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Comparing Engagement with Africa by China and the United States
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Interests

By my analysis, China has essentially four interests in Africa. They are:

- Ensure continuing access to oil, minerals, hardwood timber and agricultural products.
- Obtain political support from as many as possible of Africa's fifty-three countries.
- End Taiwan's diplomatic presence in Africa; only four African countries still recognize Taiwan.
- As a longer term interest, increase Chinese exports to Africa.

As I see it, the United States has five interests in Africa. They are:

- Ensure continuing access to oil.
- Obtain political support from as many as possible of Africa's countries.
- Increase U.S. exports to Africa.
- Gain the support of African countries in the fight against terrorism, drug smuggling and international crime.
- Maintain access for U.S. military aircraft to over fly/land in African countries and for U.S. Navy ships to dock in African ports.

The interests of China and the United States in Africa are surprisingly similar. They have three interests that are essentially the same. China has one unique interest and the United States has two that are peculiar to its situation.

Strategy

China has a long-term strategy for Africa even if it has only been well articulated in recent years. Its top-down, communist system of government has the advantage of being able to determine with some certainty its foreign policy one or even two decades into the future. There has been a relative continuity of strategy in China's Communist Party leadership, although there can be significant policy changes as happened after Deng Xiaoping took power. China's attention to the past and its own long history provide a backdrop for thinking long-term and strategically.

American democracy does not lend itself easily to long-term strategic thinking. Power changes every four or eight years in the executive branch and rarely do administrations develop foreign policies that can be assured of lasting beyond four years. Sometimes administrations have trouble thinking beyond the next month. The American democratic system places considerable power in the hands of Congress when foreign policy decisions require funding, making it more difficult to plan ahead with certainty. Private interest groups can have an enormous and unpredictable impact on long-term foreign policy initiatives. Being a relatively young nation, the United States does not have a history of sweeping foreign policy strategic concepts. Isolationism, anti-communism or containment and more recently support for democratization and counterterrorism tend to be medium term strategies. Isolationism, although occasionally interrupted, lasted longer than the others.

Policies

President Hu Jintao laid out China's current policy towards Africa in a speech on 16 February 2009 during a visit to Dar es Salaam. The key points were:

- Faithfully implement decisions reached at the Beijing Summit in 2006, increase economic assistance within China's capacity, cancel debt and expand trade.
- Step up high level contact and continue to participate in UN peacekeeping operations in Africa.
- Institute preferential measures to increase imports from Africa and increase technology transfers to Africa.
- Increase educational and cultural cooperation.
- Deepen cooperation with African countries in multilateral organizations such as the UN and World Trade Organization on issues like climate change, food security, poverty alleviation and development.
- Strengthen the structure of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC).

The Acting Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Phil Carter, described U.S. policy towards Africa during remarks in Washington on 9 February 2009. He made the following key points:

- Provide security assistance programs that are critical to securing the objective of a peaceful African continent, including the elimination of the ability of terrorists to operate in the region.
- Promote democratic systems and practices and support the rise of freedom.
- Encourage sustainable and broad-based, market-led economic growth.
- Support health and social development, especially the reduction of HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria.

While the interests of China and the United States are surprisingly similar, the stated policies of the two countries are largely dissimilar. China says that it is primarily interested in cooperation with Africa while the United States encourages change.

Structures

In the case of China, decision-making is concentrated at the top. The highest organ of executive power is the State Council, which includes the premier, vice premiers, ministers and others. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs advises Chinese leaders and helps implement African policy. It divides responsibility between a unit for Sub-Saharan Africa and one for West Asia and North Africa. China created FOCAC in 2000 to coordinate interaction with the entire continent, both Sub-Saharan and North Africa. FOCAC meets at the chief-of-state level every three years. The next summit will take place this year in Egypt.

The Ministry of Commerce plays an important role in trade, aid and investment. It has a Department of Foreign Aid. China's State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission (SASAC) ranks equally with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Commerce. SASAC is either sole owner of a state-owned enterprise (SOE) or maintains a controlling share of stock in a public SOE, many of which have business in Africa. SASAC has branch offices in Africa. China's Export-Import Bank is the only state-owned entity that distributes official economic assistance in the form of low interest loans, export credits and guarantees.

The Communist Party of China's (CPC) International Department interacts with African counterparts to lay the foundation for commercial and diplomatic cooperation, exchange visits and ensure that policies are implemented in accordance with CPC strategic objectives. China's Central Military Commission/People's Liberation Army has frequent interaction with African counterpart military organizations. Xinhua, which has deep roots in Africa, has regional bureaus in Cairo and Nairobi and more than twenty branch offices throughout Africa that report on developments in Africa and feed information to African news services.

China's twenty-two provinces, five autonomous regions, four municipalities, and two special administrative regions (Hong Kong and Macau), although taking direction from the CPC, have their own interaction with African countries and cities. Their main interest is trade promotion, obtaining African contracts (usually for large infrastructure projects), encouraging investment in China and to a lesser extent providing aid to Africa. Chinese medical teams are usually sourced from a Chinese province and then twinned with an African country. Many state-owned enterprises operate directly from these local Chinese jurisdictions. Chinese provinces have fifty-two twin relationships with African countries while twenty-two Chinese cities have sister city ties to African cities.

China has forty-eight embassies in Africa, one for every country with which it has diplomatic relations except Somalia. Because of the security situation, only a few countries have embassies in Mogadishu. It also has nine independent consulates in Africa. The only African country that recognizes China and does not have an embassy in Beijing is the Comoro Islands.

U.S. structures for dealing with Africa are generally better understood. The president takes advice from the National Security Council, relevant departments of government and Congress before making the most important African policy decisions. The Africa Bureau of the State Department has responsibility for Sub-Saharan Africa while the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs is responsible for North Africa. State often

shares responsibility with the Department of Defense on security matters, Department of Commerce and U.S. Trade Representative on trade issues, Treasury on international debt and financial issues, FBI on legal matters, etc. The State Department and the Voice of America share the public diplomacy effort. The U.S. Agency for International Development and Millennium Challenge Corporation are the principal assistance agencies while the Export-Import Bank and Overseas Private Investment Corporation play important roles in trade and investment.

The Director of National Intelligence, CIA, National Security Agency, Defense Intelligence Agency and State Department's Intelligence and Research Bureau provide intelligence support. The new Africa Command (AFRICOM) has the lead on military-to-military relations.

American state governments have limited relationships with African countries; they tend to be confined to the exchange of trade missions. One hundred and fourteen American cities have a sister city relationship with about one hundred African cities.

The United States has forty-eight embassies in Africa, the same number as China, and seven consulates or branch offices, two fewer than China. Four African countries that recognize the United States do not have embassies in Washington, although two of them have missions accredited to the United States at the UN in New York.

China and the United States have some structures in common, such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs/State Department, Export-Import Banks and embassy operations throughout Africa. Both the State Department and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs divide responsibility for Africa between Sub-Saharan and North Africa. Other structures are very different. The United States has nothing comparable to China's Communist Party, FOCAC, its large state-owned enterprises or its State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission. Organizations such as Xinhua and the Voice of America may appear at first glance to be similar, but they are actually very different. For its part, China has nothing like the Millennium Challenge Corporation, AFRICOM or a legislative branch that exerts considerable influence on policy in Africa.

Tactics

Tactically, the United States and China use essentially the same political, economic, military and cultural tools for implementing their relations with Africa. The emphasis the two countries place on these tactics, however, and the way they implement policy varies considerably. China presents itself more humbly in its interaction with Africa. Having served as the leader of the Western world since the end of the Second World War and the only superpower since the end of the Cold War, the United States often comes across in Africa as insensitive and arrogant.

China emphasizes high-level personal contact with African government leaders. President Hu Jintao has made six trips to Africa, two as vice president and four as president. While serving as president, Clinton and Bush each visited Africa twice over the past sixteen years. Premier Wen Jiabao is a frequent visitor to Africa. Vice President Cheney never visited Sub-Saharan Africa. China's foreign minister has made his first overseas visit every year since 1991 to Africa. If you exclude visits to Cairo in connection with Middle East issues, there have been many years since 1991 that the American Secretary of State never visited Africa. China has also placed more emphasis

on visits to Africa by senior members of the CPC, senior military officials, provincial officials, etc. In addition, China has a particularly active program of inviting African leaders to China. The United States has done less well in receiving African leaders in Washington for bilateral visits, but has been able to take advantage of the presence of the UN in New York and World Bank and IMF in Washington to arrange brief high-level meetings as African leaders visit those institutions.

The United States has a natural advantage in building relations with civil society, non-governmental organizations, labor unions, opposition political parties and university communities. China is still struggling with some of these groups because it has had so little experience in dealing with them. Both China and the United States interact effectively with the African business community, although the Chinese government and business sector are currently working harder at this goal than the U.S. government and private sector.

Nearly all of the assistance provided to Africa by the United States is in the form of grants. The amounts during the Bush administration increased significantly and were focused in the areas of humanitarian aid, combating HIV/AIDS, TB and malaria and human capacity building.

China offers a modest amount of grant aid, but is much better known for its huge, low-interest, long-term loans. In recent years, they have totaled, for example, \$13 billion for Angola, \$9 billion for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and \$5 billion for Niger. In many cases, the African countries draw down the loan by shipping oil or minerals to China until it is paid off. The recipient countries use most of the loan money for major infrastructure projects built by Chinese companies, which use a significant amount of Chinese material and sometimes large numbers of Chinese laborers. China describes its relationship with Africa as “win-win.” In this case, it is “win-win-win,” one win for Africa and two for China as much of the loan money never even leaves China.

China is setting up special economic zones in Africa that offer Chinese companies favorable incentives, tax breaks and reliable electric power. They have been established or are under construction in Zambia, Nigeria, Egypt, Ethiopia, and Mauritius. The United States has no comparable program.

Chinese medical teams to Africa date back to 1963 and have been a big success. Over the years more than 15,000 Chinese medical personnel have treated an estimated 170 million African patients. For its part, since 1961 the highly successful U.S. Peace Corps has sent more than 60,000 volunteers to forty-six African countries. China responded several years ago with a volunteer program of its own. In 2009, it will send 300 young Chinese to Africa.

China became active in UN peacekeeping operations in Africa beginning in 2000. Today, it has about 1,600 Chinese personnel assigned to Africa with the largest contingents in Liberia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, southern Sudan and Darfur. By comparison, the United States has just over forty Americans assigned to UN peacekeeping operations in Africa.

The United States has a more robust military presence in Africa. The Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa military base in Djibouti has about 1,400 personnel who are working primarily on counterterrorism. China has no military bases in Africa. U.S. naval vessels frequently visit African ports and military aircraft often over fly or land in African airports. The only naval visits to African ports by the modern Chinese navy

occurred in 2000 and 2002. From the beginning, the United States has been active in the anti-piracy effort off Somalia. China did send recently two destroyers and a supply ship to the Gulf of Aden to assist with this effort

Another major difference is the presence of Chinese communities in Africa. Those in South Africa, Madagascar and Mauritius date back more than a century. More recent arrivals of Chinese small traders and business persons are creating new communities in Africa. The United States has nothing comparable, although Liberia has always had a close connection because some of its current population originated with former slaves from the United States.

Conclusion

Since the mid-1990s, China has made an all out effort to gain favor in Africa. It has had considerable success and in some countries Chinese influence now surpasses that of the United States. The second term of the Clinton administration significantly increased the attention it gave Africa but was not able to increase significantly financial support for the continent. The Bush administration tripled the amount of aid to Africa, but did not increase the personal contact or attention.

The net result so far this decade is that China has advanced its interests in Africa to a greater extent than the United States has done. The global financial crisis will adversely affect both China's and the United States' ability to enhance relations with Africa. The United States still has more resources than China but China is in relatively better economic shape following the financial meltdown. If current trends continue, China may have the short-term advantage in Africa.