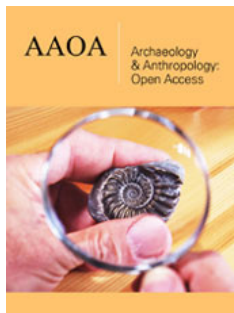


Is Security and Economic Development Closely Intertwined in China-Africa Ties?

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Opinion

Historically, there was a clear distinction between the United States and China's roles in Africa. Initially, while the United State centers its backing on military counterterrorism, China centers its backing on the promotion of economic development. However, nowadays, the distinction is gradually changing with China gradually shifting away from resources extractor to long-term strategic partner; Djibouti is a prime instance. China has not been known for establishing a military base in Africa-or even beyond its immediate sphere of influence. In recent time, this is changing following China's decision to build a military base in Djibouti on the Horn of Africa. China will be able to use this base to improve the way it manages its peacekeeping operations and humanitarian efforts in Africa, protect its investment and its regional maritime operation.

China has become conscious that insecurity and instability in Africa can influence its economic interest. This is because China believes that an Africa that is economically vibrant and whose government and security apparatus are capable of sustaining investment and trade are not only beneficial to the African population, its benefits China's commerce and workers in Africa as well. As a result, in the wake of the shifting security setting, and with the emergence of novel security threats, the safety of Chinese investment and inhabitants in Africa has turn out to be a diplomatic priority for the Chinese government. As a result, vital terms like "human development", "security", "common prosperity", and "peace" are incorporated prominently in China's several white papers on Africa.

While recognizing the significance of closely linking security with economic development, during Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang recent speeches on Africa they clearly illustrate how China's viewpoint on security is closely intertwined with the economic development of Africa. Their speeches clearly illustrate that China is unambiguously seeking to upgrade counterterrorism collaboration with the continent, given Africa's struggle with militants including Boko Haram in Nigeria, al-Shabab in Somalia, and al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in northwestern Africa. China's goal is to build up African capabilities so that African nations - as well as organizations like the African Union - can ensure their own stability. This is another move that will necessarily surge China-Africa security ties.

With China's commercial footprint further mounting across the continent inspired by the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Chinese stakeholders have assumed a snowballing role in filling the security void, particularly in lawless and volatile regions extending from the Indian Ocean to the Horn of Africa where numerous Chinese workers are working on various BRI projects. According to the recent data by the China Africa Research Initiative (CARI), by 2017 a total of 202, 689 Chinese citizens working in numerous Chinese firms in Africa. These numbers comprise of Chinese workers sent to work in Chinese firms' construction contracts ("workers on contracted projects") and Chinese workers sent to work for non-Chinese firms ("workers doing labor services"); these two categories of Chinese workers do not comprise of informal migrants like shopkeepers and traders.

So, at this point in time, Chinese Private Companies (PSCs) who Helena and Nouwens in their report referred to as the "guardians" of the BRI are evolving to offer security to Chinese

inhabitants and investment projects along lawless and volatile BRI routes. As a result, the BRI, thus, acts as a catalyst for the further internationalization of Chinese PSCs as the BRI as well as the “go global” policy drives Chinese state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and other private companies to expand their footprint across the continent of Africa, normally into numerous lawless and volatile environments. Notably, the expansion of the BRI permits Chinese PSCs to explore untapped opportunities along the BRI routes, making the Chinese PSCs a noteworthy option to fill the security gap surrounding Chinese personnel and assets across the continent of Africa.

Nevertheless, for several Chinese security firms that are starting to operate on the continent, Chinese law does not allow Chinese inhabitants to have and discharge weapons abroad. In contrast, the United States allows its inhabitants to have and discharge weapon overseas. So far, only Beijing-based Hua Zin Zhong an (HXZA) firm

has been permitted legally by the Chinese law to offer consulting and hands-on security services to large Chinese firms operating on aboard shipping vessels as well as on land in Africa. At the moment, HXZA has demonstrated its capability to work to globally-identified standards and to improve the firm’s effectiveness while at the same time looking at the safety of Chinese stakeholders as well as ensure the continuation of Chinese commercial activities across the continent of Africa.

During a recent surge in piracy activity in Africa, HXZA successfully entered a public-private partnership with some nations in the East and West African region’s security sector, extending its security service to Ethiopia and Djibouti. Based on this partnership, at present, it can be said that the Chinese security firm has established a place in the African market by offering armed guard services to Chinese commercial vessels transiting via waters and land where risk is high in terms of hijacking and kidnapping.

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