

Cooperating or Competing for Peace: Should the United States consider campaigning in African peacekeeping operations to compete with the People's Republic of China?

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The rising involvement of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in African peacekeeping operations challenges the current role of a sponsor that the United States (US) takes. This might be contributing to a strategic advantage in an area that Americans, in general, do not value. The Trump Administration's great-power rivalry shifted US military efforts toward competing heavily with the PRC in the Pacific Area of Responsibility (AOR). However, in order to compete globally with the PRC, the US must consider the potential of PRC dominance in African security matters. Peacekeeping in Africa is an internationally visible mission that the PRC has seized and gained a positive international reputation. The US government n

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Abstract

The rising involvement of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in African peacekeeping operations challenges the current role of a sponsor that the United States (US) takes. This might be contributing to a strategic advantage in an area that Americans, in general, do not value. The Trump Administration's great-power rivalry shifted US military efforts toward competing heavily with the PRC in the Pacific Area of Responsibility (AOR). However, in order to compete globally with the PRC, the US must consider the potential of PRC dominance in African security matters. Peacekeeping in Africa is an internationally visible mission that the PRC has seized and gained a positive international reputation. The US government needs an integrated peacekeeping campaign that seeks to regain US influence by improving internal efficiencies while aiming to support the development of African militaries to handle African security issues.

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Introduction

The PRC's support to peacekeeping operations (PKO) in Africa has matured physically and monetarily over the last decade and has many in the US concerned about the PRC's underlying motives. Of the permanent members of the United Nation's Security Council (P-5), the PRC currently has the highest number of PKO troops in Africa. The PRC is also the second leading monetary supporter of PKO, just behind the US who has been the most significant financial backer since the beginning of United Nations (UN) peacekeeping. With the Trump Administration's global security focus transition from counterterrorism to great-power rivalry, the impending decline in US support to African security matters raises concerns as defense priorities shift to the East. Commander, US Africa Command (USAFRICOM), General Thomas Waldhauser, recently stated that the US will cooperate with the PRC in the arena of peacekeeping. However, in light of the PRC's significant investment and growing forces on the ground in Africa, the US government needs to consider competing with the PRC rather than just cooperating.

The recently released Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning (JCIC) seeks to incorporate US military and non-military activities to campaign in mission sets that are below the threshold of war. The JCIC "recognizes the need for proactive, on-going campaigning that adjusts to fluid policy environments and changing conditions to create favorable and sustainable outcomes."¹ PKOs are inherently political, thus are led by the US State Department and are supported by the Department of Defense and various aspects of the US defense industry. By synchronizing these areas of national power, the Joint Force should seek to coordinate these efforts on a "competition continuum" that guides US activities toward reaching national

¹ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning*. www.jcs.mil. March 16, 2018, https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/concepts/joint_concept_integrated_campaign.pdf?ver=2018-03-28-102833-257, Foreword.

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objectives in Africa.² These efforts must move from a “reinforcing” and “controlling” characteristic of cooperation to those of competition that “contests” and “counters in the peacekeeping realm.”³ This leads to maintaining US leadership on the African continent which improves our strategic security objectives and continues to develop our African partners’ security capabilities.

Background

Historically, the PRC was not interested in supporting peacekeeping operations in Africa, but over the past decade, the PRC has wholeheartedly become engaged in African security affairs. Within the UN peacekeeping framework, the PRC has gradually become a leader seeking more and more influence. Though the US has been the highest monetary contributor to the UN peacekeeping budget, “assessed” to contribute 28.47% of the global peacekeeping costs,⁴ the PRC has gradually increased its contribution to 10.25% and has put significant PKO forces into Africa.⁵ As of February 2019, the PRC leads all P-5 members in direct support of African UN missions with 2,009 troops, 34 staff officers, 12 policemen, and 27 experts on mission with the majority supporting the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS).⁶ Starkly different, the US provided 32 staff officers and one expert in Africa UN missions, mostly supporting UN missions in the Central African Republic, Mali, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).⁷

² Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning*, 8.

³ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning*, 20-21.

⁴ UNPKO, *How We are Funded*, 2019, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/how-we-are-funded>.

⁵ UN General Assembly, *Agenda item 147 Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of United Nations peacekeeping operations*, www.un.org. December 25, 2015, https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/70/331/Add.1.

⁶ UNDPKO, *Peacekeeping Master Open Datasets*, United Nations Peacekeeping - Resources. February. Accessed March 30, 2019. <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/peacekeeping-master-open-datasets>.

⁷ UNDPKO, *Peacekeeping Master Open Datasets*, 2019.

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September 2018 marked the PRC's third Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) summit between the PRC and willing African countries.⁸ There it pledged some \$60 billion in assistance to “impact for the continuation of Africa’s development and stability.”⁹ The summit has become a major driving factor not only to influence economic and political ties between the PRC and Africa, but as a result, the PRC’s commitments to UN PKOs generally grow after each FOCAC.¹⁰ Commitments to the African Union’s (AU) PKO efforts were also boosted following FOCAC 2012 and 2015.¹¹ While these AU activities are not as active as the UN PKOs, they are where the PRC dominates Western influence. For instance, the PRC fully funded the \$300 million AU headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia which was inaugurated in 2012.¹²

While the PRC’s role appears to be increasing in Africa PKO, the US remains the dominant monetary contributor. This year, the US supported UN African PKOs with nearly \$1.38 billion through the Contributions for International Peacekeeping Activities (CIPA) program.¹³ It further supported African Troop Contributing Countries (TCCs) bi-laterally through two programs, the Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI) and the African Peacekeeping Rapid Response Partnership (APRRP).¹⁴ Over a \$1.1 billion was budgeted over thirteen years for GPOI, while the most recently established APRRP provides around \$267.5

⁸ Aiping, Zeng, and Shu Zhan. n.d. *Origin, Achievements, and Prospects of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation*, https://www.focac.org/eng/lhyj_1/yjcg/P020181026382446204313.pdf, 1.

⁹ Gebrehiwot, Semungus H, and Biruk Demissie, *Can China Bring Peace to Africa?*, The Diplomat. September 10, 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/09/can-china-bring-peace-to-africa>, 1.

¹⁰ Anshan, Li. n.d., *The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation: From a Sustainable Perspective*, http://awsassets.panda.org/downloads/the_forum_on_china_africa_cooperation_1.pdf, 37.

¹¹ Aiping, Zeng, and Shu Zhan. n.d, *Origin, Achievements, and Prospects of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation*, 96.

¹² Conway-Smith, Erin, *African Union's new Chinese-built headquarters opens in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia*, www.pri.org. January 28, 2012, <https://www.pri.org/stories/2012-01-28/african-unions-new-chinese-built-headquarters-opens-addis-ababa-ethiopia>, 1.

¹³ Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs, *FY 2020 Congressional Budget Justification*, Department of State. March 11, 2019. <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/290302.pdf>.

¹⁴ Department of State - Bureau of Political-Military Affairs. March 1, 2019, *U.S. Peacekeeping Capacity Building Assistance*, <https://www.state.gov/t/pm/rls/fs/2019/288740.htm>.

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million to equip six major African TCCs for UN missions.¹⁵ In general, the US has been working to build capacity within select African militaries deemed fit for assuming a UN PKO mission. APRRP and GPOI funding supports activities as building PKO training, facilities, training African military and police, and equipping those forces before deploying. In most cases, African TCCs receive donated PKO training and equipment versus actually purchasing it. With this enormous US investment in their Africa partners, the US must coordinate its activities better to compete against the rising influence from the PRC's material and monetary presence in UN PKOs.

Integrated PKO Campaign

If the US is serious about competing globally in the great-power rivalry, it must have an integrated PKO campaign for supporting African TCCs. In order to compete, the US acquisition and assistance systems must present TCCs with attractive and supportable options in a timely fashion with long term sustainability in mind. An integrated campaign must focus the involved agencies, State and Defense, on planning with the end in mind to compete against a centralized PRC effort to gain influence in Africa.

An African PKO integrated campaign should have long-term objectives. Initially, the immediate objectives should be to supply material needs and skillsets, as well as build PKO-related institutions with the potential of developing future customers. If the campaign is tailored to compete, the desired end state should be forming a partnership that eventually supports itself and becomes a viable customer. The current US-Africa TCC model initially donates and delivers attractive and quality US-made equipment and requires the TCC to maintain the equipment. The equipment often requires significant logistical support that is difficult to set up

¹⁵ Department of State - Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, *U.S. Peacekeeping Capacity Building Assistance*.

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or even afford for most African TCCs. Thus, the current method to initially outfit an African TCC does not establish true capabilities and has often developed dependencies by the TCC for US financial assistance and expertise to sustain the donated material. These complicated and expensive models often deter African TCCs from pursuing US-made equipment. The PRC, by comparison has more affordable equipment, inexpensive support packages, and PRC operators on the continent to provide military-to-military support. A US integrated PKO campaign should have the donation phase to the purchase phase in mind before putting American funding towards supporting PKO TCCs.

The PRC's model to support PKOs is competitive. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), the PRC exports 20% of its arms to Africa while some 70% goes to Asian nations.¹⁶ Of this impressive defense equipment market in Africa, PKO equipment is made readily available to meet the African TCC's needs. According to a recent Armored Personnel Carrier (APC) request by an African TCC, it was weighing purchasing Chinese, French, and lastly US models to meet the requirement of the UN mission.¹⁷ The PRC was poised to deliver the APCs to meet the TCC's request at an affordable cost. The French were unable to supply the demand in the timeframe. The US had various options, but none could deliver APCs in a timely fashion and at a competitive cost to beat the cost and timeliness of the Chinese option. Fortunately for the US, it had a stockpile of used APCs sitting in theater and was able to donate the needed APCs to meet the African TCC's request.¹⁸ Beating the PRC out of a sale was not a sign of a win for the US as it was interpreted by the US players involved. Rather the situation revealed the desire of African TCCs for US-quality equipment, even at

¹⁶ Lu, Zhenhua, South China Morning Post (Online). March 12, 2019, <https://search-proquest-com.usnwc.idm.oclc.org/docview/2189839551/fulltext/DC339CC99BB34FC0PQ/1?accountid=322#>.

¹⁷ Africa SCO, "Chinese Competing for PKO Sales to African TCCs." Security Cooperation Officer Statement. March 2019.

¹⁸ Bruce, Jason, 2019, *Chinese Competing for PKO Sales to African TCCs*.

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higher cost. The incident further shows an African TCC's willingness to go towards Chinese-made goods just to meet the UN requirements in mission. If the US does not compete in the market, it will lose out on influencing a potential buyer. An integrated campaign for PKO should align the DoS, DoD, and US defense industry to deliver equipment and beat the PRC out.

An integrated PKO campaign should present more of a US military face to its assistance

The US government needs to present more of visible military face to its approach to the Africa PKO mission. For much of what the US does, it is often reflected as a benevolent 'big' sponsor who does not want to get its hands dirty. In contrast to the current American approach, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and People's Armed Police have institutionalized the PKO mission and invested significantly in their force generation to send troops abroad. They have formed multiple police and military training facilities in the PRC to maintain an 8,000-person ready reserve PKO force.¹⁹ In 2015, this machine readied its first PLA infantry battalion to perform a PKO mission in South Sudan with troops, medical capabilities, and engineering units to support this high profile mission which continues today.²⁰ The PRC also supports PKO training with African TCCs in the PRC to learn specialized PKO skillsets that are required in UN-organized PKOs. This stepping up to meet specialized training needs demonstrates their willingness and capacity to integrate foreigners into their military and policy training systems. In March of this year, a UN Peacekeeping Ministerial meeting saw the PRC commit to "[h]ost an exercise for peacekeeping troop-contributing countries in 2020."²¹ Exercises of this scale are

¹⁹ Kuo, Lily, *China's vision of itself as the world's peacekeeper starts in Africa*, Quartz Africa. September 26, 2017, <https://qz.com/1087297/china-in-africa-chinas-vision-of-itself-as-the-worlds-peacekeeper-starts-in-africa/>, 1.

²⁰ Allen, Karen, *What China hopes to achieve with first peacekeeping mission*, December 2, 2015, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-34976580>.

²¹ UN Peacekeeping Department. (2019, March 29). *Member State Pledges*. Retrieved from [peacekeeping.un.org: https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/pk-ministerial-pledge-list_asof-8april.pdf](https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/pk-ministerial-pledge-list_asof-8april.pdf), 1.

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new for the PRC to commit to in the peacekeeping mission set and it presents a greater sphere of influence method toward Africa TCCs.

The US government's stance towards direct military involvement in PKOs has numerous factors. By in large, military activities in Afghanistan and Iraq have consumed much of the US military's capacity. As a result, the softer power toolset of nation building has been tied up supporting those prioritized operations.²² Furthermore, the US military is institutionally aligned more toward winning a conventional fight versus nation-building.²³ This tendency, in turn, feeds careerism within the ranks and does not incentivize US military members to participate in UN PKOs. Individual Augmentation (IA) is often used for sourcing UN missions, but those are primarily staff officers. In response to the need for nation building capability in the US military, the US Army has begun standing up six Security Force Assistance Brigades (SFAB).²⁴ Such an increase in US Army force generation presents the opportunity to integrate uniformed servicemembers on the ground working with African TCCs. While it would cost more to put these specialized troops in the African theater, their expertise could be drawn upon and replace a face that currently bears no US uniform.

An integrated PKO campaign plan should integrate more US military presence during the train and equip phase. Currently, the majority of the US presence in this mission is through contractors. Nearly all pre-deployment training organized by GPOI or APRRP for African units preparing for PKO in theater and is contractor led. While these contractors have prior military experience and have been effective at preparing African forces, their capacity to engage and influence is limited, and their representation of US commitment to the mission appears

²² Bellamy, Alex, and Paul Williams. 2013, *Providing Peacekeepers*. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 81-82.

²³ Bellamy, Alex, and Paul Williams, *Providing Peacekeepers*, 2013, 81-82.

²⁴ Myers, Meghann, www.armytimes.com. June 28, 2018, <https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2018/06/25/tough-sell-why-arent-soldiers-rushing-to-join-the-armys-new-adviser-brigades/>.

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diminished. The lack of physical presence speaks to a level of commitment that can be interpreted, or misinterpreted, to what the US actually intends.

An integrated PKO campaign must compete in the information domain.

An integrated campaign in PKO must have the audience in mind and speak to the American public, the African people, and the international community. In doing so, this targets explicitly the PRC's PKO force generating machine and their growing influence on the continent. The US sponsors many different partners to provide forces to PKOs, such as Pakistan and Bangladesh. However, the US should prioritize building capacity and capabilities within African militaries to perform PKOs in Africa. This prioritization toward African TCC reinforces the longtime AU concept of "African solution to African problems" which infers that Africans should be the primary forces on the ground versus foreigners.²⁵ It further works to delegitimize the PRC's growing military presence on the continent to conduct PKOs. This approach is compatible with a lighter US boots-on-the-ground approach and centers the much-needed support to build responsible African militaries which can conduct legitimate international missions.

Currently the PRC is wholeheartedly working to justify their PKO presence in Africa with a significant information operation targeted at the African and Chinese public. A television series called *Peacekeeping Infantry Battalion* was released in 2017, which romanticizes the PRC's military rescue of its citizens in Libya and helps audiences visualize the PRC in a positive and legitimate mission.²⁶ The Chinese film industry recently released another movie called

²⁵ Ola, Adegboyega, and Stanley Ehiane. 2016. *Missions with Hindrance: African Union (AU) and Peacekeeping Operations*, Journal of African Union Studies (JoAUS) 113-135, 116.

²⁶ ChineseDrama.info. (2017). *Drama: Peacekeeping Infantry Battalion*. Retrieved from ChineseDrama.info: <http://www.chinesedrama.info/2017/10/drama-peacekeeping-infantry-battalion.html>

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“Wolf Warrior 2” which was the “second highest-earning film in all of Chinese history.”²⁷

While the movie received one star of five from rogerebert.com, the intended audience loved its message. The message shapes the perception that the PRC military is there to rescue Chinese expats and Africans from the “bloodthirsty native rebels and European mercenaries.”²⁸

Under our current information effort, the US public has little knowledge of how much the US is doing to assist African nations to be more capable TCCs. Culturally, there is a low level of understanding of what happens at the UN. Most of what the US public sees are epidemics, famine, and terrorist groups. This one-sided messaging does little to inform the general public to help influence the US government to justify putting African peacekeeping higher on the security agenda.²⁹ The domain of information operations must be exploited to its maximum potential to assure the US people that their approach to compete in this area is not divisive towards the overall peacekeeping effort in Africa. It must justify why we are enabling Africans to perform their own security.

Competing is not worth it. There is too much risk, too little of a priority, and it would cost too much.

One could argue that there is too much risk in competing with the PRC in African PKOs. Forming an integrated campaign is the wrong move for a responsible global power in such a sensitive mission. Such actions take unnecessary risks and could catch our African partners in the middle of a great-power rivalry that could ignite possible conflict. If such efforts were misconstrued within institutions like the UN or AU, it could damage future influences and

²⁷ Adams, S. (2017, August 7). *Reviews*, Retrieved from www.rogerebert.com: <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/wolf-warrior-2-2017>

²⁸ Adams, S, *Reviews*.

²⁹ Bellamy, Alex, and Paul Williams. 2013. *Providing Peacekeepers*, 81-82.

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relations with our African partners and the international community. If competition within the UN PKO framework becomes too high, the PRC could find more acceptable maneuver and influencing space elsewhere as the AU. This in turn could delegitimize American developmental support in Africa and justify the PRC model as the more steady option.

Furthermore, current US security priorities in the Pacific and the Middle East would not warrant an integrated campaign for such a low priority project of national security objectives. Besides being a potentially volatile international situation, the effort for forming an integrated campaign may not be worth the US institutional hurdles. Such a change in US DoS and DoD interagency efforts to compete for providing relatively low sophisticated equipment may not have the payoff in sales and strategic effects as compared to delivering sophisticated military hardware supporting conventional warfare to our allies. Furthermore, the potential of success for competing in Africa is relatively low considering the time and effort that would be needed to counter the momentum PRC has already established.

Lastly, the cost of the US military becoming more involved to counter the PRC presence and influence in African PKO is not worth the price. The US should focus its military strength closer towards the center of gravity where the PRC is massing its military power, the Pacific. Moreover, according to a 2018 Government Accountability Office study, “it would cost the United States more than twice as much as it would cost the UN to implement a hypothetical operation comparable to the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA).”³⁰ The report says that for the cost the US has already put into MINUSCA, nearly \$700 million, is less than a one-third of the UN price to date of the

³⁰ GAO, *GAO Highlights of GAO-18-243, a report to congressional committees*, www.gao.gov. February 2018. <https://www.gao.gov/assets/690/689898.pdf>. 1

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overall mission cost.³¹ On this premise, the amount of mission being accomplished without having US forces deeply involved is a serious factor to weigh when priority areas of operations as PACOM demands US high-end capabilities to meet its security needs. This financial hurdle is not sellable to a Congress or an Administration who has been slashing PKO initiatives.

It is not too risky, its priority should be raised, and it should be seen as an investment.

While America's general tendency is to shirk its role in Africa PKOs, the PRC considers it a 'win-win' situation. Operating PKOs in Africa supports the PRC Belt and Road Initiative. America considers most engagements in Africa humanitarian or related to terrorism. The PRC is competing to influence Africans in the PKO arena because it is globally appreciated. It protects PRC economic ties, and it supports securing future support to their endeavors to become a global power.

America may draw from Japan's blunder to realize a risk when it came to secure its sea lines of communication (SLOC) in World War II. The US Navy enjoyed secure SLOCs and valued them more than their Japanese foe. The US Pacific submarine forces exploited Japan's disregard to the value of its SLOCs. It aggressively used a cumulative strategy to disable Japan's critical resources which starved Japan's ability to fight effectively in the war.

A parallel can be drawn to the US-PRC rivalry. The PRC has been working a cumulative strategy in an area of minimal interest to the US and has been incrementally gaining ground, first economically, which has led to security. With the Belt and Road Initiative, the mature PKO force that the PRC establishes will continue to build partners, increase access, and ensure a secure environment for their initiative. While this initiative has many prosperous aspects to it, it also threatens US influence in Africa. What may be riskier is continuing to let the PRC work

³¹ GAO, *GAO Highlights of GAO-18-243, a report to congressional committees 1.*

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unabated regarding PKO missions. PKO is an arena that is a critical vulnerability to enabling their economic and political expansion throughout Africa.

PKOs are an area in which the US needs to improve, and the priority of US influence in them should be raised. Integrated campaigning, as a whole-of-government effort, should involve a synergized diplomatic, informational, military and economic campaign that meets strategic objectives of competing. While the US has much to improve on its economic ties to Africa, establishing more assertive leadership in African PKOs improves and encourages American investment. The PRC has the African economy at the moment, and it is seeking to secure it with a more substantial military presence. For the moment, the US has the lead in security matters, and it can use that to rebuild US interest.

Conclusion

An integrated PKO campaign must compete to minimize PRC influence, seek to incorporate more military into the mission, and work to create a better image. The Trump Administration's desire to improve peacekeeping's effectiveness and reduce the substantial cost must be balanced against its desires to compete globally with the PRC's rising influence. Peacekeeping in Africa remains under US influence for the near term, but PRC ambition aims towards eroding the US stronghold it has over UN PKOs. Internal adjustments, like forming an integrated PKO campaigning presents a stronger united front of all aspects of US power. Africa PKO campaigning provides competition to drive an improved security situation in Africa. Campaigning sheds light on US sponsorship to a mission that very visible to the millions of Africans and the international community. One could propose to American public on how they would rather have African TCCs look while on mission. Should they be equipped and trained in

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the US-donated equipment, or should they resemble a Chinese peacekeeper? The PRC is competing in this area. It is about time the US begins.

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