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China's Atlantic Gambit: Power Projection Beyond the Indo-Pacific Through Strategic Deception

Colonel Michael Gacheru, US Army

In April 2022, Chinese President Xi Jinping announced the Global Security Initiative (GSI), a new conceptual framework outlining China's vision for global security governance as an alternative to the U.S.-backed international rules-based order.[1] In a 2023 concept paper, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs expanded on this vision, identifying six core concepts and twenty priorities for cooperation to address global security challenges in a "conflict-ridden world. [2] This marked an inflection point from the economically focused Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to a security-focused China foreign policy. The GSI aims initially to protect Chinese interests abroad but likely contains long-term Chinese ambitions to disrupt international norms and power dynamics, expand the People's Liberation Army (PLA) global posture, control strategic choke points along sea lines of communications (SLOC), and increase diplomatic influence.

By examining the historical strategies of Sun Tzu and Mao Zedong, China's security and economic activities since the announcement of GSI in 2022, and weighing them against U.S. strategy, this paper argues that Beijing's focus on Africa is not merely an economic endeavor but a long-term strategic

'encirclement' plan, aimed at establishing posture locations in the Atlantic. This paper posits that as the United States focuses on military alliances and postures for a potential conventional conflict in the Indo-Pacific, China is advancing a Sun Tzu-Mao-inspired strategy along the African coast. By leveraging the BRI and GSI, Beijing is securing economic partnerships and dual-purpose (commercial and military) strategic infrastructure investments, allowing it to gain and control access to the Atlantic. This positioning enables China to challenge U.S. influence and establish 'strategic strong points' for future power projection and disruption along key terrain. Concurrently, China draws U.S. attention and resources away from Africa through a calculated feint in the Indo-Pacific, creating strategic space through deception for it to implement its Atlantic strategy. This dual-theater approach compels Washington to recalibrate its priorities and counter Beijing's ambitions in the Indo-Pacific and Atlantic regions through a National Security Strategy (NSS) that contends globally with the pacing challenge.

Historical Context: Sun Tzu and Mao Zedong Concepts

China's present-day calculated realpolitik strategy draws upon key principles from historical strategists like Sun Tzu and Mao Zedong to implement a long-term, multi-theater approach to global dominance. Rarely in Chinese history has victory been achieved through a single decisive Clausewitzian confrontation; instead,

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China has traditionally relied on protracted, indirect maneuvers to gain relative advantage.[3] Subtlety, deception, and strategic patience define the Chinese approach, echoing Sun Tzu's lessons emphasizing winning without direct confrontation. Mao expanded on this doctrine by describing the importance of the encirclement of the enemy state through alliances and posture to compel them to submission. [4] China's most enduring strategy game, Wei-Chi, likely inspired this doctrine centered on encirclement rather than brute force and was taught to warriors and kings from the 24th century B.C.[5] Mao "required all his officers to study Wei-chi and become proficient" in the game strategy.[6] Wei-Chi is a game in which players position stones across the board, building incremental advantages while working to encircle and neutralize their opponent's pieces. Multiple contests unfold across different regions of the board. This seems to mirror China's contemporary geopolitical maneuvers

where Beijing methodically expands its influence through economic leverage, strategic partnerships, and power projection, ensuring that by the time the balance shifts, its dominance appears inevitable rather than forced. China's profound respect for its history acknowledges foremost its national identity, governance, and strategic thinking. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) often invokes historical narratives to shape contemporary policies, guide decision-making, and form strategy.[7] Ancient and modern military thinkers like Sun Tzu and Mao Zedong are central to informing China's strategic culture, actions, and ambitions on the global stage. It is through this lens that we should understand China's long-term strategy – one that prioritizes incremental advantage over direct confrontation. While tensions in the South China Sea may appear to signal an impending clash, China's true ambitions lie in a deliberate, pragmatic approach aimed at rebalancing the global security environment in its favor.

Sun Tzu's Calculation and Deception

In *The Art of War*, Sun Tzu emphasized the importance of calculation and deception in military strategy. Sun Tzu stressed both the need for thorough calculation before engaging in warfare to predict the battle's outcome before it begins and deception to mask your true intent. Calculations include evaluating whose army is the strongest, has the most capable leaders, or has the best training

before engaging in battle.[8] To this end, the CCP is executing its “Military-Civil Fusion” strategy to develop the most technologically capable, world-class military by 2049, ensuring China has the ‘most capable army’ before engaging in battle.

Simultaneously through the BRI and GSI, China is occupying “pivotal ground” – another strategically important calculative principle in The Art of War described as a “strategic area from which one can control other states, intersecting highways, and where multiple states meet.”[9] China established its first overseas military base in Djibouti, a strategically important ground, and is laying the foundation for dual-use ports or likely future strong points in Morocco, South Africa, and other key locations in Africa. These moves position China to occupy ground at intersecting maritime ‘highways,’ a key component of Sun Tzu’s strategy, while also aligning with the Sun Tzu directive to “never separate your forces from your supplies.”[10] China’s present-day selection of BRI and GSI investment locations assures future control of key SLOC choke points that can help protect critical supply lines and control transcontinental movement.

Sun Tzu also considered deception a central component of warfare. Is the war with China coming in 2027, the date President Xi instructed the PLA to be ready to invade, or is it 2049 when the CCP anticipates having a world-class military, or will it be at a date and

time when China assesses they are ready to attack? By getting the enemy fixated on a date, China is executing a straightforward deceptive tactic described by Sun Tzu: “When ready to attack, appear unready; when capable, appear to be incapable.”[11] These arbitrary timelines have influenced U.S. strategic estimates that the 2027 date, known as the “Davidson Window,” has become a focal point of American defense planning.[12] The term originates from former Indo-Pacific Commander Admiral Philip Davidson, who testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee in 2021, and expressed concern that China could invade Taiwan within the next six years. This was echoed in a recent National Defense University President’s Lecture Series by a U.S. service chief who stated that their service readiness goals were to be ready by 2027 in anticipation of a potential confrontation with China. Other U.S. military agencies are likely driving modernization and readiness goals to align with this expectation. What is clear based on Chinese historical strategy is that China will not announce a date for their annexation of Taiwan and will likely not opt for a direct confrontation. Instead, China opts to implement an approach that pushes Taiwan to concede through other coercive means. One need only review all historical writings on Chinese culture to draw this conclusion.

The deception campaign goes beyond a timeline and geography. China’s calculated feint in the South China Sea has drawn U.S. strategy to plan for a

Clausewitzian direct confrontation in the South China Sea, creating the space for China's global expansion and encirclement of the U.S. The U.S. Department of Defense Joint Publication 3-13.4, Military Deception, describes a feint as "a tactical maneuver designed to deceive the enemy by creating a perceived threat or action, typically away from the actual point of attack, to draw their attention and resources, allowing the military to gain an advantage elsewhere." [13] China's saber-rattling and harassing tactics in the South China Sea are likely a Sun Tzu-inspired feint articulated in The Art of War as "when attacking a point that is far away, make it seem as if attacking a point that is nearby." While the U.S. is fixated on China's harassing tactics in the South China Sea, China is preparing or staging to attack a point far away by making it seem they plan to attack a point that is near - Taiwan. The U.S. focus on the South China Sea has drawn attention away from other geostrategically important locations, allowing China the opportunity to secure posture locations to complete its encirclement strategy before implementing its ambitions to annex Taiwan.

"when attacking a point that is far away, make it seem as if attacking a point that is nearby."

One final lesson from Sun Tzu is his emphasis on the indispensable nature of intelligence. As outlined later in the paper's BSI and GSI section, China

has secured two dual-purpose ports at the northern and southern tips of Africa, serving as strategic gateways to the Atlantic. These key ports in South Africa and Morocco position the PLA to monitor maritime traffic transiting between the Atlantic and the Indo-Pacific. China's international policing initiatives take various forms, including the export of surveillance technology, security systems, and traditional police equipment. [14] These two geostrategic locations are positioned to facilitate monitoring and, if necessary, the disruption of commercial and military naval operations through these maritime chokepoints.

Mao Zedong's Deception and Encirclement

Although Mao's strategy aimed to defeat Imperial Japan in a guerilla campaign, many of his principles explain Beijing's present-day actions. The Maoist strategy of protracted warfare and strategic deception parallels China's modern geopolitical moves, especially in Africa and the Atlantic. Mao emphasized indirect confrontation, leveraging asymmetry, and controlling key terrain over time—principles that align with China's approach under the BRI and GSI. In "On Protracted Warfare," Mao provides the example of "making a feint to the east but attacking in the west" [15] to create misconceptions and deceive the enemy of your intent as you prepare to launch a surprise attack where he least expects it.

China's efforts in the Indo-Pacific are intended to keep the United States focused on that theater while it shapes the geopolitical and economic battlefield closer to the U.S., completing the Chinese encirclement campaign. The strategy also mirrors Mao's idea of "encircling the cities from the countryside." [16] In his writings, Mao describes three types of encirclement, the third of which is "international encirclement," which seeks to form allies to counter your enemy. [17] Mao describes this form of encirclement in terms of the "front of aggression (Japan and her allies) and the front of peace (China and her allies)." [18] Per Mao, these alliances aim to encircle one's enemy in a "gigantic net from which the fascist can find no escape, then that will be our enemy's day of doom." [19] Instead of confronting the U.S. head-on in the Pacific, China likely aims to encircle the U.S. in its 'gigantic net' woven in Africa, South America, and the Atlantic before taking decisive action that could lead to confrontation. Politically, this campaign has been underway since 2009 with the formation of the BRICS intergovernmental organization and with China's active efforts to reduce international recognition of Taiwan. Thirty African countries have recognized Taiwan since the 1950s; today, only one remains – Eswatini (formerly Swaziland). [20]

The military doctrines of Sun Tzu and Mao Zedong converge in shaping the battlefield through deception and misdirection. They both emphasize

gaining an asymmetric advantage, positioning, and leveraging indirect means – economic, diplomatic, and hybrid warfare – to advance strategic objectives. If China successfully controls key Atlantic ports, it could disrupt U.S. and NATO supply lines, global maritime trade, and force projection. The Atlantic presence also enhances China's nuclear deterrence and blue-water naval expansion, placing pressure on the U.S. from the Pacific and Atlantic.

Considering China's historically rooted Sun Tzu-Mao strategy, it is now crucial to understand the strategic frameworks of the PRC's BRI and GSI to highlight how present-day actions align with these concepts. Particularly concerning are African port investments along key maritime SLOCs into the Atlantic that will complete China's encirclement campaign.

The Belt and Road & Global Security Initiatives: Vehicles for Strategic Encirclement

Belt and Road Initiative

Since its inception in 2013 as the One Belt, One Road, the initiative's investments have quickly expanded globally to 147 countries, accounting for two-thirds of the world's population. [21] Figure 1 below depicts the global scale of this initiative.

These investments have been predominantly in transportation (rails, ports, and roads), real estate, and

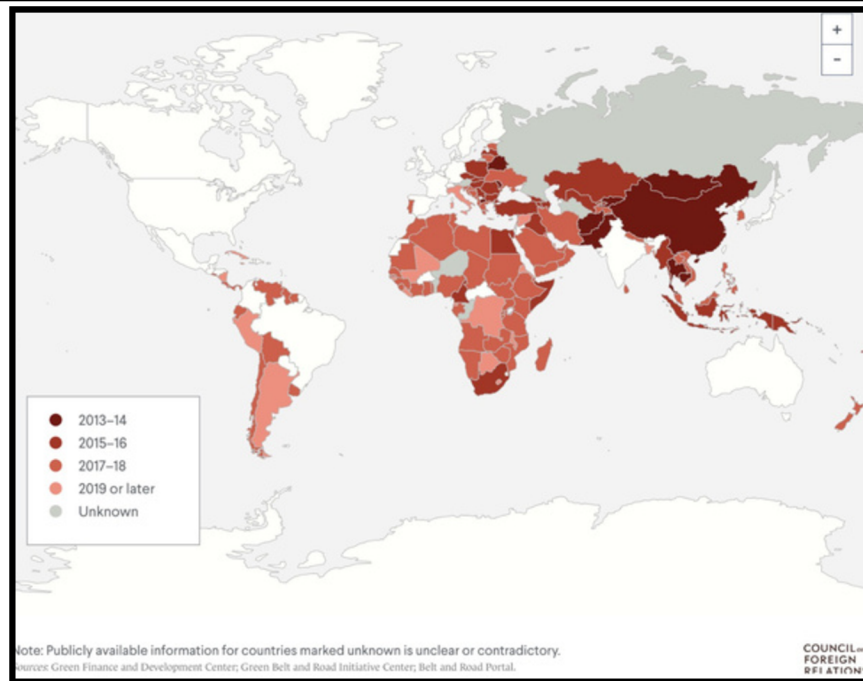


Figure 1. Official BRI participants by year of joining [22]

energy. In 2023, Africa became the largest recipient of BRI investments, which increased from the previous year by 114 percent, totaling \$21.7 billion in 52 countries.[23] This surge was driven

by China's strategic investment in key infrastructure projects, particularly in the port and shipping sectors, which increased by 47 percent. Chinese state-owned firms financed, constructed, and operate 61 of Africa's 231 commercial ports– 33 along the Atlantic coastline. [24] Those encapsulated in dashed



Figure 2. PRC port projects in Africa [25]

boxes in Figure 2 will be highlighted in subsequent discussion. Although China's investments in these ports through the BRI are billed as economically driven, at least one of these port projects has led to the establishment of a PLA military base in Doraleh, Djibouti, capable of accommodating aircraft carriers and submarines.[26] It is important to note that the PRC avoids the term 'overseas military base' due to its historical association with foreign imperialism, making it a politically sensitive term. Instead, the PRC uses the term 'strategic strong point' to describe locations supporting overseas military operations, securing SLOCs, and safeguarding Chinese interests abroad. [27] The PLA Navy (PLAN) doctrine calls for assuring strong points are mutually supporting and reinforcing when operationalized, indicating an ambition to create more to secure Chinese interests abroad.[28]

This Djibouti and Chinese-operated strong point is located at a key strategic, economic, and geopolitical location at the entrance of the Red Sea, near the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, one of the busiest maritime chokepoints. China's strategy to establish a Djibouti strong point followed a pragmatic approach, which it replicated across the African continent. First comes financial investments in major infrastructure projects, including rail, roads, and port development, then award of contracts for the construction and operation of these projects to select Chinese state-owned firms. These

loans result in indebtedness to the point where countries are unable to defray debts from these projects without significant concessions, garnering China leverage to achieve its ambitions for overseas posture.[29] In Djibouti, China justified the need for the posture location by citing the necessity to combat piracy and protect global trade through the Suez Canal. Yet, it has not joined the European Union's (EU) Operation ATALANTA, which includes non-EU states and has been successfully combating piracy in the region since 2008.[30]

China has created economic dependency through these large-scale investment loans

China has taken a similar predatory investment approach, often called debt-trap diplomacy, in several strategically located African countries along the Atlantic. Four states – Angola, Nigeria, Morocco, and South Africa – have received the highest Chinese investments since China initiated the GSI in 2022. These investments have been in similar sectors to those seen in Djibouti, leading up to establishing a PLAN strong point and using the same state-owned companies. China has invested \$6.5 billion in Angola, \$5.8 billion in Nigeria, \$2.2 billion in Morocco, and \$1.6 billion in South Africa, in port and infrastructure investments.[32] China has created economic dependency through these large-scale investment loans and again awarded the development projects to the same handful of Chinese state-

owned enterprises. The U.S. government, the European Union, and other entities have sanctioned these companies for their involvement in corruption, militarization, and human rights violations.[33] Several are also designated as ‘Chinese military companies’ by the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) for their role in building illegal artificial islands and military outposts in the South China Sea.[34] This debt trap diplomacy will likely result in these low-income countries falling behind on debt payments and acquiescing to Chinese demands to establish dual-use port facilities or strategic strong points.

Angola is China’s third largest source of oil, and the Lobito Port is critical to China’s maritime trade and mineral exports from Central Africa.[35] Angola owes billions to China and has negotiated debt restructuring deals as oil price fluctuations have impacted its repayment capacity.[36] Angola is heavily reliant on oil exports, and with price fluctuations influenced by global tensions, its debt burden to China could become even more pressing, making it increasingly susceptible to Beijing’s demands.

Nigeria is Africa’s fourth-largest economy and China’s second-largest oil supplier after Angola. Nigeria’s offshore oil and gas reserves are critical for China’s long-term energy strategy. [37] China’s investments in Nigerian ports will also likely become a crucial hub for China’s illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing fleet. Over

75 percent of ships fishing off the west coast of Africa are registered to Chinese companies.[38] Challenged with repaying its mounting indebtedness to China, Nigeria is negotiating debt restructuring and repayment schedules.

Morocco is China’s new investment darling and the only African country President Xi visited in 2024.[39] Morocco’s Tanger Med Port sits at the crossroads of Europe, Africa, and the Middle East, making it an ideal hub for trade, logistics, and manufacturing. Morocco also has free trade agreements with the European Union and the United States, making it an ideal location for joint manufacturing ventures for exports to these markets. [40] Its proximity to the Strait of Gibraltar, key terrain, allows China to expand its influence along the Mediterranean and Atlantic trade routes, where it can monitor and disrupt commerce or naval operations.

The South African port of Durban at Richards Bay is strategically located at the Cape of Good Hope, a crucial node for international maritime trade between the Indian Ocean and the Atlantic. This southern access to the Atlantic and Pacific theaters has become even more critical with the recent instability in the Bab al-Mandab Strait caused by the Houthis rebel group. As of January 7, 2024, 354 container ships, 16.4 percent of the global container fleet, were rerouted to the Cape of Good Hope to avoid the Red Sea crisis.[41]

China's economic predatory tactics are advancing its ambitions to likely future strong points in Africa along the Atlantic and strategically critical locations. Such locations enable China to monitor and disrupt naval operations as China seeks to complete its encirclement of the U.S. This next reinforcing economic investments with security sector investments. This approach enables Beijing to normalize its military presence on the continent while gaining access to local security and intelligence agencies. This enhances China's capacity to monitor, coerce, and influence internal state affairs by aligning with security institutions – often the most capable government entities in African states – while leveraging this influence to secure strategic posture locations.

Global Security Initiative

While China has had a significant economic role on the African continent through the BRI, 2024 saw an unprecedented change in emphasis on its role in Africa's security landscape. In September 2024, at the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) Summit, President Xi formally introduced the GSI to 53 African heads of state and the African Union (AU) Chairperson.[42] President Xi outlined an action plan for 2025-2027, which includes joint military and law enforcement training, intelligence sharing, counterterrorism capacity building, peacekeeping operations, and maritime security cooperation aimed at securing shipping lanes in the Gulf of

Aden, Gulf of Guinea, and Indian Ocean.[43] The operationalization of the GSI framework is opaque. Still, there are indicators that China is increasing its provision of equipment, training, security, and police partnership presence in Africa, where China has significant economic investments.[44] This implies that GSI efforts aim to secure Chinese economic investments through enduring presence. Before establishing the GSI, China's public security agencies were more active than the PLA in Africa, including having established extradition and security agreements with over 40 countries. Angola, Nigeria, Morocco, and South Africa are four of only thirteen that have full extradition agreements with China, further underscoring their strategic importance to China's long-term ambitions.[45]

Still, there are indicators that China is increasing its provision of equipment, training, security, and police partnership presence in Africa,

Accurately assessing China's security force assistance (SFA) figures and donations remains challenging due to the opaque nature of China's transactions and the limited transparency surrounding its defense and aid agreements. However, a 2024 Report on the Implementation Progress of the GSI published by the China Institute of International Studies revealed a glimpse of what Beijing attributed to the GSI. These include financial and troop contributions to

the United Nations (UN) and an \$80 million donation to the UN Peace and Security Trust Fund. China has also engaged in joint training and exercises with ten African countries and currently has 4,100 PLA soldiers and sailors deployed in Africa, with 2,000 stationed in Djibouti, 1,400 assigned to UN missions, and 700 sailors on ships around the African coast. Also lumped under the GSI are China's internal security forces, which have conducted police training in over 40 African countries and supplied equipment, supplies, and training to the Sahel, the Horn of Africa, and the Gulf of Guinea regions. Finally, the report touts China's establishment of the China-Shanghai Cooperation Organization counterterrorism training base, which hosts international seminars on counterterrorism.[46] Not captured in the report was the \$306 million in arms sales in 2023, a marked 288 percent increase from 2022.[47]

It is clear Beijing prioritizes its economic and military investments in Africa. China emphasizes states at key maritime chokepoints and strategically located ports along the Atlantic coast that could provide dual access for economic and military use through economic leverage or coercion. China is employing historically inspired stratagems to encircle the U.S., assert control over strategically vital terrain, and obscure its true intentions.

The U.S. Response: An Indo-Pacific Pivot

China's masterful game of Wei-Chi is unfolding across multiple theaters. China is leveraging historical precedents of strategic misdirection in the Indo-Pacific to divert U.S. attention while concealing its true objective – encirclement. By engaging in the reclamation of reefs, illicit expansion of its exclusive economic zone (EEZ), growing militarization, and intimidation tactics in the South China Sea, China has successfully drawn U.S. grand strategy and policy focus to the region. This deliberate maneuver not only absorbs American resources and strategic bandwidth but also allows Beijing to quietly consolidate influence in other critical arenas, advancing its long-term geopolitical ambitions with limited resistance.

In 2011, the Obama administration announced a U.S. “Pivot to Asia,” that prioritized long-term engagement in the Indo-Pacific by bolstering relationships and posture in the region to counter China's growing influence.[48] This strategic shift concentrated U.S. resources in the region but deemphasized other theaters, including Africa. During a March 2022 Congressional testimony, a former U.S. Africa Command (USAFRICOM) commander affirmed this claim when he described U.S. efforts in Africa as an “economy of force” operation – underscoring the relative neglect of the African theater in U.S. grand strategy. [49] Subsequent Trump and Biden national security strategies (NSS) recognized China's global aspirations and called for the redoubling of U.S.

commitments and partnerships in the Indo-Pacific. The 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS) went as far as to recognize “China’s predatory economics to coerce neighboring countries and reorder the Indo-Pacific region to its advantage.”[50] Again, this limits the focus of China’s effects on the Indo-Pacific and not on the global context.

The most recent 2022 NDS, under Biden, described China as America’s most “consequential competitor that challenges U.S. security through coercive and increasingly aggressive behavior.”[51] Again, this document focused efforts on countering China’s activity in the South China Sea and China’s attempts to destabilize the region. This NDS further directed a deterrence approach focused on increasing regional posture locations, building resilience to sustain the fight, and imposing costs on China’s actions in the region.

What is common to the three past administrations is that their number one priority remained to defend the homeland from threats posed by China. All were drawn to developing a response and strategy centered around the South China Sea – the distraction.

Implications for the United States: The Emerging Dual-Theater Challenge

This paper does not seek to discount China’s ambition to control the vast economic resources in the South China Sea or that it seeks to annex Taiwan.

This paper nonetheless seeks to illuminate that China aims to distract and deceive the United States in the South China Sea while it shores up its encirclement and global posture before acting to assert its territorial claims from a position of strength. While the United States and its allies are focused on the Indo-Pacific, China is implementing a calculated strategy that encircles the U.S. by establishing global posture locations, controlling ‘pivoting’ ground, and growing the ‘front of peace.’

While significant attention has been placed on China’s military aggression and economic coercion in the Indo-Pacific, Beijing is notably advancing its influence in Africa, an underappreciated yet strategically critical theater, to reshape global power dynamics. Through the BRI and GSI, China is establishing “dual-use” port facilities – ostensibly commercial ports or logistics hubs –that can be quickly converted for military purposes. This approach enables strategic positioning under the guise of economic development. It allows China to establish a base and posture within five to seven days of the U.S. East Coast by sea; control strategic maritime choke points, including Tanger Med Port in Morocco and Durban Port in South Africa; monitor and potentially disrupt U.S. military and economic vessels moving between the Atlantic and Indo-Pacific; and contest U.S. logistics support in a future Indo-Pacific conflict.

A military presence in West Africa would also enable China to expand its influence into the Atlantic. This positions China closer to its other BRI investments in South America and the Caribbean – regions traditionally within the U.S. sphere of influence.

Recommendations: New Administration, New Approach

Each new U.S. presidential administration has a new opportunity to recognize the long-game approach of China's strategy and develop an NSS that contends globally with the pacing challenge. While the Indo-Pacific remains critical, the U.S. cannot ignore the strategic implications of China's activities in Africa and the Atlantic closer to home. Efforts to strengthen ties with African nations, particularly in West Africa, should be prioritized to counter China's influence. Using tools such as Prosper Africa, which started in the last Trump administration, the U.S. can offer countries viable alternatives to Chinese investments that benefit both the U.S. and local economies.

Finally, the U.S. should closely monitor Chinese investments in ports and transportation networks in Africa to assess their potential for dual-use (commercial and military) purposes. Where indications of illicit intent exist, the U.S. should intensify diplomatic and economic efforts to counter China's potential base-building. This is similar to the 2022 Biden administration efforts in Equatorial Guinea, where the U.S. reportedly

engaged directly with Equatorial Guinea's leadership to discourage military agreements with China. The U.S. initially underestimated China's military ambitions in Djibouti, and if the U.S. does not develop a new approach to counter Chinese expansion in the Atlantic, it may face a new strategic surprise in its backyard.

Conclusion

China's Global Security Initiative marks a pivotal evolution in its foreign policy, signaling a shift from an economically centered strategy under the Belt and Road Initiative to a multidimensional global posture grounded in historical doctrine, strategic deception, and military encirclement. Drawing on the teachings of Sun Tzu and Mao Zedong, Beijing is executing a long-game strategy that prioritizes indirect confrontation, misdirection, and incremental advantage. By establishing dual-use infrastructure across Africa's Atlantic coast, China is methodically positioning itself to challenge U.S. dominance, control strategic maritime chokepoints, and enable global power projection. While U.S. national security strategies have remained Indo-Pacific focused, China's calculated actions in Africa reveal a broader encirclement strategy designed to stretch American resources and attention. If left unchecked, China's consolidation of Atlantic access and partnerships will severely undermine U.S. strategic flexibility and homeland defense. To meet this dual-theater challenge, the

United States must recalibrate its national security priorities to recognize Africa not as a secondary front but as a critical arena in the global contest with China.

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Michael Gacheru, Colonel USA, sub-Saharan FAO



Colonel Michael Gacheru has served in military assignments at tactical – through strategic – levels. During his service, he has deployed in support of Operation Desert Spring (Kuwait), Operation Iraqi Freedom (Iraq), Operation Enduring Freedom (Afghanistan), Operation United Assistance (Liberia), and Operation Inherent Resolve (Iraq).

COL Gacheru began his career as an Engineer Officer. After his promotion to Captain, he was assigned as an Infantry Officer until he was selected to be a Foreign Area Officer (FAO) in 2017. As an Infantry Officer, COL Gacheru commanded an Infantry Company in Iraq and served as a battalion operations and executive officer in Afghanistan. He has filled key staff positions at the brigade, division, and Army Service Component Command (ASCC), including serving as the Executive Officer to the Commander, U.S. Army Africa. COL Gacheru has also served with other U.S. agencies when he was

selected as an interagency fellow with the National Geospatial Intelligence Agency – Office of Counterterrorism. As a FAO, COL Gacheru has served at the U.S. Mission in Iraq, U.S. Mission to the EU, U.S. Mission to NATO, U.S. Embassy in Ethiopia, U.S. Africa Command, and U.S. Army Africa. Prior to his selection to attend the Senior Service College at the National Defense University, he served as the Senior Military Advisor to the Minister of Peshmerga Affairs in Erbil, Iraq. His military education includes the Basic and Advanced Officer company grade courses, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, and the Defense Language Institute, where he earned an associate degree in French. As a Sub-Saharan FAO, COL Gacheru is fluent in French and Swahili. He holds a Bachelor of Science in Manufacturing Engineering from Western Illinois University and a Master's in Engineering Management from the University of Missouri. COL Gacheru recently completed a Master's in Strategic Security Studies at the National Defense University and is now assigned to US Africa Command.

End notes continued:
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