

THE CHALLENGES AND DIFFICULTIES OF SINO-US MILITARY DIPLOMACY IN THE AFRICAN CONTINENT

Ailton Jose F. Barbosa,

(International Relations and Chinese Diplomacy, MA
Fudan University, Shanghai, China

Abstract

The Sino-US relationship is increasingly intertwined and this article looks at the military presence of both nations in the African continent. In particular a look from the military present in the post-9/11 world, where the war on terror have been launch by US and where the African continent is see witnessing a rise on terrorism. The article also looks at the Sino-US military action in Africa from the perspective of trade and arms sales where the securitizing a shipping lanes and factories are becoming of great concern for both the Chinese and the Americans. The article also looks at the current race between the more established “Washington consensus, and the relative “Beijing consensus”. This race is taking part in Africa it is part of a bigger race which is for a unipolar and multipolar diplomatic world and the support of each African country is crucial. The Asian and the American contenders are using their military capability to secure support to different African political and institutions.

Keywords: Sino-US diplomacy, Military Diplomacy, Africa

Introduction

The Sino-US (China-American) relationship expands from the simple day-to-day issues like the increasing number of exchanging student between the two countries and their individual diplomatic impact¹⁴⁸, to more complicated issues such as the new race between Beijing and Washington toward the moon¹⁴⁹. The interconnection between these two countries has also clearly presented itself in the “New Scramble” toward the African continent. This paper addresses this recent, yet important development in the Sino-US relations, the military agenda of the Asian and American superpowers toward the African continent. In particularly, exemplifying how each power is tackling current concerns and how they are preparing to address future hesitations.

The research is divided into three sections, in which the first section is the introduction of the article and also serves to highlight the historical background of Sino-American military relationship and their unique entrance to the African affairs. The second section and body of the article will tackle several points. First, in the section 2.1. looks at the post-9/11 world, its diplomatic impact and the fight against terrorism and arms sales in the African continent. Secondly, it describes the different types of leadership agenda pursued by both Washington and Beijing and the support to different African institutions by both Washington and Beijing in section 2.2 and 2.3. The fourth sub-section, 2.4. of the article presents the African voices in regard to understanding the increasing participation of China and United States in Africa’s affairs. Lastly, the article is concluded with the conclusion put in retrospective the implications of the “triangle diplomatic relationship” between the United States, China and

¹⁴⁸ Yang N. More, “More Students Choose to Study Abroad” China Daily 2011-04-25
< http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2011-04/25/content_12383944.htm> (11/14/12)

¹⁴⁹ Hickman J. “Red Moon Rising” July/ August 2012 Foreign Policy Magazine
<http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/06/18/red_moon_rising> (11/14/12)

the different African nations and suggest further research on the subject in section 2.5. The conclusion on the article is presented in the third section of the article.

Historical Background

The initial military interactions between the two nations began in the early 17th century with the entrance of United States into the newly open shores of China. By the end of the First Opium War in 1842, the first Sino-US Treaty was signed: the Treaty of Wanghia¹⁵⁰. The United States continued to be involved in Chinese affairs, and during the political struggle between Chiang Kai-shek and the Kuomintang Party (KMT) against the Communist Party, US supported the former. This support continued in the aftermath of the war, being as most visible with the American propagation for the sovereignty of the Taiwan Island¹⁵¹. In the autumn of 1944, the relationship between Washington and the Chiang Kai-shek's government was not in the same footing, and this ushered by the prospects for friendly relations with the other side, the Chinese Communist Party¹⁵². These ups-and-downs of the Sino-US relations continued during the Cold War era, where China sided with the Soviet Union against the "imperialist" agenda of US. Setting in motion the policy of containment by Washington D.C. which included communist countries like China and neighboring states like Vietnam. Furthermore, to "help" the South Vietnamese in maintaining their non-communist stance, the Lyndon B. Johnson administration continued the Vietnam War and further hopes of containment. On the other hand, then chairman Mao Zedong pronounced that "your [Vietnamese] business is my business; my business is your business"¹⁵³, setting China in direct course of military conformation with United States.

The hostility and the low-communication that plagued the Sino-US military during the Cold war seemed to be coming to an end with the American President Richard M. Nixon's visit in 1972 to Beijing. President Nixon then recognized that the US should help bring China out of its international isolation, in the same way that his predecessor Theodore Roosevelt had advocated and helped bringing the Soviet Union into the international system in 1940¹⁵⁴. Relations between Washington and Beijing experienced a rapid and extensive development during the 1980s with the visit of high elected official and with the visit of the first Chinese head of state visit to US, Deng Xiaoping, the Sino-US military relations once again became "shaky" during the 1990s, in which the bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade became the most critical point for Sino-US relations. Whilst the US stated that the bombings were accidental, China stated that the bombings were deliberately conducted. The US President Bill Clinton gave an official apology to China. Recently, the "China Threat", Beijing military build-up, China's economic growth and the independence of Taiwan, has received a crucial importance in shaping the commanding of the Sino-US military agenda. US leadership often uses this argument in the process of keep a close eye on the Asian country and even in this new military positioning in pacific coast.

The entrance of the Chinese and American military actions in the African continent was the result of a spill-over of the uncertainty by the Cold War. During Mao Zedongs years in power, China aspired to become the leader of the Third World and in its aspiration for "liberation and social revolution", the Chinese government funneled billions of dollars to the recently independent African nations. The United States then swiftly responded by creating anti-China propaganda, a solid support to the independence of Taiwan and by helping the retention of KMT's government seat in the UN Security Council.

¹⁵⁰ The "Treaty of Wanhia" was just one of the many treaties which China was forced to sign after its defeat against international powers during the 19th and early 20th century. Also referred to as the Unequal Treaties.

¹⁵¹ Lantaigne M., Chinese Foreign Policy: An Introduction, Routledge England, 2009

¹⁵² Cohen W. America's Response to China, Columbia University Press-5th Ed., 2010

¹⁵³ Mao L., "China and the Escalation of the Vietnam War: January to July 1965". PhD. Dissertation of University of Georgia, USA 2004

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In the 1970s there was a change in the Chinese approach to the African continent. Lacking the financial backing of the USSR, China “hoped to gain more by spreading revolutionary ideology” in the continent instead of directly funneling money to individual countries. Therefore, it focused more on dissident groups, such as the Sawaba movement in Niger, Tutsi in Burundi and opposition groups in Kenya. This happened despite the fact that the Chinese leadership was committed, at least on paper, to the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and Five Principles of Non-Interference. During this period Washington also conducted its own propaganda in the name of its ideals and also supported dissident groups in various countries.

In the 1980s China began to reverse course and began to establish diplomatic ties with economy goals in mind rather than with strictly ideological or military goals and continue to call for the Non-Alignment Movement. At this period, we witness an existing of United States from African affairs and a concentration of its Aid provision from Washington to different African nations.

Main Text

The diplomatic agenda of both the United States and Chinese toward the African continent cross in many different points. In this chapter these crossing point are evaluated further. First in chapter 2.1., these points are analyzed in a post-9/11 world, where the United States of America is much more aware of terrorist organizations and China is enjoying important political and economic position in African continent. In the following chapter 2.2. and 2.3., the issue of terrorism, and trade and arm sales are presented. Lastly, the Chinese and American competition for a leadership position in the Africa and the support for African institutions are debated in chapter 2.4. and 2.5. respectively.

Post-9/11 World

The Sino-US military diplomacy toward Africa took a new turn with the 9/11 terrorist attacks in United States. Although the attacks in 2001 occurred on American soil, the shock wave was spread around the world and heightened the awareness toward the root cause of such attacks. The United States hastily responded offensively and declared the ongoing “War on Terrorism”¹⁵⁵ and found supporters around the world, including China, to address this new threat. The call for action sent by Washington was well-received by Beijing that presented its solidarity, and gave the Sino-US diplomatic relationship a new boost. Yet, this boost was short-lived. Mass military mobilization, increased presence of the American military in China’s border states like Afghanistan in combination with the US unilateral declaration of war in Iraq, quickly made the Chinese government insecure about the United States military position. At the same, Washington began to include Africa in its strategic war on terror, and recognized that the continent gave the ideal environment for the non-state military groups to appear and spread due to its large number of refugees, potential militants, big stockpile of weapons and a large number of Muslims¹⁵⁶.

In the post-9/11 world, the African continent once again became a territory for military trials for China and United States. This because on the ground, United States’ “Washington Consensus” was now being challenged by China’s relative new term; “Beijing Consensus”¹⁵⁷. China’s position in the African continent was cemented through the establishment of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC)¹⁵⁸ in 2000 which allowed the pursue of economic goals regardless the military situation of different African nations, while

¹⁵⁵Bush G. Addressing the US Congress on September 21. The guardian.com

¹⁵⁶ Bellamy W. M., *U.S. Security Engagement in Africa*. African Security Brief No.1 Pg1

¹⁵⁷ Ramo J. “The Beijing Consensus” Foreign Policy Center. May, 2004

¹⁵⁸ FOCAC-Brings the Chinese Leadership with their Africans counterpart every three years. The FOCAC meeting happened in 2000 in Beijing. Again the Chinese capital help de 2012 FOCAC Meeting.

proclaiming its undisputed commitment toward political and military non-interference. At the same time, China deals diplomatically with the continent through trade rather than aid. This is contrary to the United States approach to issues related to the African continent. The Washington Consensus has emphasized in distributing aid to different African nations with the purpose to spread democracy, human rights and other liberal ideas¹⁵⁹. Therefore, the US military intervention in the continent has been much more pronounced and lasting than their Chinese counterpart. The US has deployed huge military actions to ensure that the values held by Washington to become universal and applied/ exercised in Africa.

Terrorism

In battle against terrorism, the approach of the US and China towards the African continent diverge in the methods deployed, however there is a consensus that eradicating terrorism in Africa should be a common objective. Especially in the Horn of Africa where there has been a long history of internally inspired terror which threatens both domestic and international interests. At same time in the last fifteen years, terrorism in East Africa is also increasing, partly due to the recent push for radical Islamist agendas in the region.¹⁶⁰ The African continent is home to more than the 600 million Muslims, (which is accounts a higher figure than the Middle East), yet this large body of Islamic membership has mostly been “un-radicalized”. However, “little attention from the West, the generally pacific and syncretistic African Islam is being swept aside by a militant Islamism imported from the Middle East.”¹⁶¹

In the light of increase and treat of militarization, the United States has increased its military efforts in the African continent to combat terrorism, and has for instance established the Combined Joint Task Force in Djibouti, in the Horn of Africa¹⁶². The Joint Task Forces originated under Operation Enduring Freedom – Horn of Africa (OEF-HOA) as part of the United States response to the 9/11 attacks¹⁶³. In October 1st 2008, Washington launched the full sub-department under the Department of Defense that deals with African affairs, and named it the African Command (AFRICOM). Newly established department was quasi-military unit, where non-military operation actions could also be taken. Thus, AFRICOM coordinates US military support by bringing the humanitarian work of the State Department, the US Agency for International Development (USAID), and other US government agencies engaged with Africa, under the direction of the US Department of Defense¹⁶⁴.

On the other hand, terrorism in the African continent was something of a less concern to Beijing For once it seemed that the message of hate from the Islamic terrorist groups is directed toward the United States, was not shared toward China¹⁶⁵. Nevertheless, as China expands in the continent it has been caught in the “Cross fire” in terrorist attacks¹⁶⁶. Terrorist activities in the African continent derive mainly from domestic issues and China’s support,

¹⁵⁹ Africa-China-U.S. Trilateral Dialogue Summary Report

<www.cfr.org/content/publications/attachments/Trilateral_Report.pdf>

¹⁶⁰ *More than Humanitarianism: A Strategic U.S. Approach Toward Africa Security and Terrorism Concerns*, Council of Foreign Relations <www.cfr.org/content/publications/.../Africa_Task_Force_Web.pdf> pg.79

¹⁶¹ Pham J. P., “Next Front? Evolving United States-African Strategic Relations in the War on Terrorism and Beyond” Pg.43

¹⁶² *More than Humanitarianism: A Strategic U.S. Approach Toward Africa Security and Terrorism Concerns*, Council of Foreign Relations <www.cfr.org/content/publications/.../Africa_Task_Force_Web.pdf> pg.86

¹⁶³ Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa- *Wikipedia*.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Combined_Joint_Task_Force_%E2%80%93_Horn_of_Africa>

¹⁶⁴ Osikena J. “Geo-politics beyond Washington: Africa's alternative security and development partnerships”. Foreign Policy Center <<http://fpc.org.uk/fsblob/1203.pdf>>

¹⁶⁵ Even though China has large amount of trouble with Muslim groups asking for independence from the predominantly Muslim area of Xinjian, in Africa, China has little trouble.

¹⁶⁶ Nigeria: Chinese Workers Killed by Gunmen in Benisheikh <BBC- <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-20255072>>

through its non-interference policy to the leadership of rogue states¹⁶⁷, are making the Chinese increasing the target over domestic matters. The same can be said to Chinese companies, which are becoming active players in domestic politics with their unique labor practice.

Trade and Arms Sales

Differently than issues of terrorism, the protection of economic trade and the openness of arms sales to the African continent are two issues that are becoming more important to the Chinese camp than of United States'. The rapid economic growth in the last 30 years has pressured domestic resources and forced China to search for natural resources around the world, including African regions that are considered as unstable by Western countries and institutions. An estimated 25% of China's total oil imports currently comes from Africa.¹⁶⁸ For instance in 2009 China received in 16% and 6% of its total crude oil imports from Angola and Sudan respectively.¹⁶⁹ Therefore, securing those energy outlets is a security priority for Beijing¹⁷⁰. At the same time, approximately 2% of total Chinese arms production from 2005-2010 was sold to the African continent¹⁷¹. Even though this figure is relatively small slice of the total weaponry sold to Africa from international arms producers, some of Beijing's African customers hold a poor record on Human Rights and have often been banned by the international community from acquiring weapons. The reason why China can hideaway with selling arms to such countries is again because Beijing "place importance on the sovereign equality and respect for every government's right to determine its own domestic policies"¹⁷²

Faced with this overwhelming situation, Washington finds itself in the defense in trying to maintain a favorite position in Africa. In 2000, the US passed the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) to increase trade with Africa, with the objective to "lower trade barrier, increase investment and improving human rights"¹⁷³. The importance of African's oil fields has also taken a center stage in US energy policy, which has become a reoccurring topic in reports delivered to policy makers.¹⁷⁴ Just over 18% of U.S. oil comes from Africa, and oil makes over 76% of the value of all imports from the continent¹⁷⁵.

The African coastline is of extreme vulnerability and is witnessing an increase in illegal maritime commerce and weapons smuggling. In approaching the situation, the US leadership introduced its first National Strategy for Maritime Security, "identifying the freedom of the seas and the facilitation and defense of commerce as top national priorities and indicating plans to fund border and coastal security initiatives with African countries."¹⁷⁶

¹⁶⁷ Hess, S and Aidoo, R. "Beyond the Rectories: Noninterference in China's African Policy". Africa and Asian Studies (2010) pg.373

¹⁶⁸ Brookes P. "China's Influence in African Implications for the United States". The Heritage Foundation, February 2006

¹⁶⁹ U.S.A. ANNUAL REPORT TO CONGRESS, "Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China" 2011

¹⁷⁰ Hess, S and Aidoo, R. "Beyond the Rectories: Noninterference in China's African Policy". Africa and Asian Studies (2010) pg.375

¹⁷¹ U.S.A. ANNUAL REPORT TO CONGRESS "Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China" 2011

¹⁷² Hess, S and Aidoo, R. "Beyond the Rectories: Noninterference in China's African Policy". Africa and Asian Studies (2010) pg.390

¹⁷³ Brookes P. "China's Influence in African Implications for the United States". The Heritage Foundation, February 2006

¹⁷⁴ Martin W. G. "Beyond Bush: The Future of Popular Movements & US Africa Policy" Review of African Political Economy, Vol. 31, No. 102, (Dec.,2004), pp. 585-597 < <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4007030>> 06/11/2012

¹⁷⁵ Comparing Global Influence: China's and U.S. Diplomacy, Foreign Aid, Trade, and Investment in the Developing World

¹⁷⁶ Ploch, L. "US Africa Command: A More »Active« American Approach to Addressing African Security Challenges?"

< library.fes.de/pdf-files/ipg/ipg-2009-1/06_a_ploch_us.pdf>

Here, one sees a great deal of conversation between Washington and Beijing is establishing joint venture to secure shipping lanes and merchandise transport in the coast line of the African continent.

Leadership Role

The Chinese and American military position in the African continent goes beyond the necessity of the African people and it is rather a reflection of the ongoing battle for leadership of the world between the two super powers. The two countries are not directly engaged in world leadership competition, as USA and the USSR were during the Cold War but Beijing and Washington are in a sort of entanglement best described as a “Hot peace”¹⁷⁷. Much of the dispute generating over the African continent comes from China’s quest for a multipolar world and from the United States’ quest to maintain the status quo. Even though Washington has shown some degree of leadership in the continent, it has failed to draft a long term policy for the continent; approximating to the African shores when needed, but also leaving it as quickly. The nations in the continent have to some extent, been left without any certainty about America’s leadership role and how to adapt to it. Exemplified by the Somalia incident where US soldiers were ruthlessly killed, thus making the US reluctant to intervene in the Darfur Genocide. This uncertainty, has allowed the Chinese some space to maneuver militarily in the continent.

At the same time Beijing recognizes that it holds a unique development model and if the African continent, with its 54 recognized countries, follows the “secret” formula behind the Asian country, this in turn would translate to a tremendous international political cloud. Washington has no doubt felt the closing up of the Chinese government in Africa and it has counterattacked by portraying China in some US media as an “evil empire”¹⁷⁸ looking toward Africa only to quench its thirst for natural resource and market for cheap products.

Support to African Institution

The race between China and the US and the military intervention in the continent by both the American and by the Chinese has not happened without the observant eyes of the African Institutions like the African Union (AU). The AU is an example of organizations which both China and the United States are engaging in the African continent. The two world powers do show a great deal of respect and knowledge toward these institutions, yet both suffer from having mixed records of support where there are high and low notes present. The United States has put out a reasonable effort in reaching out to the AU and other African Institutions, but at the same time it often undercuts its own efforts by acting militarily unilaterally. Similarly the North American policy institutions like USAFACOM have been useful in tackling social issues like AIDS/HIV epidemic with its military arm, but falls far from the expectation while it maintains a high level of weaponry sold to the continent and opposite stricter UN weaponry regulation¹⁷⁹.

As for China, the positive marks of engaging African Institutions comes from the start in the modern Sino-Africa diplomatic agreement; FOCAC. From the start the Chinese spell out its role in support of the different institutions and specially the AU¹⁸⁰. This services China in two ways. First, China maintains itself away from the more sensitive political and military situation, that normally the United States would often find itself in, because Beijing spells out clearly, on paper, its commitment to the non-interference clause. In another word, keeping its non-interference policy in place allows Beijing the space to pursue

¹⁷⁷ Wang J., “ ‘Hot Peace’ -Not Cold War-Between the US and China” *New Perspectives Quarterly* Vol. 18, Issue 3, pages 16–19, Summer 2001 <<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/0893-7850.00412>>

¹⁷⁸ Wang P., Pg. 17

¹⁷⁹ *More than Humanitarianism: A Strategic U.S. Approach Toward Africa Security and Terrorism Concerns*, Council of Foreign Relations <www.cfr.org/content/publications/.../Africa_Task_Force_Web.pdf> pg.89

¹⁸⁰ FOCAC “Six-point Proposal Offered in FOCAC Beijing Declaration to Boost New Strategic Partnership” 2012/07/23 <http://www.focac.org/eng/> (November 2012)

trade independently of international held sanction. Secondly, by following its policy of noninterference, mutual benefits and win-win policy¹⁸¹, Beijing has neglect rules put in place by the AU and United Nations on issues dealing with different African nations, and has finance many of the project put forward by these “Failed States”.

Conclusion

This section presents the conclusion of the article, along with the limitations of this article.

The Sino-US relationship is increasingly becoming intertwined, and this connection can be viewed clearly in their military action in the African continent. In the post-9/11 world, security concerns have sent the two superpowers looking to Africa in the effort to stop or eradicate terrorism there and abroad. Although the African continent is home to large amount of Muslim, many living under hash condition, there have not been little radicalization of this group of people. Still, this is changing fast and many African countries are finding the presence as terrorist cells within their border.

The security concerns for China and US in the African continent also expands to the securitizing of ship lanes and production lines. The rise of economy activity in the African continent has expose both the Asia and North American country to in piracy and other types of terrorist attack. Giving way to a gradually build-up of military presence from both Beijing and Washington in the continent.

The African continent has also become the testing ground for “hot peace” which reins between the China and US. Each country thus looks to secure its military position in the different African countries by first providing weaponry to different ethnical, political or military groups, or extends to other governmental and non-governmental institutions. Lastly, the “new race” undergoing now between Beijing and Washington toward Africa, is the translation of bigger race that is a race for the leadership of the world. Therefore, the African continent finds itself in the racetrack and it is a sort of prize that could dictate the faith of the international world.

Research limitations

This scope of this research is limited; much more conclusive conclusion can be reach once the material expanded. Due to the limitation of time and location, a third voice, the African voice, is not present in the research. This third voice would have increased to a great extend the conclusion of this article.

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¹⁸¹ Hess, S and Aidoo, R. “Beyond the Rectories: Noninterference in China’s African Policy”. Africa and Asian Studies (2010)

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