

China Day
The Center for East Asian and Pacific Studies
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
16 February 2015

China and the United States in Africa: Cooperation or Competition?
Remarks by David H. Shinn
Adjunct Professor, Elliott School of International Affairs
George Washington University

There are issues in Africa where China and the United States cooperate and others where the two countries are in competition. Leaders from both countries have stated on several occasions that Africa is not a zero sum game for American and Chinese policy. I believe this accurately reflects the situation. First, let's review the interests of China and the United States in Africa. I define an interest as what China and the United States want from Africa, not what they can do for the continent. This is an important distinction.

Interests

China has five interests in Africa:

- Ensure continuing access to oil, minerals, hardwood timber, and agricultural products.
- Obtain political support from as many as possible of Africa's fifty-four countries.
- End Taiwan's diplomatic presence in Africa; only three African countries still recognize Taiwan.
- Increase Chinese exports to Africa.
- Minimize the impact of terrorism, international crime, narcotics trafficking, and piracy on China's presence in Africa and the homeland.

The United States also has five interests in Africa:

- Ensure continuing access to oil.
- Obtain political support from as many as possible of Africa's fifty-four countries.
- Increase U.S. exports to Africa.
- Minimize the impact of terrorism, international crime, narcotics trafficking, and piracy on the U.S. presence in Africa and the homeland.
- Maintain access for U.S. military aircraft to over fly/land in African countries and for U.S. Navy ships to call at African ports.

The interests of China and the United States in Africa are surprisingly similar. The two countries have four interests that are essentially the same. China has one unique interest, universal acceptance of the One China policy, and the United States has a security interest that has not yet been reached by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy, but is approaching the American interest at least in the case of the PLA Navy.

Strategy

China has a long-term strategy for Africa that was articulated in a major policy document published in 2006. Its top-down, communist system of government has the advantage of being able to determine with some certainty its foreign policy one or even two decades into the future. There has been a relative continuity of strategy in China's Communist Party leadership since 1949, although there can be significant policy changes as happened after Deng Xiaoping took power. China's attention to the past and its own long history provide a backdrop for thinking long-term and strategically.

American democracy does not lend itself to long-term strategic thinking. Political power changes every four or eight years in the executive branch and rarely do administrations develop foreign policies that can be assured of lasting beyond four years. Sometimes administrations have trouble thinking beyond the next month. The American democratic system places considerable power in the hands of Congress when foreign policy decisions require funding, making it more difficult to plan ahead with certainty. Private interest groups can also have an enormous and unpredictable impact on foreign policy initiatives. Being a relatively young nation, the United States does not have a history of sweeping foreign policy strategic concepts. Isolationism, anti-communism or containment, and more recently support for democratization and counterterrorism tend to be medium term strategies.

Policies

President Xi Jinping laid out China's current policy towards Africa in a speech on 25 March 2013 during a visit to Dar es Salaam. The key points were:

- The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) has established a new type of strategic partnership.
- China-Africa relations draw strength from history and represent a community of shared destinies.
- The defining feature of China-Africa relations is sincerity, mutual respect, equality, mutual benefit, and common development.
- Both China and Africa take the long view and continue to identify converging interests and areas for cooperation.
- China insists on equality among all countries, irrespective of their size, strength, and wealth.
- China and Africa will continue to support each other on issues involving their core interests and major concerns.
- China will continue to expand investment and financing cooperation with Africa, including transnational and trans-regional infrastructure, agriculture, manufacturing, and sustainable development.
- China will continue to offer this assistance with no political strings attached.
- China stresses the affinity and natural feeling of kinship between the Chinese and African people.
- China will place greater emphasis on people-to-people and cultural exchanges between China and Africa.
- China stresses the importance of good faith and the need to deal with any problems in a spirit of mutual respect and win-win cooperation.

- China will work with African countries to address problems in economic cooperation and trade so that African countries gain more from the cooperation.

President Barack Obama updated U.S. policy toward Sub-Saharan Africa in a statement from the White House on 14 June 2012. The key points were:

- Strengthen democratic institutions in Africa by promoting accountable, transparent, and responsive governance and support leaders who create vibrant democratic models.
- Promote human rights, civil society, independent media, and strong democratic norms and ensure a sustained focus on the credibility of democratic processes.
- Spur economic growth, trade, and development by supporting programs that enable an environment for trade and investment.
- Promote African regional integration and encourage more transparency and efficiency in the use of donor aid and management of public finances.
- Expand the African capacity to access and benefit from global markets and encourage U.S. companies to trade with and invest in Africa.
- Counter terrorism in Africa and advance regional security cooperation and security sector reform.
- Prevent transnational criminal threats and conflict and mitigate mass atrocities and hold perpetrators accountable.
- Support United Nations and African peacebuilding and peacekeeping missions.
- Promote development by addressing poverty, food security, public health, and opportunities for women and youth.
- Respond to humanitarian crises, promote low-emissions growth, and build resilience to climate change.

While the interests of China and the United States are surprisingly similar, the stated policies of the two countries are largely dissimilar. China says that it is primarily interested in cooperation with Africa while the United States encourages more policy change.

Structures

In the case of China, decision-making is concentrated at the top. The highest organ of executive power is the State Council, which includes the premier, vice premiers, ministers, and others. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs advises Chinese leaders and helps implement African policy. It divides responsibility between a unit for Sub-Saharan Africa and one for West Asia and North Africa. China created FOCAC in 2000 to coordinate interaction with the fifty African countries that recognize Beijing. FOCAC meets at the ministerial level every three years. The next summit will take place this year in South Africa.

The Ministry of Commerce plays an important role on trade, aid, and investment. It has a Department of Foreign Aid. China's State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission (SASAC) ranks equally with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Commerce. SASAC is either sole owner of a state-owned enterprise (SOE) or maintains a controlling share of stock in a public SOE, many of which have business in Africa. SASAC has

branch offices in Africa. China's Export-Import Bank is the only state-owned entity that offers official economic assistance in the form of low interest loans, export credits, and guarantees.

The Communist Party of China's (CPC) International Department interacts with African counterparts to lay the foundation for commercial and diplomatic cooperation, exchange visits, and ensure that policies are implemented in accordance with CPC strategic objectives. China's Central Military Commission/People's Liberation Army has frequent interaction with African counterpart military organizations. Xinhua, which has deep roots in Africa, has regional bureaus in Cairo and Nairobi and more than twenty branch offices throughout Africa that report on developments in Africa and feed information to African news services. China Central Television and China Radio International have operations based in Nairobi.

China's twenty-two provinces, five autonomous regions, four municipalities, and two special administrative regions (Hong Kong and Macau), although taking direction from the CPC, have their own interaction with African countries and cities. Their main interest is trade promotion, obtaining African contracts (usually for large infrastructure projects), encouraging investment in China, and to a lesser extent providing aid to Africa. Chinese medical teams are usually sourced from a Chinese province and then twinned with an African country. Many state-owned enterprises operate directly from these local Chinese jurisdictions. Chinese provinces have more than 100 twin relationships with African countries or cities.

China has fifty embassies in Africa, one in every country with which it has diplomatic relations. It also has nine independent consulates in Africa. Every African country that recognizes China also has an embassy in Beijing.

U.S. structures for dealing with Africa have both similarities and significant differences with those in China. The president takes advice from the National Security Council, relevant departments of government, and Congress before making the most important policy decisions about Africa. The Africa Bureau of the State Department has responsibility for Sub-Saharan Africa while the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs is responsible for North Africa. State often shares responsibility with the Department of Defense on security matters, Department of Commerce and U.S. Trade Representative on trade issues, Treasury on international debt and financial issues, FBI on legal matters, etc. The State Department and the Voice of America share the public diplomacy effort. The U.S. Agency for International Development and Millennium Challenge Corporation are the principal assistance agencies while the Export-Import Bank and Overseas Private Investment Corporation play important roles in trade and investment.

The Director of National Intelligence, CIA, National Security Agency, Defense Intelligence Agency, and State Department's Intelligence and Research Bureau provide intelligence support. The Africa Command (AFRICOM) in Germany has the lead on military-to-military relations while the US has a significant military base in Djibouti.

American state governments have limited relationships with African countries; they tend to be confined to the exchange of trade missions. Well over one hundred American cities have a sister city relationship with 151 African cities in thirty-one countries.

The United States has forty-eight embassies in Africa, two fewer than China, and seven consulates or branch offices. Four of the fifty-four African countries that recognize the United States do not have embassies in Washington, although two of them have missions accredited to the United States at the UN in New York.

China and the United States have some structures in common, such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs/State Department, respective Export-Import Banks, and embassy operations

throughout most of Africa. Both the State Department and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs divide responsibility for Africa between Sub-Saharan and North Africa.

Other structures are very different. The CPC operates differently than the Republican and Democratic parties, which do not send high level, policy-mandated delegations to foreign countries as does the CPC. The National Democratic Institute and International Republican Institute operate in Africa as technical arms of their respective parties to improve voting procedures, encourage democracy, and monitor elections. The United States has nothing comparable to FOCAC, China's large state-owned enterprises or its State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission. Organizations such as China Central Television and China Radio International, on the one hand, and the Voice of America, on the other, may appear at first glance to be similar, but they are actually very different. The U.S. government has no organization similar to Xinhua. For its part, China has nothing like the Millennium Challenge Corporation, AFRICOM or a legislative branch that exerts considerable influence on policy in Africa.

Policy Implementation Tactics and Tools

Tactically, the United States and China use essentially the same political, economic, military, and cultural tools for implementing their relations with Africa. The emphasis the two countries place on these tactics, however, and the way they implement policy varies considerably. China presents itself more humbly in its interaction with Africa, although this is changing as China's power grows. Having served as the leader of the Western world since the end of the Second World War and the only superpower since the end of the Cold War, the United States often comes across in Africa as insensitive and arrogant.

China emphasizes high-level personal contact with African government leaders. President Hu Jintao made six trips to Africa, two as vice president and four as president. President Xi Jinping included Africa on his first overseas visit after assuming the presidency. He will likely return this year. Presidents Clinton, Bush, and Obama each visited Africa twice since 1993. China's foreign minister has made his first overseas visit every year since 1991 to Africa. If you exclude visits to Cairo in connection with Middle East issues, there have been many years since 1991 that the American secretary of state never visited Africa. China has also placed more emphasis on visits to Africa by senior officials from the CPC, People's Liberation Army, provincial governments, etc. In addition, China has a particularly active program of inviting African leaders to China. The United States has done less well in receiving African leaders in Washington for bilateral visits, but has been able to take advantage of their presence at the UN in New York and World Bank and IMF in Washington to arrange high-level meetings with visiting African leaders.

The United States has a natural advantage in building relations with civil society, non-governmental organizations, independent labor unions, opposition political parties, and university communities. China is still struggling with some of these groups because it has had so little experience in dealing with them. Both China and the United States interact effectively with the African business community, although the Chinese government and business sector are currently working harder at this goal than the U.S. government and private sector.

Nearly all of the assistance provided to Africa by the United States is in the form of grants. The amounts increased significantly during the Bush administration and those levels continue in the Obama administration and remain focused in the areas of humanitarian aid,

combating HIV/AIDS, TB and malaria, and capacity building. In recent years, U.S. aid to Africa has been running at about \$8 billion annually.

China offers a modest amount of grant aid, but is much better known for its huge, low-interest, long-term loans, which are usually repaid by shipping Africa's oil and minerals to China. The recipient countries use most of the loan money for major infrastructure projects built by Chinese companies, which use a significant amount of Chinese material, and usually a percentage of Chinese laborers. The concessionary components of the loans constitute most of China's aid to Africa, which is estimated in recent years at about \$2.5 billion annually.

China is setting up seven special economic zones in Africa that offer Chinese companies favorable incentives, tax breaks, and reliable electric power. They have been established or are under construction in Zambia (2), Nigeria (2), Egypt, Ethiopia, and Mauritius. The United States has no comparable program.

Chinese medical teams to Africa date back to 1963 and have been a big success. Over the years, more than 18,000 Chinese medical personnel have treated an estimated 200 million African patients in 46 African countries. For its part, since 1961 the highly successful U.S. Peace Corps has sent more than 100,000 volunteers to nearly every country in Africa. Today, about 3,000 Peace Corps volunteers serve in Africa. In 2007, China began sending its first young volunteers to Africa; they number about 300 per year. China has 38 Confucius Institutes in African universities and ten Confucius Classrooms in secondary schools. The United States has no similar program.

China became active in UN peacekeeping operations in Africa beginning in 2000. Today, it has almost 2,000 non-combat personnel assigned to Africa with the largest contingents in Liberia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan, Sudan, and Mali. It is now sending an additional 700 person combat battalion to the UN mission in South Sudan. By comparison, the United States has about forty Americans assigned to UN peacekeeping operations in Africa. On the other hand, the United States funds about 28 percent of the UN peacekeeping budget while China funds about 6 percent.

The United States has a robust military presence in Africa. The Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa military base in Djibouti has about 4,000 personnel who are working primarily on counterterrorism. It also has small drone or fixed wing surveillance operations in Niger, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, and the Seychelles. China has no military bases in Africa. U.S. naval vessels frequently visit African ports and military aircraft often over fly or land in African airports. From the beginning, the United States has been active in the anti-piracy effort off Somalia. Since the end of 2008, China has been sending two destroyers and a supply ship to the Gulf of Aden to assist with this effort, which has resulted in a significant increase in PLA Navy visits to African ports. Since 2010, there have been at least 26 separate PLA Navy port calls in nine African countries.

China has a strong presence of ethnic Chinese in Africa, which is estimated to number more than one million. Some of those living in South Africa, Madagascar, Seychelles, and Mauritius date back more than a century. More recent arrivals of Chinese small traders and business persons are creating new communities in Africa. The United States has nothing comparable, although Liberia has always had a close connection because some of its current population originated from former slaves in the United States. Increasing numbers of Africans from the diaspora in the United States are also returning to Africa for lengthy visits or even to live permanently.

Conclusion

Much of the public discussion on China in Africa has focused on the degree to which China is competing with or even trying to replace the influence of the United States and Western countries in Africa. This largely misses the point. The United States competes with China in Africa for commercial advantage such as trade, winning of contracts, and occasionally investment opportunities. But it does the same thing with all of Africa's other major commercial partners included the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and India. Africa is no different in this regard than any other world region.

There are some political issues where the United States and China disagree, which may give the impression of competition. For example, there were disagreements in 2005-2006 over the correct approach to end conflict in Darfur and in 2011 over policy towards Libya. More generally, the United States uses its leverage in Africa to encourage improvements in human rights practices and the establishment of Western style liberal democracy. China, on the other hand, has a policy of no political strings and maintains good relations with African governments whether they are democracies, autocracies, military regimes, or Islamist. In the political realm, this is the one area where it can be said there is competition between the United States and China.

But there are numerous other areas where China and the United States are cooperating or have the potential to cooperate. Both countries generally seek in Africa political stability, economic development, and the minimizing of negative developments such as terrorism, piracy, narcotics trafficking, and international crime. Both support UN and AU peacekeeping efforts and international efforts to combat piracy. The two countries have collaborated in efforts to reduce conflict in Sudan, South Sudan, and Somalia. There is the potential for more cooperation in these kinds of issues and even in the area of economic development. The United States and China have unique strengths, for example, in helping jointly to improve African agriculture and health care systems. The time has come to focus more on areas of current or potential collaboration and to pay less attention to the debilitating debate about U.S-China competition.