

CHINA'S INCREASING INFLUENCE IN TUNISIA:
IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. NATIONAL SECURITY

A thesis presented to the Faculty of the U.S. Army
Command and General Staff College in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE
General Studies

by

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Fort Leavenworth, Kansas
2020

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE			<i>Form Approved</i> <i>OMB No. 0704-0188</i>		
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1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 12-06-2019		2. REPORT TYPE Master's Thesis		3. DATES COVERED (From - To) AUG 2019 – JUN 2020	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE China's Increasing Influence in Tunisia: Implications for U.S. National Security			5a. CONTRACT NUMBER		
			5b. GRANT NUMBER		
			5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER		
6. AUTHOR(S) Mr. Stephane R. Alrivy			5d. PROJECT NUMBER		
			5e. TASK NUMBER		
			5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER		
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Army Command and General Staff College ATTN: ATZL-SWD-GD Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027-2301			8. PERFORMING ORG REPORT NUMBER		
9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)			10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)		
			11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)		
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for Public Release; Distribution is Unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT Africa remains relevant to U.S. national security strategy, particularly in the context of great power competition. In the <i>2017 National Security Strategy</i> , the U.S. classifies China as a revisionist power and views China's increasing influence in Africa as an emerging security threat. Recent U.S. Africa Command posture statements reflect the U.S. policy shift focused on countering China's increasing influence. China is emerging as a major competitor seeking to gain strategic positions of advantage in the international system. The nature of these challenges demand that the U.S. be prepared to meet these threats across the range of military operations. Recent studies highlight the fact that China is challenging U.S. interests in the Indo-Pacific region. Does the same hold true in Africa? This study examines the case of Tunisia. The purpose of this research is to support or challenge the position that China poses the primary threat to U.S. interests in Tunisia. If not, does the U.S. military's main focus on China have negative effects, diverting attention and resources from other threats in North Africa?					
15. SUBJECT TERMS China, Tunisia, Chinese Influence, Instruments of National Power, United States, National Security					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT	b. ABSTRACT	c. THIS PAGE			19b. PHONE NUMBER (include area code)
(U)	(U)	(U)	(U)	83	

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE

THESIS APPROVAL PAGE

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The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College or any other governmental agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

ABSTRACT

CHINA'S INCREASING INFLUENCE IN TUNISIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. NATIONAL SECURITY, by Mr. Stephane R. Alrivy, 83 pages.

Africa remains relevant to U.S. national security strategy, particularly in the context of great power competition. In the *2017 National Security Strategy*, the U.S. classifies China as a revisionist power and views China's increasing influence in Africa as an emerging security threat. Recent U.S. Africa Command posture statements reflect the U.S. policy shift focused on countering China's increasing influence. China is emerging as a major competitor seeking to gain strategic positions of advantage in the international system. The nature of these challenges demand that the U.S. be prepared to meet these threats across the range of military operations. Recent studies highlight the fact that China is challenging U.S. interests in the Indo-Pacific region. Does the same hold true in Africa? This study examines the case of Tunisia. The purpose of this research is to support or challenge the position that China poses the primary threat to U.S. interests in Tunisia. If not, does the U.S. military's main focus on China have negative effects, diverting attention and resources from other threats in North Africa?

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to faculty members of the Command and General Staff College (CGSC) and Master of Military Art and Science (MMAS) program who supported and challenged me throughout my course of study. Attending the Command and General Staff Officer Course (CGSOC) prepared me to better serve the Warfighter as a U.S. Army civilian. The time to study new material, build new skills, and interact with international and U.S. officers provided opportunities to expand my future potential. I especially want to thank the members of my MMAS thesis committee: Mr. Roderic Jackson, Mr. Kevin Rousseau, and MAJ David Ogura for offering their time, support, and guidance throughout this research project. I am also thankful for my experience as a member of Staff Group 5B, particularly for the faculty mentorship and camaraderie from fellow students. I am also indebted to my leadership coach, Mr. Timothy McLean, for sparking my interest in this program and his unwavering encouragement. I dedicate this thesis to all of my family and friends who have supported me. Through this work, I especially recognize the tireless efforts and involvement of my mother and late father in my education. Most importantly, I thank my wife, Awa, for her invaluable support and the sacrifices she endured as I invested in my professional military education.

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ACRONYMS

AFRICOM	U.S. Africa Command
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CGSC	Command and General Staff College
CGSOC	Command and General Staff Officer Course
COPE	Committee on Publication Ethics
DIME	Diplomatic, Informational, Military, and Economic
DOD	Department of Defense
FOCAC	Forum on China-Africa Cooperation
IPB	Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield
OA	Operational Area
VEO	Violent Extremist Organization

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Research Problem

Africa remains relevant to U.S. national security strategy, particularly in the context of great power competition. In the *2017 National Security Strategy*, the U.S. classifies China as a revisionist power and views China's increasing influence in Africa as an emerging security threat. U.S. President Donald J. Trump's National Security Strategy states the following:

China is expanding its economic and military presence in Africa, growing from a small investor in the continent two decades ago into Africa's largest trading partner today. Some Chinese practices undermine Africa's long-term development by corrupting elites, dominating extractive industries, and locking countries into unsustainable and opaque debts and commitments.¹

The current U.S. strategy in Africa, reflected in the *2020 U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) Posture Statement*, underscores the threat of great power competition and the need to contain China's influence in Africa. As a result, AFRICOM plays a significant role in advancing the priorities outlined in the *2017 National Security Strategy* and *2018 National Defense Strategy*. The *2020 AFRICOM Posture Statement* directly ties current military priorities with national strategic direction: "The National Defense Strategy directs us to prioritize great power competition with China and Russia due to the 'magnitude of the threats they pose to U.S. security and prosperity today and the potential

¹ US President, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: The White House, 2017), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>, 52.

for those threats to increase in the future.”² The policy shift centered on countering the rising influence of China was also captured in the *2019 AFRICOM Posture Statement* that identifies China as a key competitor.³

China, while not the only country extending its influence in Africa, represents one of the most significant state actors in the continent. Russia’s renewed interest in Africa is evidenced by its hosting of the first Russia-Africa summit in 2019. The Soviet Union was once a dominant power on the African continent, but its economic and political standing waned in the post-Cold-War era. Turkey has recently expanded its diplomatic and economic presence in Africa. In addition, the Arab states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) have invested significantly to bolster infrastructure development on the continent. Notwithstanding, China remains Africa’s top trading partner. China’s expanding role in African has attracted increasing scholarly attention. The exponential increase in China-Africa ties resulted in China “leaping ahead” in Africa compared to the U.S. and the European Union.⁴

² Stephen J. Townsend, *2020 Posture of U.S. Africa Command, Statement of General Stephen J. Townsend Before the Senate Armed Services Committee* (Washington, DC: U.S. Africa Command, January 30, 2020), <https://www.africom.mil/about-the-command/2020-posture-statement-to-congress>, 3.

³ Thomas D. Waldhauser, *2019 Posture of U.S. Africa Command, Statement of General Thomas Waldhauser Before the Senate Armed Services Committee* (Washington, DC: U.S. Africa Command, February 7, 2019), <https://www.africom.mil/about-the-command/2019-posture-statement-to-congress>, 5.

⁴ Witney Schneidman and Joel Wiegert, “Competing in Africa: China, the European Union, and the United States,” Brookings Institution, April 16, 2018, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2018/04/16/competing-in-africa-china-the-european-union-and-the-united-states/>.

Changes in spheres of influence can have profound global consequences and threaten U.S. national interests. China is emerging as a major competitor seeking to gain strategic positions of advantage in the international system. The nature of these challenges demand that the U.S. be prepared to meet these threats across the range of military operations. According to U.S. military doctrine, all military operations share a common purpose to “achieve or contribute to national objectives.”⁵ The range of military operations is a construct that helps relate military activities against the backdrop of a competition continuum. The potential scope of military operations extends from military engagement, security cooperation, and deterrence, up through large-scale combat operations in war. Recent studies highlight the fact that China is challenging the U.S. military primacy in the Indo-Pacific region.⁶ Does the same hold true in Africa? The case study of Tunisia will be used to assess if China’s rising influence poses a threat to U.S. interests.

Both China and the U.S. maintain strong ties with Tunisia. The U.S. established diplomatic relations with Tunisia in 1956 following its independence from France. In 2015, Tunisia became the 16th Major Non-NATO Ally of the U.S. All the while, China has recently bolstered its partnership with Tunisia in line with the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The current trend, viewed from a lens of great power competition, places

⁵ US Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication 3-0, *Joint Operations* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2017), V-4.

⁶ Ashley Townshend and Brendan Thomas-Noone with Mathilda Steward, “Averting Crisis: American Strategy, Military Spending and Collective Defence in the Indo-Pacific,” United States Studies Center at the University of Sydney, August 19, 2019, <https://www.usssc.edu.au/analysis/averting-crisis-american-strategy-military-spending-and-collective-defence-in-the-indo-pacific>.

into sharper focus the question of how Chinese influence in Tunisia will impact U.S. policy initiatives and military engagements. Does China's influence threaten or restrict U.S. interests? Do the U.S and China have intersecting interests in Africa? This study examines these questions to support or challenge the position that a rise in Chinese influence in Tunisia poses a threat to U.S. national interests.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this study is to determine if the U.S. military's shift in focus to revisionist threats, such as China, is warranted in the case of Tunisia. Based on current military doctrine, the U.S. DODs focus is to prevail against peer and near peer threats in highly contested multi-domain environments. To enable this shift, the U.S. DOD set out to transform an organization shaped by nearly two decades of persistent limited contingency operations. The plan aims to rebuild mastery in large-scale combat operations because of the exponential lethality and accelerated tempo of multi-domain operations when facing a peer or near-peer threat. While this change in culture is needed, the experience and lessons learned from years of irregular warfare remain critical to sustain. This study will attempt to determine if this shift in focus is warranted in the case of Tunisia. If not, does the U.S. military's main focus on China have negative effects, making it ill-prepared for the current fight against Violent Extremist Organizations (VEOs) across North Africa?

In order to determine if the U.S. military's shift in focus to great power competition is justified across Africa, this study will test the validity of this proposition by assessing the threat posed by China to U.S. interests in Tunisia. A comparative analysis of Chinese and U.S. interests in Tunisia will provide a framework to assess

current trends. This study will attempt to identify intersecting interests and well as areas where Chinese activities are undermining U.S. interests. Moreover, this study will provide U.S. policy makers a model to identify which instruments of national power will be most effective to achieve a desired strategic end state. The research findings will also help determine if China should remain the top U.S. priority in Tunisia.

Primary Research Question

The primary research question of this study is as follows: Does the rise in Chinese influence in Tunisia pose a threat to U.S. national interests?

Secondary Research Questions

In order to answer the primary research question, this study examines several secondary research questions relating to Chinese and U.S. engagement in Tunisia. This study will examine each of the secondary research questions in turn:

1. What are U.S. national interests in Tunisia?
2. What are the interests driving Chinese engagements with Tunisia?
3. How is China utilizing the instruments of national power (diplomatic, information, military, and economic) in support of its strategic goals?
4. How can the U.S. and China cooperate in Tunisia?

The secondary research questions allow for a deeper investigation and understanding of Chinese and U.S. involvement in Tunisia. The answers to the secondary research question will be assessed using specific evaluation criteria outlined in the methodology section. The research findings will be utilized for conclusions and recommendations for further research.

In order to assess if a rise in Chinese influence in Tunisia represents a threat to U.S interests, this study will begin by defining U.S. interests in Africa. The examination of U.S. National Security Strategy, U.S. policy in Africa, and AFRICOM posture statements will provide the necessary background to identify U.S interests in Tunisia. After U.S. national interests have been identified, this study will examine Chinese interests in Tunisia. Any areas where U.S. and Chinese interests overlap will be highlighted to identify potential opportunities where both nations could cooperate for mutual gain.

Assumptions

This study makes several key assumptions. First, China will continue to present a wide variety of political, economic, counterintelligence, military, and diplomatic challenges to the U.S. and its allies. Second, China will continue to seek strategic basing and influence in Africa. Third, China's economic investments and humanitarian efforts on the continent positively influence public sentiment on China. Fourth, China will maintain a relatively stable and positive relationship in Africa. Fifth, China does not perceive that African countries present any direct threat to its security or expanding role in world affairs. Another assumption, based on the previous assumptions, is that Tunisia will continue to maintain strong ties with both the U.S. and China.

Limitations

Limitations are external factors that constrain the breadth of research for this study. This research project was conducted concurrently while attending the U.S. Army Resident Command and General Staff Officer Course (CGSOC) at Ft. Leavenworth,

Kansas. The primary limitation was the time available as the thesis has to be satisfactorily completed, defended, and approved in time for graduation. The demands of the program also prevented the researcher from travelling outside the area to conduct research. The researcher did not have the opportunity to conduct field research in Tunisia or China. Given these limitations, there were no human factors research conducted for this study.

Scope and Delimitations

Delimitations are self-imposed factors that constrain the breadth of research for this project. This study has significant delimitations. The scope of this research is limited to the case study of Tunisia. As a result, this study will not specifically address Chinese influence elsewhere on the African continent. Moreover, U.S. interests in Tunisia will only be examined during the administration of President Donald Trump. As with all changes of administration, there are significant changes to both personnel and policies. For this reason, only government documents and policies under the current administration will be used for this study. Any changes to U.S. strategic policy or diplomatic focus after April 2020 will not be covered in this study.

My research training and experience also shaped the scope of this research project. A researcher's background influences the selection of a research approach. A researcher trained in technical, scientific writing, statistics, and computer statistical programs will most likely select a quantitative design. Conversely, a researcher with experience in narrative data, seeking in-depth understanding, and exploring specific case studies will most likely select a qualitative design. I selected the qualitative approach for this study because of my familiarity with this research method. My academic training includes college and graduate level research in the fields of political science and

international affairs. I also have extensive experience in African area studies. I completed field research in The Gambia as a Fulbright fellow while pursuing my graduate studies. I have worked as an Africa analyst during most of my fifteen-year professional career with U.S. Department of the Army. I also completed a six-month deployment to Tunisia prior to starting the U.S. Army CGSOC at Ft. Leavenworth, KS. My research project contributes directly to accomplishing the missions and objectives of the Command and General Staff College (CGSC). The primary audience of this study includes CGSC faculty and students, members of the broader academic community, colleagues and practitioners in the field, and fellow researchers.

All research will be conducted using published materials in English, as the researcher does not possess fluency in Chinese or Tunisian Arabic. There are also limitations with respect to available information. Access to Chinese and Tunisian primary documents is limited and difficult to examine because of language barriers. Research materials on China will be limited to translated sources. This study is also limited to open source documents. No classified material will be reviewed or used for the purpose of this research project.

Significance of Study

This study will contribute to the existing body of literature concerning how the U.S. Army influences the security environment and engages host nation forces in order to consolidate gains and achieve sustainable security outcomes in support of Geographic Combatant Commands and Joint Requirements. U.S. Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 3-0, *Operations*, serves as the common operational doctrine for the Army. The Army's contribution to Joint Operations is Unified Land Operations. According to ADP 3-0, the

“central idea of Unified Land Operations is that, as part of a joint force, Army forces seize, retain, and exploit the initiative to gain a position of relative advantage in order to shape the operational environment, prevent conflict, consolidate gains, and win our Nation’s wars.”⁷ This case study will contribute to understanding the impact of U.S. DOD policy on the security environment in Africa. The findings of this study will also identify recommendations to shape the direction of U.S. DOD policy.

Summary and Conclusions

There are five chapters in this study. The first chapter of this study is the introduction, which provided context for the examination of China’s increasing influence in Tunisia. The introduction outlined the purpose and significance of this research. The introduction also defined the primary and secondary research questions. Lastly, the introduction identified fundamental assumptions and limitations. In the following chapter, a literature review will provide an understanding of the current knowledge to answer secondary research question #1: What are U.S. national interests in Tunisia? By reviewing the current literature on this topic, this study can identify the research gaps in the current body of knowledge. This study will attempt to fill these gaps in chapter 4 by answering the remaining secondary research questions. The answers to all the research questions will determine if the rise in Chinese influence in Tunisia poses a threat to U.S. interests.

⁷ US Department of the Army, Army Doctrine Publication 3-0, *Operations* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2017), Foreword.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research Purpose

The purpose of this study is to determine if the U.S. military's shift in focus to revisionist threats, such as China, is warranted in the case of Tunisia. In order to determine whether the decision to shift focus to great power competition is justified across Africa, this study considers the case of Tunisia to test this proposition. This study sets out to answer the following primary research question: Does the rise in Chinese influence in Tunisia pose a threat to U.S. national interests? Answering this question requires a review of U.S. policy pertaining to this topic.

The literature review will inform the reader about U.S. strategic guidance documents regarding U.S. policy in Africa. In this way, the literature review anchors the examination of this topic by identifying the documents guiding U.S. policy toward Tunisia. Given the recent shift in U.S. policy to interstate strategic competition, this study will also examine previous U.S. policy priorities in Africa. By comparing and contrasting U.S. strategic guidance documents, this study provides a framework to scope the literature review to sources that pertain to secondary research question #1. The literature review will identify major groups of relevant literature pertaining to U.S. national interests in Tunisia. This chapter will first consider two groups of documents pertaining to *current* and *previous* U.S. strategic guidance toward Africa. Lastly, this chapter will review specific U.S. policy toward Tunisia. The comparative analysis of U.S. strategic guidance documents will provide the rationale for this topic and the selection of Tunisia as a case study in North Africa.

The U.S. Strategic Shift

U.S. President Trump's National Security Strategy (NSS), published in 2017, placed the U.S in a new posture vis-à-vis China. The National Security Strategy, a congressionally-mandated document dating to the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Act, outlines an administration's appraisal of U.S. national security interests, the global security environment, challenges to U.S. interests, and policies to put the vision into practice. The new strategy specifically countered the U.S.-China policy from the previous administration: "Although the U.S. seeks to continue to cooperate with China, China is using economic inducements and penalties, influence operations, and implied military threats to persuade other states to heed its political and security agenda."⁸ China is characterized as a strategic competitor that challenges the U.S. across the diplomatic, informational, military, and economic (DIME) domains. China is mentioned 23 times in the document, almost twice as many times compared with the Obama administration's last version of the strategy.⁹ While former U.S. President Barack Obama's strategy focused on engagement and cooperation with China, the Trump administration pointed to the mounting threats posed by China. The *2017 National Security Strategy's* warnings are not limited to Asia. The report also warns of China's expanding influence in Europe, the Western Hemisphere, and Africa.

⁸ US President, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, 46.

⁹ Josh Rogin, "Trump's National Security Strategy Marks a Hawkish Turn on China," *Washington Post*, December 18, 2017, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/josh-rogin/wp/2017/12/18/trumps-national-security-strategy-marks-a-hawkish-turn-on-china/>.

The current U.S. strategy casts China’s rising influence in Africa as an emerging security threat. The strategy states that “China is expanding its economic and military presence in Africa, growing from a small investor in the continent two decades ago into Africa’s largest trading partner today.”¹⁰ The current strategy also contends that “some Chinese practices undermine Africa’s long-term development by corrupting elites, dominating extractive industries, and locking countries into unsustainable and opaque debts and commitments.”¹¹ The *2018 National Defense Strategy* points to an increasingly complex global security environment, characterized by strategic competition between states in the international arena. In support of the National Security Strategy, the U.S. DOD asserts that the “long-term strategic competitions with China and Russia are the principal priorities.”¹² The central challenge to U.S. security is “the *reemergence of long-term, strategic competition* by what the National Security Strategy classifies as revisionist powers.”¹³ The *2018 National Military Strategy* also makes clear that interstate strategic competition is the primary concern to U.S. interests. Among emerging security trends, this report considers that “especially those posed by the reemergence of great power competition with China and Russia, represent the most difficult challenges facing the

¹⁰ US President, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, 52.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² US Secretary of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America: Sharpening the American Military’s Competitive Edge* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2018), 4.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 2.

Joint Force.”¹⁴ The current U.S. strategy in Africa, reflected in the *2020 U.S. AFRICOM Posture Statement*, underscores the threat of great power competition and the need to contain China’s influence in Africa. As a result, AFRICOM plays a significant role in advancing the priorities outlined in the *2017 National Security Strategy* and *2018 National Defense Strategy*. The *2020 AFRICOM Posture Statement* directly ties current military priorities with national strategic direction: “The National Defense Strategy directs us to prioritize great power competition with China and Russia due to the ‘magnitude of the threats they post to U.S. security and prosperity today and the potential for those threats to increase in the future.’”¹⁵ The policy shift centered on countering the rising influence of China was also captured in the *2019 AFRICOM Posture Statement* that identified China as a key competitor.¹⁶

U.S. Policy Toward Africa

A review of U.S. strategic documents reveals a tension between the current National Security Strategy and recent AFRICOM Posture Statements. The primary focus of U.S. foreign policy is interstate strategic competition. The *2017 National Security Strategy* states that “China and Russia want to shape a world antithetical to U.S. values and interests.”¹⁷ The shift in focus to revisionist threats is not reflected in the *2017*

¹⁴ US Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Description of the National Military Strategy 2018* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2018).

¹⁵ Townsend, *2020 Posture of U.S. Africa Command*, 3.

¹⁶ Waldhauser, *2019 Posture of U.S. Africa Command*, 5.

¹⁷ US President, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, 25.

AFRICOM Posture Statement. While the Trump administration’s strategy placed the U.S. in a new posture vis-à-vis China, the *2017 AFRICOM Posture Statement* published the same year only references China once in the report. China is portrayed in the report as an international competitor in Africa: “Just as the U.S. pursues strategic interests in Africa, international competitors, including China and Russia, are doing the same.”¹⁸ Most importantly, the report states that terrorism, not interstate strategic competition, represents the primary threat to U.S. interests. As of 2017, the “greatest threat to U.S. interests emanating from Africa is VEOs.”¹⁹ A year after the publication of the *2017 National Security Strategy*, there were no significant changes to the updated AFRICOM Posture Statement. The *2018 AFRICOM Posture Statement* also references China only once in the report. The characterization of China remains unchanged: “As the strategic environment becomes more crowded and competitive, our engagement with external actors, like China and Russia, will continue with an open and clear discussion of intersecting interests and differences.”²⁰ While maintaining a primary focus on terrorism, the report asserts that “transnational VEOs are not only the most direct threat to U.S.

¹⁸ Thomas D. Waldhauser, *2017 Posture of U.S. Africa Command, Statement of General Thomas Waldhauser Before the Senate Armed Services Committee* (Washington, DC: U.S. Africa Command, March 9, 2017), <https://www.africom.mil/Search?query=2017+posture>, 3.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Thomas D. Waldhauser, *2018 Posture of U.S. Africa Command, Statement of General Thomas Waldhauser Before the House Armed Services Committee* (Washington, DC: U.S. Africa Command, March 6, 2018), <https://www.africom.mil/about-the-command/2018-posture-statement-to-congress>, 4.

interests in Africa, but also a threat to stability across the continent.”²¹ The *2017* and *2018 AFRICOM Posture Statements* do not reflect the National Security Strategy’s categorization of China.

U.S. Policy Toward Tunisia

Compared to the *2017* and *2018 AFRICOM Posture Statements* that only reference China a single time each, the *2019 AFRICOM Posture Statement* cites China 22 times. Notwithstanding, the 2019 report maintains that “VEOs remain a serious threat to the shared interests of our partners, allies, and the U.S.”²² Despite referencing China 18 times in the report, the *2020 AFRICOM Posture Statement* also asserts that VEOs “remain a reality.”²³ The 2020 report goes as far as to warn that the “window of opportunity to dig a firebreak and prevent the further spread of VEOs is months, not years.”²⁴ The sense of urgency conveyed in the report falls in line with the warnings of the *2017 AFRICOM Posture Statement*: “The instability in Libya and North Africa may be the most significant, near-term threat to U.S. and allies’ interests on the continent. The multiple militias and fractured relationship between factions in east and west Libya exacerbate the security situation, spilling into Tunisia and Egypt and the broader Maghreb.”²⁵ The AFRICOM posture statements themselves make clear that terrorism,

²¹ Waldhauser, *2018 Posture of U.S. Africa Command*, 6.

²² Waldhauser, *2019 Posture of U.S. Africa Command*, 7.

²³ Townsend, *2020 Posture of U.S. Africa Command*, 5.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

²⁵ Waldhauser, *2017 Posture of U.S. Africa Command*, 9.

not interstate strategic competition, is the primary concern to U.S. interests at least in the case of Tunisia.

Summary and Conclusions

The literature review revealed contradictory information between U.S. strategic guidance documents regarding the main threat to U.S. interests in Africa. Based on current military doctrine, the U.S. DODs focus is to prevail against peer and near peer threats in the international arena. The purpose of this research is to determine if the U.S. military's shift in focus to revisionist threats, such as China, is warranted in the case of Tunisia. Since the *2017 National Security Strategy* placed the U.S in a new posture vis-à-vis China, there are no studies published at the Command and General Staff School (CGSS) or the School of Advanced Military Studies (SAMS) that have specifically examined China's threat to U.S. interests in North Africa. This study attempts to bridge the current gap in the existing body of literature by examining the case of Tunisia.

The literature review provided an overview of U.S. strategic guidance documents to provide the most current information on U.S. interests in Africa in general, and Tunisia in particular. The author will reference these documents in chapter 4 to answer the secondary research questions. The next chapter, chapter 3, outlines the methodology this thesis will use to answer the secondary research questions, and ultimately the primary research question. The goal of this study is to support or challenge the position that China poses the primary threat to U.S. interests in Tunisia.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Purpose

The literature review identified a research gap regarding the impact of China's increasing influence in Tunisia on U.S. interests. The purpose of this research is to determine if the U.S. military's shift in focus to revisionist threats, such as China, is warranted in the case of Tunisia. Chapter 3 outlines the research methodology, including the rationale for selecting a qualitative or quantitative to start the research process.

Research Approach

Research approaches are the plans and procedures for conducting research that include steps ranging from formulating a research question to detailed methods of data collection, analysis, and interpretation. While a research plan involves several steps, the overall starting point is shaped by the selection of an approach to study a given topic. In his study *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, John Creswell identifies three approaches to research.²⁶ In planning a research project, researchers must identify whether they will employ a qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods approach. Creswell contends that “the selection of an approach is informed by the research problem, the personal experiences of the researcher, and the research audience.”²⁷ This study adopts a qualitative approach to analyze the impact of China's

²⁶ John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2014), 32.

²⁷ Ibid.

increasing influence in Africa on U.S. national security interests, and uses Tunisia as a case study. This chapter explains the rationale for selecting a qualitative approach and describes the successive steps from the general selection of a research approach to the specific procedures of data collection and analysis.

The research approaches identified by Creswell must be compared and contrasted in order to justify the selection of a qualitative approach for this study. Creswell underscores that the qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches are “not mutually exclusive.”²⁸ Qualitative and quantitative approaches should not be viewed as distinct categories. Instead, Creswell argues that “qualitative and quantitative approaches represent different ends on a continuum.”²⁹ Mixed methods research resides along this continuum because it incorporates elements of both qualitative and quantitative approaches.

The main difference between qualitative and quantitative approaches is that qualitative approaches generate narrative data while quantitative approaches produce numerical data. This distinction can also be framed in terms of research studies that tend to rely primarily on closed-ended questions (quantitative approach) rather than open-ended questions (qualitative approach). Qualitative research, for example, provides an approach for exploring and understanding the behavior of states in the international system. In *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*, Beverley Hancock, Elizabeth Ockleford, and Kate Windridge recognize that researchers working in the social sciences

²⁸ Creswell, *Research Design*, 32.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

experience “difficulty in trying to explain human behavior in quantifiable, measurable terms.”³⁰ The authors add that “qualitative research attempts to broaden and/or deepen our understanding of how things came to be the way they are in our social world.”³¹ The qualitative approach is best suited to investigate emerging questions in various fields of study and to explore the complexity of a problem. This approach also relies heavily on the researcher to interpret the meaning of data findings.

On the other hand, quantitative research in the social sciences is the systematic investigation of observable phenomena using statistical, mathematical, or computational techniques. In their work, *Interactive Statistics*, Martha Aliaga and Brenda Gunderson define quantitative research as “explaining phenomena by collecting numerical data that are analyzed using mathematically based methods.”³² The quantitative approach is used to test theories by examining the relationship among variables. The variables selected in a quantitative study must be measurable so that numbered data can be analyzed using statistical procedures. In *Doing Quantitative Research in Education*, Daniel Muijs underscores that “in order to be able to use mathematically based methods our data have to be in numerical form.”³³ This is not the case for the qualitative approach. Muijs adds

³⁰ Beverly Hancock, Elizabeth Ockleford, and Kate Windridge, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research* (United Kingdom: The National Institute for Health Research RDS EM/YH, 2009), 4.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Martha Aliaga and Brenda Gunderson, *Interactive Statistics* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2002).

³³ Daniel Muijs, *Doing Quantitative Research in Education* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2004), 2.

that “qualitative data are not necessarily or usually numerical, and therefore cannot be analyzed using statistics.”³⁴ Notwithstanding, Creswell notes that multimethod research, which includes the use of more than one method of data collection, emerged in the latter half of the 20th century. Creswell argues that “mixed methods research is an approach to inquiry involving collecting both quantitative and qualitative data, integrating the two forms of data, and using distinct designs that may involve philosophical assumptions and theoretical frameworks.”³⁵ The core assumption of this approach is that the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods provides a more complete understanding of a research problem than either approach alone.

The comparative analysis of the qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches reveals that certain types of social science research problems are better suited for a specific approach. A qualitative approach, for example, provides depth and detail. The qualitative approach is also useful when limited research is available. The purpose of this study is to determine if the U.S. military’s shift in focus to revisionist threats, such as China, is warranted in the case of Tunisia. The literature review, outlined in chapter 2, reveals that this policy shift in North Africa has drawn only limited research attention. Additional studies are needed to better understand the impact of China’s increasing influence across North Africa, including Tunisia. The qualitative approach is best suited to conduct exploratory research on this topic. The selection of a qualitative approach is also justified by the fact that qualitative research is primarily used to gain in-depth

³⁴ Muijs, *Doing Quantitative Research in Education*, 2.

³⁵ Creswell, *Research Design*, 4.

knowledge of a specific case. Creswell adds that “qualitative data tends to be open-ended without predetermined responses while quantitative data usually includes closed-ended responses such as found on questionnaires and surveys.”³⁶ As a result, this study relies on open-ended research questions.

The qualitative approach provides flexibility and allows for the development of researcher-designed frameworks. A researcher’s training and experience also influences the selection of a research approach. A researcher trained in technical, scientific writing, statistics, and computer statistical programs will most likely select a quantitative design. Conversely, a researcher with experience in narrative data, seeking in-depth understanding, and exploring specific case studies will most likely select a qualitative design. I selected the qualitative approach for this study because of my familiarity with this research method.

Case Study Design

After selecting a research approach, a researcher must also choose a specific research design. Research designs are types of inquiry within qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches that provide specific direction for a research project. This study adopted a qualitative approach. As a result, this chapter will only consider the different strategies of inquiry that pertain to the qualitative approach. Creswell notes that the “designs in qualitative research include narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study.”³⁷ Narrative research is a design of inquiry from the

³⁶ Creswell, *Research Design*, 14.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 12-14.

humanities in which the researcher studies the lives of individuals. This information is compiled by the researcher into a narrative chronology. Phenomenological research is a design of inquiry coming from philosophy and psychology in which the researcher describes the experiences of individuals participating in a study. This design typically involves conducting subject interviews. Grounded theory is a design of inquiry from sociology in which the researcher derives a general theory based on participant observation. Ethnography is a design of inquiry coming from anthropology and sociology in which the researcher studies the shared patterns of behavior, language, and actions of a cultural group in a natural setting over a prolonged period of time. Data collection often involves observations and interviews. Case studies are a design of inquiry found in many fields in which the researcher develops an in-depth analysis of a case.³⁸ This research project uses a case study method. A case study is a research approach that is used primarily to generate an in-depth understanding of a complex issue. The case study approach is used extensively in a wide variety of social science disciplines, including international relations where the primary unit of analysis is the state.

Data Analysis and Synthesis

The study of Chinese and U.S. foreign policy is a complicated phenomenon in which multiple domestic actors coalesce or compete to set policy. Recognizing the breadth of social science inquiry and the many challenges researchers must confront,

³⁸ Creswell, *Research Design*, 12-14.

Laura Neack contends that “scholars have ways to manage what they study.”³⁹ Foreign policy analysts, for example, can break down each case into different component parts in order to study and understand specific aspects. In her study, *Studying Foreign Policy Comparatively*, Neack posits that “scholars use frameworks that are situated at different levels of analysis.”⁴⁰ These levels of analysis are tools that help a research examine a given topic. She argues that “levels of analysis are like different lenses on a camera that can give us different views on our subject.”⁴¹ At each level of analysis, the researcher gains a particular perspective on the understanding of a research topic. If a study focuses on a single level, the researcher must acknowledge that the research findings will only be limited to that level. Neack cautions that “an analysis conducted at just one level will not yield a complete picture.”⁴² This study will focus on several levels of analysis in order to provide a better understanding of the research problem. The levels of analysis approach provides a tool to examine the case study of Tunisia. The levels of analysis approach will help guide and organize data collection to examine Chinese and U.S. interests in Tunisia.

The ability of a country to advance its national interests is dependent upon its effectiveness in employing the instruments of national power to achieve strategic objectives. According to U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff Joint Publication 1, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States*, the instruments of national power are defined as “all

³⁹ Laura Neack, *Studying Foreign Policy Comparatively* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2018), 9.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

of the means available to a government in its pursuit of national objectives. They are expressed as diplomatic, economic, informational, and military.”⁴³ A focus on the instruments of national power provides four different levels to examine the articulation of national interests. For the purposes of this study, the instruments of national power represent the sum of all the resources available to a country in the pursuit of national objectives. The four levels of analysis used to measure Chinese and U.S. interests in Tunisia are DIME. In order to answer the primary research question, this study must answer the following secondary research questions: 1) What are U.S. national interests in Tunisia?, 2) What are the interests driving Chinese engagements in Africa?, 3) How is China employing the instruments of national power (DIME) in support of its strategic goals in Tunisia?, and 4) How can China and the U.S. cooperate in Tunisia? Measuring the four instruments of national power will help answer these research questions.

The diplomatic instrument of national power is the principal means for engaging with other states to advance national interests. Diplomacy is the principal means to advance bilateral relations between states. According to Joint Publication 1, diplomacy is also a “means of organizing coalitions and alliances, which may include states and non-state entities, as partners, allies, surrogates, and/or proxies.”⁴⁴ Military activities can play a significant role in enabling the diplomatic process. Joint Publication 1 underscores that “geographic combatant commanders (GCCs) are responsible for aligning military

⁴³ US Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication 1, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2017), GL-8.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, I-12.

activities with diplomatic activities in their assigned areas of responsibility (AORs).”⁴⁵

This study will examine Chinese and U.S. diplomatic interests in Tunisia using the following indicators: 1) recognition (presence or absence of diplomatic relations), 2) embassy (presence or absence of an embassy), 3) policies (national policy priorities reflected in government publications), and 4) international forums (presence or absence in bilateral or multilateral meetings).

The informational instrument of national power also represents a critical tool to advance national interests. States attempt to align communication activities to “facilitate an understanding” of how the planning and execution of national strategies and actions will be received by external actors.⁴⁶ Joint Publication 1 asserts that “every DOD action that is planned or executed, word that is written or spoken, an image that is displayed or relayed, communicates the intent of DOD, and by extension the U.S. Government, with the resulting potential for strategic effects.”⁴⁷ The need to “synchronize, align, and coordinate communication activities” is undertaken to improve the efficacy of these actions and set the necessary conditions for the advancement of national interests.⁴⁸ In support of these efforts, Joint Publication 1 notes that “commanders and staffs at all levels should identify and understand key audience perceptions and possible reactions

⁴⁵ US Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication 1, I-12.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

when planning and executing operations.”⁴⁹ The communication guidance of geographic combatant commanders, for example, represents a fundamental component of national strategic direction. This study will examine the employment of Chinese and U.S. informational instruments of national power in Tunisia using the following indicators: 1) public affairs (presence or absence of themes and messages), 2) military information (presence or absence of communication that aligns with overarching national messages), and 3) communications resources (presence or absence of venues to facilitate exchanges).

States employ the military instrument of national power in support of national security goals. According to Joint Publication 1, the military instrument is “coercive in nature, to include the integral aspect of military capability that opposes external coercion.”⁵⁰ The military also has various capabilities that are useful in non-conflict situations, such as security cooperation. This study will examine the employment of Chinese and U.S. military instruments of national power in Tunisia using the following indicators: 1) military engagement (presence or absence of military programs or exchanges), 2) military equipment (presence or absence of military sales), and 3) military presence (presence or absence of Defense Attaché representation).

The economic instrument of national power also represents a critical tool to advance national interests. According to Joint Publication 1, a strong “economy with free access to global markets and resources is a fundamental engine of the general welfare” of

⁴⁹ US Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication 1, I-12.

⁵⁰ Ibid., I-13.

a state.⁵¹ In the international arena, states seek to work with other actors in the international arena to “encourage economic growth, raise standards of living, and predict and prevent, to the extent possible, economic and financial crises.”⁵² This study will examine the employment of Chinese and U.S. economic instruments of national power in Tunisia using the following indicators: 1) trade (presence or absence of imports and exports), 2) tariffs (presence or absence of trade barriers), and 3) financial assistance (presence or absence of foreign aid and loans). Table 1 illustrates the four levels of approaches used in this case study and depicts the indicators that will be used to measure how China and the U.S. employed the instruments of national power in Tunisia.

Table 1. Levels of Analysis Research Indicators	
Level	Indicators
Diplomatic	Recognition Embassy Policies International forums
Informational	Public affairs Military information Communications resources
Military	Engagement Equipment Presence
Economic	Trade Tariffs Financial assistance

Source: Created by author.

⁵¹ US Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication 1, I-13.

⁵² Ibid., I-14.

In order to answer the primary research question, this study must answer all the secondary research questions. The remaining secondary research question is as follows: What kind of threat does China pose to U.S. interests in Tunisia? A set of evaluation criteria is needed to analyze the research findings in chapter 4. Two measurement devices will be used: 1) China's threat to the U.S. based on the employment of each instrument of national power, and 2) the overall level of threat posed by China to U.S. interests in Tunisia. By employing two sets of measurement, this study seeks to increase the validity and reliability of research findings.

The first step in the research methodology is to develop a measurement device to assess how China is employing the instruments on national power in Tunisia. Each instrument of national power will be attributed a score based on the level of threat China poses to U.S. interests. The judgment of the researcher in attributing the score will be supported by data findings presented in chapter 4. Each instrument of national power will be assigned a numerical score based on the assessed threat level. The levels of threat are defined as follows: 1) low threat (low threat is defined as posing limited or no direct harm to U.S. interests, 2) medium threat (medium threat is defined as disrupting U.S. interests), and 3) high threat (high threat is defined as severely damaging U.S. interests). A numerical score will be assigned to each level of risk: low (1), medium (2), and high (3). Upon completing the evaluation for each of the four instruments of national power, the scores will be aggregated to determine the level of threat China poses to U.S. interests in Tunisia. This score will help determine the answer to the primary research question in chapter 4. Table 2 illustrated how the results will be aggregated to determine the threat China poses to the employment of U.S. instruments of national power in Tunisia.

Table 2. China's Threat to U.S. Interests in Tunisia			
China's Employment of National Power	Low Threat (1 Point)	Medium Threat (2 Points)	High Threat (3 Points)
Diplomatic			
Informational			
Military			
Economic			
Total			

Source: Created by author.

This study considers another measurement device to determine how China's presence and capabilities in Tunisia pose a threat to U.S. interests. According to U.S. Army Field Manual 3-0, *Operations*, the intelligence preparation of the battlefield (IPB) process supports the ability to understand the operational environment.⁵³ U.S. Army Techniques Publication 5-19, *Risk Management*, defines IPB as "a systematic process of analyzing and visualizing the portions of the mission variables of threat, terrain, weather, and civil considerations in a specific area of interest."⁵⁴ This study will focus exclusively on the IPB step related to identifying the enemy threat. By focusing on this step in the IPB process, this study will advance our understanding of the threat China poses to the U.S. in Tunisia.

The evaluation criteria will determine the level of threat to U.S. national interests in Tunisia. According to U.S. Joint Publication 3-10, *Joint Security Operations in*

⁵³ US Department of the Army, Field Manual 3-0, *Operations* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2017).

⁵⁴ US Department of the Army, Army Techniques Publication 5-19, *Risk Management* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army), 4-6.

Theater, there are three levels of threat. These levels (Level I, Level II, and Level III) provide “a general description and categorization of threat activities, identify recommended security responses to counter them, and establish a common reference for planning.”⁵⁵ Level I threats include foreign intelligence entities and terrorists who may conduct espionage, subversion, sabotage, assassination, and bombing attacks. Level II threats include small-scale forces that can pose serious threats to military forces and civilians. Attacks by Level II threats can cause significant disruptions to military operations and the orderly conduct of local government and services. Level III threats may be encountered when an enemy has the capability of projecting combat power by air, land, or sea or anywhere into the operational area (OA). Specific examples include airborne, heliborne, and amphibious operations, large combined arms ground force operations, and infiltration operations into the OA.⁵⁶ Table 3 depicts the criteria in a matrix that will be applied in the data analysis to determine if China poses a Level I, Level II, or Level III threat to the U.S. in Tunisia. The results will be based on the possible levels of threat defined in U.S. Joint Publication 3-10.

Table 3. China’s Overall Threat to U.S. Interests in Tunisia			
Country	Level I	Level II	Level III
China			

Source: Created by author.

⁵⁵ US Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication 3-10, *Joint Security Operations in Theater* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2019), I-2.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

The study will compare and contrast the findings in Table 3 and Table 4 to draw conclusions and answer secondary research question #5.

Ethics and Trustworthiness

Regardless of the research approach selected, a researcher must consider the ethical implications of collecting data and publishing research findings. This study will specifically consider the ethical considerations in conducting qualitative research. The Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) is one of many organizations dedicated to promoting ethics in scientific research. These organizations recognize that ethics represent an integral aspect of research. COPE developed guideline to define best practices in the ethics of scientific publishing. These guidelines address “study design and ethical approval, data analysis, authorship, conflict of interests, the peer review process, redundant publication, plagiarism, duties of editors, media relations, advertising, and how to deal with misconduct.”⁵⁷ The author applied these guidelines to ensure the study’s validity. The benefits of this study to academicians and practitioners rest on the trustworthiness of the research results.

The guidelines outline that a research project “should be well justified, well planned, appropriately designed, and ethically approved.”⁵⁸ According to COPE, the “research design must address specific research questions.”⁵⁹ This study clearly identifies

⁵⁷ Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), *Guidelines on Good Publication Practice*, December 10, 2017, <https://farname-inc.com/post-2/f53d32c/Committee-on-Publication-Ethics-COPE-GUIDELINES-ON-GOOD-PUBLICATION-PRACTICE>.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

one primary research question and five secondary research questions. The conclusions and of this study must also correlate to the primary and secondary research questions. Research ethics also demand that the methods used must relate specifically to these research questions. Moreover, all data collected should be analyzed using a scientific method. All sources and methods used to obtain and analyze data are fully disclosed in this study. Fabrication and falsification of data constitute ethical misconduct. With respect to authorship, the author alone takes full responsibility for the content of this study. There are no personal, commercial, political, academic, or financial conflicts of interest influencing the judgment of the author that would make a reader feel misled or deceived. A three-member faculty committee from the U.S. Army CGSC, selected by the author, reviewed this study. In order to avoid plagiarism, the author disclosed all sources and referenced the use of all published ideas. The author did not conduct surveys or observations as part of this study. As a result, the author was not required to complete a research application through the U.S. Army CGSC Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure that ethical practices are followed since no human participants were involved in the research project.

Summary and Conclusions

This chapter restated the purpose of this research project and highlighted the timeliness of evaluating if the recent U.S. military's shift in focus to revisionist threats, particularly China, is warranted in the case of Tunisia. In addition, this chapter provided a rationale for the selection of a qualitative approach to answer the primary and secondary research questions. The research methodology also justified the suitability of the case study approach to conduct in-depth analysis. The research design outlined the steps for

data collection and evaluation, while accounting for assumptions, scope, definition of terms, limitations, and delimitations identified in chapter 1. Lastly, this chapter addressed how validity, ethics, and trustworthiness are vital in the research process. The following chapter will analyze the data collected using this qualitative methodology. Chapter 4 will answer the primary and secondary questions of this study, leading to the conclusions and U.S. policy recommendations provided in chapter 5.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS

Introduction

This chapter provides the research findings to answer the primary research question: Does the rise in Chinese influence in Tunisia pose a threat to U.S. national interests? In order to answer this question, this chapter will follow a logical progression by first addressing the secondary research questions: 1) What are U.S. national interests in Tunisia?, 2) What are the interests driving Chinese engagements in Africa?, 3) How is China employing the instruments of national power (DIME) in support of its strategic goals in Tunisia?, and 4) How can China and the U.S. cooperate in Tunisia? This study will answer these research questions to support or challenge the position that China poses the primary threat to U.S. interests in Tunisia.

U.S. Interests in Tunisia

In order to assess if the rise in Chinese influence poses a threat to U.S. interests, this study sets out to define U.S. policy toward Tunisia. This section begins with a response to secondary research question #1: What are U.S. national interests in Tunisia? The scope of this question focuses on U.S.-Africa policy in general, and U.S. policy toward Tunisia in particular. Answering this question requires a study of the most recent U.S. strategic guidance documents to identify U.S. interests in Africa: the *2017 National Security Strategy*, the *2018 Africa Strategy*, and the *2020 U.S. AFRICOM Posture Statement*. According to the current National Security Strategy, Africa “remains a

continent of promise and enduring challenges.”⁶⁰ The U.S. seeks “sovereign African states that are integrated into the world economy, able to provide for their citizens’ needs, and capable of managing threats to peace and security.”⁶¹ President Trump’s Africa policy, published in December 2018, rests on three pillars: 1) promoting prosperity in Africa and America, 2) strengthening security, and 3) striving for stability.⁶² The new strategy emphasizes enhancing reciprocal economic activity between the U.S. and African states and countering Chinese influence. The banner of the *2020 AFRICOM Posture Statement* reflects these strategic priorities: “A secure and stable Africa is an enduring American interest.”⁶³ In line with the *2018 National Defense Strategy*, AFRICOM prioritizes “global power competition, even while we remain engaged in counter-VEO (C-VEO) operations.”⁶⁴ The AFRICOM Posture Statement acknowledges the threat of great power competition, nesting the aims of AFRICOM with the strategic guidance of the *2017 National Security Strategy* and the *2018 National Defense Strategy* to compete with China.

The current National Security Strategy identifies specific political, economic, and military and security priority actions in Africa. In the political realm, the U.S. seeks to

⁶⁰ US President, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, 52.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² US President, “President Donald J. Trump’s Africa Strategy Advances Prosperity, Stability, and Security” (Washington, DC: The White House, 2018).

⁶³ Townsend, *2020 Posture of U.S. Africa Command*, 1.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 10.

end violent conflicts and encourage governance reform.⁶⁵ The *2020 AFRICOM Posture Statement*, in its North Africa regional assessment, highlights that “Tunisia just completed its second free and fair presidential election since its 2011 revolution.”⁶⁶ The political priority actions in the National Security Strategy also include responding to humanitarian needs.⁶⁷ In April 2020, the U.S. committed \$600,000 to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in Tunisia. Donald Blome, U.S. Ambassador to Tunisia, noted that “Tunisia is a priority country and it is imperative to support the Government of Tunisia’s efforts to respond to and mitigate COVID-19, and any corresponding challenges.”⁶⁸

The U.S. economic priority actions include expanding trade and commercial ties. The National Security Strategy underscores that the U.S. “will offer American goods and services, both because it is profitable for us and because it serves as an alternative to China’s often extractive economic footprint on the continent.”⁶⁹ In March 2020, U.S. Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo expressed his “commitment to continuing the

⁶⁵ US President, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, 52.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁶⁸ US Embassy in Tunisia, “U.S. Provides 1.7 Million Dinars Assistance to Tunisia to Respond to Novel Coronavirus COVID-19,” April 3, 2020, <https://tn.usembassy.gov/u-s-provides-1-7-million-dinars-assistance-to-tunisia-to-respond-to-novel-coronavirus-covid-19/>.

⁶⁹ US President, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, 53.

strong bilateral relationship between the U.S. and Tunisia with Prime Minister Fakhfakh’s government and strengthening economic and commercial ties.”⁷⁰

Regarding military and security priority actions, the U.S. seeks to “work with partners to improve the ability of their security services to counter terrorism, human trafficking, and the illegal trade in arms and natural resources.”⁷¹ The *2020 AFRICOM Posture Statement* underlines that “Tunisians are strong partners in the fight against ISIS-Libya and complement our security cooperation investment dollars with national funds.”⁷²

Answer to Secondary Research Question #1

The response to secondary research question #1 is captured in Table 4:

Table 4. Secondary Research Question #1	
Question	Answer
What are U.S. national interests in Tunisia?	Democracy Stability Security Trade

Source: Created by author.

⁷⁰ US Embassy in Tunisia, “Secretary Pompeo’s Call with Tunisian Prime Minister Fakhfakh,” March 3, 2020, <https://tn.usembassy.gov/secretary-pompeos-call-with-tunisian-prime-minister-fakhfakh/>.

⁷¹ US President, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, 53.

⁷² Townsend, *2020 Posture of U.S. Africa Command*, 13.

Both the National Security Strategy and U.S. Africa Strategy specifically mention democracy, stability, security, and trade as major U.S. interests in Africa. These areas also represent the main U.S. interests in Tunisia. Without stability and security, Tunisia will struggle to consolidate recent democratic gains. The U.S. remains committed to supporting democratic transitions in Africa, including Tunisia. The *2020 AFRICOM Posture Statement* underscores that “Tunisia just completed its second free and fair presidential election since its 2011 revolution.”⁷³ In this effort, the report reaffirms U.S. support to Tunisia to provide a secure environment conducive to the development of democratic institutions. AFRICOM continues to prioritize keeping “pressure on ISIS and other VEOs as they seek to take advantage of the security vacuum created by the civil war in Libya.”⁷⁴ The report characterizes “ISIS freedom of action as a regional terrorist threat” in North Africa.⁷⁵ VEOs represent a near-term threat to the Tunisian government’s capacity to govern effectively, protect its population, and improve its economy.

Chinese Interests in Africa

In order to assess if China poses a threat to U.S. interests, this study identifies China’s primary interests in Tunisia. This section addresses secondary research question #2: What are the interests driving Chinese engagements in Africa?

⁷³ Townsend, *2020 Posture of U.S. Africa Command*, 13.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) holds a Party Congress every five years to set the direction of the country's domestic and foreign policy and elect its top leadership. The 19th Party Congress, held in October 2017, was led by China's president and party chief, Xi Jinping. China's leader replaced Hu Jintao as the CCP's general secretary at the 18th Party Congress in November 2012, before becoming China's president in 2013. During his 2017 address, President Xi outlined China's main foreign policy goals, which are subsumed under the broader national objective of achieving the "great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation."⁷⁶ President Xi's vision builds on two economic targets set by the CCP's previous leadership known as the "two centenary goals." The first centennial goal is to build a "moderately prosperous society" by eradicating poverty by 2021, the 100th anniversary of the party's founding. The second goal is to turn China into a "fully developed nation" by 2049, the 100th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic. In his speech, President Xi outlined for the first time a specific timetable for reaching the second centennial goal. He asserted that China will "basically realize socialist modernization" during an initial phase ending in 2035. The second stage will last from 2035-2050, during which China will become a leading global power and the Chinese people will enjoy "common prosperity." At that historical juncture, President Xi

⁷⁶ Xi Jinping, "Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era," 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, October 18, 2017, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/special/2017-11/03/c_136725942.htm.

asserted that “the Chinese nation will stand with a more high-spirited image in the family of nations.”⁷⁷

The most significant foreign policy component of the 19th Party Congress was the affirmation of China’s intention to play a more influential role in world affairs.

According to President Xi, China entered into a “new era” marked by greater self-confidence, expanded goals, and an unambiguous desire to occupy a position of global leadership alongside the U.S. and other major powers.⁷⁸ As in previous CCP congresses, peace and development remained the dominant themes. The 19th Party Congress also addressed how global challenges are creating increasing uncertainties and destabilizing factors. In particular, President Xi deplored that “global economic growth lacks energy; the gap between rich and poor continues to widen; hotspot issues arise often in some regions; and unconventional security threats like terrorism, cyber-insecurity, major infectious diseases, and climate change continue to spread.”⁷⁹ In confronting these challenges, President Xi cited a wide range of recent foreign policy-related accomplishments in China’s effort to “become a proud and active member of the community of nations.” These include, most notably, pursuing new economic initiatives such as the BRI and the Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank, hosting of major international summits and conferences, calling for reforming global governance to better

⁷⁷ Jinping, “Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era.”

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

reflect the interests of developing countries, “historic breakthroughs” in military modernization and reform alongside increases in “cultural soft power,” and significant progress in “building an ecological civilization.”⁸⁰ As a result of these initiatives, President Xi stated that “China’s international standing has risen as never before. Our Party, our country, our people, our forces, and our nation have changed in ways without precedent. The Chinese nation, with an entirely new posture, now stands tall and firm in the East.”⁸¹ The 19th Party Congress address reflects China’s increasing assertiveness in the international arena. China’s expanding foreign policy ambitions invariably include Africa.

While China favors a bilateral foreign policy strategy, the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) represents the centerpiece of multilateral engagements with African states. China’s initiative in establishing a regional cooperation mechanism emphasizes the importance attached to Africa. The FOCAC, launched in 2000, brings together Chinese and African leaders every three years to coordinate China’s activities in Africa. The FOCAC’s objectives are “equal consultation, enhancing understanding, expanding consensus, strengthening friendship and promoting cooperation.”⁸² The forum rotates its location between Beijing and African cities. Since 2000, China and African nations have participated in seven summit meetings: 2000 in Beijing, China; 2003 in

⁸⁰ Jinping, “Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era.”

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), “Previous Conferences,” accessed October 8, 2019, <https://focasummit.mfa.gov.cn/eng/>.

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; 2006 in Beijing, China; 2009 in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt; 2012 in Beijing, China; 2015 in Johannesburg, South Africa; and 2018 in Beijing, China. In 2021, the President of Senegal will host the next summit in Dakar.⁸³ The theme of the most recent summit was "China and Africa: Toward an Even Stronger Community with a Shared Future through Win-Win Cooperation."⁸⁴ China and African states affirmed that "peace and development remain our common aspirations."⁸⁵ While FOCAC summit meetings lay out broad policy objectives that both China and African countries endorse, China's engagements with African countries are generally executed on a bilateral basis.

The publication of China's first Africa policy paper in 2006 further consolidated China's strategic vision for Africa. The report outlined China's four overarching principles guiding its engagements with African state: 1) sincerity, friendship and equality, 2) mutual benefit, reciprocity and common prosperity, 3) mutual support and close coordination, and 4) learning from each other and seeking common development.⁸⁶ According to the paper, enhancing solidarity and cooperation with African countries represents "an important component of China's independent foreign policy of peace."⁸⁷ With this policy paper, China set out to promote "the steady growth of China-Africa relations in the long-term and bringing the mutually-beneficial cooperation to a new

⁸³ FOCAC, "Previous Conferences."

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ People's Republic of China, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *China's Africa Policy*, January 2006, <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/zflt/eng/zgdfzcc/t481748.htm>.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

stage.”⁸⁸ In 2015, China released its second Africa policy paper. The aim was to “further clarify China's determination and goodwill to develop friendly and cooperative relations with Africa and expound the new vision, approach and measures of China's Africa policy under the new circumstances with the aim of guiding the multi-faceted exchanges and cooperation between China and Africa in the years to come.”⁸⁹ The 2015 new policy paper signaled the intention to deepen China-Africa cooperation. China’s reinvigorated approach seeks to deepen the strategic partnership, enhance political mutual trust, deepen cooperation in international affairs, deepen economic and trade cooperation, strengthen development cooperation, deepen and expand cultural and people-to-people exchanges, promote peace and security in Africa, and strengthen exchanges and cooperation in consular, immigration, judicial and police areas.⁹⁰ China’s policy objectives in Africa, communicated through the FOCAC framework and the Africa policy papers, make clear that China’s central goal in increasing ties with Africa is rooted in a “win-win” approach that enhances Chinese trade and investment opportunities and promotes development in Africa without interfering in the internal affairs of African states.

Answer to Secondary Research Question #2

The primary Chinese interests in Africa are captured in Table 5:

⁸⁸ People’s Republic of China, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *China’s Africa Policy*.

⁸⁹ People’s Republic of China, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *China's Second Africa Policy Paper*, December 5, 2015, http://www.china.org.cn/world/2015-12/05/content_37241677.htm.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

Table 5. Secondary Research Question #2	
Question	Answer
What are the interests driving Chinese engagements in Africa?	Peace Development Trade Security

Source: Created by author.

The interests driving Chinese engagements in Tunisia are consistent with China’s strategic vision for Africa. China’s interest in the stability of its trading partners and protecting overseas investments has gradually increased as China expanded its presence in Africa. The answer to secondary research question #2 considers the range of China’s diplomatic, economic, and security interests. China’s central goal in increasing ties with Africa now enables high-level outreach to 53 of 54 African countries, comprising nearly 28 percent of the overall membership of the United Nations. China also views Africa as a source for natural resource imports and a growing market for exports. As China seeks to bolster its ability to safeguard its increasing economic interests in Africa, including Tunisia, China will likely seek to enhance military ties in key geostrategic areas such as the Mediterranean region.

China’s Increasing Influence in Tunisia

The levels of analysis approach will help organize research findings on China’s activities in Tunisia. The ability of a country to advance its national interests is dependent upon its effectiveness in employing the instruments of national power to achieve strategic objectives. For the purposes of this study, the instruments of national power represent the sum of all the resources available to a county in the pursuit of national objectives. As

discussed in chapter 3, the four levels of analysis used to measure Chinese and U.S. interests in Tunisia are DIME. In order to answer the primary research question, this chapter initially identified U.S. national interests in Tunisia and the overarching objectives driving Chinese engagements in Africa. This section will address secondary research question #3: How is China utilizing the instruments of national power in support of its strategic goals? The indicators developed in chapter 3 are used to measure how China is employing the DIME instruments of national power in Tunisia.

Diplomatic Instrument

The diplomatic instrument of national power is the principal means for engaging with other states to advance national interests. Diplomacy is employed to advance bilateral relations between states. This section examines Chinese diplomatic interests in Tunisia using the following indicators: 1) recognition (presence or absence of diplomatic relations), 2) embassy (presence or absence of an embassy), 3) policies (national policy priorities reflected in government publications), and 4) international forums (presence or absence in bilateral or multilateral engagements).

Tunisia is among the 53 African states that recognize China.⁹¹ China's 2015 policy paper reaffirmed that the "one-China principle is the political precondition and foundation for the establishment and development of China's relations with African countries and regional organizations."⁹² As of May 2020, eSwatini is the only remaining

⁹¹ Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), "About FOCAC," accessed October 8, 2019, <https://focasummit.mfa.gov.cn/eng/>.

⁹² People's Republic of China, *China's Second Africa Policy Paper*.

African state with full diplomatic ties to Taiwan. The number of African states that recognize China increased since the publication of the first Africa policy paper. As of 2006, 47 African states had established diplomatic relations with China.⁹³ China established diplomatic relations with Tunisia in 1964 and maintains an embassy in the capital city of Tunis.⁹⁴ In October 2019, China and Tunisia signed an agreement to conduct a feasibility study for the expansion of the new university hospital in the Province of Sfax. The hospital is currently under construction with Chinese financing estimated at 70 million U.S. dollars. The Sfax hospital is the largest and most long-term project among the Chinese aid projects under construction in Tunisia. The construction was started in December 2016 and its construction area covers about 26,000 square meters.⁹⁵ In July 2019, Tunisian Prime Minister Youssef Chahed met with the Chinese Ambassador to Tunisia. In the communiqué, Chahed expressed “his gratitude to [the] Chinese government for its support and assistance to Tunisia, adding that relations between the two countries have been friendly for a long time and have witnessed development in recent years.”⁹⁶ While these examples reflect the diplomatic component

⁹³ Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the Republic of Ghana, “Chinese Government Issues and African Policy Paper,” accessed December 28, 2019, https://gh.china-embassy.org/eng/xwtd/t23_1007.htm.

⁹⁴ Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in Tunisia, accessed March 11, 2020, <http://tn.china-embassy.org/fra/dsxxs/dszcs/>.

⁹⁵ “Tunisia, China Sign Agreement to Expand Chinese-Funded University Hospital,” *Xinhua*, October 9, 2019, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-10/09/c_138456915.htm.

⁹⁶ “Tunisian PM hails China's support for Tunisia,” *Xinhua*, July 10, 2019, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-07/10/c_138212712.htm.

of the bilateral relationship, China also cooperates with Tunisia on a multilateral level. China cooperates with Tunisia as part of sub-regional cooperation mechanisms, including the China-Arab Cooperation Forum and the FOCAC.⁹⁷

Informational Instrument

The informational instrument of national power also represents a critical tool to advance national interests. States attempt to align communication activities to “facilitate an understanding” of how the execution of national strategies and actions will be received by external actors.⁹⁸ This section examines how China employs the informational instrument of national power in Tunisia using the following indicators: 1) public affairs (presence or absence of themes and messages), 2) military information (presence or absence of communication that aligns with overarching national messages), and 3) communications resources (presence or absence of venues to facilitate exchanges). Within the framework of the 2015 Africa policy paper, China “will strengthen exchanges and cooperation with Africa in education, science, culture, health and other social and cultural fields, expand exchanges between Chinese and African people, increase think tank, university and media exchanges, and support sub-national contacts and cooperation.”⁹⁹ China seeks to increase its influence in Tunisia through a stronger cultural engagement. The first Confucius Institute (Institute of Chinese Language and Culture) opened in Tunis in November 2018. Xu Rixuan, director of Confucius Institute,

⁹⁷ Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in Tunisia.

⁹⁸ US Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication 1, I-12.

⁹⁹ People’s Republic of China, *China's Second Africa Policy Paper*.

stated that "our specific objective is to teach Tunisians Chinese, to train teachers in Chinese and to promote cultural and academic exchanges between Tunisia and China."¹⁰⁰ During the 2018 Beijing Summit of the FOCAC, China pledged to increase the number of scholarships awarded to African students, including those from North Africa, to pursue higher education in China. China is the second most popular destination for African students studying abroad, after France. The number of African studying in China increased from 2,000 in 2003 to nearly 50,000 in 2015, representing a 26-fold increase.¹⁰¹ In December 2019, China's Ambassador to Tunisia stressed that "China is keen and ready to stand with Tunisia to achieve economic and social growth as part of concretizing the recommendations of the FOCAC held in 2018."¹⁰² The Chinese ambassador pointed to current projects in Tunisia funded by China, including the Sfax hospital, Diplomatic Academy in Tunis, and the Cultural and Sports Centre in El Menzah VI.¹⁰³ China is also investing in communications infrastructure in Tunisia. China's Belt and Road action plan mentions telecommunications, and specifically submarine cables, as a priority sector for future investments. China specializes in laying submarine cables, a crucial element of its telecommunication development strategy. Huawei Marine

¹⁰⁰ "Confucius Institute opens classroom in Tunisia," *Xinhua*, November 13, 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-11/13/c_129992290.htm.

¹⁰¹ Victoria Breeze and Nathan Moore, "China Tops US and UK as Destination for Anglophone African Students," *The Conversation*, June 27, 2017, <https://theconversation.com/china-tops-us-and-uk-as-destination-for-anglophone-african-students-7896>.

¹⁰² "'China's Support for Tunisia Will Continue,' Says Ambassador," *Agence Tunis Afrique Presse*, December 30, 2019, <https://www.tap.info.tn/en/Portal-Politics/12175712--china-s-support>.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

Networks designed and installed the “Hannibal” cable linking Tunisia to Italy in 2009. China has also invested in satellite facilities in Tunisia. China opened its first overseas center for Beidou navigation satellite system in April 2018.¹⁰⁴ Despite these inroads in Africa, China ranks second as a developmental model after the U.S. according to recent survey research.¹⁰⁵ In Tunisia, respondents ranked France (47 percent) as the country they thought had the most influence. The U.S. ranked second with 35 percent among respondents, and China placed a distant third with only 2 percent.¹⁰⁶ The data does not support the assertion that China’s increasing role in Tunisia has led to a decrease in U.S. influence.

Military Instrument

States employ the military instrument of national power in support of national security goals. According to Joint Publication 1, the military instrument of power is “coercive in nature, to include the integral aspect of military capability that opposes external coercion.”¹⁰⁷ The military also has various capabilities that are useful in non-conflict situations, such as security cooperation. This section examines how China is

¹⁰⁴ Alice Ekman, “China in the Mediterranean: An Emerging Presence,” *Notes de l’Ifri* (February 2018): 17.

¹⁰⁵ Mogopodi Lekorwe, Anyway Chingwete, Mina Okuru, and Romaric Samson, “China’s Growing Presence in Africa Wins Largely Positive Popular Reviews,” *Afrobarometer Dispatch*, no. 122 (October 24, 2016), http://afrobarometer.org/sites/default/files/publications/Dispatches/ab_r6_dispatchno122_perceptions_of_china_in_africa1.pdf.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁰⁷ US Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication 1, I-13.

using the military instrument of national power in Tunisia by using the following indicators: 1) military engagement (presence or absence of military programs or exchanges), 2) military equipment (presence or absence of military sales), and 3) military presence (presence or absence of Defense Attaché representation). Chinese security cooperation with Tunisia is increasing. In 2013, Beijing gave an 8 million Dinar grant to the Tunisian military to bolster its counterterrorism capabilities. The Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) publicized the participation of one of its ships in an international naval parade in Tunisia in 2018. In May 2019, China's Ambassador to Tunisia underscored his country's desire to strengthen bilateral cooperation and support the Tunisian army in various fields, particularly in military training and health services. China's Ambassador made the remarks during a meeting with Tunisia's Defense Minister Abdelkrim Zbidi.¹⁰⁸ China also maintains a "Defense Attaché Office" at its embassy in Tunisia.¹⁰⁹ These engagements signal China's interest in bolstering security cooperation.

Economic Instrument

The economic instrument of national power also represents a critical tool to advance national interests. According to Joint Publication 1, a strong "economy with free access to global markets and resources is a fundamental engine of the general welfare" of a state.¹¹⁰ In the international arena, states seek to work with other actors in the

¹⁰⁸ "China, Tunisia to strengthen military training cooperation," *Xinhua*, May 30, 2019, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-05/30/c_138100821.

¹⁰⁹ Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Tunisia.

¹¹⁰ US Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication 1, I-14.

international arena to “encourage economic growth, raise standards of living, and predict and prevent, to the extent possible, economic and financial crises.”¹¹¹ This section examines the employment of China’s economic instrument of national power in Tunisia using the following indicators: 1) trade (presence or absence of imports and exports), 2) tariffs (presence or absence of trade barriers), and 3) financial assistance (presence or absence of foreign aid and loans).

China is seeking to expand trade with Tunisia. The 2018 FOCAC summit reaffirmed China’s “fundamental national policy of opening up” along with support for efforts to facilitate free trade and to expand an “open world economy.”¹¹² In this regard, the BRI serves as a major driver of cooperation, involving “policy, infrastructure, trade, financial, and people-to-people connectivity.” Both countries signed an agreement to expand cooperation under the BRI in 2019.¹¹³ President Xi launched the BRI in 2013. The two-pronged plan includes the overland Silk Road Economic Belt and the Maritime Silk Road. The two are collectively referred to as the BRI. Chinese imports from Tunisia have reached an annual average of \$1.85 billion since 2016, ranking third behind France and Italy.¹¹⁴ China, which is expanding its presence in the Mediterranean region, is also

¹¹¹ US Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication 1, I-14.

¹¹² Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), “2018 FOCAC Summit,” accessed October 8, 2019, <https://focasummit.mfa.gov.cn/eng/>.

¹¹³ “China-Tunisia Sign Economic and Technical Cooperation Agreement,” *Xinhua*, January 13, 2019, <https://www.beltandroad.news/2019/01/13/china-tunisia-sign-economic-technical-cooperation-agreement/>.

¹¹⁴ Adel Abdel Ghafar and Anna L. Jacobs, “Beijing Strengthens its Presence in the Maghreb,” Brookings Institution, September 9, 2019, <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/beijing-strengthens-its-presence-in-the-maghreb/>.

seeking to invest in ports in Tunisia. China is reportedly negotiating to build an “economic hub for the port of Zarzis.” Another project would involve building the deep-water port of Enfidha.¹¹⁵

Answer to Secondary Research Question #3

The response to secondary research question #3 is captured in Table 6:

Table 6. China’s Employment of National Power in Tunisia	
Level	Indicators
Diplomatic	Recognition Embassy Policies International forums
Informational	Public affairs Military information Communications resources
Military	Engagement Equipment Presence
Economic	Trade Tariffs Financial assistance

Source: Created by author.

China is employing all the instruments of national power in Tunisia to advance its strategic interests. In the diplomatic realm, China has longstanding political ties with Tunisia. China is increasingly leveraging the informational instrument of national power to advance national interests. The informational power of China in Tunisia mostly derives

¹¹⁵ Ekman, “China in the Mediterranean: An Emerging Presence,” 15.

from the media, advertising, higher education opportunities, and the growing access that Chinese languages provides for business relations and cultural exchanges. China's Africa strategy specifically mentions economic growth, investment, and trade as major Chinese interests across Africa. China has demonstrated a willingness to increase both trade and investments in Tunisia. Lastly, China employs the military instrument of national power in support of security goals. China maintains a Defense Attaché Office in Tunisia and is seeking to expand military engagements.

U.S.-China Cooperation in Tunisia

The levels of analysis approach provided a framework to measure China's increasing influence in Tunisia. The previous section of this chapter illustrated how China is employing the DIME instruments of national power to achieve strategic objectives. The first three secondary research questions examined U.S. national interests in Tunisia, the overarching objectives driving China-Africa relations, and how China is utilizing the instruments of national power in Tunisia. These research findings also provide the answer to secondary research question #4: How can the U.S. and China cooperate in Tunisia? The remainder of this section discusses intersecting U.S. and Chinese interests in Tunisia.

Answer to Secondary Research Question #4

This study revealed that the U.S. and China share common interests in Tunisia in the diplomatic, military, and economic realms. The research findings summarized in Table 1 and Table 2 highlight the areas of policy convergence, in particular peace and stability in Africa, African development, increased trade, and defeating transnational

terrorist threats. The informational instrument of national power, while used primarily to advance individual national interests, is also employed by China to convey themes and messages that support U.S. interests in Tunisia, such as peace and stability.

In the diplomatic realm, the U.S. and China share a common interest in African stability. President Trump's Africa Strategy views stability as one of the three pillars for success in Africa.¹¹⁶ China's 2015 Africa policy paper underscores the importance of peace and security.¹¹⁷ China and the U.S. share a common interest in defeating VEOs. In December 2019, U.S. Representative Stephen F. Lynch, Chairman of the Subcommittee on National Security, held a hearing on the growing threat of violent extremism in Africa. Across the African continent, extremist activity increased from 288 attacks in 2009 to 3,050 in 2018.¹¹⁸ Organizations, including Al-Shabaab, Boko Haram, Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM), Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), and various regional affiliates of Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), continue to destabilize already fragile African states, with significant implications for U.S. national security interests.¹¹⁹ While the U.S. has been far more active in countering these threats to date, China's 2015

¹¹⁶ US President, "President Donald J. Trump's Africa Strategy Advances Prosperity, Stability, and Security."

¹¹⁷ People's Republic of China, *China's Second Africa Policy Paper*.

¹¹⁸ US House of Representatives, "Subcommittee on National Security to Examine U.S. Counterterrorism Priorities and Challenges in Africa," Press Release, December 16, 2019.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Africa policy paper highlights transnational terrorist and criminal threats as a concern requiring increased attention.¹²⁰

Both the U.S. and China view African stability as a prerequisite for economic activity. The National Security Strategy and U.S. Africa Policy cite economic growth, investment, and trade as major U.S. interests in the international system, which includes Tunisia. China has also demonstrated a willingness to increase trade and investment in Tunisia. Longstanding African conflicts, in particular, preclude sustainable development, hinder the deepening of bilateral relations, detract foreign investment, and often contribute to broader regional instability. Working with China on common goals will not only serve to further advance the economic development, infrastructure improvement, and security environment in Tunisia, but can do so while advancing U.S. national interests.

China's Threat to U.S. Interests in Tunisia

In order to determine how much of a threat China poses to U.S. interests in Tunisia, this study must answer the primary research question. The primary research question is as follows: Does a rise in Chinese influence in Tunisia pose a threat to U.S. interests? The evaluation criteria developed in chapter 3 will be applied to analyze the research findings. This study will determine if China's increasing influence in Tunisia has limited or restricted U.S. actions. Two measurement devices will be used: 1) China's threat to each U.S. instrument of national power, and 2) the overall level of threat posed

¹²⁰ People's Republic of China, *China's Second Africa Policy Paper*.

by China to U.S. interests in Tunisia. By employing two sets of measurement, this study seeks to increase the validity and reliability of research findings.

Answer to Primary Research Question

The first step outlined in the research methodology is to apply the evaluation criteria to each of the four U.S. instruments of national power employed in Tunisia. As outlined in chapter 3, each instrument of national power will be attributed a score based on the level of threat posed by China. The judgment of the researcher in attributing the score will be supported by data findings presented earlier in this chapter. Each instrument of national power will be assigned a numerical score based on the assessed level of threat posed by China. The levels of threat are defined as follows: 1) low threat (low threat is defined as posing limited or no direct harm to U.S. interests, 2) medium threat (medium threat is defined as disrupting U.S. interests), and 3) high threat (high threat is defined as severely damaging U.S. interests). A numerical score will be assigned to each level of risk: low (1), medium (2), and high (3). Upon completing the evaluation for each of the four instruments of national power, the scores will be aggregated to determine the level of threat China poses to U.S. national interests in Tunisia. This score will help determine the answer to the primary research question at the end of this chapter.

With respect to the diplomatic instrument of national power, this study highlighted that both the U.S. and China have longstanding diplomatic relations with Tunisia and maintain an embassy in the capital city. In addition, this study revealed that both countries have significant converging policy interests towards Tunisia. Both countries also engage Tunisia in bilateral and multilateral efforts. There are no

indications that the rise in Chinese influence has degraded U.S.-Tunisia diplomatic relations. As a result, China poses a low threat to U.S. diplomatic efforts in Tunisia.

The informational instrument of national power also represents a critical tool to advance national interests. As demonstrated earlier in this chapter, a representative case study of the nations of North Africa showed that an increase in Chinese influence, even over the space of a decade, had no appreciable impact on U.S. influence, or the perception of the U.S. by the local populations. This study also revealed that Chinese information campaigns have highlighted themes and messages that support U.S. interests in Tunisia. As a result, China's employment of the informational instrument of national power in Tunisia poses a low threat to U.S. interests.

The U.S. and China both employ the military instrument of national power in support of national security goals across the globe. China maintains a Defense Attaché representation in Tunisia and is seeking to expand military engagements. China's investments in China raise strategic issues given their nature and size in recent years. Investments in satellite facilities, submarine cables or ports in the region make it possible to develop non-commercial activities in the future, such as hosting permanent PLA forces or collecting intelligence. Consequently, a continuing rise in Chinese influence in Tunisia poses a medium threat to U.S. interests.

Lastly, the economic instrument of national power represents a critical tool to advance national interests. Both the National Security Strategy and U.S. Africa Strategy specifically mention economic growth, investment, and trade as major U.S. interest not just in Tunisia, but across Africa. China has also demonstrated a willingness to increase both its trade and investment in Tunisia. Working together with China will not only serve

to further advance the economic development, infrastructure improvement, and security environment in Tunisia, but can do so at slight risk to U.S. national interests. As a result, China poses a limited threat to U.S. economic interests in Tunisia.

Table 7 aggregates all the results covered in this section and reveals that China currently poses a low threat to the employment of U.S. instruments of national power in Tunisia.

Table 7. China's Threat to U.S. Interests in Tunisia			
China's Employment of National Power	Low Threat (1 Point)	Medium Threat (2 Points)	High Threat (3 Points)
Diplomatic	1		
Informational	1		
Military		2	
Economic	1		
Total	3	2	0

Source: Created by author.

This study considers another measurement device to determine how China's presence and capabilities in Tunisia pose a threat to U.S. interests. According to U.S. Army Field Manual 3-0, *Operations*, the IPB process supports the ability to understand the operational environment.¹²¹ U.S. Army Techniques Publication 5-19, *Risk Management*, defines IPB as "a systematic process of analyzing and visualizing the portions of the mission variables of threat, terrain, weather, and civil considerations in a

¹²¹ US Department of the Army, Field Manual 3-0.

specific area of interest.”¹²² This study will focus exclusively on the IPB step related to identifying the enemy threat. By focusing on this step in the IPB process, this study will advance our understanding of the threat China poses to the U.S. in Tunisia.

The evaluation criteria will determine the level of threat to U.S. national interests in Tunisia. According to U.S. Joint Publication 3-10, *Joint Security Operations in Theater*, there are three levels of threat. These levels (Level I, Level II, and Level III) provide “a general description and categorization of threat activities, identify recommended security responses to counter them, and establish a common reference for planning.”¹²³ Level I threats include foreign intelligence entities and terrorists who may conduct espionage, subversion, sabotage, assassination, and bombing attacks. Level II threats include small-scale forces that can pose serious threats to military forces and civilians. Attacks by Level II threats can cause significant disruptions to military operations and the orderly conduct of local government and services. Level III threats may be encountered when a threat force has the capability of projecting combat power by air, land, or sea or anywhere into the OA. Specific examples include airborne, heliborne, and amphibious operations; large combined arms ground force operations; and infiltration operations involving small groups infiltrated into the OA, regrouped at predetermined times and locations, and committed against priority targets.¹²⁴ Based on the findings presented in this study, China does not currently represent a Level II or Level III threat to

¹²² US Department of the Army, Army Techniques Publication 5-19, 4-6.

¹²³ US Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication 3-10, I-2.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

U.S. interest in Tunisia. As a result, China is assessed to represent a Level I threat to U.S. interests in Tunisia. Table 5 depicts the results of this study based on the possible levels of threat defined in U.S. Joint Publication 3-10.

Table 8. China's Overall Threat to U.S. Interests in Tunisia			
Country	Level I	Level II	Level III
China	X		

Source: Created by author.

Summary and Conclusions

The findings of this study revealed that China currently poses a low threat to U.S. interests in Tunisia. In order to answer the primary research question, this study first answered all of the secondary research questions. This chapter identified the U.S. national security interests and the overarching interests driving Chinese engagements in Africa. By examining how China is employing the instruments of national power in Tunisia, the findings revealed that China and the U.S. share common interests in Tunisia. Lastly, this study used two measurement devices to assess the level of threat posed by China. Both sets of measurement yielded the same result and enabled the researcher to answer the primary research question with a high degree of confidence. The next step in the research methodology is to draw conclusions from the research, provide recommendations to policy makers, and identify avenues for further research. These conclusions and recommendations will be covered in chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this research was to determine if the U.S. military's shift in focus to revisionist threats, such as China, is warranted in the case of Tunisia. Considering that the recent shift in U.S. military policy in Tunisia has received limited scholarly attention, this study attempted to bridge the current gap by measuring the impact of China's increasing influence in Tunisia on U.S. interests. In order to determine whether the U.S. military's decision to shift focus to great power competition is justified across Africa, this study assessed the threat posed by China to U.S. interests in Tunisia. This study set out to answer the primary research question: Does the rise in Chinese influence in Tunisia pose a threat to U.S. national interests? In order to answer this question, this study followed a logical progression by first addressing the secondary research questions: 1) What are U.S. national interests in Tunisia?, 2) What are the interests driving Chinese engagements in Africa?, 3) How is China employing the instruments of national power (DIME) in support of its strategic goals in Tunisia?, 4) How can China and the U.S. cooperate in Tunisia?, and 5) What kind of threat does China pose to U.S. interests in Tunisia? A comparative analysis of Chinese and U.S. policy objectives in Tunisia provided a basis to identify possible areas of policy convergence and divergence. This study identified the U.S. national security interests and the overarching interests driving Chinese engagements in Africa. By examining China's employment of their instruments of national power in Tunisia, this study revealed that China and the U.S. share common interests in Tunisia. Lastly, this study used two measurement devices to assess China's

threat to U.S. interests in Tunisia. Both sets of measurement yielded the same result and enabled the researcher to answer the primary research question with a high degree of confidence. This study determined that China currently poses a low threat to U.S. interests in Tunisia. Consequently, this study challenged the position that China poses the primary threat to U.S. interests in Tunisia. The findings of this study suggest that China should not remain the top U.S. priority in Tunisia. Chapter 5 will provide conclusions and recommendations as well identify suggestions for future research. The interpretation of the research findings will specifically explore why the U.S. DODs shift in focus to China is unsuitable in the case of Tunisia. This study will also examine the implications of current U.S. policy, specifically addressing whether the U.S. military's primary focus on China may have negative effects, making it ill-prepared for the current fight against VEOs across North Africa. The conclusions drawn from the interpretation of data findings will highlight the limitations of current U.S. military policy in Tunisia.

Interpretation of Findings

Based on the findings presented in chapter 4, the answer to the primary research question is yes. The rise in Chinese influence in Tunisia poses a threat to U.S. national interests. The secondary research questions provided a line of inquiry to assess the level of threat. This study demonstrated that China currently poses a low threat to U.S. interests in Tunisia. However, the findings to one of the four secondary research questions revealed that China's increasing use of the military instrument of national power poses a medium threat to U.S. interests. The variance in the results to secondary research question #4, summarized in Table 4, has implications for the conclusions and

recommendations of this study. The nuance in the answer to this secondary research question must, therefore, be taken into account.

This study assesses that the overall threat level to U.S interests from China in Tunisia is low. Notwithstanding, the variance in scores reflected in Table 4 require an in-depth interpretation of the results. With respect to the diplomatic instrument of national power, this study highlighted that both the U.S. and China have longstanding diplomatic relations with Tunisia. In addition, this study revealed that both countries have significant converging policy interests toward Tunisia. This study uncovered no indications that the rise in Chinese influence in Tunisia has degraded U.S.-Tunisia diplomatic relations. The *2019 AFRICOM Posture Statement* identified Tunisia as “one of our most capable and willing partners.”¹²⁵ As a result, China poses a low threat to U.S. diplomatic efforts in Tunisia. This study also underscored that China poses a low threat to U.S. interests in other areas. As highlighted in chapter 4, a representative case study of the nations of North Africa showed that an increase in Chinese influence, even over the space of a decade, had no appreciable impact on U.S. influence, or on the perception of the U.S. by the local populations. This study revealed that the themes and messages of Chinese information campaigns have not had a significant negative effect on U.S. interests in Tunisia. As a result, China’s employment of the informational instrument of national power in Tunisia currently poses a low threat to U.S. interests. Moreover, this study revealed that China and the U.S share broad economic goals in Tunisia. Both the National Security Strategy and U.S. Africa Strategy specifically mention economic growth,

¹²⁵ Waldhauser, *2019 Posture of U.S. Africa Command*, 26.

investment, and trade as major U.S. interest not just in Tunisia, but across Africa. China has also demonstrated a willingness to increase both its trade and investment in Tunisia. The World Bank *Investing Across Borders* initiative affirms that Tunisia has the fewest limits on foreign equity ownership in the Middle East and the North Africa (MENA) region. Tunisia has opened up the majority of the sectors of the economy to foreign capital participation.¹²⁶ Working alongside China would not only serve to further advance economic development and infrastructure improvement in Tunisia, but could do so at a slight risk to U.S. national interests. As a result, China poses a limited threat to U.S. economic interests in Tunisia.

Despite the aggregate results indicating that China's threat to U.S. interests is low, the findings in Table 4 cautioned that China's military instrument of national power poses a medium threat to U.S. interests in Tunisia. The U.S. and China both employ the military instrument of national power in support of national security goals across the globe. China maintains a Defense Attaché Office in Tunisia and is seeking to expand military engagements.¹²⁷ China's investments in Tunisia raise strategic issues given their nature and size in recent years. Investments in satellite facilities, submarine cables or ports in the region make it possible to develop non-commercial activities in the future, such as hosting permanent Chinese forces or collecting intelligence. Consequently, a continuing rise in Chinese influence in Tunisia poses a medium threat to U.S. interests.

¹²⁶ U.S. Department of State, "2019 Investment Climate Statements: Tunisia," July 17, 2019, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-investment-climate-statements/tunisia/>.

¹²⁷ Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Tunisia.

The implications of this finding merit further interpretation, considering the case of Djibouti where China established its first permanent base in Africa. Former U.S. National Security Advisor Bolton’s remarks introducing the current U.S. Africa Strategy as well as the 2018 and 2019 *AFRICOM Posture Statements* reference China’s activities in Djibouti. The 2019 *AFRICOM Posture Statement* asserts that “Djibouti’s increased partnership with China across defense, trade, and financial sectors encroaches on and, at times, diminishes U.S. access and influence.”¹²⁸ However, the question remains whether the case of Djibouti resembles a country like Tunisia.

In order to better understand the level of threat posed by China, this study employed a second measurement device to determine how China’s presence and capabilities in Tunisia pose a threat to U.S. interests. According to U.S. Joint Publication 3-10, *Joint Security Operations in Theater*, there are three levels of threat. These levels (Level I, Level II, and Level III) provide “a general description and categorization of threat activities, identify recommended security responses to counter them, and establish a common reference for planning.”¹²⁹ Based on the findings presented in this study, China does not currently represent a Level II or Level III threat to U.S. interest in Tunisia. Therefore, China represents a Level I threat to U.S. interests in Tunisia. Table 5 depicts the findings of this study based on the possible levels of threat defined in U.S. Joint Publication 3-10. Both sets of measurement used in this study yielded the same result and enabled the researcher to answer the primary research question with a high

¹²⁸ Waldhauser, *2019 Posture of U.S. Africa Command*, 23.

¹²⁹ US Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication 3-10, I-2.

degree of confidence. The findings in Table 5 complement the results in Table 4 and also help set apart the case of Tunisia from Djibouti. These conclusions have broad sweeping implications for U.S. policymakers and planners.

Recommendations

China’s increasing influence in Tunisia must be viewed as part of a broader Chinese strategy toward Africa rather than a singular phenomenon. The *2020 AFRICOM Posture Statement* makes this point, recognizing that “it is clear that China prioritizes Africa.”¹³⁰ The same report concedes that the U.S. may not be prepared to treat Africa as an arena for great power competition: “While we can and will grow more efficient to contribute to higher NDS priorities, if the U.S. steps back from Africa too far, China and Russia will fill the void to our detriment.”¹³¹ The *2018 National Defense Strategy* prioritizes countering China and Russia across the range of military operations. While the U.S. military faces five major challenges in line with American national security interests—China, Russia, North Korea, Iran, and terrorism—countering the first two represents the preeminent theme of current U.S. strategy. The U.S. military, according to the *2018 National Defense Strategy*, will sustain its presence in the Middle East, but will shift its focus to Asia and Europe. Specifically referencing the threat posed by China, the report asserts that China “will continue to pursue a military modernization program that

¹³⁰ Townsend, *2020 Posture of U.S. Africa Command*, 4.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 17.

seeks Indo-Pacific regional hegemony in the near-term.”¹³² If Asia and Europe are the major theaters for the U.S. military with respect to great power competition, the justification for the reprioritization of U.S. efforts in Africa is, at best, not as compelling.

China’s increasing influence in Africa, occurring in the broader context of U.S.-China tensions in Asia, has heightened fears of renewed great power competition in Africa. This study revealed a more balanced view in the case of Tunisia, providing a basis for the recommendations outlined below.

Recommendation #1: *China’s activities should be viewed in the African context.* While China has emerged as a geostrategic competitor in the Indo-Pacific region, U.S.-China relations in Africa are far less divergent and pose a far lesser threat in Tunisia. The U.S. and China share a common interest in the stability of African states and favorable investment climates as a prerequisite for economic trade, deepening relationships, and global leadership that each hopes to project. Most importantly, African states will continue to seek diverse partnerships in the international arena. According to the *2020 AFRICOM Posture Statement*, China “currently maintains 52 embassies in Africa – three more than the U.S. and a 24 percent increase since 2012.”¹³³ Despite China’s increasing influence in Africa, this point underscores that African states are maintaining relations with both the U.S. and China. As a result, U.S.-China relations in Africa cannot be viewed as a zero-sum geopolitical competition. While a coherent Africa strategy must

¹³² US Secretary of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America*, 2.

¹³³ Townsend, *2020 Posture of U.S. Africa Command*, 4.

account for Chinese activity, maintaining a balanced perspective about China's activities in each African state is required to understand the specific threats to U.S. interests.

Recommendation #2: *China's threat to U.S. interests should be viewed on a country-to-country basis.* China-Africa relations should not represent the organizing principle of U.S. foreign policy in Africa. This study, for example, challenged the position that China poses the primary threat to U.S. interests in Tunisia. Absent a country specific approach, U.S. policy in Africa risks subordinating broad ranging foreign policy priorities to U.S.-China bilateral strategic competition. U.S. interests in Africa go well beyond competition with China. The *2020 AFRICOM Posture Statement* asserts that VEOs “remain a reality.”¹³⁴ The report goes as far as to contend that the “window of opportunity to dig a firebreak and prevent the further spread of VEOs is months, not years.”¹³⁵ The sense of urgency conveyed in the report falls in line with the warnings of the *2017 AFRICOM Posture Statement*: “The instability in Libya and North Africa may be the most significant, near-term threat to U.S. and allies’ interests on the continent. The multiple militias and fractured relationship between factions in east and west Libya exacerbate the security situation, spilling into Tunisia and Egypt and the broader Maghreb.”¹³⁶ This study challenged the position that China poses the primary threat to U.S. interests in Tunisia. The AFRICOM posture statements themselves appear to make

¹³⁴ Townsend, *2020 Posture of U.S. Africa Command*, 5.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹³⁶ Waldhauser, *2017 Posture of U.S. Africa Command*, 9.

clear that terrorism, not interstate strategic competition, is the primary concern to U.S. interests at least in the case of Tunisia.

Recommendation #3: *AFRICOM should seek opportunities for greater engagement with China.* Despite deep levels of strategic distrust, increasing security threats in Africa may increase the potential for multilateral if not bilateral engagement. Such a move could recast U.S-China relations in Africa from the prism of bilateral strategic tension in the Indo-Pacific region. AFRICOM is the best positioned combatant command to lead such an engagement initiative given the continued emphasis on “military support to diplomacy and development.”¹³⁷ The *2018 National Defense Strategy* asserts that “inter-state strategic competition, not terrorism, is now the primary concern in U.S. national security.”¹³⁸ By taking a lead in military support to diplomacy through military-to-military relations with China in Africa, AFRICOM may prove valuable to the broader U.S. DOD initiative of rebalancing to the Pacific by growing more efficient in prioritizing efforts on a country-to-county basis and avoiding to elevate lower level competition with China in each African state to bilateral strategic tension.

Suggestions for Future Research

The study of the impact of China’s increasing influence in Africa on U.S. interests will continue to generate increasing attention. This study challenged the position that China poses the primary threat to U.S. interests in Tunisia. This finding suggests that

¹³⁷ Townsend, *2020 Posture of U.S. Africa Command*, 7.

¹³⁸ US Secretary of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America*, 1.

China should not remain the top U.S. priority in Tunisia. Additional research is required to determine if there are other African states where “inter-state strategic competition” is not the primary concern to U.S. national security.”¹³⁹ Future studies in this area will make a significant contribution to making AFRICOM operations more efficient by adjusting its posture and activities on a country-to-country basis given the changing African strategic environment.

¹³⁹ US Secretary of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 The National Military Strategy of the United States of America*, 1.

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