

Highlighting PRC Malign Activities in Africa

This research examines the People's Republic of China's (PRC's) presence across Africa. The project identified malign PRC entity and actor activities, highlighted the effects of these activities, and tracked, publicized, and disseminated the details of these activities to inform the broader public. The project resulted in a series of three reports, with each report having a different focus area:

- **Report 1** examines the PRC's critical infrastructure investments in African nations, with an emphasis on the mining industry
- **Report 2** analyzes PRC loans and debt restructuring to African nations
- **Report 3** discusses the PRC's military and security involvement in Africa

Report 1 key findings

The first report provides an overview of the PRC's critical infrastructure investments in African nations, with an emphasis on activities in the mining industry that negatively affect communities, the environment, and economies. Our research examined reporting from PRC and African media, human rights and nongovernmental organizations, and investigative journalists. We detailed seven cases in which PRC entities and actors reportedly carried out illicit activities across the African continent between 2018 and 2023. We found the following:

- **PRC actors demonstrate a range of malign behavior in their activities in Africa associated with investments and development in critical infrastructure, and such behavior is particularly prevalent in the mining sector.**
 - This problematic behavior includes dangerous labor conditions, human rights abuses, corporal punishment, environmental damage, economic exploitation, wage theft, and low-quality workmanship, which often directly affect local communities.
- **PRC activities in Africa often contradict the PRC government's official rhetoric of helping African nations and people through investment and development projects.**
 - The disconnect between the PRC's narrative of helping African nations and people through investment and development projects and the reality of its activities points to a larger paradox within the critical minerals industry in Africa.
- **Increased awareness of malign and illicit PRC activities comes at a time when African leaders are in a better bargaining position to demand more from partner nations.**
 - Growing global demand for African resources provides an opportunity for African leaders to improve their bargaining position and renegotiate contracts or seek new partners in pursuit of a more equitable balance of benefits.

Report 2 key findings

In the second report, we identified trends in and effects of PRC economic lending practices in nine African countries after the economic shock of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war. The countries of focus were Angola, Chad, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Uganda, and Zambia. Through our examination of nine cases of PRC lending across Africa, we found the following:

- **Widespread shocks to the global financial system after the COVID-19 pandemic significantly reduced PRC lending across Africa.**
 - PRC lenders began to call in debts and seek bilateral renegotiation for terms more favorable to the PRC.
- **The PRC model of investment has inherent flaws that, over time, create risk for African countries.**
 - A lack of transparency in negotiations, higher costs for contract implementation by PRC state-owned enterprises, limited hiring of local workers, exclusion of private sector entities and other international investors, and incentivization of rapidly acquired massive loans for relatively fragile African economies have led to risk of intensified debt distress.

- **As PRC lending decreased across Africa, the types and amounts of loans changed.**
 - This drop in PRC capital creates opportunities for African nations to explore new lenders and smaller, more efficient infrastructure projects.

Report 3 key findings

The third report discusses the military and security dimensions of the PRC's presence in Africa, covering the People's Liberation Army's (PLA's) operational role on the African continent and the PRC's involvement in Africa's security affairs. Africa is home to many firsts for the PRC: the first PLA overseas military base (in Djibouti), the first rotational deployment of PLA Navy (PLAN) anti-piracy ships, and one of Beijing's first multilateral forums established outside of China's periphery—the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). However, global events since 2020—the COVID-19 pandemic, the ongoing wars in Ukraine and the Middle East, the transition to green energy, and rising instability in regions in Africa—have affected the PRC's interests on the continent. These changes have had implications for the PRC's military and security presence in the region. We found the following:

- **Africa has been a testing ground for PRC military and security involvement outside China's borders.**
 - The PRC's military presence in Africa is significant. Africa is the location of the largest deployed PLA force operating outside of China's periphery, with PLA troops deployed to Djibouti, operating in United Nations peacekeeping missions, and conducting counterpiracy operations in the Gulf of Aden.
 - Since its establishment in 2017, the PLA base in Djibouti has expanded from a "logistics facility" designed to service rotational deployments to a major logistics base with a dedicated naval pier capable of hosting China's largest blue-water naval vessels and a deployed PLAN Marine Corps special operations force unit able to support combat missions.
 - The PRC will likely pursue more military bases and infrastructure around the continent, including in the Gulf of Guinea on the west coast of Africa.
- **The PRC remains deeply involved across Africa's security domain, despite some setbacks.**
 - The PRC leads multilateral forums such as FOCAC and the China-Africa Peace and Security Forum.
 - The PRC is building influence with African military leaders through a long-established professional military education program.
 - The PRC is increasing its arms sales to African nations as Russian sales to the continent decline.
- **Implications for African nations of the PRC's involvement in Africa's security and military sectors include the following:**
 - Deepening PRC multilateral security engagements could negatively impinge upon individual African nations' sovereignty and governance across the continent.
 - PRC military bases could be a political liability for African governments that host them.
 - The PRC could use Africa as the testing ground for its aspirations of security assistance globally through implementation of the Global Security Initiative, potentially foreshadowing a more globally active PLA military and security presence.

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This document contains the best opinion of CNA at the time of issue. The views, opinions, and findings contained in this report should not be construed as representing the official position of the Department of the Navy.

This summary is based on these full-length CNA reports: *PRC Illicit and Malign Activities in Africa: Critical Infrastructure and Mining*, DRM-2023-U-036218-Final (Unclassified); *PRC Lending in Africa: Impacts in a Time of Global Shocks*, DRM-2023-U-036941-Final (Unclassified); *The Military and Security Dimensions of the PRC's Africa Presence: Changes in a Time of Global Shocks*, DRM-2024-U-038088-Final (Unclassified).

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