND ACTIVITY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SERVICE</th>
<th>REGION</th>
<th>ACTIVITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chief of Police</td>
<td>Northern</td>
<td>Conference (low impact)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chief of Air</td>
<td>Central</td>
<td>Ceremonial (low impact)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chief of Army</td>
<td>Southern</td>
<td>Education (high impact)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chief of Naval</td>
<td>Eastern</td>
<td>Donation/Purchase (high impact)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chief of Defense Staff</td>
<td>Western</td>
<td>Training (high impact)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Authors’ research, comprising sources listed in endnotes.
Naval Engagement
China’s concerns about piracy and maritime security underpin its focus on African navies, as does its interest in securing access to major sea lines of communication (SLOCs) and in addressing evolving requirements for operating in far-flung maritime environments. In the late 2000s, China deployed naval ships to deter, prevent, and repress acts of piracy off the Horn of Africa, and it courts counterparts in coastal countries in the Gulf of Guinea. In addition, Chinese companies have financed, constructed, or operated at least 46 ports across sub-Saharan Africa, all of which are built according to People’s Liberation Army (PLA) Navy specifications.

Army Links
The Chinese military’s long history as a land-based army may explain its enduring connections to and affinity for African army chiefs. Indeed, China historically was the primary source of aid for the Tanzanian military, furnishing it with small arms, trucks, anti-aircraft guns, medium tanks, patrol boats, and landing craft. This doting on army chiefs echoes African militaries’ priorities, wherein the army is the largest service and tasked with the most important issues, such as counterterrorism and regime protection.

Air Force Activities
China has traditionally engaged African air force chiefs in ceremonial settings, but recent sales of planes and other assets suggest a more substantive relationship may be in the making. African air forces have been upgrading their fleets, including by acquiring unmanned aerial vehicle drones. In 2020, Ethiopian air chief Yilma Merdasa was present at the purchase of eight drones from China’s Zerotech.

Police Ties
Chinese engagement with police chiefs stems from its contributions to UN peacekeeping missions and its growing interest in selling or providing equipment and training to African law enforcement agencies. China has contributed Formed Police Units (FPU)—which are usually drawn from provincial-level border police units and therefore not under the command of the PLA—to UN missions, including in Liberia and South Sudan. Beijing has provided training and equipment to police in Ghana and South Africa, among others. In addition, Chinese armed forces and companies tend to market their surveillance technology and “safe city” programs to police; for instance, Huawei established the Integrated Control and Communication Center in Kenya, which provides support to over 9,000 police officers and 195 police stations.

With regard to subregions, Beijing prefers to court African security chiefs in southern Africa, followed by East Africa, whereas more of Washington’s engagements occur in West Africa.

Southern African Links
China’s most frequent senior military engagements are with southern African nations, representing 34 percent of its total engagements, whereas the United States engages southern African officials at a rate of 18 percent. Beijing’s relations with southern African countries date back to their liberation struggles. It backed the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) and Liberation Front of Mozambique (FRELIMO) and started making overtures to the South West African People’s Organization (SWAPO) in Namibia and the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa in the 1980s. In 2018, Chinese companies funded and built a military training center at the Mwalimu Nyerere Memorial Academy “to provide leadership training to emerging leaders from countries governed by the Former Liberation Movements of Southern Africa (FLMSA).”

East African Partnerships
The Chinese government also values its military counterparts in East Africa, home to several geographically important island nations and China’s only overseas PLA base. At 27 percent of its interactions, China’s engagement with East African countries is second to its activities in southern Africa and slightly more than the United States’ share (25 percent). Chinese efforts in East Africa, with which it also has historical ties, have become more important under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and as competition has increased with the United States, India, and other countries over key maritime routes and access.

THE MEDIA BATTLE FOR HEARTS AND MINDS
Chinese media present a disjointed picture of the country’s senior security engagements to African audiences, struggling to connect their messages with visual representations of the country’s activities. For instance, Chinese government and media coverage often use words such as “friendship,” “peace,” and “stability” to construct a narrative of camaraderie and protection. Their images, however, focus on...
docked Chinese ships and armies marching in formation, often failing to show African counterparts in equal standing. This weakens China’s ability to elicit positive impressions of Chinese contributions to African security.

In contrast, U.S. government and media coverage of U.S. engagements are more consistent in their messaging. The United States refers to its senior African military counterparts as “partners,” weaving a narrative of training and support. This theme is reinforced by photos of U.S. and African leaders working together, shaking hands, or having a discussion as peers.

Both Chinese and U.S. government and media coverage have limited reach and influence in Africa. According to an academic briefing, Kenyans, Nigerians, and South Africans rarely watch China Global Television Network (CGTN) or read China Daily.26 Similarly, most U.S. engagements are posted on the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) website, embassy pages, and social media—including the photo-sharing website Flickr—which Africans do not frequently visit.

CONTEXTUALIZING CHINA’S COURTSHIP OF SECURITY CHIEFS

Chinese engagement with senior security leaders supports Beijing’s strategic goals in Africa. These connections are about deepening personal relationships and reinforcing China’s general agenda. And while they may facilitate China’s economic and political objectives, it is difficult to show causation or even correlation. Indeed, some Chinese engagements reflect unique circumstances: Cameroon received one of the highest number of interactions in part because its service chiefs have stayed in office for 20 years or more, enabling China to repeatedly engage certain individuals over longer periods of time.

While no single strategic objective appears to drive Chinese military engagement, its security engagement generally mirrors its major trading partnerships, aligns with its peacekeeping activities, and partly relates to African support on China’s priority issues, including policies regarding Xinjiang and Hong Kong.

Trade Partners

Beijing’s preferred countries for security engagement overlap with its top trading partners. Ghana and South Africa are some of China’s key commercial partners and also top targets of Chinese military courtship. In fact, the top 15 countries with which China engaged security chiefs generated approximately half of all China-Africa trade in 2019, according to CSIS analysis of data compiled by the International Trade Center’s Trade Map.27

Loan Recipients

Beijing’s pattern of military engagement matches with major loan recipients in the region. More than half (8 out of 15) of China’s most-engaged countries from CSIS’s study received the highest number of Chinese loans on the continent between 2017 and 2019, according to data collected by the China Africa Research Initiative.28 These include Cameroon, Ghana, Nigeria, Republic of Congo, South Africa, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

Blue Helmets

Chinese military interactions with senior African security chiefs reveal partiality for states that host or contribute to UN peacekeeping missions, underlining Beijing’s preference for engaging multilaterally. This preference may make Chinese officials more likely to meet with African security chiefs from countries that host or contribute to UN peacekeeping missions. Two of China’s most-engaged countries, Mali and Liberia, are or have been home to significant missions. China currently has 426 experts, police, staff officers, and troops participating in the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), which has the second-largest Chinese peacekeeping deployment on the continent.29 Ghana, which also receives higher levels of military engagement from China, is itself a major troop-contributing country.

UN Votes

China appears to court African security service chiefs from countries that back Chinese policies on Xinjiang and Hong Kong. Six out of China’s fifteen most-engaged countries—Algeria, Cameroon, Djibouti, the Republic of Congo, Uganda, and Zimbabwe—have supported Beijing’s position on these controversial issues at the United Nations.30 While China’s engagement with top African security chiefs aligns with its economic, peacekeeping, and domestic security agendas, it also raises questions about its strategic ranking of African countries and seems to have little or no bearing on African public opinion. Beijing employs a tiered system of partnership rankings to provide a wide mix of options to protect its interests, and only two countries ranked in its most important category—“comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership”—appear in China’s top 15 engaged African
TRENDS BEHIND CHINESE ENGAGEMENT

China’s most-engaged countries mirror its top trading partners and loan recipients on the continent, as well as illuminate Beijing’s preferences for UN peacekeeping partners and relationship building to garner support for its policies in Xinjiang and Hong Kong.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Top Trading Partner (Over $2.5M of two-way trade in 2019)</th>
<th>Top Loan Recipient (One of China’s top 15 loan recipients in 2019)</th>
<th>Peacekeeping Partner (Hosts or meaningfully contributes to peacekeeping missions)</th>
<th>Policy Supporter (Votes in support of Chinese policies in Xinjiang or Hong Kong)</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Algeria</td>
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<td>Zimbabwe</td>
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*In alphabetical order

Source: Authors’ research, comprising sources listed in endnotes.

countries. This finding is consistent with scholars who question the relevance of this tiered system. In addition, Chinese courtship of current and former security chiefs has not seemed to be a factor in Africans’ public perception of China; countries were split between a bump and drop in positive views toward China over the past five years, as measured by Afrobarometer.

WINDS OF CHANGE

Chinese engagement with senior leaders may be at an inflection point, presaging a shift in its activities, preferred subregions, and the frequency of its interactions. This is in part a response to its evolving ties with African counterparts, as well as the requirements of intensifying competition with the United States in general and in the South China Sea in particular. The CSIS database, paired with broader China-Africa trends, suggests several directions China’s courtship of senior African security chiefs may go.

Look East and West

China’s engagements are likely to skew toward East and West Africa, possibly at the expense of its legacy relationships with southern African countries. Beijing’s military base in Djibouti, its investments in Kenya and Ethiopia, and its focus on sea power and access in the Indian Ocean will almost certainly steer it toward East Africa. Similarly, West Africa’s perch on the Atlantic Ocean; its large populations and economies, notably in Nigeria; and key resources, including liquefied natural
gas, iron ore, bauxite, uranium, and fish stocks, augur more security engagement. In addition, the region’s terrorism and maritime challenges, which have led to the kidnapping of Chinese citizens, portend an elevated focus on West Africa. Beijing will probably seek new opportunities to increase naval interactions, sell military gear, market Chinese private security contractors (PSCs), and promote smart and safe city technology.

**Parlez-vous Français?**

China appears primed to address its underperformance in French-speaking Africa. This includes the Sahel, where Beijing is implementing $46 million in aid to the G5 Sahel Joint Force and has pledged to increase its funding and troop contributions to MINUSMA. In addition, the next FOCAC is scheduled to take place in Senegal, marking the first time it has been hosted in a francophone country. Chinese companies have increasingly ramped up their competition with French and Belgian competitors, including media companies, and are very active in the Democratic Republic of Congo’s mining sector, which provides metals and minerals important to electric vehicles and mobile phones. Beijing may want to challenge Paris in its former colonies, increasing its security partnerships in places where France has long been ascendant. In a 2019 meeting with Djibouti president Ismail Omar Guelleh, French president Emmanuel Macron took a swipe at Chinese expansion, reminding his “historical partners” that “what can look good in the short term . . . can often end up being bad over the medium to long term.”

**Sailors and Cops Wanted**

China’s evenly distributed engagement among army, air, navy, and police chiefs may start to break down, portending a greater focus on navies and police. Chinese security activities in the Horn of Africa, Indian Ocean, and Gulf of Guinea will have significant naval components. As crime and geostrategic competition increase, along with requirements to protect sea lanes, PLA Navy efforts may start to outpace the PLA’s interactions. Similarly, Huawei and other Chinese technology firms are selling safe and smart city packages to African police forces, suggesting Beijing’s attention to police
chiefs will increase. As Chinese PSCs continue to focus on protecting Chinese VIPs in the region, this also should redound to greater engagement with the police.\(^{35}\)

**Send in the Trainers**
China will probably expand its training, which has been relatively low, as Chinese equipment and weaponry become more sophisticated and require more hands-on interactions. For example, Chinese arms manufacturers have started to sell more advanced technologies, including the CH-3 and CH-4 unmanned aerial vehicles and battle tanks, to support Nigerian operations against Boko Haram.\(^{36}\) Use of these technologies will require training, as will the greater use of ZTE and Huawei infrastructure and equipment for police. This poses a challenge for the United States, which has a strong track record on train-and-equip engagements.

**Doing Less**
These shifts in priority regions and activities will likely be accompanied by a decline in total engagements. While Beijing will continue to host professionalization courses, send defense attachés abroad, and integrate security elements into its commercial sales, its time and attention will be increasingly consumed by heightened tensions with Washington and regional states over the South China Sea.

**U.S. OPPORTUNITIES, ADJUSTMENTS, AND TRAPS**
The United States has forged strong ties with current and former African security chiefs, and it is poised to build on its decades of personal engagement—as long as it pursues the full spectrum of U.S. objectives, not just strategic competition with China. Because the United States and China have different goals in Africa, seeking to beat China on every possible metric is a recipe for failure, and it will not serve long-term U.S. objectives in the region.

U.S. security interests are broader and deeper than China’s. They include fighting extremism and criminality, as well as defense institution building, combating corruption, stressing security sector accountability, and contributing to public health responses. U.S. relations with senior African security chiefs benefit from this more comprehensive approach to the region’s security challenges. While understanding how and where China courts African security leaders is important, the United States should base its interactions with specific armed services, subregions, and countries on its own national security interests, irrespective of Chinese priorities. Specifically, Washington should consider the following five steps.

1. **ELEVATE ARMY AND POLICE ENGAGEMENT**
U.S. interactions with army chiefs are inconsistent, and its engagement with police is limited. While several legal and bureaucratic factors underpin these dynamics, the United States is missing an opportunity to develop close ties to critically important security services. The United States should increase its work with regional armies because they represent the bulk of most militaries and are more responsible for protecting civilians. Similarly, the police are the first line of defense against criminality and extremism and have a leading role in managing security in urban spaces.

2. **ADJUST MIX OF ENGAGEMENTS**
The United States, like China, predominantly conducts low-impact engagements. While the U.S. military leads by far on training, it only slightly eclipses China on its educational offerings. It is not enough to argue that U.S. professionalization courses are of higher quality. While some Africans recoil from the heavy dose of Chinese ideology in Beijing’s curriculum, African officers think highly of Chinese military education for non-commissioned officers, junior officers, and mid-level officers, as well as on technical subjects.\(^{37}\) In addition, within its low-impact engagements, the United States stresses activities that may not have as much effect on African counterparts. For example, an African senior leader visit to the United States is likely to be more memorable for Africans than a senior U.S. visit to Africa, despite all the U.S. staff work the latter may entail.

3. **ENGAGE EARLY, OFTEN, AND AFTERWARD**
The United States and China both pride themselves on offering professionalization courses and education. However, less than 10 percent of officers tracked by CSIS studied in either China or the United States before assuming their role as security chief. Making good on the U.S. Army’s pledges to increase participation in Invitational-Professional Military Education (I-PME) by up to 50 percent over fiscal years 2022–25 would be a good start, increasing the chances that an early career engagement will pay off.\(^{38}\) Similarly, both countries almost never engage with chiefs after they retire, missing an opportunity to retain ties with influential individuals who likely have a deep network within their respective service and may receive appointments to lead UN or AU peacekeeping missions in the future. This might include inviting retired security chiefs to be guest speakers at U.S. military engagements, such as AFRICOM’s Silent Warrior
retreat, or continuing to collaborate through the alumni networks at the Africa Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS).

The United States and China both pride themselves on offering professionalization courses and education. However, less than 10 percent of officers tracked by CSIS studied in either China or the United States before assuming their role as security chief.

4. IMPROVE MEDIA OUTREACH
The United States and China continue to exhibit weaknesses in their media outreach. While U.S. government messaging is more consistent and resonant, it is generally restricted to government websites and social media. The United States should consider holding public events with top African security chiefs to discuss shared challenges, which will attract more attention in the local press. Moreover, the United States should look for opportunities to embed journalists in its trainings and exercises. For instance, AFRICOM invited Mauritanian journalists to attend Exercise Flintlock 2020 in Nouakchott but apparently did not invite reporters from the 10 other African countries that participated in the command’s premier and largest annual special operations forces exercise.

5. WORK WITH NON-AFRICAN AND NONGOVERNMENTAL PARTNERS
The United States does not have to court African security chiefs on its own to advance its strategic objectives in the region. While it enjoys strong ties with European partners, the United States should also investigate holding joint training engagements with countries such as India, Pakistan, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates—which already train many African officers at their staff and command colleges. A joint U.S.-Indian training exercise, for example, would reinforce partnerships and norms of engagement and draw attention to Chinese limitations. Washington may also want to partner with U.S.-based businesses, foundations, universities, think tanks, and other nongovernmental organizations to set up fellowships and high-profile public engagements that reinforce U.S. government efforts and deepen its ties with African security chiefs.

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ENDNOTES


3 CSIS identified 454 out of 530 total possible security chiefs across 53 out of Africa’s 54 sovereign countries (all except Egypt), up to 10 security chiefs per country (incumbent and predecessor for the air force, army, defense, navy, and police).

4 “China to Offer $100m in Military Aid to African Union in Next 5 Years,” Global Times (China), September 28, 2017, https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1068735.shtml.


11 Benabdallah, “China-Africa Military Ties Have Deepened. Here Are 4 Things to Know.”


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John Van Oudenaren and Benjamin Fisher, “Foreign Military Education as PLA Soft Power.”