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**RUSSIAN AND CHINESE INFLUENCE IN AFRICA**

by

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**RUSSIAN AND CHINESE INFLUENCE IN AFRICA**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

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## **ABSTRACT**

Current U.S. strategy describes a world of great power competition, where China and Russia are named U.S. competitors. In Africa, a narrative of U.S. competitors gaining influence in a region of growing strategic significance has emerged. The extent to which U.S. competitors realize influence over targeted African states and the roots of one state's influence over another, however, remains under analyzed, revealing gaps within the broader literature. This research seeks to address these gaps, by asking how and to what extent Chinese and Russian activities succeed in furthering their influence in Africa and what are the implications for U.S. policy within the region? To address these questions, this thesis applies a framework emphasizing the power mechanisms of international influence to study Chinese and Russian activities in two pivotal states in Africa: Kenya and South Africa. Broadly speaking, this research found foreign influence to be much more nuanced than what common narratives suggest. Specifically, the findings show that democratic institutions in the two countries often blunt U.S. competitor influence, suggesting the importance of U.S. foreign policy toward assisting its African partners in advancing democratic institutions. Improving the political structures of its African partners, this research suggests, will better serve the United States.

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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

ANC	African National Congress
BNC	Bi-National Commission
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
BRICS	Brazil Russia India China and South Africa
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CRBC	China Roads and Bridges Corporation
EU	European Union
EXIM	Export Import
FOCAC	Forum on China-Africa Cooperation
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
KLTN	Kenya Transport and Logistics Network
LAPSSET	Lamu Port-South Sudan Ethiopia Transport
MK	Umkhonto we Sizwe
MRO	Maintenance Repair and Overhaul
ROC	Republic of China
SGR	Standard Gauge Railway
UN	United Nations
UNSC	United Nations Security Council

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## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Africa has attracted the interests of foreign powers throughout its history. The late nineteenth century saw European powers seeking to consolidate their own spheres of influence on the continent in what came to be known as the “Scramble for Africa.” Today authors, such as Pádraig Carmody, see a similar struggle taking shape between the U.S. and its competitors.<sup>1</sup> Observers of African geopolitics have taken notice to the increasing levels of Russian and Chinese engagement with African nations.<sup>2</sup> This research examines the contours of great power competition between the U.S. and its competitors, namely Russia and China, within the African context.

Potential threats posed by Russia and China have increasingly attracted U.S. attention. U.S. strategy describes a world of great power competition with China and Russia as the named U.S. strategic competitors. As a result, researchers have conducted a wealth of analysis regarding the behavior of Russia and China. This body of knowledge has left gaps about the extent to which these U.S. competitors realize influence over targeted African states and the root causes for one state to have influence over another. This research seeks to address these gaps. Specifically, this research asks, **How and to what extent do Chinese and Russian activities succeed in furthering their influence in Africa? And what are the implications for U.S. policy within the region?**

This thesis finds that foreign influence in African countries appears more nuanced and limited than what other narratives would suggest. A key finding in this literature was the limiting factor of foreign influence due to the political landscape of the target state. In short, societies who maintain politically conscious civil societies, institutional checks on executive decisions, and a relatively free media environment, tend to limit the ambitions of foreign powers seeking to exert influence over another.

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<sup>1</sup> Pádraig Carmody, *The New Scramble for Africa* (New Jersey: Wiley, 2011), 9.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

## B. SIGNIFICANCE OF RESEARCH QUESTION

Africa is of strategic concern for the U.S. and its allies. Diplomatically, nearly one third of the U.N. General Assembly is comprised of African states, making Africa a potentially large political bloc. Demographically, current U.N. projections predict that 40% of the world's population will consist of African peoples by the end of the century.<sup>3</sup> Economically, six of the ten fastest growing economies in the world are African countries.<sup>4</sup> Because of these factors, the African continent offers the U.S. and its competitors both current and future strategic opportunities. Understanding the influence U.S. competitors achieve through their engagements with African nations plays a critical role in assessing U.S. foreign policy within the region. This is especially true when considering current U.S. foreign policy aims to compete with Russia and China in the region, by strengthening its partnership with African states.

Recent updates to the *National Security Strategy* (NSS) and the *National Defense Strategy* (NDS) recognize Africa's strategic value and the importance of competing with Russia and China within the region. Echoing the NSS and NDS, former President Trump's own Africa Strategy placed competition with Russia and China at the heart of his sub-Saharan Africa policy. Unsurprisingly, U.S. military commanders have aligned their priorities with Washington's. General Townsend, testifying before the Senate Armed Services Committee in April 2019, claimed that Africa offers America a competitive edge over Russia and China, an advantage which should be leveraged in his opinion.<sup>5</sup> The special emphasis given to Chinese and Russian activities within Africa by top U.S. officials makes the significance of this research all the more relevant, as it directly aligns with stated U.S. foreign policy and the priorities of top U.S. officials.

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<sup>3</sup> Benjamin Elisha Sawe, "In 2100, 40% Of the World Population Will be African," World Atlas, last modified, January 6, 2020, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/in-2100-40-of-the-world-population-will-be-african.html>

<sup>4</sup>"Global Issues Population," United Nations, last modified July 11, 2020, <https://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/population/index.html>

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Africa Command Public Affairs, "U.S. Africa Command Testimony to Senate Armed Services Committee," AFRICOM, last modified April 21, 2021, <https://www.africom.mil/pressrelease/33693/us-africa-command-testimony-to-senate-armed-services-committee>

## C. LITERATURE REVIEW

Several perspectives emerge from the literature focusing on Russian and Chinese influence in Africa. In general, scholars tend to see Russian activities in Africa as having limited influence. By contrast, much of the scholarship on China in Africa sees China's many activities and large-scale investments as generating the potential for significant influence in African countries, with some noting the limits.

Before addressing these perspectives, it is necessary to define what it means for a country to have influence over another. The literature talks extensively of influence, yet often fails to define it. Political science scholars offer their own definition of influence. In one prominent definition, Robert Dahl describes influence as, “a relation among human actors such that the wants, desires, preferences, or intentions of one or more actors affect the actions, or predispositions to act, of one or more other actors in a direction consistent with—and not contrary to—the wants, preferences, or intentions of the influence-wielders.” This research adopts Dahl’s description of influence towards its own assessment of Russia and China in Africa. Although much of the literature fails to define the term and tends to assume certain actions lead to influence, the literature is rich with case studies focusing on the influence of U.S. competitors with African states.

### 1. Russian Influence

Russia’s intransigent behavior in the international arena, culminating with its annexation of Crimea in 2014, has given the Kremlin’s engagement with African states special scrutiny. Western media tends to characterize Russia’s engagement with African governments as disruptive and undermining to the regional objectives of Western countries and their African partners. This narrative often sees Russia gaining influence through nefarious commercial arrangements and military support to authoritarian African regimes. Some in the academic community echo this perspective; however, more characterize Russia’s engagement as achieving limited influence over target states.

### *a. The Dominant Perspective: Limited Russian Influence*

The dominant perspective from the literature suggests the limited nature of Russian influence. Kimberly Marten acknowledges the increasing level of Russian activity in Africa, but argues the Kremlin's influence within the region remains limited.<sup>6</sup> One limiting factor to Russian influence, she argues, is the longstanding presence of the United States (US), the European Union (EU), China's commercial and financial activities, and the growing interest of other states.<sup>7</sup> Emmanuel Dreyfus makes a claim similar to Marten's, arguing that Russia comparatively lacks the economic attractiveness characteristic of China, the EU, or the U.S. and will struggle to gain a meaningful foothold in Africa.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, Dreyfus argues that Russia's influence activities within the region, such as the military cooperation agreements signed between Russia and African governments, are likely unsustainable because of Russia's own domestic challenges and the low priority Africa holds in Russia's foreign policy agenda.<sup>9</sup> These perspectives suggest there are a variety of reasons why Russia's influence is likely to be limited in Africa.

It appears the key factor limiting Russian influence in Africa is the fact that Russia has little to offer African governments relative to other foreign powers. Dylan Yachyshen argues that despite the increased Russian commercial activity on the continent, Russia has little to offer African states outside of military capabilities. Even as a provider of military capabilities, Yachyshen claims Russian influence remains limited. When South Africa, one of the largest African recipients of Russian military equipment, rejected of a civil nuclear deal signed between the Kremlin and former President Jacob Zuma, Yachyshen saw this as a sign of Russia's limited influence.<sup>10</sup> Even when it comes to improving their military

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<sup>6</sup> Kimberly Marten, "Russia's Back in Africa: Is the Cold War Returning?" *The Washington Quarterly*, last modified December 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2019.1693105>

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Emmanuel Dreyfus, "Moscow's Limited Prospects in Sub-Saharan Africa," *Kennan Cable*. February 2020. Wilson Center. Washington, DC. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/kennan-cable-no-47-moscos-limited-prospects-sub-saharan-africa>

<sup>9</sup> Dreyfus, "Moscow's Limited Prospects in Sub-Saharan Africa."

<sup>10</sup>Dylan Yachyshen. "Great Power Competition and the Scramble for Africa." Foreign Policy Research Institute.2020. <https://www.fpri.org/article/2020/04/great-power-competition-and-the-scramble-for-africa/#:~:text=From>

capabilities, Yachyshen argues that various African states would prefer to work in partnership with the U.S., but since the opportunity is not there, Russia supplies this need.<sup>11</sup>

A key component to Russia's increasing activity in Africa appears to be linked to Western sanctions rather than efforts by the Kremlin to gain influence. Yachyshen dismisses the idea that Russian energy agreements perform as mechanisms for Russian influence over African states. Instead, he argues Western sanctions levied on Russia following its annexation of Crimea in 2014 forced Russian firms to seek markets unconstrained by these sanctions. Additionally, he sees Russia's military cooperation agreements with African regimes as mechanisms to facilitate Russian energy firms'—such as Gazprom, Rosneft, and Lukoil—operations in Africa.<sup>12</sup> Arnaud Kalika, sees the interests of these domestic firms as counterproductive to the Kremlin's influence over African governments. Kalika argues that these firms need access to African markets more than African governments need Russian commercial activity.<sup>13</sup> Kalika characterizes Russia as an ‘economic lightweight’ in the region that is seeking to build inroads with likeminded authoritarian regimes, who provide the Kremlin's domestic firms with markets unconstrained by Western sanctions.<sup>14</sup> Both Yachyshen and Kalika argue that once Western sanctions began to impact Russian domestic firms, Russian energy deals and military cooperation agreements appeared in Africa.

Russia's military cooperation agreements with African governments typically manifest themselves in the form of arms sales, private military companies (PMCs), and military advisors.<sup>15</sup> Arms sales, Paul Stronski explains, provide the Kremlin's best resource towards gaining influence in Africa because such activities, “make it possible to

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<sup>11</sup> Yachyshen. “Great Power Competition and the Scramble for Africa.”

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Kalika, Arnaud. *Russia's 'Great Return' to Africa?* Paris, France: INFRI, No. 114. 2019. Pp.4  
<https://www.ifri.org/en/publications/notes-de-lifri/russienvisions/russias-great-return-africa>

<sup>14</sup> Arnaud, Russia's ‘Great Return’ to Africa?

<sup>15</sup> Steve Balestieri. “Russian Military Expands in Africa by Building Bases in Six Countries,” last modified August 2020, <https://sofrep.com/news/russian-military-expands-in-africa-by-building-bases-in-six-countries/>

establish and sustain long-term relationships with African military and political leaders.”<sup>16</sup> Russian PMCs and military advisors operating on the African continent have been viewed by many, especially in the Western media, as indicators of growing Russian influence within the region. Stronski argues differently. He sees these activities as symptoms of Russia’s limited capacity to deploy its uniformed personnel abroad and that Russia uses such activities to cheaply broadcast the perception that it shares the same global relevance as its predecessor the Soviet Union.<sup>17</sup>

Russian officials often evoke a positive narrative when describing the historical legacy of the Soviet Union in Africa, suggesting that this legacy may provide inroads for renewed relations.<sup>18</sup> Stronski, while acknowledging the support the Soviet Union provided to many African independence movements, challenges the premise that such a legacy attracts any meaningful influence for the current Russian Federation. Stronski argues the present-day Russia lacks the economic ‘deep pockets’ and the ideological influence of its predecessor.<sup>19</sup> Taking a position similar to Stronski’s, Arnaud Kalika expresses doubts that Russia’s ‘Great Return’ to Africa, combined with the legacy of the Soviet Union, furthers the Kremlin’s influence within the region. Kalika further points out that African governments disapprovingly remember how quickly Russian diplomats left Africa once the Soviet Union began to unravel.<sup>20</sup>

The dominant themes emerging from the above literature characterize the limited influence Russia maintains over African states. Blocked by Western sanctions, Russia’s commercial interests, seeking new markets and resources, appear to be largely responsible for driving the Kremlin’s return to Africa. This need for commercial opportunities, the

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<sup>16</sup> Paul Stronski. “Late to the Party: Russia’s Return to Africa.” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, October 2019. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/10/16/late-to-party-russia-s-return-to-africa-pub-80056>

<sup>17</sup> Balestieri. “Russian Military Expands in Africa by Building Bases in Six Countries.”

<sup>18</sup> Reid Standish. “Putin Has a Dream of Africa.” Foreign Policy. October 2019. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/10/25/russia-africa-development-soviet-union/>

<sup>19</sup> Paul Stronski. “Late to the Party: Russia’s Return to Africa.” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, October 2019. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/10/16/late-to-party-russia-s-return-to-africa-pub-80056>

<sup>20</sup> Kalika, Russia’s ‘Great Return’ to Africa?

literature suggests, places African governments in a position to potentially exert their own influence over the Kremlin.

**b. Possible Sources of Russian Influence in Africa**

As previously mentioned, Russia's military support to African regimes has become fundamental to its foreign policy within the region, and offers one potential avenue for influence. In Grzegorz Kuczyński's perspective, Russia's military support to African countries and its use of mercenaries encompass the Kremlin's most effective mechanisms to gain influence.<sup>21</sup> Kuczyński sees the military cooperation agreements the Kremlin signed with African nations since 2018 as indication of Russia's relevance as a provider of military capabilities to African governments. Russian military equipment maintains a reputation among African militaries as being reliable, cheap, easy to maintain and operate, making Russian military equipment in high demand on the continent. Kuczyński argues that the provision of military hardware gives Russia influence by establishing long-term relationships with African military and political leaders.<sup>22</sup> In his eyes, Russia's only comparative advantage in gaining influence in Africa is through this military support, which has been welcomed by many African governments. Christian Malanga, an opposition politician in the Democratic Republic of Congo, admitted that "China is the money and Russia is the Muscle."<sup>23</sup>

Russia's military cooperation agreements often attract certain types of regimes, suggesting that Russian influence could take hold in some countries. The military support Russia offers African governments, according to Kyle Stramblad, comes with fewer strings attached when compared to Chinese and U.S. agreements. Stramblad claims this strategy is used by the Kremlin to gain influence over Africa rulers, especially those in

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<sup>21</sup> Grzegorz Kuczyński, *Russia in Africa: Weapons, Mercenaries, Spin Doctors* Warsaw, Poland: Warsaw Institute, 2019. <https://warsawinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Russia-in-Africa-weapons-mercenaries-spin-doctors-Warsaw-Institute-Report.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> Kuczyński, *Russia in Africa: Weapons, Mercenaries, Spin Doctors*.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

opposition to initiatives supported by the U.S. and the EU.<sup>24</sup> Many African governments resent these Western pressures and Stramblad sees Russia as exploiting this resentment in order to align African regimes with the anti-Western position of the Kremlin. Stramblad admits that Russian influence is nowhere near the scale of China or the U.S. Despite this, he claims Russia has been successful in gaining influence through the military support it provides African regimes.<sup>25</sup>

## 2. Chinese Influence

Much of the literature focuses on the large-scale characterizing China's recent engagement with Africa. It is this seemingly massive scale of Chinese engagement with African countries that many authors associate with Beijing's increasing influence in the region. However, while these authors demonstrate the scope and scale of China's activities, they often fail to demonstrate how such activities lead to Chinese influence. Other authors, acknowledging the magnitude of Chinese engagement in Africa, argue that such activities achieve limited, if any, influence over African states.

### a. *Chinese History and Motivations in Africa*

Chinese interest and engagement with African countries is hardly new. The Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) helped train the Former Liberation Movements of Southern Africa (FLMSA), along with other independence movements, during their liberation struggles.<sup>26</sup> Many African leaders attribute the success of their liberation movements to the Chinese models and doctrine they adopted. On his visit to Hunan, the birthplace of Mao Zedong, Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni is quoted as saying, "Revolutionaries come to Hunan like Catholics go to Rome."<sup>27</sup> China leverages its historical legacy in Africa in an effort to perpetuate the image of a benevolent partner to

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<sup>24</sup> Kyle Stramblad, "The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Scramble for Africa," Over the Horizon, last modified November 27, 2019. <https://othjournal.com/2019/11/27/the-21st-century-scramble-for-africa/>

<sup>25</sup> Stramblad. "The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Scramble for Africa."

<sup>26</sup> Paul Nantulya. "China Promotes Its Party-Army Model in Africa." July 28, 2020. <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/china-promotes-its-party-army-model-in-africa/>

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

African nations. Unlike many Western powers, China does not have an imperial legacy in Africa, avoided an assertive African policy during the Cold War, and supported several African countries in their struggles for independence. This historical narrative, as previously illustrated by President Museveni's quote, potentially builds friendly partnerships between Beijing and African leaders, enhancing China's influence in the process. These partnerships are becoming increasingly important for China's own growth.

China's rapid development and modernization continues to stress the limits of its own domestic resources. By 2025, more than 520 million Chinese people will be considered upper-middle class, which will further stress China's domestic resources to meet the demands of its domestic market.<sup>28</sup> With this in mind, it is easy to see why China is attracted to Africa. African countries are rich in natural resources and their booming populations makes Africa a growing market for Chinese exports. Lastly, as a political voting bloc, nearly a third of the UN General Assembly is comprised of African nations, making the region all the more relevant from a geopolitical standpoint. Beijing's interest in Africa has made China Africa's largest economic and development partner.<sup>29</sup>

### ***b. Chinese Activities and Influence in Africa***

Economically, Africa is a rich source in natural materials and market opportunities for foreign powers. Understanding this, China has engaged heavily in infrastructure development, financial aid and loans to African states. A large driver to this engagement is China's One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative, credited with large infrastructure projects throughout Africa. Some authors, such as Robert Blackwill and Jennifer Harris, claim that such activities are intended to bolster China's influence over African states through material rewards, a method sometimes referred to as 'stadium diplomacy'.<sup>30</sup> Others, such as Paul Nantulya, claim China's economic activities are methods to positively influence

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<sup>28</sup> Tiboris, Michael. "Addressing China's Rising Influence in Africa." The Chicago Council on Global Affairs. May 2019. [https://www.thechicagocouncil.org/sites/default/files/report\\_addressing-chinas-rising-influence-africa\\_20190521.pdf](https://www.thechicagocouncil.org/sites/default/files/report_addressing-chinas-rising-influence-africa_20190521.pdf)

<sup>29</sup> Brigety, Reuben. "A Post-American Africa: The U.S. Is Falling Behind." *Foreign Affairs*. August 2018. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/africa/2018-08-28/post-american-africa>

<sup>30</sup> Blackwill, Robert, and Jennifer Harris. *War by Other Means: Geoeconomics and Statecraft*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016.

the attitudes African states have towards the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), by portraying China as a benevolent superpower seeking to assist African states in their own economic prosperity.<sup>31</sup> No matter what the motivations, it is clear that China is engaging in a range of activities that may—or may not—bring about greater influence in African countries.

China's military engagements are more limited than its economic engagements, but its importance and influence may be growing. Paul Nantulya addresses the military component to China's engagement with African militaries. He highlights the increase of African military officers attending Chinese Professional Military Education engagements. In his account, 60% of foreign officers attending Chinese military institutions are from African countries, and these institutions tend to emphasize the importance of military loyalty to the ruling party of the state.<sup>32</sup> Zimbabwe, South Sudan, Angola, Mozambique, and Uganda have incorporated similar political-military structures in their own militaries. Nantulya views these activities as China's effort to attract African governments to the CCP in order to further its influence on the continent.<sup>33</sup> Despite Nantulya's observation, few examples from the literature link Chinese military activities with Chinese influence in Africa.

The Chinese diaspora currently residing in Africa is another potential avenue of influence for Beijing. China presently has an estimated 1 million migrants living in Africa, largely working on behalf of Chinese. A Chinese diaspora in Africa, Howard French claims, offers the Chinese government the greatest potential to further its economic and political influence across the continent.<sup>34</sup> Drawing parallels from Portuguese and Japanese empire building in Africa and Manchuria respectively, French argues China is showing a similar pattern of empire through emigration in Africa.<sup>35</sup> French does not claim Beijing is

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<sup>31</sup> Paul Natulya. "Grand Strategy and China's Soft Power Push in Africa." August 30, 2018. <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/grand-strategy-and-chinas-soft-power-push-in-africa/>

<sup>32</sup> Nantulya. "China Promotes Its Party-Army Model in Africa."

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

purposefully pursuing building an empire in Africa through such means; however, his observations lead him to conclude that such an outcome is taking shape.

On the surface, it appears the scale of China's engagement with African countries brings influence to Beijing. However, the more one analyzes this claim, the more scrutiny it attracts. The literature does not dispute the unprecedented level of Chinese engagement across Africa. Where the literature diverges is to what extent these efforts achieve influence over African states. Some argue China's economic, commercial, and financial engagement with African states gives it multiple avenues for furthering its own influence within the region. Others, acknowledging the level of China's involvement in Africa's development, see that China has yet to demonstrate it has achieved such influence over its African partners.

Despite the expanding array of Chinese engagements in Africa, there remains some question as to whether China succeeds in expanding its influence. Yun Sun sees China's Africa Policy as encountering more challenges than influence. Specifically, she depicts its mercantilist policy over Sino-African relations as detrimental to Beijing's reputation with its African partners.<sup>36</sup> Yun Sun highlights that China's engagement with African states is complex and that despite its unprecedented economic and financial engagement with African countries, Chinese influence remains unguaranteed. Like Sun, Elizabeth Economy contends that the scale of China's financial activities fails to translate into influence over African states. She claims that were China to repeat the kind of 'debt trap diplomacy' it demonstrated in Sri Lanka and Pakistan, it would likely encounter African governments less conciliatory to Chinese demands.<sup>37</sup> These perspectives cast doubt on whether China's model of economic engagement is actually advancing its influence.

With regards to Chinese lending practices as a source of influence, Chris Alden and Lu Jiang argue that China's two decades of debt-financed infrastructure development has

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<sup>36</sup> Yun Sun, *Africa in China's Foreign Policy*, Washington, D.C. Brookings. <https://www.brookings.edu/research/africa-in-chinas-foreign-policy/>

<sup>37</sup> Elizabeth C. Economy. *The Third Revolution Xi Jinping and the New Chinese State*. Oxford University Press, 2018. 221–227.

not necessarily increased its influence in Africa.<sup>38</sup> Instead, it has exposed Beijing to disquieting proportions of African debt that will likely trigger a change in China's Africa policy. Rather than achieving influence from so called 'debt trap diplomacy', these authors see China's activities in Africa as forcing Beijing to change its overall approach to the continent. Specifically, they argue the Chinese government seems intent on limiting further exposure to African sovereign debt.<sup>39</sup> Simply put, Alden and Jiang argue that China's massive financial projects in Africa has become a liability to Beijing rather than mechanisms for gaining influence.

In summary, the literature stresses the limited influence of Russia and the potential for Chinese influence in Africa. Although Russia is characterized as the more disruptive power, its impact tends to be focused and limited. In contrast, China's foreign policy in Africa is more broadly focused and impactful. Although contemporary media hype tends to take a skeptical look towards Sino-African relations, scholarly work on the matter is hesitant to jump to conclusions.

#### D. RESEARCH DESIGN

Much of the framework for this research draws from the work of Meierding and Sigman.<sup>40</sup> They describe the power resources an influencing state uses to engage in influence activities. They define these power resources as a state's material and ideational assets, including its military capabilities, economic wealth, and cultural output. Influence activities they define as the military, economic, diplomatic, and popular actions that can enhance a state's influence.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, they suggest that different types of influence activities may engage different types of power mechanisms, which produce the desired behavioral changes. They find that mechanisms of expertise, attraction, and legitimacy are important for building long-term influence. This research applies Meierding and Sigman's

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<sup>38</sup> Chris Alden and Lu Jiang, "Brave New World: Debt, Industrialization and Security in China-Africa Relations," *International Affairs* 95 No: 3, 2019.

<sup>39</sup> Alden et al., "Brave New World: Debt, Industrialization and Security in China-Africa Relations." *International Affairs* 95 No: 3, 2019.

<sup>40</sup> Meierding et al., "Understanding International Influence in an Era of Great Power Competition."

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

framework to understand Russian and Chinese influence within two countries—Kenya and South Africa. Equipped with this framework, this research analyzes the most prevalent power resources mobilized by Russia and China and the influence activates these countries undertake in Kenya and South Africa. However, conducting an in-depth analysis of each category of influence activities—military, economic, diplomatic, and popular—was beyond the scope of this research. Thus, this research focuses on those influence activities most likely to generate influence in Kenya and South Africa.

Influence is a widely discussed topic among international relations (IR) scholars, yet the concept remains difficult to measure and assess. Attributing the causal mechanism for a state's behavior is a difficult process and often becomes the genesis of perpetual debate among IR scholars. Acknowledging these challenges, Meierding and Sigman propose a method for evaluating influence by examining changes in target states behavior, examining the power mechanisms mobilized by influence activities, as well as the leverage, admiration, and goodwill they generate in the target state.<sup>42</sup> This research adopts this model in its own assessment of U.S. competitor influence in Kenya and South Africa.

The model describes six mechanisms through which one state's activities can generate influence in another state. The reward and coercion mechanism provide the target with something positive or by shielding it from something negative. Through the expertise mechanism, the influencer knowledge or skills shifts the target's behavior. In the legitimacy mechanism, the target views the influencer as a valid authority figure and aligns itself with the influencer's preferred behavior. In the attraction power mechanism, the target identifies with the influencer or desires that sense of identification. Lastly, the recognition mechanisms entails the influencer activity identifies the target in a favorable way. These mechanisms—reward, coercion, expertise, legitimacy, attraction, and recognition—form the lens, through which this research approaches its analysis of state influence.

This research applies this model to Russian and Chinese attempts to cultivate influence, with Kenya and South Africa serving as the targeted states. Both Kenya and

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<sup>42</sup> Meierding et al. "Taking Stock."

South Africa are considered strategic partners by the U.S. and both play important roles in Africa. As the most developed economy in sub-Saharan Africa, South Africa is the U.S. number one trading partner in Africa with approximately six hundred U.S. owned businesses operating in the country.<sup>43</sup> South Africa is a member of BRICS, Southern African Development Community (SADC), and is a key partner in the Organization for the Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) Enhanced Engagement program. In short, South Africa plays a key economic and political role in Africa.

Of similar importance, Kenya serves as an economic, financial, and transportation hub for East Africa. With 80% of East African trade flowing through Mombasa Port, Kenya plays a critical role in the East African Community.<sup>44</sup> In July 2020, the U.S. and Kenya engaged in bilateral negotiations with the goal of establishing a bilateral free trade agreement between the two countries. The U.S. maintains longstanding security interests with Kenya as well. The U.S. stated security cooperation objectives seek to improve the professionalism of the Kenyan military, increase its maritime security awareness, and improve its counterterrorism and peacekeeping capabilities.<sup>45</sup> Ultimately, Kenya and South Africa are of importance to U.S. foreign policy and understanding how U.S. competitors gain influence among these strategic partners merits concerted analysis.

This research uses a broad pool of sources to assess whether Russian and Chinese activities are generating influence in Kenya and South Africa. Scholarly publications, books, government and nongovernment organization reports, theses and dissertations will provide the bulk of research material for this research. Popular sources—news and social media—will also be leveraged; however, they serve to augment explanations supported from more academically credible sources. Given the difficulty of attributing a country's influence to a targeted state's behavior, a wide variety of scholarly and journalistic works will prove necessary in order to support the explanations of this research.

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<sup>43</sup> United States Department of State. Bureau of African Affairs, “U.S. Relations With South Africa,” last modified August 21, 2020, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-south-africa/>

<sup>44</sup> United States Department of State. Bureau of African Affairs. “U.S. Relations With Kenya,” last modified August 21, 2020, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-kenya/>

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

## **E. CHAPTER OVERVIEW**

This rest of the thesis is organized into three chapters. The next two chapters are case studies of U.S. competitor influence. These chapters will examine the power mechanisms mobilized by China and Russia and the influence, or potential influence, they generate. These chapters will focus on the influence activities most likely to generate influence in Kenya and South Africa. The final chapter will reflect on the findings, the implications for U.S. foreign policy in Kenya and South Africa respectively, and discuss future research possibilities.

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## **II. KENYA**

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

This chapter focuses on Chinese and Russian influence in Kenya, how power resources are mobilized, and what power mechanisms, if any, are activated in the process. First, this chapter will provide a background to Kenya-China relations and the avenues through which it mobilizes power resources in Kenya. This will provide the reader context for the follow-on discussion regarding the potential power mechanisms activated through China's activities in Kenya, which focus primarily on large scale infrastructure development projects. This research identifies extensive power resources mobilized by China in Kenya and determined the existence of high potential for Chinese influence. Limiting this influence; however, is Kenya's political landscape, which prioritizes the rule of law and maintains an engaged civil society sensitive to the impacts of Chinese business.

Next, this chapter will provide a background on Kenya-Russia relations and the power resources mobilized through this relationship. Due to the marginal power resources mobilized by Russia, this research fails to identify activation of the various power mechanisms vis-à-vis Kenya-Russia relations. Although, rhetoric from Russia and Kenya leadership indicates the two intend to reshape this relationship into a more meaningful partnership. Should this transpire through the activation of Russian power resources, the potential for various power mechanisms will prove more relevant. This research assumes that, due to the political landscape of Kenya, Russian influence activities will face similar challenges encountered by China and the trajectory of Kenya-Russia relations will be shaped by this political landscape.

### **B. BACKGROUND: KENYA-CHINA RELATIONS**

China has maintained economic ties with Kenya since before Kenya's independence in 1963. Political intrigue between the Maoist regime and the newly independent Kenyan government culminated when both declared the other's chargé d'affaires *persona non grata* in 1967. This diplomatic tension soured the economic ties between the two countries, effectively putting them on hold until Chairman Mao and

President Jomo Kenyatta both left the political scene in the late 1970s.<sup>46</sup> During this era of diplomatic hiatus, Kenya sought a capitalistic oriented developmental model, which ideologically and economically distanced Kenya from China. Replacing Kenyatta in 1978, Daniel Arap Moi sought to reshape the contentious relationship between Beijing and Nairobi. President Moi toned down Kenya's criticism towards China in favor of reestablishing friendly ties with Beijing.

The Moi era saw an increase in top-level Chinese diplomatic delegations to Kenya. Between 1980 and 2002, twenty top-level Chinese diplomatic entourages visited Kenya. They included Prime Minister Zhao Ziyang (1983), Foreign Minister Wu Xueqian (1987), President Jian Zemin (1996), and Prime Minister Zhu Rongji (2002). These diplomatic missions underscored the growing importance of Kenya in China's foreign policy. The Moi era also saw an increase in Kenya's diplomatic delegations to China. Moi's state visit to China in 1980, put into motion subsequent diplomatic and economic negotiations between the two countries, slowly rekindling friendly relations strained during the previous presidency.

Moi's new approach towards Kenya-China relations brought an economic and technological cooperation agreement along with a state-managed trade agreement.<sup>47</sup> This positive shift between Nairobi and Beijing witnessed the construction of the Moi International Sports Center outside of Nairobi, a new teaching hospital at Moi University in Eldoret, and the Gambogi-Serem highway.<sup>48</sup> China provided interest free loans for all these projects, accounting for more than half their total cost, along with assistance in their construction. By the time Moi left office in 2002, he had rehabilitated friendly diplomatic ties with China, earned the respect of some top party members within the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), and set conditions for a long-term economic partnership with China.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Lilian Tunai Mulati, "China-Kenya Relations: An Analysis of Its Nature Since Independence," *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science* 10, no. 10 (October 2019): 738.

<sup>47</sup> D. H. Shinn and J. Eisenman, *China and Africa: A Century of Engagement* (ProQuest), 266.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. 267.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

Succeeding Moi in January 2003, President Mwai Kibaki instituted broad economic reforms, resulting in an economic recovery that sustained an accelerated growth from 2.9% GDP increase in 2003 to 7.1% GDP increase in 2007.<sup>50</sup> Kenya's rising economy attracted many foreign entities, who saw an opportunity for profit in Kenya's rising market, China among them. It was during this time where opportunities for China to mobilize its power mechanisms began to emerge. With China's economic transformation in the mid-2000s, Beijing became more of a relevant partner to the capitalist oriented Kenyan government.<sup>51</sup> Seeing this, President Kibaki used Kenya's economic growth and the diplomatic momentum, achieved by his predecessor, to continue close economic ties with Beijing. China during this time continued to view Kenya as an importance economic partner, illustrated by a highly successful Chinese trade exhibition in Nairobi, a presidential visit to Kenya by Hu Jintao in 2006, followed by larger trade delegations to Nairobi.<sup>52</sup> Additionally, China began increasing its development assistance to Kenya, largely focused on agriculture, telecommunications, and transportation infrastructure development. By 2009, China had become Kenya's largest trading partner.

Looking at this history through the lens of influence, it is important to note that Africans have come to understand the forces used by outsiders to achieve influence over African societies.<sup>53</sup> This partially explains Kenya's initial distrust of Chinese motives between 1963 and the early 1980s.<sup>54</sup> As a result, China had few opportunities to gain influence in Kenya until Kenya's impressive economic expansion in the mid-2000s, occurring in parallel with China's own economic growth. In 2015, China became Kenya's

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<sup>50</sup> Elijah Siringi, "Kenya China Trade Relations," *Journal of Economics and Development Studies*, Vol. 6, no. 2 (June 2018): 5.

<sup>51</sup> Anita Plummer, "Kenya and China's Labour Relations: Infrastructural Development for Whom, by Whom?" *Africa: The Journal of International African Institute* 89, no. 4 (November 2019): 689.

<sup>52</sup> Mulati, "China-Kenya Relations: An Analysis of Its Nature Since Independence," 738.

<sup>53</sup> Plummer, "Kenya and China's Labour Relations: Infrastructural Development for Whom, by Whom?" 689.

<sup>54</sup> Maggie Opondo, "The Impact of Chinese Firms on CSR in Kenya's Garment Sector." (Masters Research, Chapman University, 2020), 22, <https://doi.org/10.36837/chapman.000190>

largest financier in terms of infrastructure development assistance.<sup>55</sup> As Kenya's chief financier, China owns roughly 66% of Kenya's bilateral debt, the bulk of which funds Kenya's large-scale infrastructure development projects.<sup>56</sup> It is these infrastructure projects where China's power resources are most visible, and where the potential for influence is more likely.

Chinese investments in Kenya are largely driven by the economic initiatives of the two countries—Kenya Vision 2030 and China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The Kenya Vision 2030, launched in 2006 by President Mwai Kibaki and adopted by current President Uhuru Kenyatta, the Kenya Vision 2030 aims to, "transform Kenya into a newly industrializing, middle-income country, providing a high quality of life to all its citizens by 2030, in a clean and secure environment."<sup>57</sup> China's BRI is a multi-decade initiative that aims to reshape China's commercial ties and geopolitical significance in the global economy.<sup>58</sup> Heavily oriented towards infrastructure development, China's BRI aligns well with Kenya Vision 2030 and President Kenyatta's desire to further Kenya's role as a commercial hub for East Africa. As a result, large scale infrastructure development projects, principally financed by China, have emerged.

Since 2006, Kenya has accumulated over \$9.8billion in debt owed to China's Export-Import (EXIM) Bank.<sup>59</sup> These Chinese investments are heavily directed towards commodities, information technology, food production, and largescale infrastructure

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<sup>55</sup> Plummer, "Kenya and China's Labour Relations: Infrastructural Development for Whom, by Whom?" 689.

<sup>56</sup> Candice Newcomb, "The Impact of Chinese Investments on the Kenyan Economy," (Masters Research, Chapman University, 2020), 3,  
[https://digitalcommons.chapman.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1003&context=international\\_studies\\_theses](https://digitalcommons.chapman.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1003&context=international_studies_theses)

<sup>57</sup> Kenya Vision 2030, "About Vision 2030," last modified March, 2019,  
<http://vision2030.go.ke/about-vision-2030/>

<sup>58</sup> Baker and McKenzie International. *Belt and Road: Opportunity and Risk* (Chicago, Il: Baker and McKenzie International, 2017), [https://www.bakermckenzie.com-/media/files/insight/publications/2017/10/belt-road/baker\\_mckenzie\\_belt\\_road\\_report\\_2017.pdf?la=en](https://www.bakermckenzie.com-/media/files/insight/publications/2017/10/belt-road/baker_mckenzie_belt_road_report_2017.pdf?la=en)

<sup>59</sup> Sushovan Dhar, "Kenya: Caught Between Debt and Political Indifference," Committee for the Abolition of Illegitimate Debt, last modified May 1, 2019, <https://www.cadtm.org/Kenya-caught-between-debt-and-political-indifference>

projects.<sup>60</sup> Such construction projects include powerline installation for the Kenya Electricity and Energy Transmission Company, the tallest real estate project in Kenya (NSSF shopping mall), deep-water port construction in Lamu, and standard gauge railway line spanning the breadth of the country.<sup>61</sup>

Three major Chinese backed infrastructure projects—Kenya Standard Gauge Railway, Lamu Port-South Sudan-Ethiopia-Transport Corridor, and the Thika Highway Project—have attracted particular attention from Kenyans and the international community. Each is an exhibition China’s extensive power resources mobilized in Kenya and the importance Kenya maintains vis-à-vis China’s global ambitions. Ultimately, these examples of China’s mobilized power resources can potentially become sources of influence for China.

#### *a. Kenya Standard Gauge Railway (SGR)*

The Kenya SGR project is one of many ambitious infrastructure projects associated with China’s BRI. The project aims to reduce transport cost and transit time of both passengers and freight of Kenya’s railway by as much as 60%.<sup>62</sup> The state-owned China Roads and Bridges Corporation (CRBC) won the contract for the project and began construction in October 2014. Partly as a result, eighty-five percent of the \$4.7 billion project was financed by China’s EXIM Bank, while Kenya co-financed the remaining 15 percent.<sup>63</sup> Construction was completed in 2017 and, despite being Kenya’s most expensive infrastructure project since its independence, has yet to achieve the level of profitability

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<sup>60</sup> Michael Wang, “Empirical study on African energy resources and China’s outflow foreign direct investment,” *Journal of International Business Research*, 11, no. 1 (September 2012): 22.

<sup>61</sup> Charles Onjumi Okumu and Anthony Fee, “Understanding the Impacts of Chinese Business Activity in Kenya from the Perspective of Locals: An Exploratory Field Study,” *Critical Perspectives on International Business* 15, no. 4 (June 2019): 361–389, doi 10.1108/cpoib-06-2019-0037

<sup>62</sup> Lucie Morangi, “Rail Project an Engine of Learning,” China Daily, last modified July 10, 2015, [http://africa.chinadaily.com.cn/weekly/2015-07/10/content\\_21242975.htm](http://africa.chinadaily.com.cn/weekly/2015-07/10/content_21242975.htm)

<sup>63</sup> Uwe Wissenbach and Yuan Wang, “Local Politics Meets Chinese Engineers: A Study of the Chinese-Built Standard Gauge Railway Project in Kenya,” *China Africa Research Initiative Policy Brief*, no. 16 (October 2016) 1–3.

necessary to cover the railway's operational costs and associated debts, the first payment of which came due in June 2020.<sup>64</sup>

**b. *Lamu Port-South Sudan-Ethiopia-Transport Corridor Project***

The Lamu Port-South Sudan-Ethiopia-Transport (LAPSSET) Corridor project is a multinational infrastructure development project aimed at creating Kenya's second transport corridor. The project includes the construction of roads, railways, pipelines, and the expansion of the port of Lamu. The primary goal of the project is to bring to export, through the port of Lamu, newly discovered mineral resources within East Africa's interior. The Lamu port is expected to consist of 32 deep water berths, sixteen of which are under construction by the CBRC.<sup>65</sup> China's role in LAPSSET could provide China with favored access to much needed energy reserves. However, the development of the port of Lamu has sparked backlash among the local community, most notably the Save Lamu Project, a nongovernmental organization that seeks to ensure the community of Lamu achieves sustainable development while preserving its social, cultural, and environmental integrity. The Save Lamu project continues to speak out against Chinese business practices in the area.

**c. *Thika Highway Project***

The Thika Highway project aimed to ease traffic congestion between Nairobi and the industrial town of Thika, roughly 50 kilometers away. The CRBC won the Thika highway contract and two other major road contracts in Kenya.<sup>66</sup> Co-financed between China's EXIM Bank and the African Development Bank, construction began in 2009 and was completed in 2012. The Thika Highway project raised concerns among Kenyans, who felt regional firms were barred from the contract negotiation process.

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<sup>64</sup> Eric Claude Olander, "Kenyan Government's Hiring of the State-Owned Chinese Company Used to Build the SGR Ruled Illegal by Court of Appeals," The China Africa Project, last modified June 22, 2020, <https://chinaafricaproject.com/2020/06/22/kenyan-governments-hiring-of-the-state-owned-chinese-company-used-to-build-the-sgr-ruled->

<sup>65</sup> David Goldman, "China Communications Construction Company Wins Lamu Port Phase 1 Contract," Strategic Intelligence News, last modified April 11, 2016, <https://web.archive.org/web/20130424092536/http://intelligencebriefs.com/?p=3550>

<sup>66</sup> Newcomb, "The Impact of Chinese Investments on the Kenyan Economy," 8.

The above infrastructure development projects are far from a complete list of those with Chinese involvement. Although not a comprehensive list, each illustrates the characteristics stemming from Chinese business practices in Kenya. Such characteristics, whether they are a matter of perception or fact, include large financial assistance, lack of transparency, favoritism towards Chinese firms, and a lack of skills transfer from Chinese technicians to their Kenyan counterparts. Each project also has the potential to activate various power mechanisms, which might enable Chinese influence in Kenya.

## C. POWER MECHANISMS

Next, I discuss power mechanisms—reward, coercion, expertise, attractiveness, legitimacy, and recognition—potentially at work through these infrastructure development projects.<sup>67</sup> When an influencer state mobilizes its power resources to engage in influence activities, these power mechanisms are what guide target states to change their behavior in favor of the influencer’s preferences, generating influence through leverage, admiration, or goodwill.<sup>68</sup> China has clearly mobilized its power resources in support of infrastructure projects in Kenya, and with such actions comes the potential to activate these power mechanisms.

### 1. Reward and Coercion

An influencer rewards a target state by providing it with something positive or shielding it from something negative.<sup>69</sup> Equipped with this understanding, it becomes easy to see the opportunities for China to leverage this power mechanism through its infrastructure projects in Kenya. Much of Kenya’s transportation infrastructure remains long overdue for modernization and, for the past two decades, Beijing has demonstrated a willingness to provide Kenya with extensive financial and technical support to modernize this infrastructure. This is not to suggest that China’s motivations in Kenya are wholly benevolent. Kenya’s transportation infrastructure is of strategic importance to China’s

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<sup>67</sup> Emily Meierding and Rachel Sigman, “Understanding International Influence in an Era of Great Power Competition” (unpublished article, 2020), 3.

<sup>68</sup> Meierding et al., “Understanding International Influence in an Era of Great Power Competition.” 3.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.”

global ambitions. Kenya's ports and transportation infrastructure provide China with a gateway into East Africa, giving China access to an estimated 230 million potential consumers and newly discovered energy reserves.<sup>70</sup> China likely seeks to activate the reward mechanism to gain influence in Kenya, through their infrastructure development projects, in an effort access to Kenya's economic corridors and commercial markets.

The potential for influence through reward is high because infrastructure is such an important part of Kenya's development strategy. These infrastructure development projects are central to Kenya Vision 2030 and the ambitions of President Kenyatta. When speaking about the Kenya SGR project, President Kenyatta said, "Without infrastructure, there will be no investors. Without investors there will be no jobs for our youth."<sup>71</sup> More than any foreign actor, China provides Kenya with the development assistance, deemed necessary by Kenya's president, to achieve the goals outlined in Kenya Vision 2030.<sup>72</sup> Additionally, in 2009 China became Kenya's largest trading partner, with the majority of Kenya's exports destined for Chinese markets.<sup>73</sup> With a large market to export to and generous development aid, the relationship between Nairobi and Beijing is full of rewards. For China, these rewards potentially position Beijing for market access, large construction contracts, and dependency on Chinese technicians. Such a position comes with it the opportunity to activate the coercion and reward power mechanisms.

Additionally, China is in a more financially advantageous position, a position that carries with it the potential for China to coerce Kenya towards certain behavior. Coercion entails the threat or imposition of punishment, such as trade restriction, diplomatic censure,

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<sup>70</sup> Plummer, "Kenya and China's Labour Relations: Infrastructural Development for Whom, by Whom?" 690.

<sup>71</sup> Kristin Huang, "Will China Seize Prize Port if Kenya Can't Pay Back its Belt and Road Loans," South China Morning Post, last modified December 30, 2018, <https://www.scmp.com/economy/china-economy/article/2180026/will-china-seize-prized-port-if-kenya-can-t-pay-back-its-belt>

<sup>72</sup> Kevin Acker, Deborah Brautigam, and Yufan Huang, "Debt Relief with Chinese Characteristics," (working paper, China Africa Research Initiative, 2020), 8, [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=3745021#:~:text=We%20found%20that%20China%20has,application%20of%20penalty%20interest%20rates](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3745021#:~:text=We%20found%20that%20China%20has,application%20of%20penalty%20interest%20rates).

<sup>73</sup> Charles Onjumi Okumu and Anthony Fee, "Understanding the Impacts of Chinese Business Activity in Kenya from the Perspective of Locals: An Exploratory Field Study," 366.

or military force.<sup>74</sup> In the case of Kenya-China relations, such coercion could very well come in the form of concessions stemming from Kenya's troubling debt owed to China. The Kenya SGR project for instance, has been credited for placing Kenya in financially precarious situation vis-à-vis China. The railway has yet to produce a profit sufficient to maintain its operational costs or associated debt owed to China.<sup>75</sup> In 2016, before the completion of the railway, the World Bank had already warned Kenya's heavy foreign debt burden, stemming largely from Chinese loans, were reaching unsustainable levels.<sup>76</sup> These conditions potentially allow China to impose harsh measures. It is rumored in the case of the Kenya SGR project that such concessions could include a partial Chinese takeover of the port of Mombasa.<sup>77</sup> However, given the history of China's approach towards debt renegotiations and the importance of Kenya within China's larger economic goals, leveraging such a coercive power mechanism is arguably unlikely.<sup>78</sup>

The infrastructure development projects, largely financed and carried out by Chinese state-owned firms, have placed China in a position to influence Kenya through rewards or coercion. However, these power mechanisms have proven expensive for China, putting into question their sustainability. Both Kenya and China view the other as a valuable economic partner, contributing to each other's larger economic ambitions. And it might be the case that neither wishes to jeopardize this economic relationship in pursuit of influence.

More importantly, the realities of Kenyan politics limit China's potential to gain influence through reward and coercion. Thus far, it appears Chinese infrastructure projects have done more to mobilize Kenya's population against what it perceives as government

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<sup>74</sup> Meierding et al., "Understanding International Influence in an Era of Great Power Competition."

<sup>75</sup> Sam Parker and Gabrielle Chefitz, *Debtbook Diplomacy: China's Strategy Leveraging of its Newfound Economic Influence and the Consequences for U.S. Foreign Policy*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Kennedy School, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs: 2018), <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/debtbook-diplomacy>

<sup>76</sup> Parker et al., *Debtbook Diplomacy: China's Strategy Leveraging of its Newfound Economic Influence and the Consequences for U.S. Foreign Policy*.

<sup>77</sup> Huang, "Will China Seize Prize Port if Kenya Can't Pay Back its Belt and Road Loans."

<sup>78</sup> Agatha Kratz, Allen Feng, and Logan Wright, "New Data on the 'Debt Trap' Question," Rhodium Group, last modified April 29, 2019 <https://rhg.com/research/new-data-on-the-debt-trap-question/>

malfeasance, instead of activating the reward or coercion power mechanisms. Kenya's politically active population, relatively free media, and independent branches of government, continue to challenge Chinese business practices and decisions from Kenya's top government officials. For instance, in June 2020, Kenya's Court of Appeals ruled that the Mombasa SGR contract negotiated by President Kenyatta's administration, violated Article 227 (1) of the Constitution that stipulates all government purchasing decisions should be fair, equitable, transparent, competitive, and cost-effective.<sup>79</sup> The Kenyan Parliament also demonstrated a willingness to challenge decisions from Kenya's president concerning Chinese construction projects.

In September 2020, the Kenyan Parliament faulted a recent executive order by President Kenyatta to establish the Kenya Transport and Logistics Network (KLTN). If allowed to proceed, the KLTN would have been the result of a state merger of the Kenya Port Authority, Kenya Railways Corporation, and Kenyan Pipeline Corporation. Kenyan human rights activities and transport sector workers claimed the merger would have led to Chinese control over the port of Mombasa.<sup>80</sup> Opponents of the merger, claim President Kenyatta was hiding illegal policies behind executive order.<sup>81</sup> Ultimately, the Kenyan Parliament agreed with this assessment, determining that such a merger of state-owned corporations could only be legitimate through new legislation, which should also involve public discourse due to the impact this would have on Kenyan communities.<sup>82</sup> Grievances from concerned communities create additional obstacles for Chinese infrastructure projects. The community of Lamu provides such an example.

In 2019, an environmental nongovernmental organization known as Save Lamu, succeeded in preventing the construction of a Chinese-backed coal power plant, the first of

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<sup>79</sup> Olander, "Kenyan Government's Hiring of the State-Owned Chinese Company Used to Build the SGR Ruled Illegal by Court of Appeals."

<sup>80</sup> Duncan Miriri, "Kenya Forcing Importers to use Costly New Chinese Railway, Businessmen Say," Reuters, last modified, December 2, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-kenya-railways/kenya-forcing-importers-to-use-costly-new-chinese-railway-businessmen-say-idUSKBN1Y70LT>

<sup>81</sup> Miriri, "Kenya Forcing Importers to use Costly New Chinese Railway, Businessmen Say."

<sup>82</sup> "Senate faults state merger of port pipeline, and railway authorities," Federation of East African Freight Forwarders Associations, last modified, September 17, 2020, <https://magazine.feaffa.com/senate-faults-state-merger-of-port-pipeline-and-railway-authorities/>

its kind in Kenya.<sup>83</sup> This group continues to engage local communities and stakeholders in decision-making to achieve sustainable and responsible development among the Lamu community.<sup>84</sup> Their efforts have come into conflict with other Chinese development projects, to include a Lamu Port construction project intended to support China's BRI.<sup>85</sup> The opposition of Kenya's civil society, combined with a contingent of the Kenyan public against Chinese business ventures, appears to have manifested itself in Kenya's political sphere to the detriment of future Chinese influence.

If China succeeded in mobilizing the reward or coercion power mechanisms through infrastructure projects, it appears to have been short-lived. The lack of transparency surrounding the contract negotiating process has generated public pressure on the Kenyan government. This pressure has succeeded in exposing executive overreach into both legislative and constitutional purgatives. If Beijing seeks to influence the Kenya government through reward or coercion, these infrastructure projects highlight the competition China will encounter from Kenya's civil society and political institutions.

French and Raven show the reward and coercion power mechanisms run the risk of being expensive and non-sustainable.<sup>86</sup> A state which uses these power mechanisms can induce short-term changes in a target state's behavior, but have a greater risk of requiring extensive inducements or willingness to enact severe punishments when threats fail.<sup>87</sup> The other power mechanisms—legitimacy, attractiveness, recognition, and expertise—can produce more long-term and self-sustaining changes in a target state's behavior.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Abdi Latif Dahir, "China's Plan to Help Build Kenya's First Coal Plant Has Been Stopped—for Now," Quartz Africa, last modified, June 26, 2019, <https://qz.com/africa/1653947/kenya-court-stops-china-backed-lamu-coalplant-project/>

<sup>84</sup> "You Need Lamu. Lamu Needs You. Join Us in Saving Lamu," Save Lamu, last modified April, 2020, <https://www.savelamu.org/>

<sup>85</sup> Vijay Oberoi, "All is Not Quiet on the Eastern Front: China's Perfidious Actions," the Citizen, last modified, October 12, 2020, <https://www.thecitizen.in/index.php/en/NewsDetail/index/4/19485/All-Is-Not-Quiet-on-the-Eastern-Front>

<sup>86</sup> Meierding et al., "Understanding International Influence in an Era of Great Power Competition."

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

## 2. Expertise

The expertise mechanism is activated when the target state shifts its behaviors due to its respect for the influencer's knowledge or skills.<sup>89</sup> Influence activities that highlight the influencer's information and proficiencies, such as technical assistance, engage the expertise mechanism.<sup>90</sup> From the construction of Jing-Hang Grand Canal in the 7<sup>th</sup> century to the construction of the Three Gorges Dam in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, China has established unquestionable ability in large infrastructure projects. Such projects have become a matter of national pride to the Chinese people.<sup>91</sup> China's state-owned CRBC continues to demonstrate this pedigree through its tunnel, airway, port, highway, and railway projects across the globe.

Given this background of expertise, Chinese infrastructure projects in Kenya appear well positioned to activate the expertise power mechanism. Chinese firms have become world renowned for the construction of large-scale infrastructure projects, associating Chinese construction firms with world-class expertise in construction. Nathaniel Matalango, President of the Institute of Engineers of Kenya, said as much regarding Chinese firms saying, "Chinese contractors have helped the country because they have better technology as well as new ways of labor management that ensure projects are completed on time."<sup>92</sup> This acknowledgement of Chinese expertise opens avenues for Chinese influence.

One way in which expertise may lead to influence is through the government's contracting decisions. Potentially, the expertise power mechanism was at play during the tendering process of the SGR and Thika Highway projects. In this case, Kenya's government shifted from following established legal requirements to ensure government

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Romain Dittigen and Abel Abate Demissie, "Own Ways of Doing: National Pride, Power and China's Political Calculus in Ethiopia," (working paper, South Africa Institute of International Affairs, 2017), 16, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/313368903>

<sup>92</sup> Salem Solomon and Falastine Iman, "New African Railways Ride on Chinese Loans," Voice of America, last modified, January 24, 2017, <https://www.voanews.com/africa/new-african-railways-ride-chinese-loans>

contracts went to Chinese firms. Kenya's Transport and Infrastructure Cabinet Secretary, James Macharia, has defended the awarding of construction contracts to Chinese firms, claiming local contractors could not deliver the quality of work nor the speed of Chinese contractors.<sup>93</sup> Some ordinary Kenyans have given Chinese construction firms praise that is similar to Macharia's description.<sup>94</sup> These admiring comments suggest that the expertise mechanism may be at work in government decisions, regarding the awarding construction contracts.

This expertise-driven influence can backfire in ways that prevent the mechanism's future effectiveness. Kenyan construction firms were quick to criticize the preferential treatment forwarded to Chinese firms. Although the SGR and Thika Highway projects employed thousands of Kenyans, higher level positions were occupied by Chinese workers.<sup>95</sup> Additionally, some materials required for the construction of these projects, such as concrete, were sourced through Chinese vendors, despite the prevalence of local ones.<sup>96</sup> Lastly, a common complaint among many Kenyan construction firms is the lack of skills transfer between Chinese technical experts and Kenyan workers, who will inevitably take over the operation and maintenance activities. One engineer student, and critic of the Kenyan's government handling of Chinese lead infrastructure projects, Wilfred Gachugi, sums up the concern among many skilled workers within Kenya saying, "It will be a pity if indeed we achieve the Vision 2030, which will be in fact, a vision made in China."<sup>97</sup>

The concerns stemming from the perceived preferential treatment towards Chinese expertise have triggered a response from the Kenyan government. Former Kenyan Prime

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<sup>93</sup> Alex Kirwa, "Chinese Dominance Over Kenya's Construction Industry," *Construction Review Online*, last modified, January 31, 2019, <https://constructionreviewonline.com/features/chinese-dominance-over-kenyas-construction-industry/>

<sup>94</sup> Kirwa, "Chinese Dominance Over Kenya's Construction Industry."

<sup>95</sup> Uwe Wissenbach and Yuan Wang, "Local Politics Meets Chinese Engineers: A Study of the Chinese-Built Standard Gauge Railway Project in Kenya."

<sup>96</sup> Plummer, "Kenya and China's Labour Relations: Infrastructural Development for Whom, by Whom?" 682.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, 683.

Minister Raila Odinga justified the employment practices of Chinese firms and the contracting processes of the Kenyan government by re-stating the importance expertise, saying that Chinese firms were professional, produced quality work, and at lower cost to the local competition.<sup>98</sup> Later, however, President Kenyatta changed course. For instance, President Kenyatta stated future construction projects will use available local vendors for construction materials.<sup>99</sup> Additionally, in order to prevent dependence on Chinese technical experts for the operation and maintenance of the SGR, the Kenyan Government and the CRBC have agreed to properly transfer technical knowledge to Kenyan workers.<sup>100</sup> This agreement is responsible for the creation of a Technology Transfer Competence Training Facility in Voi, financed by the CRBC and meant to train Kenya workers on the operation and maintenance of the SGR.<sup>101</sup>

This research has found that the expertise mechanism likely reached its limit when the Kenyan government sought to promote skills transfer and a fair-minded contracting process. The argument that the expertise mechanism was activated in the early negotiation of these projects is valid, yet Kenyan businesses appear to have limited such influence. It could also be a matter of cost, rather than expertise, when Kenya's government awarded Chinese firms with government contracts, seeing them as a cheaper than local firms. Regardless of these limits, such large-scale projects still carry the potential to activate other power mechanisms.

### **3. Attraction and Legitimacy**

In the attraction power mechanism, the target state identifies with the influencer or desires that sense of identification.<sup>102</sup> Here the target state wants to be like the influencer

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid, 682.

<sup>99</sup> Wissenbach et al., "Local Politics Meets Chinese Engineers: A Study of the Chinese-Built Standard Gauge Railway Project in Kenya."

<sup>100</sup> Maundu Pius, "Mombasa-Nairobi Section of the SGR to be Complete by June Next Year," Daily Nation, last modified on May 28, 2016, <http://www.nation.co.ke/news/-/1056/3223138/-/piwcedz//index.html>

<sup>101</sup> Pius, "Mombasa-Nairobi Section of the SGR to be Complete by June Next Year."

<sup>102</sup> Meierding et al., "Understanding International Influence in an Era of Great Power Competition."

or become a member of the influencer's social, economic, or political circle.<sup>103</sup> Any activity that highlights the influencer's attractive characteristics can mobilize this power mechanism. In the legitimacy power mechanism, the target state views the influencer as a valid authority figure, which could arise from the influencer's role in transnational advocacy networks, leadership in international organizations, or formal positions, such as being a permanent member of the UN Security Council.<sup>104</sup> In the case of Kenya-China relations, China's rise as an economic giant and its efforts to gain more geopolitical influence, suggest the potential relevance of these power mechanisms.

Since implementing free market reforms in 1979, China's economy maintained a 9.5% average of real annual GDP growth through 2018, a pace described by the World Bank as, "the fastest sustained expansion by a major economy in history."<sup>105</sup> China's economic advancement has allowed it to cultivate the image as a legitimate alternative to Western promoted economic development models. China's BRI represents a grand strategy to maintain China's economic momentum and increase its economic significance across the globe.<sup>106</sup> All these factors contribute towards China's image as a global economic leader and the desire for states to be a part of China's economic circle. Membership within China's BRI provides an avenue for states to become a part of this economic circle.

Creating six economic corridors to connect Asia, Europe and Africa, touching an estimated 60% of the world's population in the process, China's BRI has the potential to significantly expand Kenya's export and investment markets.<sup>107</sup> Indeed, Kenya's own president has acknowledged the attraction of the economic circle BRI could bring saying,

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103 Ibid.

104 Ibid.

105 Wayne M. Morrison, *China's Economic Rise: History, Trends, Challenges, and Implication for the United States*, CRS Report No. RL33534 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2019), 2, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/RL/RL33534/98>

106 Morrison, *China's Economic Rise: History, Trends, Challenges, and Implication for the United States*.

107 Andrea Villarnovo Lopez Begleiter, "The Dragon Stretches its Wings: Assessing the Geopolitical and Economic Implications of China's Belt and Road Initiative in Pakistan and Kenya" 01 March 2019. CUREJ: College Undergraduate Research Electronic Journal, University of Pennsylvania, <https://repository.upenn.edu/curej/227>

“The Belt and Road Initiative gives our continent the opportunity to make a paradigm shift. Post-colonial Africa has been stuck in a rut. Being part of One Belt allows the continent to move to a new platform, through which global collaboration will allow for value-addition, innovation and increased prosperity.”<sup>108</sup> Since it joined BRI, Kenya’s membership has brought improvements to the port of Mombasa, the construction of a modern port in Lamu, and standard gauge railway construction across the country, validating Kenyatta’s previous statement in the eyes of many.<sup>109</sup> Given these circumstances, it appears conditions for the attraction mechanism are present through China’s BRI and Kenya’s desire to become a part of this economic circle.

Additionally, China’s economic rise and global engagement has positioned Beijing as an authority figure in several ways, making the activation of the legitimacy mechanism a possibility. China’s geopolitical position gives its plenty of opportunity to demonstrate itself as a legitimate authority figure. As one of the permanent members of the UN Security Council, a prominent member within the Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS) economic association, and as the founder of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), China maintains credible geopolitical leadership. The speaker of Kenya’s National Assembly, Justin Muturi, underscored the importance of FOCAC saying, “China has over the years cultivated a strategic partnership with the continent [Africa], which today is the Forum for China Africa Cooperation...Kenya cherishes the milestone made in the history of China-Africa relations through this forum, which has grown in strength since its inception.”<sup>110</sup> Further enhancing this position, is China’s previously mentioned economic achievements and status as the world’s second largest economy. With these factors in mind, opportunities to activate the legitimacy power mechanism appear salient in the case of Kenya-China relations.

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<sup>108</sup> Yvonne Rarieya, “Kenya Lauds Belt and Road Initiative as Best Model for Growth of Africa,” CGTN Africa, last modified, May 16, 2017, <https://africa.cgtn.com/2017/05/16/kenya-lauds-belt-and-road-initiative-as-best-model-for-growth-of-africa/>

<sup>109</sup> Nancy Githaiga, Salumun Mohammed Ahmed, and Alfred Burimaso, “The Belt and Road Initiative: Opportunities and Risks for Africa’s Connectivity,” *China Quarterly of International Strategic Studies* 19, no. 1 (August 2019): 120, <https://doi.org/10.1142/S2377740019500064>

<sup>110</sup> Hou Liqiang, “Kenyan Official Praises Elevating Forum to Summit,” China Daily, last modified, September 29, 2015, [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2015-09/29/content\\_22005142.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2015-09/29/content_22005142.htm)

Despite rhetoric from Kenya's senior officials, Kenya's behavior has yet to indicate a clear instance of Chinese influence through the legitimacy mechanism. Although President Kenyatta has visited China more than any previous president, and continues to attend the FOCAC summit and the BRI forum in Beijing, thus far, his visits served to underscore Kenyatta's intention of maintaining a steady economic partnership with China.<sup>111</sup> Typically, when Kenyatta returns from Beijing, he announces the signing of a new trade agreement or investment deal, in what appears to be an effort to cultivate his own image as a leader guiding Kenya towards economic prosperity, and not toward any new legitimate international authority.<sup>112</sup>

In summary, the potential for both the attraction and legitimacy power mechanisms appears well grounded through China's economic achievements and BRI ambitions. However, these power mechanisms have yet to manifest themselves into changed behavior from Kenya. Additionally, both these power mechanisms appear to hinge on China's continued economic progress and the fulfillment of the BRI's ambitions. Since the latter has yet to fully come to fruition, and the former is by no means guaranteed, the likelihood of these power mechanisms achieving lasting influence remains uncertain.

#### 4. Recognition

The recognition power mechanism is activated when the influencer identifies the target state in a positive way and the target state adjusts its behavior in response to this recognition.<sup>113</sup> Here the influencer's recognition creates a sense of goodwill that stimulates the target to align its behavior with the influencer's preferences. Essentially, this power mechanism acts similarly to the attraction mechanism, only in reverse—the influencer in this case identifies the target state in a favorable way.<sup>114</sup> Such instances of recognition are prominent among Kenya-China relations.

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<sup>111</sup> Lilian Tunai Multai, "China-Kenya Relations: An Analysis of Its Nature Since Independence," *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science* 3, no. 10 (October 2019): 743, ISSN 2454-6186

<sup>112</sup> Multai, "China-Kenya Relations: An Analysis of Its Nature Since Independence."

<sup>113</sup> Meierding et al., "Understanding International Influence in an Era of Great Power Competition."

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

At President Uhuru Kenyatta's inauguration ceremony in April 2013, China was the only country, outside of Africa, to send a high-ranking envoy to the event.<sup>115</sup> Likely a reciprocal gesture, China's flag was the only pennant of a foreign country outside of Africa to occupy a flagstaff at the ceremony.<sup>116</sup> This recognition was more than a matter of diplomatic protocol and showed China's acknowledgement of Uhuru Kenyatta as a legitimate leader at a time when Western governments accused him of crimes against humanity attributed to post election violence in 2007.<sup>117</sup>

Following his inauguration, Kenyatta's first official visit outside of Africa was to China, where he was credited with cementing new economic ties with Chinese officials and investors.<sup>118</sup> These economic ties eventually became a preferred anecdote when Beijing describes China-Africa relations. At the 2018 FOCAC in Beijing, Chinese officials touted Kenya's SGR as a model for how Chinese projects were, "changing the face of Africa," and praised officials in Nairobi for their efforts in fostering a fruitful relationship with Beijing.<sup>119</sup>

China has repeatedly recognized Uhuru Kenyatta for refuting criticism from Western governments. In April 2019, Xi Jinping praised Kenyatta in Beijing for his stance against Western criticism concerning Chinese investment practices in Africa.<sup>120</sup> Such criticism included the accusation that China's investment strategy in Africa constituted 'debt trap' diplomacy. During the meeting between the two leaders, Xi Jinping further

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<sup>115</sup> Multai, "China-Kenya Relations: An Analysis of Its Nature Since Independence." 743.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> "Uhuru Kenyatta," Coalition for the International Criminal Court, last modified, August 22, 2017, <https://www.coalitionfortheicc.org/cases/uhuru-kenyatta>

<sup>118</sup> Okumu et al., "Understanding the Impacts of Chinese Business Activity in Kenya from the Perspective of Locals: An Exploratory Field Study," 366.

<sup>119</sup> Abdi Latif Dahir, "Satisfied and Inspired: All the Ways African Leaders Praised Their Alliance with China," Quartz Africa, last modified, September 5, 2018, <https://qz.com/africa/1379457/china-africa-summit-african-leaders-praise-relations-with-beijing/>

<sup>120</sup> "Xi Praises Kenya's Rebukes on China's African Investment Criticisms," CGTN, last modified, April 25, 2019, <https://news.cgtn.com/news/3d3d674d79556a4d34457a6333566d54/index.html>

emphasized his commitment towards promoting cooperation with Kenya and its infrastructure projects under BRI.<sup>121</sup>

China's recognition of Kenya also highlights Beijing's opinion of Nairobi as a regional leader. In 2019, Xi Jinping's special envoy State Councilor Wang Yong gave Kenya China's pledge supporting Kenya's UN Security Council bid.<sup>122</sup> In a public statement, Wang said, "We [China] firmly support reforms of the UN Security Council and believe that Kenya will help to increase the voice of African countries."<sup>123</sup> In June 2020, Kenya won the two thirds majority of the UN General Assembly vote required for its Security Council seat.

In short, this research has found instances where China recognized Kenya in a positive way, making the prospect for Kenya to align its behavior in favor of Beijing's interests likely. This research, however, was not able to attribute any behavior from the Kenyan government to Chinese recognition. Instead, it could only conclude the potential for such influence. Next, this research will assess the nature of Russian activities in Kenya and their potential to activate the various power mechanisms.

#### D. BACKGROUND: KENYA-RUSSIA RELATIONS

Since gaining its independence in 1963, Kenya has maintained cordial relations with Russia. Kenya's non-alignment policy during the Cold War allowed Jomo Kenyatta's government to reconcile with the British and other Western countries, while at the same time pursuing bilateral agreements with the Soviet Union.<sup>124</sup> Although relations remained cordial between Kenya and Russia during the Cold War, the partnership never grew beyond a few small-scale development projects and minor trade agreements.

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<sup>121</sup> "Xi Praises Kenya's Rebukes on China's African Investment Criticisms."

<sup>122</sup> "China Pledges Support for Kenya's UN Security Council Bid," *The East African*, last modified, December 17, 2019, <https://www.theeastfrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/china-pledges-support-for-kenya-s-un-security-council-bid-1433080>

<sup>123</sup> "China Pledges Support for Kenya's UN Security Council Bid."

<sup>124</sup> Paul Odhiambo and Catherine Mutuku, "Russia's Renewed Interest in Africa: Implications for Kenya," *The Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis*, last modified, December 22, 2019, <https://kippra.or.ke/russias-renewed-interest-in-africa-implications-for-kenya/>

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent economic turmoil that plagued Russia made an already minor partnership virtually irrelevant. It was not until Vladimir Putin's reign that Russia-Kenya relations gained some relevance in Russian foreign policy. Despite this, Russia's engagement with Kenya has remained limited when compared to its involvement with other African countries. The same is true for Kenya. When compared to its interaction with other foreign powers—namely China, India, the EU and the US—Nairobi's relationship with Moscow hardly registers. However, rhetoric from Presidents Putin and Kenyatta could indicate a shift in Russia's approach towards East Africa, signaling Kenya's increasing importance to Russia's foreign policy objectives in Africa.

Vladimir Putin's Kremlin has established a renewed interest in Russia-Africa relations. Highlighting this renewal was the 2019 Russia-Africa Summit in Sochi. Modelled after China's FOCAC, the Russia-Africa Summit facilitated bilateral engagement between African heads of state, Kremlin officials, and the Russian business community, ending with multiple bilateral energy, mining, infrastructure, and security sector agreements.<sup>125</sup> The summit signaled to African leaders Russian interest in the African continent, an interest which reemerged in 2014 following the economic sanctions imposed on Russia over its actions involving Ukraine. With this economic constraint, new markets became more relevant for Russian oligarchs and business firms. As a result, Russian energy, mining, and security firms have become increasingly prevalent on the continent.

Thus far, the Russia-Kenya partnership remains modest. Economically, annual trade between the two countries averages around \$200 million per year.<sup>126</sup> Kenyan exports to Russia are mostly agriculture products, with Russian imports consisting mostly of cereals, iron, and steel.<sup>127</sup> Kenya's famous tourism industry only attracts 10,000 Russian

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<sup>125</sup> Odhiambo et al., "Russia's Renewed Interest in Africa: Implications for Kenya."

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

visitors annually.<sup>128</sup> And for Russia, known across the continent as a provider of military equipment, Kenya has only bought three Mi-17 helicopters from Russia's inventory in the past two decades.<sup>129</sup> Serbia serves as Kenya's primary supplier of Soviet-era military equipment, which are becoming less relied by Kenyan security forces.<sup>130</sup> In short, the economic engagement between Russia and Kenya is minimal.

Russia's energy and mining firms also maintain a modest presence in Kenya. The two countries signed a memorandum for cooperation in peaceful use of nuclear technology, and Kenya's council of Nuclear Energy maintains a dialogue with Russia's nuclear agency Rosatom, but no major project has yet to emerge after more than a decade of dialogue.<sup>131</sup> As for other Russian energy firms, such as Gazprom or Lukoil, they have yet to establish significant operations within Kenya. And when it comes to Russian mining firms, who operate elsewhere on the continent, they also have yet to establish operations in Kenya. All these factors have not gone unnoticed by Russia's foreign policy officials, and recent rhetoric from Vladimir Putin, discussed below, could indicate an intention to redefine what historically has been a modest partnership.

#### E. REDEFINING THE RELATIONSHIP

Paul Stronkski, a senior fellow with the Carnegie Endowment, described, "Russia's clout in Africa [remains] tied to a handful of client states with relatively limited strategic influence."<sup>132</sup> As it stands today, Kenya remains outside this handful of client states. The type of Russian engagement other African countries are experiencing has yet to reach similar levels in Kenya. In other words, Russia's power resources and influence activities have yet to become a substantive factor in Kenya-Russia relations.

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<sup>128</sup> Mehmet Cem Oğultürk, "Russia's Renewed Interests in the Horn of Africa As a Traditional and Rising Power," *Rising Powers Quarterly* 2, no. 1 (February 2017): 134, <https://risingpowersproject.com/quarterly/russias-renewed-interests-in-the-horn-of-africa-as-a-traditional-and-rising-power/>

<sup>129</sup> Oğultürk, "Russia's Renewed Interests in the Horn of Africa As a Traditional and Rising Power."

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> "Russia in Africa: What's Behind Moscow's Push into the Continent?" BBC, last modified, May 7, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-45035889>

Rhetoric between Uhuru Kenyatta and Vladimir Putin indicates the two leaders see the potential benefit of increasing Kenya-Russia engagement. Putin met with Kenyatta during the Russia-Africa Summit in 2019, with the two agreeing to establish a Russia-Kenya business council to facilitate communication and cooperation between their respective business communities.<sup>133</sup> During the summit, Putin also mentioned the marginal trade between the two countries, saying that it was “not enough” and that it should double within the next five years.<sup>134</sup> Kenyatta expressed a similar need to enhance the economic engagement between the two countries saying, “to enhance the shared development of our two countries we need to deepen our people to people contact...over cooperation in security and defense, trade and investment, tourism, energy, culture, science, and technology.”<sup>135</sup> Clearly, both Kenyatta and Putin share an interest towards increasing the ties between their two countries, which could possibly signal the beginning of a new Kenya-Russia relationship.

Whether or not the two leaders bring about this new relationship will determine the potential influence Russia might gain in the process. Presently, Russia’s power resources and influence activities have yet to establish a considerable foothold within Kenya. This could be a product of Russia’s current renewal of interest in Africa and that Russia is only beginning to build what it intends to be a more influential presence on the continent.<sup>136</sup> Should Putin’s statements from Sochi manifest themselves into action, then the potential for influence becomes plausible.

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<sup>133</sup> Brian Ngugi, “Putin Woos Kenya with Military Kit and Energy,” Business Daily, last modified, October 25, 2019, <https://www.businessdailyafrica.com/bd/economqy/putin-woos-kenya-with-military-kit-and-energy-2268748>

<sup>134</sup> Stephen Paduano, “Putin Lost His African Great Game Before He Started,” Foreign Policy, last modified, October 31, 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/10/31/putin-russia-africa-great-game-china-united-states/>

<sup>135</sup> “Kenya, Russia Agree to Form Business Council,” APA News, last modified, October 25, 2019, <http://www.apanews.net/en/news/kenya-russia-agree-to-form-business-council>

<sup>136</sup> Paul Stronski, “Late to the Party: Russia’s Return to Africa.” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, last modified, October 2019. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/10/16/late-to-party-russia-s-return-to-africa-pub-80056>

## **F. CONCLUSION**

This chapter has found that China is economically important to Kenya and that the mobilization of China's vast power resources sets conditions for the great influence potential for Beijing. As a result, President Kenyatta has emphasized the importance of Kenya-China relations to the success of Kenya's future. Despite this seemingly extensive influence potential, this research has identified some limiting factors. First, as demonstrated from Kenya's Supreme Court ruling and parliamentary determinations, Kenya demonstrates a commitment to the rule of law over the ambitions of its executive. Second, Kenya's civil society has taken an active role shaping Kenya-China relations to ensure greater transparency and accountability with their government's engagement with Chinese business firms. Ultimately, this research has identified Kenya's political landscape as the primary limiting factor to Chinese influence.

In the case of Russia, this research has found limitations to influence, due in large measure to the marginal power resources mobilized by Russia in the region. Both Kenyatta and Putin have expressed interest in furthering the ties between their respective countries, which might result in the increase of Russian power resources in the region, but this remains to be seen. Based off China's experience with their own objectives in Kenya, this research assumes Russia will likely face similar challenges, regardless of the power resources the Kremlin mobilizes. Should Kenya and Russia redefine their relationship through meaningful action, the literature would benefit from focusing on the Kenya's political landscape and how it shapes the trajectory of Kenya-Russia relations.

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### **III. SOUTH AFRICA**

#### **A. INTRODUCTION**

This chapter explores the potential of Chinese and Russian influence in the context of South Africa. First, this chapter will provide a background to Chinese-South African relations, involved power resources, and the potential activation of the various power mechanisms. In the case of China, this research identified a unique dynamic to its bilateral relationship with South Africa. Specifically, the party-to-party engagement between the ANC and CCP generates some potential influence for Beijing. At the same time, South Africa's political landscape reveals some limitations to foreign influence over domestic institutional decision making.

Next, this chapter will provide a background to Russia-South Africa relations, Russian power resources mobilized, and the potential power mechanisms activated in the process. A key limitation of Russian influence in South Africa revolves around a failed bilateral nuclear power arrangement, which exposed instances of corruption and Russian overreach. There is growing interest in building upon existing military-to-military engagement between Russia and South Africa, which could bring about greater Russian influence within South Africa.

#### **B. BACKGROUND: CHINA-SOUTH AFRICA RELATIONS**

Before the apartheid regime came to an end in 1994, South Africa maintained no official ties with Beijing. Instead, South Africa recognized the Republic of China (ROC) as the legitimate government of China and established diplomatic relations with Taipei. Furthering this divide, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) supported anti-apartheid groups, such as the Pan African Congress, throughout the anti-apartheid struggle. In 1997, a few years after the end of apartheid, South Africa's ruling political party, the African National Congress (ANC), reversed South African policy towards Beijing and adopted a

one-China position, asserting the People's Republic of China (PRC) as the only sovereign state under the name China.<sup>137</sup> This opened a new era for China-South Africa relations.

Official diplomatic relations between the PRC and South Africa began in 1998. By 1999, Premier Hu Jintao and President Nelson Mandela had officially visited each other's countries. Mandela's visit to China stressed promoting bilateral trade and cultural exchanges. Addressing Peking University in 1999, Mandela praised the "unwavering political, diplomatic, and material support of the Chinese people and government for South Africa's liberation."<sup>138</sup> He continued, highlighting the shared experience of China and South Africa as victims of colonial rule.<sup>139</sup> Subsequent South African administrations would echo this narrative, sometimes conveying anti-Western rhetoric and China-South African solidarity, with the Pretoria Declaration being a prime example.

In 2000, Chinese President Jian Zemin and South African President Thabo Mbeki signed the Pretoria Declaration on the Partnership Between the People's Republic of China and the Republic of South Africa. This declaration announced their shared commitment towards developing countries and a commitment to strengthen one another's, "capacity for co-operation and mutual support in the international system."<sup>140</sup> Although other agreements came from this official declaration—police cooperation, maritime transport, arts, and cultural exchanges—the core of the Pretoria Declaration announced the dedication the two countries shared towards enhancing cooperation among developing countries. This emphasis highlighted a South-South Cooperation and the need to reform the "international multilateral political, economic and financial architecture to reflect new global

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<sup>137</sup> Thompson Ayodele and Olusegun Sotola, "China in Africa: An Evaluation of Chinese Investment" (working paper, Initiative for Public Policy Analysis, 2014), 5, [https://ippanigeria.org/articles/China%20-Africa%20relation\\_Workingpaper\\_final.pdf](https://ippanigeria.org/articles/China%20-Africa%20relation_Workingpaper_final.pdf)

<sup>138</sup> James Griffiths, "This Day in History: Nelson Mandela's Changing Relationship with China," That's, last modified December 5, 2020, [http://www.thatsmags.com/china/post/28938/when-nelson-mandela-came-to-china\\_1](http://www.thatsmags.com/china/post/28938/when-nelson-mandela-came-to-china_1)

<sup>139</sup> Griffiths, "This Day in History: Nelson Mandela's Changing Relationship with China."

<sup>140</sup> Yu-Shan Wu and Chris Alden, "South Africa and China: The Making of a Partnership" (Occasional paper 199, South African Institute of International Affairs, 2014), 7, <https://saiia.org.za/research/south-africa-and-china-the-making-of-a-partnership/>

realities.”<sup>141</sup> In essence, the Pretoria Declaration provided the foundational framework for future China-South Africa relations and the solidarity the two shared on the international level. It also established several mechanisms through which Beijing and Pretoria would interact, chief among them was a Bi-National Commission.

Launched in 2001, the Bi-National Commission (BNC) provided government-to-government coordination on all matters of mutual interest. This accelerated economic activity between the two countries, and within a decade South Africa became China’s largest trading partner on the African continent.<sup>142</sup> South Africa was among the 35 African countries to attend the first Forum on China-Africa Cooperation Summit (FOCAC) in 2006 and would host the first summit-level FOCAC on the African continent in 2015. Economic ties between the two countries remained strong during the 2008 global financial crisis, which China and South Africa endured better than most, further vindicating the alternative vision to the ‘Bretton Woods’ institutions shared between Beijing and Pretoria.<sup>143</sup>

By 2009, China had become South Africa’s largest trading partner, surpassing the United States. In 2010, South Africa became the fifth member of the group of major emerging national economies known today by the acronym BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa). In 2015, South Africa joined China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), bringing increased Chinese presence in South Africa’s infrastructure, industrial, and telecommunications industries.

In the political realm, beginning in 2009, President Jacob Zuma increased interaction between his ruling party and the CCP. This relationship emphasized political training for ANC members at the China Executive Leadership Academy in Shanghai, where CCP members and foreign guests receive classes on ‘revolutionary traditions’, media management, grass roots political mobilization, party management, and cadre

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<sup>141</sup> “Pretoria Declaration,” Foreign Ministry of the People’s Republic of China, last modified, October 18, 2004, <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/ceza/eng/zghfz/zngx/t165286.htm>

<sup>142</sup> Yu-Shan Wu et al., “South Africa and China: The Making of a Partnership.”

<sup>143</sup> Prinesha Naidoo and Rene Vollgraff, “South Africa’s Economic Firepower: Now vs 2008 Crisis in Charts,” Bloomberg Magazine, last modified March 25, 2020, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-03-26/south-africa-s-economic-firepower-now-vs-2008-crisis-in-charts>

development.<sup>144</sup> Some observers claim that South African President Jacob Zuma began modeling the ANC after the CCP following these training engagements.<sup>145</sup> This party-to-party engagement continued into the administration of President Cyril Ramaphosa, who often emphasized the benefits stemming from these interactions.<sup>146</sup>

In summary, the history of China-South Africa engagement has resulted in a strong diplomatic, economic, and political relationship between the two countries. The characteristic of this engagement demonstrates the strategic significance both countries attribute to this bi-lateral relationship. As a result, the potential for Chinese influence over South Africa appears high. Next, this chapter will analyze Chinese influence through the various power mechanisms, highlighting both the potential and limits of Chinese influence.

### C. POWER MECHANISMS

China's extensive power resources are unquestionably mobilized in the South African context. China is South Africa's largest trading partner, controlling 10.7% of its total exports and 18.5% of total imports.<sup>147</sup> With 59% of South Africa's GDP tied to trade, China is key to South Africa's economic development.<sup>148</sup> Additionally, South Africa's unstable currency and low IMF credit rating slowed foreign investment into South Africa, which contributed towards its economic stagnation, making Chinese investment a boon for South Africa's economy. South Africa continues to struggle with high unemployment, especially among South Africa's youth, becoming an economic and political challenge to the ruling ANC.<sup>149</sup> Addressing these issues, South Africa's government has focused on improving its infrastructure, with China playing an integral role.

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<sup>144</sup> “The Party and the Media: Learning to Spin,” the Economist, last modified February 8, 2014, <https://www.economist.com/china/2014/02/08/learning-to-spin>

<sup>145</sup> “The Party and the Media: Learning to Spin.”

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> “South African Foreign Trade in Figures,” Santander Trade, last modified April 2021, <https://santandertrade.com/en/portal/analyse-markets/south-africa/foreign-trade-in-figures>

<sup>148</sup> “South African Foreign Trade in Figures.”

<sup>149</sup> “The World Factbook: South Africa,” Central Intelligence Agency, last modified April 27, 2021, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/south-africa/>

## **1. Reward and Coercion**

Since 2014, South African projects received \$2.2 billion from China.<sup>150</sup> During the 2018 BRICS summit, China pledged to invest \$14.7 billion more in South Africa, which would include loans to South Africa state-owned Eskom and Transnet.<sup>151</sup> These Chinese investments provide much needed financial resources in modernizing South Africa's transportation and energy infrastructure, which the South African government has struggled to maintain and modernize. Chinese investments have given particular emphasis towards modernizing South Africa's Richards Bay and Durban port facilities, two strategically vital ports for South African export industries.<sup>152</sup> Given this significant mobilization of power resources, it would appear China maintains a strong position to leverage the reward and coercion mechanism over the South African government to further its own interests.

However, the previous administration of Jacob Zuma showed the limits of Chinese influence over a democracy that maintains strong institutional checks on the executive and a country where government officials are sensitive to business practices that deviate from South African law. The Gupta family state capture scandal, which forced President Zuma's resignation, has energized South Africa's political opposition, who have become increasingly sensitive to potential instances of high-level corruption. Transnet, one of the entities implicated in the scandal and a recipient of Chinese loans, has drawn particular scrutiny, with cases of spending 'irregularities' in its business operations.<sup>153</sup> This has significantly slowed Chinese investments, progress on their construction projects, and President Ramaphosa's infrastructure ambitions. It also serves as indication of the

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<sup>150</sup> Baker McKenzie, "Funding Africa's Infrastructure Gap," South Africa Financial Markets Journal, last modified April 30, 2021, <https://financialmarketsjournal.co.za/funding-africas-infrastructure-gap/#:~:text=As%20one%20of%20South%20Africa's,owned%20enterprises%20Eskom%20and%20Transnet>.

<sup>151</sup> McKenzie, "Funding Africa's Infrastructure Gap."

<sup>152</sup> Alexander Winning, "China's Xi pledges \$14.7 billion investment on South Africa visit," Reuters, last modified July 24, 2018, <https://in.reuters.com/article/safrica-china/chinas-xi-pledges-14-7-billion-investment-on-south-africa-visit-idINKBN1KE1EG>

<sup>153</sup> Prinesha Naidoo, "South Africa May Ring-Fence Transnet's Irregular Spending: BD," Bloomberg, last modified October 24, 2020, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-10-24/south-africa-may-ring-fence-transnet-s-irregular-spending-bd>.

limitations on China's influence in South Africa's institutional decision making, despite China's large financial commitments. Chinese commitment towards South Africa's infrastructure is relatively new, and their success may hinge on the relationship between the ANC and CCP. It is this party-to-party relationship and China's political expertise where another potential for influence lies.

## 2. Expertise

Party-to-party interactions represent one activity with strong potential to mobilize the expertise mechanism. As previously mentioned, the ANC has engaged with the CCP for its own political training since President Zuma's administration. In 2009, the ANC and CCP signed a memorandum of understanding on China's enhanced efforts to train ANC members in China.<sup>154</sup> Since then, the ANC sent members of its National Executive Committee to China for training on the Chinese ruling party's political philosophy and practices.<sup>155</sup> In 2015, an ANC senior delegation visited China to receive specific training on the CCP's implementation of the Central Committees initiatives at grass roots level.<sup>156</sup> The ANC Secretary General included in his strategy before the 2019 parliamentary elections to send a cadre of ANC members to China to receive training in communication strategies and other political skills.<sup>157</sup>

ANC members clearly see the CCP's political expertise as valuable to their own political ambitions. Reflecting on the CCP's instruction, Ramaphosa stated the ANC "gained so much" from the CCP's training.<sup>158</sup> Samson Gwede Mantashe, a senior ANC Chairperson, spoke of how the training provided by the CCP gave an example for the

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<sup>154</sup> Yun, Africa in China's Foreign Policy.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Christine Hackenesch and Julia Bader, "The Struggle for Minds and Influence: 2, The Chinese Communist Party's Global Outreach," *International Studies Quarterly* 64, no. 2 (June 2020): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqaa028>

<sup>158</sup> "South Africa's Ruling ANC Looks to Learn from the Chinese Communist Party," Fahamu, last modified November 26, 2019, [http://www.fahamu.org/ep\\_articles/south-africas-ruling-anc-looks-to-learn-from-chinese-communist-party/](http://www.fahamu.org/ep_articles/south-africas-ruling-anc-looks-to-learn-from-chinese-communist-party/)

ANC's own ruling philosophy and party building theory.<sup>159</sup> In 2019, the Deputy President of the ANC, David Mabuza, spoke of these trainings, emphasizing how they furthered the "core interests" of the ANC and CCP.<sup>160</sup>

This party-to-party relationship allows China to maintain a unique connection with South Africa's political elites. Some claim this engagement allows the CCP to export its own foreign policy objectives through training that favors Chinese 'core interests', a term which some interpret to mean those issues that are of a sensitive nature to Beijing, such as human rights allegations and Taiwanese sovereignty.<sup>161</sup> As a result, many South Africans have been quick to criticize this party-to-party engagement. Critics of Zuma claim the former president began modeling the ANC after the CCP and that China's political training has encouraged behavior characteristic of authoritarian regimes.<sup>162</sup>

Partly fueling this criticism is Chinese technological support and the development of smart cities in South Africa, with Chinese technological expertise assisting in this endeavor. An essential part of BRI is China's 'Digital Silk Road Initiative', which aims to integrate China's state-owned technology company Huawei Technologies Co. (referred hereafter as Huawei) into BRI members' broadband telecommunications networks.<sup>163</sup> Providing technical support and equipment to South Africa's four largest telecommunications companies, Huawei plays an integral role in South Africa's information economy and the development of its fifth-generation broadband telecommunications network. Given South Africa's need to modernize its broadband network, a recognized necessity to engage in the world's information economy, Chinese

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<sup>159</sup> "South Africa's Ruling ANC Looks to Learn from the Chinese Communist Party."

<sup>160</sup> *China's Strategic Aims in Africa: Hearing before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission*, 117th Cong. 2 (2020), [https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2020-12/Chapter\\_1\\_Section\\_3--Chinas\\_Strategic\\_Aims\\_in\\_Africa.pdf](https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2020-12/Chapter_1_Section_3--Chinas_Strategic_Aims_in_Africa.pdf)

<sup>161</sup> H.R., China's Strategic Aims in Africa.

<sup>162</sup> Samuel Ramani, "Can China Burnish Its Image in South Africa? A Closer Look at the State of Ties Between the Two Countries," *The Diplomat*, last modified August 31, 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/08/can-china-burnish-its-image-in-south-africa/>

<sup>163</sup> "Assessing China's Digital Silk Road Initiative: A Transformative Approach to Technology Financing or a Danger to Freedoms?" Council on Foreign Relations, last modified January 1, 2021, <https://www.cfr.org/china-digital-silk-road/>

technological expertise clearly provides South Africa with this much needed modernization.

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa has acknowledged the importance of Huawei with his country's economy, defending its practices against pressure from Western powers, who stand in opposition to Huawei's activities in developing countries. The U.S. and EU accuse the CCP of installing 'backdoor' vulnerabilities within Huawei's hardware, which presumably would allow nefarious cyber actors to exploit the network. Another narrative claims that importing Huawei 5G networks, is akin to importing a Chinese style surveillance state.<sup>164</sup> Both these narratives imply potential for Chinese influence in foreign countries because it enables China to exploit network vulnerabilities in pursuit of its own interests. Additionally, the entrenchment of Huawei within South Africa's broadband infrastructure makes South Africa dependent on Chinese expertise, a dependency Beijing could leverage to shape South African behavior.

This expertise-based influence appears to be working to some extent. President Ramaphosa has strongly defended his country's endorsement of Huawei, seeing the Chinese telecommunications company as an integral element to South Africa's economic advancement.<sup>165</sup> In his opening remarks at the 2019 South Africa Digital Economy Summit, Ramaphosa criticized the U.S. saying, "The United States has been unable to imagine a better future which goes beyond 4 plus 1G...they are jealous that a Chinese company called Huawei has outstripped them. And because they have been outstripped, they must now punish that one company and use it as a pawn in the fight they have with China."<sup>166</sup> While this rhetoric might illustrate an example of the legitimacy mechanism, it underscores South Africa's respect for China's technological expertise.

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<sup>164</sup> "Assessing China's Digital Silk Road Initiative: A Transformative Approach to Technology Financing or a Danger to Freedoms?"

<sup>165</sup> Jan Cronje, "Ramaphosa Says U.S. 'Clearly Jealous' of Huawei," News24, last updated July 5, 2019, <https://www.news24.com/fin24/Companies/Financial-Services/ramaphosa-says-us-clearly-jealous-of-huawei-20190705>

<sup>166</sup> Cronje, "Ramaphosa Says U.S. 'Clearly Jealous' of Huawei."

While it is difficult to attribute a shift in South Africa's behavior to China's political and technological expertise, it remains the case that the potential for influence through the expertise mechanism is strong. The party-to-party engagement between the ANC and CCP forwards Beijing an unparalleled relationship with South Africa's ruling party. Further entrenching this relationship, is South Africa's commitment towards implementing Huawei technology towards its own telecommunications modernization. Given South Africa's behavior towards China's political and technological expertise, the attraction and legitimacy mechanisms might provide more concrete instances of Chinese influence.

### **3. Attraction and Legitimacy**

It would appear South Africa identifies with China, desires that sense of identification, or wants to become a member of its economic circle. Both share an anti-colonial heritage, identify as leading members of the Global South, maintain skepticism towards Western institutions, and are strategic players within their regions.<sup>167</sup> Beginning with President Zuma, South Africa has shifted foreign policy with a particular emphasis towards closer ties with China. South Africa increasingly views Beijing as a legitimate leader among developing nations, whose own economic model provides an example for South Africa's own political and economic development.<sup>168</sup>

China's ability to weather the 2008 global financial crisis by maintaining economic growth, vindicated its economic model in the eyes Jacob Zuma. During his 2009 presidential campaign, Zuma incorporated closer China-South Africa ties as one of his foreign policy agenda items.<sup>169</sup> Although momentum for China-South Africa relations was building before Zuma's presidency, Zuma's administration witnessed a pivot towards China for addressing South Africa's own economic stagnation.<sup>170</sup> Zuma viewed China's

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<sup>167</sup> Wu et al., "South Africa and China: The Making of a Partnership."

<sup>168</sup> U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *China's Engagement with Africa: Foundations for an Alternative Governance Regime* (Washington, DC: U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, 2020), [https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2020-05/Chinas\\_Engagement\\_with\\_Africa.pdf](https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2020-05/Chinas_Engagement_with_Africa.pdf)

<sup>169</sup> Wu et al. "South Africa and China: The Making of a Partnership."

<sup>170</sup> "South Africa's Ruling ANC Looks to Learn from the Chinese Communist Party."

‘Asian-style development state’, as a viable alternative to the Western-style economic models, which he viewed as being flawed and an impediment to the economic development of the Global South.<sup>171</sup>

In 2010, Zuma’s administration further integrated South Africa into China’s economic circle when it joined BRICS, an alternative to the western oriented G-7 grouping. A few years later, China-South Africa relations were upgraded to a comprehensive strategic partnership and in 2014 South Africa became a BRI member. All these instances illustrate South Africa’s attraction towards China and a desire to further integrate into China’s economic circle. Zuma’s closing remarks at the 2015 FOCAC summit in Johannesburg confirms this when he lauded China-South Africa relations as a “win-win” and that other African nations should pursue closer economic ties with China.<sup>172</sup> Zuma’s successor continued to emphasize the importance of China-South African relations and has become one of China’s more prominent African supporters.<sup>173</sup>

President Ramaphosa has maintained a positive tone towards China and its leadership. Speaking at the BRICS summit in 2019, Ramaphosa praised the Chinese people for their, “great economic and social achievements,” which he attributed to the leadership of its ruling party.<sup>174</sup> Ramaphosa went out to condemn “bullying tactics” against China and the unfair treatment of Chinese businesses from Western governments.<sup>175</sup> Many see this rhetoric as being aimed at China’s Western critics, the U.S. chief among them, who assert China is engaging in ‘debt-trap’ diplomacy and exportation of its own brand of

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<sup>171</sup> Chris Alden and Yu-Shan Wu, “South African Foreign Policy and China: Converging Visions, Competing Interests, Contested Identities,” *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 54, no. 2 (July 2016): 8, <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/67110/>

<sup>172</sup> “Zuma Says China-Africa Cooperation win-win,” BBC, last modified December 5, 2015, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-35018241>

<sup>173</sup> *China in Africa: What the U.S. Should Know About Africa’s Turn to China*, Opinor report (Pretoria, SA: Opinor 2020), <https://netact.org.za/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Afriforum-China-in-Africa.pdf>

<sup>174</sup> Gert Grobler, “South Africa and China: What Next for Relations Between the Two Countries,” IOL, last modified June 8, 2020, <https://www.iol.co.za/news/opinion/south-africa-and-china-what-next-for-relations-between-the-two-countries-49135925>

<sup>175</sup> *China in Africa: What the U.S. Should Know About Africa’s Turn to China*

authoritarian rule.<sup>176</sup> Ramaphosa continues to dismiss such criticism, going so far as to call it a symptom of “jealousy” from nations who choose to distance themselves from Beijing.<sup>177</sup>

It would appear Ramaphosa’s favorable view towards China is reflected in South Africa’s population. A 2018 Pew Research Center survey saw 46% of South Africans polled responding favorably to China, with 35% responding unfavorably.<sup>178</sup> In a 2014/2015 Afrobarometer poll, 41% of South Africans polled saw China’s economic activities as having a lot of influence on their country, with 28% viewing China as having some influence on their economy.<sup>179</sup> Both these polls, show an increase in positive perceptions compared to previous years. Seeing that South Africa remains an active democracy, with its elected officials beholden to public scrutiny, South Africa’s favorable public opinion complements the attraction and legitimacy mechanisms, serving to vindicate Ramaphosa’s own approach towards Beijing and further Chinese influence.

In short, South Africa sees its relations with China as central to its own economic development. Having demonstrated unparalleled economic growth, which was sustained during the 2009 financial crisis, China’s economic model has attracted the attention of South African leaders, who view Beijing as a legitimate alternative to Western powers. Both share membership in various multinational fora and both have shown the other support through these international venues. As it stands today, the South African President clearly sees Beijing as valid authority figure on the world stage and its engagement with the African continent a benefit for its African partners.

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<sup>176</sup> Georges Dib, Fançoise Huang, and Selin Ozyurt, “Emerging Markets: Heading for a China-Less Recovery,” Allianz Research, last modified November 10, 2020, [https://www.eulerhermes.com/en\\_global/news-insights/economic-insights/Emerging-markets-heading-for-a-china-less-recovery.html](https://www.eulerhermes.com/en_global/news-insights/economic-insights/Emerging-markets-heading-for-a-china-less-recovery.html)

<sup>177</sup> China in Africa: What the U.S. Should Know About Africa’s Turn to China

<sup>178</sup> “Global Indicators Database: South Africa, Opinion of China,” Pew Research Center, March 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/database/indicator/24/country/za>

<sup>179</sup> “China’s Influence on Economy,” Afrobarometer (R6 2014/2015), <https://afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis/analyse-online>

#### **4. Recognition**

Both China and South Africa recognize the importance of their bilateral relationship. On the international stage, China became South Africa's chief advocate for its ascension into BRICS in 2010.<sup>180</sup> Economically, Chinese officials described South Africa as a locomotive for the continent's industrialization and economic development.<sup>181</sup> South African diplomats working with Chinese diplomats at the UNSC level, underscored the willingness of the Chinese to, "genuinely seek out, consult and integrate South African views in formulating UNSC positions."<sup>182</sup> This recognition of South Africa illustrates the importance Beijing harbors towards its relations with South Africa and its commitment towards strengthening economic ties.

China's recognition of South Africa appears to be working. Since it began to prioritize its relations with China, South Africa has aligned itself with China on issues particularly sensitive to Chinese interests. For example, in 2009, President Zuma, barred the Dalai Lama's visit to South Africa, a clear departure from previous president Nelson Mandela who received the Dalai Lama in 1998 and protested China's human rights record in Tibet.<sup>183</sup> The timing of Zuma's decision draws particular attention for South African's suspicious of China-South Africa relations. It came less than a year before South Africa joined BRICS, a move that received Beijing support. Since its ascension into the BRICS group, the ANC continued to block any official visit of the Dalai Lama and stopped criticism towards China's human rights record in Tibet. The Zuma era would bring other instances of South African alignment with Chinese core issues.

South Africa accused the U.S. and other western powers of overreach when Muamar Ghaddafi was overthrown in 2011. This in effect echoed Beijing's criticism towards the west. Another instance of South Africa alignment with China's core issues,

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<sup>180</sup> "Global Indicators Database: South Africa, Opinion of China."

<sup>181</sup> Chris Alden and Yu-Shan Wu, "South Africa and China: The Making of a Partnership," Africa Portal, last modified August 1, 2014, <https://www.africaportal.org/publications/south-africa-and-china-the-making-of-a-partnership/>

<sup>182</sup> Alden et al., "South Africa and China: The Making of a Partnership."

<sup>183</sup> Ramani, "Can China Burnish Its Image in South Africa? A Closer Look at the State of Ties Between the Two Countries."

and another departure from previous administrations, has been South African silence regarding accusations of the Chinese government abusing ethnic and religious minorities.<sup>184</sup> Lastly, South Africa maintains a ‘One China Policy’ and avoids a relationship with Taiwan that could jeopardize its relationship with China. These instances of South African alignment with Chinese core issues largely continues under the leadership of President Ramaphosa. At the international level, such Chinese-South African alignment was well received in Beijing, who reinforced this behavior by recognizing South Africa’s autonomy and willingness not to be subject to Western pressure.<sup>185</sup>

#### **D. BACKGROUND: RUSSIA-SOUTH AFRICA RELATIONS**

In the 1980s, the Soviet Union became the principal source of foreign military equipment and training to the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa.<sup>186</sup> The primary recipient of this assistance was South Africa’s African National Congress (ANC) and its armed wing the Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK). Soviet support maintained an ideological and geopolitical purpose. Ideologically, the anti-communist apartheid regime, which maintained repressive white minority control over a disenfranchised black majority, represented class struggle in the eyes of Soviet onlookers. Geopolitically, South Africa represented another element of the ongoing competition against the West and Russia’s communist competitor, China.<sup>187</sup> During this period, an estimated 3,000 ANC and MK activists would visit the Soviet Union to receive political and military training.<sup>188</sup> This Soviet support established interpersonal ties between the Kremlin and future South African political leaders.

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid

<sup>185</sup> China’s Strategic Aims in Africa: Hearing before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission.

<sup>186</sup> Lere Amusan, “Seeking Relevance in the Age of Globalisation: Russia in Africa through South Africa,” *Journal of African Union Studies* 7, no.1 (April 2018): 166, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26889979?seq=1>

<sup>187</sup> Amusan, “Seeking Relevance in the Age of Globalisation: Russia in Africa through South Africa.”

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

The ideological and geopolitical underpinnings that facilitated Soviet-ANC ties began to deteriorate when Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin started to reshape Russian relations with the West. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 witnessed Moscow's cancellation of direct funding to the ANC and retraction of the Kremlin's involvement abroad. Yeltsin's hosting of apartheid President De Klerk's visit to Russia in 1992, while refusing a visit to the newly freed Nelson Mandela, signaled to the ANC that relations with Moscow were different now the Cold War had ended. In short, the Yeltsin years saw a retraction in Moscow's engagement with African governments, a trend which initially continued under his successor Vladimir Putin.

During Vladimir Putin's first two terms as Russia's President, South Africa remained low on Moscow's foreign policy agenda. In 2006, Putin visited South Africa to facilitate commercial ties between Russian businesses and the South African government. This state visit culminated with the signing of the Treaty of Friendship and Partnership Between the Republic of South Africa and The Russian Federation, which declared a shared commitment of friendly relations, sustainable development, international standards, non-alignment movement, and fight international terrorism, among other things.<sup>189</sup> Largely a symbolic gesture, little else would come from this state visit in terms of enhancing ties between the two countries. Putin's successor, Dimitri Medvedev, visiting Africa in 2009, did not include South Africa on his itinerary.<sup>190</sup> In short, the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century saw little substantive change in Russia-South Africa relations, but change would come through a more ambitious Putin and the rise of Jacob Zuma to the South African presidency.

President Zuma sought closer ties between South Africa and Russia. In 2010, Zuma and Medvedev declared that the 2006 Treaty of Friendship constituted a strategic partnership between the two countries, symbolically elevating bi-lateral relations. South Africa's rhetoric through international platforms and stances on geopolitical issues began

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<sup>189</sup> "Treaty of Friendship and Partnership Between Republic of South Africa and Russian Federation: Briefing by Deputy Minister and Department and Ratification," Parliamentary Monitoring Group, last modified October 21, 2008, <https://pmg.org.za/committee-meeting/9673/>

<sup>190</sup> Amusan, "Seeking Relevance in the Age of Globalisation: Russia in Africa through South Africa."

to align with Russian interests during this time. Zuma’s presidency saw South Africa’s incorporation in the BRICS group of emerging economies, where during his first BRICS summit, Zuma openly criticized the West’s “overreach” in Libya—despite having voted in favor of a Libyan no fly zone during a previous session of the UN General Assembly.<sup>191</sup> In March 2014, South Africa abstained from voting regarding Ukraine’s territorial integrity and dodged criticizing Russia’s proxy war in Eastern Ukraine.<sup>192</sup> In a statement, Zuma justified this action saying it was, “important to close ranks with fellow BRICS members.”<sup>193</sup> One reason for this increased alignment with the Kremlin involves the personal ties between Zuma and Moscow.

Following his release from prison in 1973, Jacob Zuma continued his anti-apartheid struggle in exile, where he would spend time in the Soviet Union for training.<sup>194</sup> In 1980, he took over as the ANC’s counterintelligence branch, where he frequently interacted with East German and Soviet advisors.<sup>195</sup> Zuma would rise through the ranks of the ANC, eventually becoming its Chief of Intelligence Officer, further exposing him to Soviet advisors. It was during this time, that Zuma began establishing an extensive network of Russian connections, some speculate this would come to influence his presidency’s Russian leaning approach.<sup>196</sup> Whatever the reason for Zuma’s increased engagement with Moscow, often opaque in nature, it would contribute to Zuma’s eventual political ruin. A controversial nuclear deal between South Africa and Russia, among other instances of high-level corruption and state capture, helped end Zuma’s presidency and blemished the Kremlin’s reputation in Pretoria.

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<sup>191</sup> Amusan, “Seeking Relevance in the Age of Globalisation: Russia in Africa through South Africa.”

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

## **E. POWER MECHANISMS**

In terms of its power resources, the Russian Federation is a far cry from the Soviet Union. The Russia-South Africa relationship, as it stands today, illustrates the limits of Russia's ability to mobilize its power resources to achieve influence. Economically, bilateral trade between the two is marginal, constituting of only .4% of South Africa's foreign trade.<sup>197</sup> Where Russia maintained a competitive advantage, vis-à-vis South Africa, was through its state-owned energy firms, such as the nuclear corporation Rosatom. However, the way this Russian energy firm engaged with President Zuma contributed to Zuma's resignation and stalled future Russian business ventures in South Africa. The mobilization of Russia's military power resources in Africa has attracted particular attention of international observers. In the case of South Africa, evidence suggests the Kremlin intends to mobilize its military power resources in South Africa, offering another potential avenue for Russian influence.

### **1. Reward and Coercion**

Seeking to expand the output of the Koeberg nuclear facility, President Zuma approached Rosatom for assistance. The genesis of this arrangement attracted criticism within Zuma's own administration, with his finance minister, Pravin Gordhan, warning Zuma in 2011 that the lack of transparency surrounding Rosatom's preferred treatment with President Zuma violated South African procurement policies.<sup>198</sup> In August 2014, Zuma and Putin signed a nuclear cooperation deal. South African civil activists and political opposition were leaked information about the deal by Ecodefense. The nuclear arrangement, which amounted to an estimated \$76 billion, bypassed South African procurement policies and tender laws, deliberately avoided by President Zuma.<sup>199</sup> The controversy of this nuclear deal amounted to an abuse of office, adding to a list of other

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<sup>197</sup> WTO Trade Data

<sup>198</sup> Andrew S. Weiss and Eugene Rumer, "Nuclear Enrichment: Russia's Ill-Fated Influence Campaign in South Africa," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2019), [https://softpowerwarfare.files.wordpress.com/2019/12/weiss\\_rumer\\_southafrica\\_v2.pdf](https://softpowerwarfare.files.wordpress.com/2019/12/weiss_rumer_southafrica_v2.pdf)

<sup>199</sup> Weiss et al., "Nuclear Enrichment: Russia's Ill-Fated Influence Campaign in South Africa."

corruption charges under investigation. Threatening a vote of no confidence by ANC members of parliament, Zuma resigned his office in 2018, ending the future of any Russia-South Africa nuclear deal in the process.

Rather than gaining an influential foothold within the South African presidency, through the reward of a potentially lucrative nuclear deal, the failure of this deal, arguably, represents an example of the Kremlin's overreach into the domestic matters of South Africa. It also attracted skepticism among South African officials regarding their country's dealings with Russia. Thus, the failure of this deal represents the limitations of Russia's ability to use the reward mechanism to gain influence. Limitations which remain prevalent in sectors where Russia typically maintains a comparative advantage elsewhere in Africa.

Russian arms dealers and energy firms have increased their involvement in Africa, gaining a credible reputation among African governments in the process, as well as potential influence for the Kremlin. Russia is currently the largest arms exporter to Africa, accounting for nearly 39 percent of arms transfers to the region.<sup>200</sup> Rosatom continues to increase its engagement in West Africa and has the potential to outcompete its French counterpart, Areva, in the region.<sup>201</sup> In the case of South Africa, traditional Russian business endeavors face several challenges. As a primary commodity exporter, Russia often finds itself in competition with South Africa's energy exports.<sup>202</sup> In the arms sector, South Africa maintains its own weapons industry. Ironically, Russian embargoes during the apartheid era helped create a need for South Africa's own weapons industry, and today, South Africa's weapons industry often finds itself competing with Russian firms in export markets.<sup>203</sup> South Africa's arms industry has also indicated a desire to modernize, which has increased its collaboration with EU arms manufacturers.<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> Theo Locherer, "Russia's Strategy in Africa," Global Risk Insights, last modified October 4, 2020, <https://globalriskinsights.com/2020/10/russias-strategy-in-africa/>

<sup>201</sup> Locherer, "Russia's Strategy in Africa."

<sup>202</sup> Stronski, "Late to the Party: Russia's Return to Africa."

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

In short, Russia holds limited options to activate the coercion and reward mechanism in its relations with South Africa. Recovering from a damaged reputation in an ill-fated nuclear deal and limited economic power in the South African context, Russia's forced to utilize other mechanisms in pursuit of its foreign policy objectives. Historically, Russia provided the ANC with military expertise during its fight against apartheid and Russia has signaled potential interest in continuing a similar relationship. Paul Stronski argues that the Russian nuclear deal with Zuma was an attempt to rekindle these Cold War-era ties.<sup>205</sup> With the nuclear deal no longer an option, the Kremlin is forced to pursue other avenues of influence.

## 2. Expertise

Russian military expertise has roots in South Africa's history. Many senior ANC members and current senior South African National Defense Force officers received military training from the Soviet Union during their struggle against apartheid.<sup>206</sup> Despite these high-level ties, Russian activity in Africa and the Indian Ocean region decreased significantly following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Part of Russia's Africa re-engagement efforts involve rekindling some of the military-to-military ties between the Kremlin and its African partners. Recent events indicate that South Africa is among these African partners.

In 2019, two Tupolev ‘Black Jack’ bombers landed in Pretoria, coinciding with the inaugural Russia-Africa Summit in Sochi. The fortuitous timing of this event made many observers speculate that the incident signaled an increase in bilateral military engagement between the Russia and South Africa.<sup>207</sup> In November 2019, a month after the landing of the bombers, South Africa, Russia, and China participated in Exercise Mosi, a trilateral maritime training exercise whose purpose was to strengthen maritime cooperation among

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<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> Allan Du Toit, “Russia’s Southern Strategy,” The Interpreter, last modified, November 12, 2019, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/russia-s-southern-strategy>

the countries.<sup>208</sup> At a previous BRICS summit, President Vladimir Putin called for greater military integration among BRICS countries, leading many security experts to conclude that the increased military cooperation between Russia and South Africa was a manifestation of this statement.<sup>209</sup> Beyond the landing of Russian bombers and a maritime training exercise, much remains to be seen in the military-to-military engagement between Russia and South Africa in terms of expertise.

One potential instance of Russian expertise involves the state-owned Denel Aeronautics helicopter maintenance facility in Kempton Park. The facility is the only one of its kind in Africa that is certified to conduct maintenance, repair, and overhaul (MRO) on Russian made helicopters.<sup>210</sup> The facility routinely engages with Russian technicians for training and assistance. The facility opened in 2013 and in 2018 was the sole MRO facility for the nearly 700 Russian made helicopters in operation on the continent.<sup>211</sup> However, a single maintenance facility employing Russian technicians is hardly a source of geopolitical influence and South Africa's history of 'fierce neutrality' that involves skepticism of any foreign military influence would likely prevent Russia gaining any influence involving the facility.<sup>212</sup>

The nuclear sector, a comparative advantage for Russia, could have proven a useful vector to activate the expertise mechanism. The failure of the Russia-South Africa nuclear deal has, at present, made this an unlikely possibility. While speaking during the Russia-

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<sup>208</sup> Oriana Skylar Mastro, "Russia and China Team up on the Indian Ocean," *The Interpreter*, last modified December 16, 2020, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/russia-and-china-team-indian-ocean#:~:text=Exercise%20Mosi%20was%20designed%2C%20according,such%20as%20terrorism%20and%20piracy>.

<sup>209</sup> Peter Fabricius, "South Africa's Military Drills with Russia and China Raise Eyebrows," *The Institute for Security Studies*, last modified November 19, 2019, <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/south-africas-military-drills-with-russia-and-china-raise-eyebrows>

<sup>210</sup> Guy Martin, "Denel Opens Africa's First Russian Helicopter Maintenance Facility," *Defence Web*, last modified March 27, 2013, <https://www.defenceweb.co.za/aerospace/aerospace-aerospace/denel-opens-africas-first-russian-helicopter-maintenance-facility/>

<sup>211</sup> "Russian Helicopters to Take Part in Africa Aerospace and Defense Exhibition," *Russian News Agency*, last modified September 18, 2018, <https://tass.com/economy/1022213>

<sup>212</sup> Will Todman, "The Gulf Scramble for Africa: GCC States' Foreign Policy Laboratory," *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, last modified November 20, 2018, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/gulf-scramble-africa-gcc-states-foreign-policy-laboratory>

Africa Summit in 2019, President Ramaphosa assured President Putin of his country's desire to expand its nuclear program, but such would occur at South Africa's preferred, "timing, comfort, and cost."<sup>213</sup> The damage stemming from the controversial nuclear deal is difficult to overstate and might expose limits of Russian influence in other mechanisms.

### **3. Attraction and Legitimacy**

In terms of attraction, President Zuma's foreign policy approach could very well be explained with his own personal ties with Russia and a desire to become more integrated with his former anti-apartheid ally.<sup>214</sup> The 2009 financial crisis, brought Zuma to prioritize closer ties his country maintains towards the BRIC group of Brazil, Russia, India, and China, which Moscow touted as an alternative to the G-7.<sup>215</sup> As mentioned earlier, Zuma's foreign policy adopted a more critical stance against European and U.S. actions in Libya, claiming both went beyond their UN Security Council mandate. And on the question of Ukrainian sovereignty, in 2014, South Africa abstained from the UN General Assembly vote, arguably a departure from previous administrations 'non-interference' policy.<sup>216</sup> The instances of South Africa behaving, believing, and perceiving as Russia does, aligns well with French and Raven's attraction concept.<sup>217</sup> The degree to which this remains an element of South Africa's foreign policy; however, remains disputable.

Although Cyril Ramaphosa, to a large extent, maintains Zuma's prickly foreign policy towards the West, his approach towards Russia is more subtle than his predecessor. In an interview following the first Russia-Africa Summit in 2019, Cyril Ramaphosa spoke of his appreciation for Putin's view towards African nations saying he found Putin's perception, "very mature."<sup>218</sup> Rather than speaking of Russia as a country that South

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<sup>213</sup> "In Conversation with President Cyril Ramaphosa in Russia," SABC News, last modified October 25, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pcUpdIXu20k>

<sup>214</sup> Alexandra Arkhangelskaya and Vladimir Shubin, *Russia-South Africa Relations: Beyond Revival*, Policy Briefing 75 (Pretoria, South Africa, South African Institute of International Affairs, 2013), [https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/171980/saia\\_spb\\_%2075\\_arkhangelskaya%20&%20shubin\\_20131015.pdf](https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/171980/saia_spb_%2075_arkhangelskaya%20&%20shubin_20131015.pdf)

<sup>215</sup> Weiss et al., "Nuclear Enrichment: Russia's Ill-Fated Influence Campaign in South Africa."

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>217</sup> Meierding et al., "Understanding International Influence in an Era of Great Power Competition."

<sup>218</sup> "In Conversation with President Cyril Ramaphosa in Russia."

Africa wishes to align with, Ramaphosa spoke of Russia as an equal, whose approach towards African nations, based on mutual respect and mutual recognition, has the potential to build fruitful relations between Africa and Russia.<sup>219</sup> In keeping with this spirit of being treated as equals, Ramaphosa suggested the next Russia-Africa Summit take place in Africa, rather than having nearly 47 heads of state travel to Russia, which Putin accepted.<sup>220</sup> A lack of meaningful deliverables characterized this summit in Sochi and some speculate that the current Russia-South Africa relationship is still marking time due to the ongoing fallout from South Africa's previous administration.<sup>221</sup>

In terms of legitimacy, from the ANC's anti-apartheid struggle to when South Africa joined BRICS, it appears South Africa's political leaders view Moscow as a legitimate authority figure. On the international stage, Jacob Zuma's closing ranks with his fellow BRICS nations and South Africa's voting record on Ukrainian sovereignty, demonstrate clear instances of South Africa aligning itself with Russia's preferred behavior. President Zuma has probably viewed friendly relations with the Kremlin at a higher priority than previous South African presidents. However, the controversial nuclear deal effectively reset Russia-South Africa relations, potentially requiring a cooling off period before President Ramaphosa could bring relations to the same level as they were before Zuma's resignation. With Zuma currently battling the South African judicial system, it appears this chapter in Russia-South Africa relations has not yet run its course and remains fresh in South Africa's political memory. Taking a cautious approach towards his relations with President Putin is probably President Ramaphosa's most likely course of action, given the level of sensitivity South Africa's civil and political society holds towards the previous administration's corruption charges, which involved the Kremlin to a large extent. Andrew Weiss and Eugene Rumer, simplify these implications saying, "the controversy arising from the \$76 billion nuclear deal triggered strong pushback and legal challenges from South Africa's institutional checks and balances, civil society groups, and

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<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid.

<sup>221</sup> Arkhangelskaya et al., Russia-South Africa Relations: Beyond Revival.

independent media.”<sup>222</sup> Thus, the Kremlin faces an uphill battle in gaining influence through the attraction and legitimacy mechanisms.

#### 4. Recognition

In its effort to re-engage with South Africa, as part of Russia’s larger re-engagement strategy with African countries, instances of recognition have emerged. The Zuma administration witnessed instances of Russia identifying South Africa in a favorable way. Russia encouraged South Africa’s ascension into the BRICS group and advocated for its seat as a rotating member on the UNSC.<sup>223</sup> The Russian bombers landing in South Africa and the naval Exercise Morsi, also serve as indication that the Kremlin views South Africa as an important security cooperation partner. Although President Ramaphosa described the landing of the two ‘Blackjack’ bombers as being fortuitous, it remains difficult to image such a rare event occurring just before the first Russia-Africa Summit as mere coincidence.<sup>224</sup> Many around the world saw these instances of military-to-military engagements as indication of strengthening cooperation between the two countries; however, Ramaphosa described the incidents as a symptom of the two countries ongoing military relationship.<sup>225</sup> Whether the incident was Russia recognizing South Africa as an important military partner or mere coincidence resulting from an already established military-to-military engagement, appears dependent on the audience. Ramaphosa’s downplaying these events, might reflect his own strategy of avoiding political backlash from the 44 percent of South Africans who harbor negative views towards Russia.<sup>226</sup> Given the diplomatic backlash from the failed nuclear deal, the Kremlin may continue to leverage the recognition mechanism to regain South African confidence towards the

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<sup>222</sup> Weiss et al., “Nuclear Enrichment: Russia’s Ill-Fated Influence Campaign in South Africa.”

<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

<sup>224</sup> “In Conversation with President Cyril Ramaphosa in Russia.”

<sup>225</sup> Ibid

<sup>226</sup> Christine Huang and Jeremiah Cha, “Russia and Putin Receive Low Ratings Globally,” Pew Research Center, last modified February 7, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/02/07/russia-and-putin-receive-low-ratings-globally/>

Kremlin. Currently, the level of influence the Kremlin gains through recognition remains limited.

## F. CONCLUSION

In summary, South Africa's political landscape has limited foreign influence. Chinese infrastructure projects effectively stalled in South Africa's legal system, which scrutinizes foreign business practices within its borders, a likely artifact of the Zuma presidency, and instances of corruption at the highest levels in South Africa's government. Attempting to distance himself from the previous administration's corruption, President Ramaphosa has cautiously approached his engagement with the Kremlin. Despite this limitation, Russia and South Africa exhibit a desire to further their bi-lateral military engagement, witnessed in a recent maritime security cooperation exercise and the landing of Russian strategic bombers on South African soil.

The party-to-party engagement between the ANC and CCP was of particular interest of this research. This relationship exhibited an ability to foster personal relationships between high-ranking Chinese and South African officials. Naturally, this research found that such a relationship garners potential for Chinese influence. Again, the limiting factor to this potential influence, resides within South Africa's political landscape, which remains particularly sensitive to potential foreign influence in domestic decisions and potential instances of high-level corruption

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## IV. CONCLUSION

This research attempted to address how and to what extent Chinese and Russian activities succeed in advancing their influence in Kenya and South Africa. It applied established frameworks for assessing international influence that examines a state's use of its power resources to activate power mechanisms. Although not an exhaustive analysis, this research identified relevant findings and points to important areas for future research and implications for U.S. foreign policy. This chapter will provide a summary of this analysis, first through a comparative analysis of Chinese and Russian influence. Then, this chapter will identify recommended future research. Lastly, this chapter will provide implications for U.S. influence and policy in Africa.

### A. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS: CHINESE INFLUENCE

Unsurprisingly, this research identified extensive Chinese power resources mobilized in Kenya and South Africa. In the case of Kenya, China's massive infrastructure development projects and increasingly strong economic ties with Nairobi, comprised the main focus of this research. On the surface, these activities appeared to bring unquestionable influence to Beijing, especially when considering the importance such activities served Uhuru Kenyatta's economic development priorities. The implication behind China's mobilization in Kenya is it places Beijing in a position to reward or coerce Kenyan behavior, make Kenya dependent on Chinese expertise, and attract Kenya's integration into China's economic circle.

Despite the magnitude of Chinese power resources, this research argues Chinese ambitions and their potential for influence face significant challenges in Kenya. Kenya's courts and politically conscious civil society demonstrated an ability to influence Kenya-China relations. First, when Kenya's Supreme Court ruled that the Mombasa-Nairobi SGR project was unconstitutional, due to violating Kenyan tendering laws, it signaled to President Kenyatta the need to work within Kenya's legal framework. Second, when Kenya's Parliament blocked an executive order to merge state-owned enterprises, an action many Parliament Members saw as advantageous to Chinese construction firms, it checked executive overreach into legislative prerogatives. Lastly, community-based organizations

such as the Save Lamu project and Kenya's private construction firms, applied pressure on the Kenyan government and its dealings with Chinese state-owned businesses. In some cases, as in Lamu, civil society groups succeeded in blocking future construction projects. And, in the case of private construction firms, both China and Kenya adopted a more equitable approach towards employing local contractors, procuring local materials, and training Kenya workers to replace Chinese workers in managerial positions. These findings underscored the limits of Chinese influence on Kenya's institutional decision making.

This research found domestic political environments impacted Chinese influence in South Africa as well. Chinese power resources could play an integral role in South Africa's economic development and infrastructure modernization. And like Kenya, South Africa's current president has prioritized relations with Beijing, seeing China's power resources as an integral element to his development strategy. Despite the importance Chinese power resources carry for South Africa's economic development, South Africa's political landscape has slowed ambitions established by Beijing and South African administrations. Specifically, South African courts are working to ensure China-South Africa relations do not violate South African law. This effectively stalled Chinese infrastructure projects in South Africa.

In short, this research found extensive mobilization of Chinese power resources in Kenya and South Africa. With these power resources came potential for Chinese influence in terms of reward, coercion, expertise, and attraction. Elements characteristic of a democratic society—rule of law and civil society—proved to be the principal factor towards limiting Chinese influence. Across the two countries, respect for the rule of law, institutional checks on power, and a politically conscious civil society, impeded the ambitions of both Beijing and the chief executives of Kenya and South Africa

## **B. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS: RUSSIAN INFLUENCE**

Whereas China mobilizes massive power resources and attracts potential avenues of influence, Russia is more limited in terms of both power resources and influence potential. The Russian Federation does not possess the economic or ideological relevance of its predecessor, the Soviet Union, and any foreign policy attempting to leverage gains

achieved in the Soviet era are becoming increasingly irrelevant. These limitations are due in part to Russia's recent re-engagement with Africa, which only meaningfully resumed two decades after the fall of the Soviet Union, and, unlike China, lacks the massive power resources to accelerate relations.

In Kenya, Russia is only beginning to build a relationship with Nairobi. Kenya's alignment with Western powers during the Cold-War and Russia's retraction from Africa following the collapse of the Soviet Union left little, in terms of bilateral relations, for the Russian Federation to build upon. The Kremlin's recent engagement with Nairobi, however, indicates both countries have an interest in increasing economic ties. Such rhetoric has yet to manifest itself in significant Russian activity. As a result, the Kremlin currently maintains little opportunities of influence in Kenya. Ultimately, this research determined Kenya-Russia relations are in the beginning stages of forging meaningful bi-lateral relations.

Russia has encountered less of a cold start in its re-engagement with South Africa. Having had established ties between the Kremlin and prominent South African political elites during the Soviet era, Russia appears well-positioned for a more seamless re-engagement strategy; however, evidence suggests that an ill-fated Russian nuclear deal proved an example of Russian overreach into South Africa's institutional decision making. Like the challenges faced by China, South Africa's commitment to the rule of law, institutional checks, and politically conscious civil society, prevented the fulfillment of Russian plans with South Africa, leaving the current relationship at a standstill.

The current Russian re-engagement strategy with Africa, a recent development of Putin's foreign policy agenda, continues to take shape in Africa, showing few instances of Russia mobilization of power resources. It is doubtful Russia will achieve the level of geopolitical significance in Africa characteristic of the Soviet Union. Given Russia's comparatively limited power resources, Russia's re-engagement with Kenya and South Africa will likely remain low on Putin's foreign policy agenda. Consequently, the opportunities for Russia to leverage the various power mechanisms to influence state behavior remain negligible in Kenya and South Africa.

### C. AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Admittedly, this research is not an exhaustive analysis of Chinese and Russian influence in Kenya and South Africa. Readers with an understanding of Russian and Chinese foreign policy characteristics would quickly identify other potential influence activities not mentioned in this research—China’s Confucius Institutes and Russian Private Military Companies for example. Even some of the elements discussed in this research would benefit from a deeper analysis. The CCP’s engagement with other foreign political parties is one such element.

In the case of South Africa, this research identified a strong relationship between the CCP and ANC. This relationship took the form of political training for ANC cadre’s and routine engagement between the two political parties. Undoubtedly, these engagements provide the CCP with personal ties to South Africa’s political elites at high levels within the South African government. A deeper analysis of the extent of this relationship in South Africa, and other African countries, would provide a meaningful addition to the literature regarding Chinese influence. Given the extensive power resources mobilized by China, it seems the element of party-to-party engagement has proven largely overlooked in favor of more tangible elements of Chinese power resources.

One element of Chinese power resources that continues to be the focus of the literature is the large-scale infrastructure projects and their associated financing from Beijing. Often, the narrative of ‘debt trap diplomacy’ emerges from these power resources, leading many to conclude that China provides loans with the knowledge of the recipient’s inability to service them. This assumes that, should recipients of Chinese loans fail in their repayment obligations, China would achieve leverage and influence over foreign governments. This depiction of Chinese foreign policy continues to propagate, despite limited evidence. The economic impacts of the COVID-19 virus adversely impacted many African counties, to include Kenya. Yet China has not seized infrastructure or acted in a way that would support a ‘debt trap diplomacy’ narrative. This does not suggest that Chinese large-scale infrastructure projects and their associated loans do not provide Beijing with avenues to influence state behavior. Instead, this research suggests that such influence is more nuanced than what other narratives imply. The literature would benefit from further

analysis into China's approach towards debt restructuring and potential influence such seemingly benevolent behavior forwards Beijing. Ultimately, the 'debt trap diplomacy' narrative is a specious argument at best and potentially overlooks other avenues of influence achieved through Chinese loans.

Concerning Russia, this research suggests that Russia maintains a limited capacity to mobilize power resources in Kenya and South Africa. However, this limitation should not discount the value of further research into Russia's approach towards Kenya and South Africa. In both cases, Putin expressed interest towards enhancing his country's ties with Kenya and South Africa. In Kenya, Russian rhetoric typically implies increasing economic ties. And in South Africa, Russian expertise might prove an avenue for future influence. In the latter case, Russia backed its rhetoric with action, such as the landing of Russian strategic bombers in South Africa and joint maritime exercises, indicating a growing security cooperation partnership between the two countries. And despite setbacks from a failed nuclear deal, both Russia and South Africa expressed interest in re-engaging each other on this issue. Simply put, future research would benefit the literature by providing a deeper analysis of the trajectory of Russian relations with Kenya and South Africa.

Lastly, the political landscape of Kenya and South Africa was identified as the key impediment to Russian and Chinese influence. This assumes that political environments lacking characteristics such as an independent judiciary, politically conscious civil society, and free media are potentially more vulnerable to Chinese and Russian influence. Future research should investigate which types of domestic political conditions shape international influence and why.

#### **D. POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

Based on the central argument of this research, a key ingredient blunting Russian and Chinese influence lies in the political landscape of African nations. U.S. foreign policy would do well to assist in the strengthening of these political landscapes. Organizations such as the United States Agency for International Development or National Endowment for Democracy, focus on building democratic, accountable, and effective governments through institutional reform and technical assistance. They should also engage with civil

society groups and other political stakeholders to promote government responsiveness and accountability. Such organizations would likely prove the most beneficial towards U.S. foreign policy and improve the circumstances of its African partners, while neutralizing influence of U.S. competitors. Conversely, should societies backslide from democratic progress, this research suggests, they would then become increasingly vulnerable to U.S. competitor influence.

Chinese and Russian interactions with Kenya and South Africa, discussed in this research, identify some important lessons for U.S. foreign policy, especially when considering the NSS and NDS. Both documents recognize the strategic value of Africa and the importance of competing with Russia and China in the region. The U.S. should cautiously approach its competition with Russia and China in Africa, while respecting the national interests of Kenya and South Africa. Neither country represents an open playing field in which international actors can simply get whatever they want.

Both Kenya and South Africa possess societies very much aware of the implications of foreign influence. Instead of placing competition of Russia and China at the heart of U.S. sub-Saharan Africa policy, U.S. foreign policy would benefit by identifying the national interests of African governments, where they align with U.S. interests, and how elements of U.S. national power could assist in achieving these interests. Approaching foreign policy through the lens of ‘great power competition’ would likely fall short of achieving this and runs the risk of mobilization African societies against U.S. foreign policy.

In the case of Kenya and South Africa, political leaders have plans and ambitions independent of external influence. Both, like elsewhere in Africa, are managing economies that struggle to modernize and keep pace with growing populations. Thus, economic development and modernization of their countries’ infrastructure hold a high priority towards addressing their domestic issues. Often, they turn to U.S. competitors for assistance in addressing these challenges. Looking at such behavior through the lens of ‘great power competition’ oversimplifies a complex problem and ignores the strong incentives for agency by African governments.

The national interests of Kenya and South Africa do not revolve around a rhetoric of ‘great power competition’ or ‘a new scramble for Africa’. Such rhetoric negates the national interests of African countries and shifts the focus towards the rivalry between the U.S. and its competitors. Cooperation might provide an avenue to dial down an adversarial focused great power competition narrative. Areas of cooperation exist in economic development, technological modernization, and security assistance. U.S. foreign policy should take a more indirect approach towards competition and this research offers such an approach.

In summary, U.S. foreign policy should approach its competition through the lens of African interests rather than ‘great power competition’. Undoubtedly, areas exist where U.S. foreign policy should confront Chinese and Russian interactions with African countries, predatory and illegal business practices, but this should not dominate the core of U.S. foreign policy. The U.S. maintains several comparative advantages, and its competitors have demonstrated limitations to their own power resources. Leveraging U.S. comparative advantages, such as improving democratic institutions and supporting African interests in security and economic development, would prove more lasting and beneficial to U.S. foreign policy.

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