

# SPECIAL REPORT

NO. 521 | JULY 2023

UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE [www.usip.org](http://www.usip.org)

## Chinese Professional Military Education for Africa: Key Influence and Strategy

By Paul Nantulya



President Xi Jinping welcomes President Filipe Jacinto Nyusi of Mozambique to Beijing on May 18, 2016. (Photo by Mark Schiefelbein/AP)

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### Summary

- The role of China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) in accomplishing Beijing's political and ideological goals is called "military political work." A subset of such work is China's version of professional military education (PME).
- China's PME treats the education and training of foreign military personnel as an opportunity to promote China's governance model to develop closer relationships with foreign militaries and governments and to build a shared understanding of security.
- Each year, thousands of African officers from many different countries attend training programs in China and participate in dialogues and exchanges with their Chinese counterparts. Many alumni of these programs go on to play leading roles in their countries' militaries and governments.
- Chinese PME is embedded within a larger framework designed to generate political support through party-to-party work, assistance in building infrastructure, and multifaceted soft power campaigns.
- US policymakers should respond to China's effective use of PME by expanding opportunities for African officers and making PME part of its own package of targeted human resource development.



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## ABOUT THE REPORT

This report offers a policy-oriented analysis of the evolution of China's provision of professional military education to African officers. It draws on historical and contemporary records and feedback from African officers, the latter including interviews conducted for this report with 20 African officers. It was commissioned by the United States Institute of Peace's Asia Center.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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### United States Institute of Peace

2301 Constitution Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20037

(202) 457-1700  
[www.USIP.org](http://www.USIP.org)

Special Report no. 521. First published 2023.

ISBN: 978-1-60127-919-4



UNITED STATES  
INSTITUTE OF PEACE PRESS



Chinese leader Xi Jinping welcomes the presidents of Egypt, Kenya, Liberia, Sierra Leone, South Africa, and other African leaders to Forum on China-Africa Cooperation summit in Beijing on September 3, 2018. (Photo by How Hwee Young/Pool Photo via AP)

## Introduction

There is more to China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) than warfighting. Focusing solely on its military capabilities fails to capture the full range of its activities. Mao Zedong himself proclaimed that those who think the PLA's task is merely to fight fail to understand that it is the armed body for carrying out political and revolutionary tasks. Indeed, the PLA is the army of the Communist Party of China (CPC)—not an entity separate from the party.

The 2020 edition of “Political Work Regulations of the Peoples Liberation Army” requires the PLA to shape its environment to accomplish objectives set for it by the CPC.<sup>1</sup> The military's role in accomplishing political and ideological goals is called “military political work” (军队政治工作学), which the “Political Work Regulations” defines as encompassing the human dimensions of warfare—principally, the “three warfares”: psychological warfare (心理战), public opinion warfare (舆论战), and legal warfare (法律战).<sup>2</sup>

Psychological warfare, as conceived by the CPC, seeks to manipulate the psychological workings of the opponent's leadership and society by displaying China's martial capabilities, civilian competencies, convening power, and ability to expand China's “circle of friends.” Public opinion warfare seeks to shape domestic and international public opinion to build support for China and to look for and exploit discontent in the opponent's political system and dissuade them from taking actions to counter China's interests. Legal warfare aims to shape the international legal

environment in which China operates, manage potential political repercussions of its activities, and build international support.<sup>3</sup>

The three warfares, which the PLA pays as much attention to as it does to military operations, also seek to enhance the CPC's "discourse power" (话语权)—meaning the power to shape positive perceptions of China while isolating opponents. The 20th CPC National Congress in October 2022 called on the party to "accelerate the development of China's discourse and narrative systems, better tell China's stories, make China's voice heard, and present a China that is credible, appealing, and respectable."<sup>4</sup>

This report discusses Chinese professional military education (PME) as a subset of military political work and a vector of the three warfares. Specifically, it focuses on China's provision of PME to members of African militaries. PME is viewed by the "Political Work Regulations" as one of the human dimensions of warfare as it seeks to shape the cognitive domain and is complementary to the three warfares. Broadly speaking, PME describes the professional training and education of military personnel, typically conducted at universities, academies, schools, and similar institutions.

Africa has received significant attention from China in this regard. Between 2008 and 2016, for instance, China conducted 294 military engagements in 40 African countries.<sup>5</sup> Of those, no fewer than 259 were leadership visits and exchanges, guided tours of PLA facilities, and dialogues—reflecting China's emphasis on the political uses of military power.<sup>6</sup> Only 22 engagements were naval port calls, and 13 were military exercises. By comparison, in Asia, the PLA conducted 1,151 engagements between 2003 and 2016, of which 842 were military exchanges and dialogues, 105 were naval port calls, and 204 were military drills.<sup>7</sup> In Latin America, only eight were military exercises and 12 were naval port calls, while 222 were senior-level meetings and dialogues. The Middle East hosted 10 military drills, 76 naval port calls, and 113 leadership meetings and exchanges. These comparisons reveal a key characteristic of the PLA: nonmilitary activities, usually in the form of leadership exchanges, political engagements, and dialogue forums, far outweigh military exercises and operations as a mechanism for exercising political influence, at least for the time being. In each case, the military exchanges and dialogues build on expansive PME engagements, mostly in Chinese military academies.

This report begins by describing the PLA's support for African independence movements during the decolonization period and then examines recent trends in Chinese PME, focusing on the training African officers receive in China. Next, the report sketches the larger political context and ideological framework within which Chinese PME functions. The report then explores how China has used the ties its PME has created or strengthened to overcome political differences with African countries and to serve its broader strategic interests. The penultimate section examines the impressions African officers have of Chinese PME and how it compares with what the West offers. The final section discusses key takeaways and policy implications for American policymakers and military educators as they consider what China's PME approach in Africa means in the context of strategic competition with China, which both the 2022 US National Security Strategy and the US National Defense Strategy identify as a strategic priority.

The sources for this report include an array of historical and contemporary records, studies, and reports from Africa, China, and the West that address Chinese military education in general

and PME in particular. The research encountered problems posed by some Chinese sources that reflect the official CPC line and are in tune with its propaganda narratives. These were cross-checked against authoritative Chinese military texts and directives in the open-source domain to represent the PLA as completely as possible. The report also draws on the results of a survey of African officers who have been educated in China and the United States and other Western countries. The officers' views were gathered via written responses to questions and discussions conducted during the author's extended stay in East Africa during the COVID-19 lockdowns of 2021. Due to time and travel constraints, the sample was kept small at 20 officers. The identities of the respondents and, in some cases, of their countries are not disclosed when the interviewees requested anonymity. The comments of a wider group of officers who have gone on the record (e.g., through their writings or interviews with journalists) are also interspersed throughout the study.

## PLA Support for African Independence Movements

The PLA's overseas military political work dates back to its support for anti-colonial movements in the Global South in the early 1950s. The PLA trained at least one movement in nearly every African territory that fought for independence.<sup>8</sup> However, its deployments were modest.<sup>9</sup> China sent 3,418 military experts to Africa between 1965 and 1980.<sup>10</sup> Overall, 17,000 African guerillas received Chinese training in Africa and 3,022 in China. Cuba and the Soviet Union made far greater commitments. The Soviet Union, for example, established bases in six African locations and supplied troops, advisers, and heavy weaponry such as tanks, aircraft, and even aerial defense systems. Cuban troops, which numbered about 337,000 by 1986, conducted major combat operations in Africa—something China did not commit to at any point.<sup>11</sup>

The PLA prioritized military political work over major military commitments and displays of military power. It trained guerillas in China and systematically exposed them to China's society and political system. From the 1960s through the early 1990s, PLA trainers were stationed in countries that hosted liberation movements, including Algeria, Egypt, Ghana, Tanzania, Zaire, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. The Organization of African Unity (OAU) Liberation Committee coordinated military support for these movements from its headquarters in Tanzania. The PLA supported the committee's work by stationing instructors in various rear bases in Tanzania.

The PLA curricula covered several ideological themes: the "Third World" as the main force in world affairs, armed struggle as a method of liberation, and the need for a united front against American (and Soviet) superpower hegemony.<sup>12</sup> Evidence of this ideological grounding is reflected in the training manuals of the movements the PLA trained.<sup>13</sup> According to Mbulelo Musi, a veteran of Umkhonto We Sizwe, the armed wing of South Africa's African National Congress (ANC), the PLA's training model focused on anti-imperialism, the protracted nature of liberation struggle, the world balance of forces, the primacy of political and ideological intent, and respect for "the people." Operationally, the PLA stressed the "criticality of planning and flexible employment of our forces."<sup>14</sup>

The PLA also influenced the organizational development of the groups it trained. Thami

Ka Plaatjie, a veteran of the Azania People's Liberation Army (APLA), the armed wing of the Pan Africanist Congress, and currently a senior advisor in the South African government, noted, "It is clear that the structure of the APLA was based closely on that of the Chinese PLA. The high command included a commander, chief political commissar, chief of staff, functional directors, and regional commanders. APLA was also equipped with a revolutionary ideology and significant effort went into the ideological education of cadres."<sup>15</sup> This structure was also used by the ANC and the liberation movements of Algeria, Angola, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Namibia, and Zimbabwe, among many other countries.<sup>16</sup>

The doctrine of "people's war" (人民战争), sometimes called "protracted people's war," guided the vast majority of Africa's movements, including those that sided with the Soviet Union after the Sino-Soviet split of 1960. It was seen as a cheap but effective blueprint for waging war; African fighters called it "poor man's war." Its wide use extends to movements now in power in Eritrea, Rwanda, South Sudan, and Uganda. The Ethiopia People's Revolutionary Democratic Front, which ruled Ethiopia from 1991 to 2019, also employed it. Reflecting on the Ugandan case, General Muhoozi Kainerugaba, the former commander of the Uganda People's Defence Force Land Forces, explains: "Whenever [Ugandan president Yoweri Museveni] was wracked by doubt, he returned to Mao Zedong orthodoxy. . . . There were remarkable similarities [in Mao's and Museveni's circumstances], so it was patently obvious to Museveni that of all the theorists of war, Mao was the most compelling and relevant."<sup>17</sup>

However, there was more to the PLA than just fighting. The CPC complemented the PLA's military political work by orchestrating numerous political, cultural, and educational exchanges; conducting a host of trainings of government personnel; and carrying out considerable media and propaganda work to shape public opinion and discredit Western powers and the Soviet bloc. Between 1958 and 1964 alone, the CPC sent 144 missions to Africa for political exchanges and received 405 African delegations in turn.<sup>18</sup> These were arranged by the Office of the Premier, the National People's Congress, and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, as well as numerous CPC "front" organizations such as the All China Students Federation, the Union of Chinese Writers, and the China Islamic Association, which was active in North Africa. The PLA has its own CPC "front organization," the Chinese People's Association for International Friendly Contact, which was heavily involved in these activities. Front organizations were established by the CPC's United Front Work Department to engage well-placed individuals and institutions outside the CPC and China to support Chinese narratives, policies, and stances. The CPC defined this flurry of exchanges as "revolutionary (military) political work" and "armed propaganda" to entrench China firmly within African public opinion as the most committed champion of African independence.

China also deployed military and civilian Chinese Medical Teams (CMTs) annually to African countries, starting in Algeria in 1963.<sup>19</sup> Each CMT consisted of anywhere between 25 and 100 military and civilian personnel who served two-to-three-year tours. And at any time during the Cold War, there were about 40 CMTs operating throughout Africa.

The most enduring demonstration of Chinese support for African independence was not directly related to PME, although it had a military dimension. The Chinese-funded 1,160-mile (1,860-km) Tanzania-Zambia Railway, known as TAZARA or the Uhuru Railway (*uhuru* means



The Tanzania-Zambia Railway was built by the Railway Engineering Corps of the People's Liberation Army in the early 1970s and remains a symbol of China's support for Africa's independence movements. (Photo by Yuzu2020/iStock)

“freedom” in Kiswahili), provided landlocked Zambia access to the sea via Dar es Salaam. It also reduced Zambia's and Tanzania's dependence on the transport infrastructure of apartheid South Africa, allowing them to provide more effective military support to Africa's liberation movements.<sup>20</sup> This project was a long-standing OAU military goal for which Tanzania and Zambia failed to raise funding from the United States, Japan, the World Bank, and even the Soviet Union. TAZARA demonstrated China's military political work in action. It was built in the early 1970s by the PLA's Railway Engineering Corps and a workforce of 50,000 Chinese (some of them PLA recruits) and 60,000 Africans recruited from the youth leagues of Tanzania's and Zambia's ruling parties, as well as from the Tanzanian military's National Youth Service.

TAZARA generated more political capital for China than relying solely on military contributions would have. Former Tanzanian prime minister and OAU secretary general Salim Ahmed Salim notes that TAZARA was the chief reason why the OAU mobilized support for Beijing at the crucial vote that restored its seat at the United Nations in 1971.<sup>21</sup> China has invested in keeping these solidarities alive because memories of the anti-colonialism and anti-apartheid struggles resonate strongly, particularly in Southern Africa, which was decolonized much later than the rest of Africa.

However, not all of China's efforts to keep memories of its anti-colonial contributions alive have been successful. For instance, China funded construction of TAZARA Memorial Park, a

By far the most substantial element of PLA engagement in Africa over the past two decades has been in foreign PME. Knowledgeable African officers say China's programs are on a scale and scope that is unmatched by other foreign partners.

huge complex that opened in Lusaka, Zambia, on August 10, 2022.<sup>22</sup> The park is dedicated to those who died building TAZARA, but it seems to visibly prioritize—with prominent Chinese and PLA martial messages, murals, and iconography—the Chinese dead. This pronounced Chinese emphasis triggered angry posts on social media, with some Tanzanian and Zambian commenters reminding the Chinese embassy in Zambia that more Africans than

Chinese died building TAZARA. Violent protests erupted in Zambia.<sup>23</sup> In response to heavy Tanzanian and Zambian government pressure, China appears to have committed to rehabilitating the railway, which over the years has fallen into a state of disrepair.

Beyond this lesson on respecting African sensitivities, China has also learned practical lessons from TAZARA. The most important of these is the wisdom of building political support through intensive political work, massive infrastructure projects, and extensive soft power campaigns, with minimal use of military power. China's current Africa strategy continues to place heavy emphasis on these elements while maintaining a lighter military footprint than its great power competitors for influence in Africa. The PLA's deployments on the continent entail peacekeepers, medical teams, small groups of instructors, and occasional visits of the PLA hospital ship *Peace Ark* on humanitarian missions. By African governments' count, by 2017, over 20,000 CMTs had served in Africa, treating an estimated 270 million people. As during the Cold War, at least 40 CMTs are active in Africa in any year.<sup>24</sup> The more operational aspects of the PLA are its anti-piracy patrols, which started in 2008. However, these occur largely outside public view. Likewise, the PLA naval base in Djibouti tends to receive little media attention around Africa.

## Trends in Chinese PME for African Officers

By far the most substantial element of PLA engagement in Africa over the past two decades has been in foreign PME. Knowledgeable African officers say China's programs are on a scale and scope that is unmatched by other foreign partners.<sup>25</sup> The proportion of Chinese PME that happens in Africa, however, is much smaller than that which involves training African officers in China.

China is tapping an existing demand in this regard. In 2019, a survey of 742 rising African military professionals by the US government's Africa Center for Strategic Studies found that 97 percent held international training in high regard. The vast majority said international training was the most influential factor in determining their service's identity.<sup>26</sup> Meanwhile, military academies and colleges have sprouted across Africa; there were as many as 118 as of February 2022.<sup>27</sup> China, which since the 2000s has gradually emerged as an important destination for military education, has engaged in a concerted marketing campaign to respond to this demand by increasing African enrollment in its schools. However, it still lags far behind the United States, other Western powers, and even India in the running of PME programs in military schools on African soil.



African officers train in three types of schools in China: midlevel command and academic institutions, such as the command colleges of the PLA's service arms; higher specialized academic and professional institutions, such as the PLA's medical universities, the Chinese Ministry of Defense's Peacekeeping Training Center, the Police Peacekeeping Training Center for the People's Armed Police and related academies; and strategic-level schools, such as the PLA National Defense University (NDU) and its component colleges. Sometimes, officers also attend political schools such as the Pudong Cadre College (officially called the China Executive Leadership Academy, Pudong). African students are exposed to China's military system and political practices in many ways, including classroom teaching, exposure visits, and China's PME model itself. Every school is led by a commandant and a political commissar of equal rank and authority. Political commissars (政委) are an integral part of the directing and teaching staff and participate in designing the course content and methodology of instruction.

The PLA Army Command College in Nanjing—which oversees China's International Military Education Exchange Center—is the school with the highest number of African students. It includes among its African alumni 10 chiefs of defense; eight defense ministers; the former presidents of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Laurent Kabila), Guinea-Bissau (João Bernardo Viera), Namibia (Sam Nujoma), and Tanzania (Jakaya Kikwete); and the current presidents of Eritrea (Isaias Afewerki) and Zimbabwe (Emmerson Mnangagwa).<sup>28</sup> Mozambique's president Filipe Nyusi visited this college in May 2016 to thank its directing staff for training his Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO).<sup>29</sup> Nyusi also visited Nanjing itself, which has a large Mozambican community and plays host to the China Mozambique Business Forum. By 2016, 94 Mozambicans had graduated from this college, including the longest-serving army chief, General Lagos Lidimo. Several Ugandan commanders have studied there, including General Fred Mugisha, who commanded the African Union Mission to Somalia forces from 2009 to 2011 before becoming joint chief of staff of the Ugandan military.<sup>30</sup>

Other schools that have been popular with African officers include the 4th Department of Military College (Nanjing), the 4th Department of Higher Military College (Beijing), and the Foreign Training Department of the College for Defense Studies (Beijing). In 2017, they were merged into the PLA International College for Defense Studies (ICDS), which the PLA markets heavily to African countries. Sometimes close to half of its students are from Africa, as was the case in 2017, when 60 of 134 students were African.<sup>31</sup> Speaking about the course he took at the ICDS, Colonel Ngwah Abdoulaye Kenyiveh of Cameroon said, "It gave me a clear insight into the economic metamorphosis of the People's Republic of China, and a broad view of international and national security issues."<sup>32</sup>

The PLA NDU receives an annual intake of several hundred African officers. Formed in 1985 from the merger of the PLA Military College, the PLA Political College, and the PLA Logistics College, the PLA NDU has a distinguished list of African alumni that includes former Democratic Republic of the Congo president Joseph Kabila and General David Muhoozi, the former commander of the Uganda People's Defense Forces and currently the country's internal affairs minister.<sup>33</sup> Beginning in 2015, Ethiopian senior officers slated to become generals have attended a graduate-level "Ethiopian Senior Leaders Course" at China's NDU as a "finishing course," though the practice was interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>34</sup> Other long-standing PME destinations in China for African officers include the PLA Army Infantry College, the PLA Academy of Armored Forces, and the



During a five-nation tour in Africa in January 2023, China's foreign minister, Qin Gang—shown here in Addis Ababa with Moussa Faki Mahamat, chair of the African Union Commission—declared that accelerating China-Africa military exchanges, which had been slowed during the pandemic, would be a “top priority.” (Photo by AP)

Dalian Naval Academy, which has trained Tanzanian officers annually since 1965.<sup>35</sup>

Specialized PLA schools have seen a significant uptick in African attendance over the past decade. The People's Armed Police, which has become increasingly active in Africa's security sector,

was placed under the control of the Central Military Commission in 2017, and thus its academies qualify as part of China's system of military education and training. According to the Chinese government, 2,000 African police and paramilitary personnel have attended various police academies, including the Police Command College in Hebei Province and the People's Public Security University in Beijing.<sup>36</sup> Over the same period, 500 officers from 16 African countries have graduated from the PLA Naval Medical University.

China's Peacekeeping Training Center in Huairou District in Beijing has also become increasingly popular with African students. African countries are keen to develop and deploy peacekeepers, and China is well-placed to help. China contributes more peacekeepers to international missions than the other permanent members of the UN Security Council combined, and over 80 percent serve in Africa.<sup>37</sup>

Before the outbreak of COVID-19, about 6 percent of the roughly 100,000 training opportunities China offered Africa every three years via the Forum for China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC)—a multilateral organization that is the leading platform for cooperation between China and the continent—were for military education.<sup>38</sup> According to a Southern African officer interviewed for this study, “China has a very generous and attractive package. They can give you as many slots as necessary, and they have a wide pool of funded slots to choose from. No one else does it like this.” FOCAC's overall three-year training and education quota for African countries was drastically reduced to 10,000 in November 2021 amid uncertainty caused by the pandemic. However, Chinese diplomats have hinted that the pre-pandemic training levels will be resumed “as quickly as possible.” During his five-nation African visit in January 2023, Qin Gang, China's new foreign minister, declared that China was going to “accelerate the promotion of China-Africa physical exchanges, including military education,” as a top priority.<sup>39</sup>

# The Political Ecosystem for Chinese PME

As was the case in the 1950s, China’s contemporary military education and training in Africa occurs in a larger environment of continual political and ideological exchanges designed to send a clear message to African political and military establishments, and to China’s opponents, that Africa matters to China. The year 2023 marks the 33rd consecutive year that a Chinese foreign minister visited five or six African countries in early January as China’s first diplomatic activity of the year. Since the end of the Cold War, every Chinese foreign minister has made at least 50 state visits to Africa during his 10-year tenure—a higher rate of visits than any foreign minister from China’s great power competitors.

Overall, the frequency of China’s exchanges has been breathtaking. Between 2008 and 2018, China’s top leaders visited Africa 79 times, while African leaders visited China 222 times. The premier, customarily the second-ranked official on the CPC’s Politburo Standing Committee, China’s highest leadership body, oversees FOCAC’s 36 implementing agencies.<sup>40</sup> The third-ranked official leads the National People’s Congress, which has institutional relations with 35 African parliaments and can influence legislation and laws. The fourth-ranked heads the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, which works with 59 organizations in 49 African countries. The CPC International Liaison Department has relations with 89 political parties across 51 African countries. Meanwhile, FOCAC conducts regular exchanges for media executives, government officials, political parties, and military leaders, among other professional groups.

A West African officer called this “the larger political ecosystem in which military ties are built.” “When you sit in the general headquarters and see this flurry of political, social, cultural, and educational engagements, you reach the conclusion that China should be treated as a priority, even a preferred partner,” he wrote. “This is the FOCAC ecosystem. It is very impactful on the impressions we form about China as officers in uniform. Engagements with the West on these levels are not as intense, regular, or high-level.”

Each PME system not only educates personnel in tactics, techniques, and doctrines relevant to the fulfillment of military duties but also reflects national values, norms, and identity. Western systems stress subordination of the military to civilian control, allegiance to the constitution, public service, and political neutrality. These have been accepted over time as the international standard of military professionalism, as evidenced by the security sector reform programs of the United Nations, the European Union, and the World Bank. African Union conventions and most African constitutions take a similar approach to military professionalism.<sup>41</sup>

The PLA, by contrast, adheres to the principle of the party’s absolute leadership over the military.<sup>42</sup> According to Chai Jianzhong, a professor at the PLA’s ICDS, “Many officers have previously been exposed to Western military education before arriving in China; however, most come from developing countries whose national conditions are very different from those of Western countries. Chinese strategy opens up a new perspective and provides inspiration.”<sup>43</sup>

Central to the concept of three warfares is the idea that many threats China faces occur in the realm of ideas.<sup>44</sup> Since the late 1980s, China has viewed the dominance of Western ideas as particularly threatening. This threat perception became acute after the collapse of the Soviet Union, when the CPC concluded that the United States in particular was committed to overthrowing it through “evolution.” In other words, the CPC fears an “infiltration of ideas and ways of thinking,” as opposed to revolution.<sup>45</sup>

The liberal democratic ideas the CPC finds threatening to its political system include regular multiparty elections, separation of government branches, a free and independent press, political and individual rights, a more free market economy, and separation of the military from party politics and control. Hence, China’s effort to promote its models abroad and discredit those of its competitors can be understood in part as an effort to ensure the survival of the CPC regime at home.

This ambition is reflected in Chinese PME. At the start of the PLA’s latest military reorganization in 2011 (the largest and most ambitious since 1949), numerous articles appeared in the state-owned and military press denouncing the idea of establishing a “nonparty army” delinked from the CPC—an idea supported by some voices within the PLA and by some of the 500,000 troops demobilized. General Li Jinai, the former director of the PLA’s General Political Department (renamed the CPC Central Military Commission Political Work Department under the reforms), echoed the official line by describing the debate on a nonparty army as an attempt by “domestic and hostile foreign forces to overthrow the CPC.”<sup>46</sup> General Fan Changlong, then the Central Military Commission’s vice chairman, warned that the PLA must “resolutely refute and reject the erroneous political viewpoints of disassociating the military from the Party, depoliticizing the armed forces and putting the armed forces under the state.”<sup>47</sup>

President Xi Jinping himself, in his capacity as chairman of the CPC Central Military Commission, warned that the CPC’s mechanisms of control had slackened to a point where the principle of the “party commanding the gun”—a principle that is often called the “soul of the PLA”—was in serious doubt as the PLA was slowly developing an identity of its own outside the CPC and had to be brought back in line.<sup>48</sup> At the November 2014 All Army Political Work Conference, Xi identified 10 “outstanding problems in the military” centered on ideology, ideals and beliefs, party and revolutionary spirit, party loyalty, and organizational discipline. He issued new directives to revitalize the ideological commitment of the PLA to the party leadership, which sets the basic guideline for Chinese PME.<sup>49</sup>

China’s system of military management forms part of what Chinese analysts have called the “Beijing Consensus,” a term originally coined in the West that loosely frames China’s governance model as an alternative to the universality of the neoliberal “Washington Consensus.” He Wenping of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences has argued that “an authoritative and effective governance in certain periods [is] critical to a developing country undergoing enormous changes in order to build consensus among its people and pool the energy necessary to carry economic, social, and political reforms.” He continued, “That’s also the reason why the development-oriented ‘Beijing Consensus’ can compete with the ‘Washington Consensus’ that aims to promote liberal ideas and is increasingly becoming popular among developing countries.”<sup>50</sup>

In 2019, Major General Xu Hui, dean of the PLA’s ICDS, noted that “the most important part of our military assistance to Africa is the sharing of wisdom and experience.”<sup>51</sup> But how receptive African stakeholders are to Chinese ideas of governance is a hard question to answer. “It depends

on who you ask,” observed Kwezi Mngqibisa, who taught at the Southern African Development Community Regional Peacekeeping Training Center at the Zimbabwe Staff College. Mngqibisa explained that “many ruling parties are fixated on the idea that they can achieve high levels of economic growth and deliver prosperity without democracy, however defined. This is China’s biggest selling point. However, the story is different when you ask civil society, NGOs, and those working to preserve democracy. They see China’s example as harmful, even undesirable.”<sup>52</sup>

## How China Uses the Ties Created by PME

The impact of Chinese military education manifests in different ways. It can foster and strengthen ties to China among not only military personnel but also policymakers. In many African countries, the defense establishment has a close relationship with one or more Chinese schools based on deep benches of Chinese-trained alumni in influential positions in the country’s defense hierarchy. Examples of such relationships include Tanzania and the Dalian Naval Academy, Ethiopia and the PLA NDU, Mozambique and the Army Command College, and Uganda and Shijiazhuang Tiedao University—the forerunner of the PLA’s Railway Engineering Institute. These affiliations afford the PLA an opportunity to shape military doctrine and concepts and to nurture personal ties.

China has also used such ties to overcome political differences. For example, the PLA NDU and its components moved swiftly to cultivate a strong relationship with South Sudan in the years leading to the country’s independence in 2011. This is instructive given the historically strained relations between the rebel movement-cum-government of the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement and Army (SPLM/A) and China, whom the SPLM/A believed supported Khartoum’s war effort against the South in part to protect its interests in Sudan’s oil industry.<sup>53</sup>

Following South Sudan’s independence, China assiduously built a strong military and political relationship with SPLM/A elites, rooted in their shared experience of liberation struggle. These ties grew stronger when relations between the new state and its Western backers soured over its abysmal human rights record. Between 2011, when South Sudan gained independence, and 2017, more than 4,100 students and officials, including military officers, were trained and educated in Chinese academies—a rate of almost 600 annually, easily one of the highest in Africa.<sup>54</sup> China’s renewed outreach had an almost instantaneous effect: by 2016, when most South Sudanese officers were training in China, China was South Sudan’s top investor in the oil and agricultural sectors, a major arms supplier, and a leading trading partner.<sup>55</sup>

There were limits to what China gained in return, however, as evidenced by how it had to scramble to evacuate its citizens when security around Juba collapsed in 2016. During the meltdown, Chinese peacekeepers reportedly abandoned their posts when a rocket-propelled grenade exploded near a Chinese armored personnel carrier, killing two Chinese soldiers.<sup>56</sup> To bring Chinese civilians to safety, China relied on unarmed security contractors, who in turn enlisted the support of rival militias and the Ugandan military.<sup>57</sup>

China's ability to make amends with estranged friends can also be seen in how it dealt with its Southern African partners, many of which switched sides from Beijing to Moscow or severed relations with China over its support for opposing groups during the Cold War. It should be recalled that China refused to recognize the government of the Angola People's Liberation Front (MPLA) until 1983, preferring to arm the Union for the Total Liberation of Angola, which was also backed by apartheid South Africa and the United States.<sup>58</sup> This stance severely damaged China's credibility in OAU circles.

In nearby Mozambique, the FRELIMO government opposed China at every turn, including China's 1979 incursion into Vietnam.<sup>59</sup> By the 1980s, South Africa's ANC ended its relationship with China and switched its allegiance to Moscow. Meanwhile, China's earlier support for rebels in Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Senegal, Uganda, and many other countries ended in failure, because they were unable to seize power. Moreover, some countries that were staunchly allied with China, such as Ghana, severed ties with Beijing when governments changed hands.<sup>60</sup> These low points of Chinese engagement in Africa have largely been forgotten in public discourse, partly because China was the only real socialist option African countries had left after the Soviet Union collapsed. However, China's offers of PME and intensive media, economic, diplomatic, political, and ideological work also played a key role in overcoming these historical slights. Indeed, Angola's MPLA, South Africa's ANC, Mozambique's FRELIMO, and the South West Africa People's Organisation in Namibia are now among the CPC's most important PME partners, not to mention its closest friends in Africa and the Global South.

China's rapprochement with its original Southern African partners is epitomized by its alliance with the Former Liberation Movements of Southern Africa (FLMSA)—a grouping of the former frontline movements against apartheid that still govern Angola, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. These ties were cemented in February 2022 with the opening of FLMSA's Mwalimu Julius Nyerere Academy in Tanzania through a \$40 million grant from the CPC's International Department. This school is the CPC's first overseas political academy and serves as a venue where China can share its experience in governance more systematically with like-minded political organizations. It also potentially serves as a platform for PME as its attendees also include civilian and military leaders.

China's partnership with these countries also serves broader strategic interests, given their shared liberation movement heritage. A 2008 fact-finding report funded by the US Air Force Academy based on interviews with African and US officials concluded that the stiffest opposition to the initial decision to relocate the US Africa Command (AFRICOM) to Africa came from Southern Africa.<sup>61</sup> This resistance had little to do with popular dislike of the United States in Southern Africa and more to do with a "national liberation heritage" and a commitment to "non-alignment," the report found. This sentiment was strongest in Angola, Mozambique, Namibia, and South Africa, which mobilized the Southern African Development Community and the African Union against the relocation of AFRICOM. The ANC passed several resolutions against AFRICOM that became South African government policy.

Lawrence Rapula, director of Organizational Support in the Botswana Defense Force, said that countries run by former liberation movements were ideologically opposed to AFRICOM's relocation, even though they train with the command.<sup>62</sup> More generally, the FLMSA group, which meets

biennially at the summit level, takes positions reflecting shared worldviews with the CPC, due not necessarily to Chinese pressure but to a similar ideological orientation and outlook. For example, the FLMSA's 2016 political report, "War with the West," warned of a risk of African regimes being overthrown by the West through "color revolutions" and "soft power."<sup>63</sup>

The ANC's current "Balance of Forces" and "Battle of Ideas" policy documents—part of a compendium of documents adopted at its 55th National Conference and integrated into South African government policy in January 2023—call attention to the "security doctrines of NATO and allied countries which seek to demonize, isolate and even physically confront China—somehow perceiving its economic rise as an existential threat to their own countries."<sup>64</sup>

China is deeply wedded to the idea of strengthening its ties with like-minded parties. Between 2000 and 2018, Mozambique, Namibia, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe (and Seychelles, which does not share their liberation movement heritage) procured 90 percent of their arsenals from China, reflecting in part a causative effect of regular and systematic PME in Chinese institutions.<sup>65</sup> Indeed, over the same period, these countries also sent large numbers of officers to China.<sup>66</sup> They also had the greatest number of intensive exchanges with the CPC compared with other African regions. For example, between 2016 and 2018, the CPC conducted 47 exchanges in Africa. The FLMSA countries accounted for 25 of these, followed by West Africa with 11, Central and East Africa with 8, and North Africa with 3.<sup>67</sup>

Overall, the PLA's activities in the broader Southern Africa region represent 34 percent of its total African engagements.<sup>68</sup> Additionally, the FLMSA countries are among the 24 African countries that enjoy official strategic partnerships with China, according to criteria set by the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs to grade its relationships around the world. However, China's engagements are not limited to countries that share liberation movement ties. China has built strong military ties with countries such as Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Morocco, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Tunisia, which have traditionally been politically neutral. Ghana, Kenya, and Seychelles all received more than 50 percent of their arms transfers from China between 2000 and 2018.<sup>69</sup>

## African Perspectives on Chinese and Western PME

In 2011, China International Press published *China in the Eyes of Foreign Military Officers*, a 247-page book that purports to describe what 32 PLA NDU alumni from the graduating class of 2010, most of them from Africa and Asia, felt about their experience at NDU and, more particularly, about how their time there had shaped their perceptions of China.<sup>70</sup> Given that the book was presumably published under strict political oversight, one must regard its content as unreliable. Even so, it offers insight into what the students were taught and some of China's goals.

The book is divided into four topics: "Harmonious China and Harmonious World," "China's Reform and Opening Up and Social and Economic Development," "China's Foreign Policy," and "Life in China." This structure in itself indicates the amount of time spent studying China's governance model in Chinese military schools. In the foreword, Major General Zhang Yingli,

then commandant of the ICDS, explains that the students had “profound exchanges with party and government officials, and extensive exposure to different regions and projects.” Hence, their perspectives were “different from not only foreign media, but [also] those foreign people who have had a short stay in China.”<sup>71</sup>

The contributors included a Kenyan colonel, R. N. Nguuku; General Joseph Kapwani, who went on to command the Tanzania Air Force; Nigerian Navy Commodore Ferguson Bobai (promoted to rear admiral after graduation); Brigadier Shadrack Moloi, the commandant of Botswana’s Senior Staff and Command College; a Namibian colonel, E. M. Nakapiji; and General Aliyu Mohammed Gusau, Nigeria’s former defense minister and national security advisor to three Nigerian presidents. Like others featured in the book, these officers are quoted as being impressed by China’s political system and governance model, which has enabled China to sustain “economic and political progress” and mobilize “strong positive public sentiment of the people towards the party and government.” At the same time, the African officers pointed to the challenges facing China, including the need “to come up with an equitable income reform system that will ensure a fair method for sharing the benefits of reform and development” between the wealthier coastal areas and poorer interior and between “ordinary citizens” and “excessively rich officials.”

Notwithstanding such negative comments, China was held in a positive light, with virtually all contributors regarding it as a successful model for developing countries. This overall attitude is consistent with the feedback gleaned from African officers surveyed for this report. According to an East African interviewee, “China has a different way of doing things and has always offered Africa an alternative among many others.” Another East African officer noted that

China’s appeal comes from similarities China shares with Africa. . . . [Our instructors] took us to rural areas of Suzhou and villages in Changping . . . quite different from the glamor of Beijing or Shanghai, which can overwhelm you. But here, one could see the rudimentary lifestyle, subsistence farming, savings groups, etc. We looked at this and said, surely this is something we can do . . . it is similar to the ideas we have back home.

“We have a lot to learn from China,” wrote a third East African officer. “At independence, we [African countries] had higher GDPs than China’s. What happened? They [China] got something right . . . they didn’t develop using Western paradigms. How did they do it? We should pay keen interest.” An officer from Southern Africa agreed: “Their [China’s] message resonates because they have proof of pulling themselves out of backwardness. As long as we keep democracy alive and avoid damaging our environment, their model is, in fact, optimal to our conditions.”

The interviewees also reflected on practical lessons they took back home. An East African security specialist highlighted similarities between the Chinese and African security outlooks. “Their [China’s] approach is domestically focused, like ours. Our threats are mostly internal and tied to lack of development, social cleavages, etc. How can you defeat cattle rustling and banditry with a regular force structure? The PLA is suited to these priorities because they have lived it.” A Southern African graduate of the PLA Army Infantry College explained that the curriculum was related to her country’s security situation: “It covered areas like how to command a motorized infantry unit and other special infantry forces like mountain and artillery detachments. They also have training on how to command high-mobility infantry units and air assault units.



It was easy to integrate into our military because we have been building these types of units for a long time.”

Beyond this, African officers feel a sense of pride in visiting China. “Learning in the same halls as our forebears in the liberation struggle is a badge of honor,” said another Southern African officer. “This ensures our younger officers remain connected to our history and I think it also reminds the Chinese side of its own history.” According to a West African interviewee:

[A Chinese education] might not be as prestigious as a Western academy but it's off the beaten path and has a mystique to it. Our guys are used to the West. When you come back from Sandhurst or a West Point, everyone knows that you have first-rate credentials. . . . However, when you come back from Nanjing or Guangzhou, almost everyone in your unit wants to know what it was like. There is a growing demand for Chinese expertise within our service, and so going to China is seen as beneficial for one's career advancement.

Some interviewees explained that their views about China were shaped by the larger political environment and signals sent by their leadership about China's growing importance.

For example, some countries have introduced Chinese language courses into their national curricula, public service, and security forces, sending a message that a Chinese education is a viable career path in some militaries. Indeed, some officers—particularly those who spend time in graduate-level institutions—return home with basic Chinese language skills that they might develop further at their local Confucius Institutes. (These institutes are supervised by China's education ministry and housed within universities and schools.)<sup>72</sup> That said, the development of Chinese proficiency within African public services is still a long way off. The educational and private sectors have fared much better, but governments do not appear to be tapping them to improve their in-house Chinese expertise, including their military-to-military relations with China.<sup>73</sup>

Any assessment of African perspectives would be incomplete if it excluded nongovernmental stakeholders, who are far less sanguine than their governments about military-to-military relations between China and Africa.

A Zimbabwean civil society activist recalled a scandal that erupted in her country in 2011, when it emerged that the Zimbabwe National Defense University was constructed through revenues from a diamond-mining deal between the Zimbabwe military and a Chinese firm, Anjin Investments. This firm is closely connected to political and military actors, many of whom were educated in Chinese military schools. Parliamentary deputies revealed that it was part owned by the Zimbabwean military. The Zimbabwean military and Anjin in turn were part owners of Anhui Foreign Economic Construction Company, which was contracted and paid to build the university. Then finance minister and opposition leader Tendai Biti called the deal “criminal” but said he signed the loan documents because they were presented to him in the presence of visiting Chinese vice premier Wang Qishan, whom he did not want to embarrass.<sup>74</sup> In 2016, President Robert Mugabe revoked Anjin's license under tremendous public pressure. He also admitted that “well over \$15 billion was earned in that area [Zimbabwe's diamond mines] and the companies there have virtually robbed us.”<sup>75</sup> However, Mugabe's successor, President Emmerson Mnangagwa, restored Anjin's license in early 2021, reportedly under heavy Chinese government pressure.<sup>76</sup>

In South Africa, an investigation by the Cape Town–based *Daily Maverick* underscored some of the downsides of African elite partnerships with the Chinese security sector. The *Daily Maverick*'s article followed the story of a rogue unit created in 2016 by disgraced former security minister Nathi Nhleko and sent to the elite Chinese People's Armed Forces Academy in Shanghai for specialized education and training.<sup>77</sup> Upon return, its members were illegally deployed into some of South Africa's elite security institutions, reportedly as a “death squad” led by officials loyal to Nathi. The officials involved were all fired for gross misconduct after President Cyril Ramaphosa replaced the disgraced former president, Jacob Zuma, in December 2017. Civil society groups working on such cases tend to be fearful of Chinese security assistance, military education, and training as they are seen as potentially undermining democracy, human rights, and civilian safety.

Among the African public at large, China has long had a positive image. Since 1999, Afrobarometer has conducted an annual survey that covers 34 African countries and involves interviews with almost 50,000 respondents. In the 2020–21 survey, almost two-thirds (63 percent) of Africans say China's political and economic influence is positive.<sup>78</sup> These positive views have held constant since 1999. They do not, however, affect Africa's enduring demand for democracy.

Seventy percent of Africans surveyed say democracy is favorable compared with any other kind of government; 75 percent reject military rule; 77 percent reject one-party rule; and 82 percent reject “one-man-rule.”<sup>79</sup> This enduring demand for democracy is rooted in part in demographics: the median age in Africa is 18 years, and over 60 percent of Africa's 1.2 billion people are under 25 years. The demand for democracy is highest among the cohorts aged 18–25, 26–35, and 36–45; it drops among older cohorts.<sup>80</sup>

Unsurprisingly, young people are at the forefront of protests for political change, which governments often respond to violently, usually by calling in the military. Africa's prodemocracy movements frequently accuse China of aiding unpopular regimes and strengthening their security apparatus. (These movements also often criticize Western countries for prioritizing short-term security over democracy and human rights.)<sup>81</sup> China is likely to continue to confront negative views toward its security assistance, particularly among younger cohorts, which it is trying to court—an ambition spelled out in “China and Africa in the New Era: A Partnership of Equals,” Beijing's latest Africa policy, released in 2021.<sup>82</sup>

## Future Directions and Policy Implications

In terms of military presence in Africa, China is outmatched by its Western peers by nearly every metric. For instance, the United States, the United Kingdom, and France each have at least 50 military attachés in the continent; China has 21. Western countries have more than 50 bases and other facilities (the United States alone has 27 military outposts); China has one.<sup>83</sup> In terms of African-based PME, too, China has a much smaller presence on African soil. France, the United States, and the United Kingdom conduct between them at least 40 year-round programs with defense colleges and academies, whereas China has PLA instructors and “training missions” in only two known countries, Zimbabwe and Tanzania, according to publicly available data.<sup>84</sup>

Moreover, as table 1 (see page 20) suggests, by most metrics, Chinese PME is narrower in scope and less rigorous than Western PME (although table 1, it should be noted, should not be regarded as authoritative). China's principal competitors do more with African PME institutions than China by way of training, curriculum development, and capacity building.

Nonetheless, for several reasons it would be unwise to ignore Chinese PME. First, as the interviews demonstrate, African officers and militaries appreciate the fact that China offers far more PME scholarships than do Western countries. Second, African officers do not face the same vetting prior to enrolling in Chinese military schools that they encounter in Western ones. In the United States, for example, Congressional rules require a prospective student (and his or her unit) to be examined for evidence of having committed gross human rights violations before the student can be admitted to a US military school. China's "no questions asked" stance is seen as attractive, especially by those with questionable human rights records. Third, Chinese offers of PME come with a host of incentives aimed not only at individual officers but also at their military institutions and governments. These incentives can take a wide array of forms, including financial support for individual officers and decision-makers, training opportunities outside PME (e.g., academic scholarships and professionalization trainings for civil servants), loans with low interest rates or extended grace periods, provision of military equipment on favorable terms, and party-to-party training programs to strengthen the governing regime and enhance its prospects of remaining in power. The larger package of incentives China offers is just as attractive as the PME quotas it provides.

It should also be recalled that 97 percent of African officers think highly of international training and consider it to be the primary determinant of their service's identity regardless of which country provides it.<sup>85</sup> Furthermore, 82 percent of officers surveyed expressed a preference for developing training partnerships with a wide diversity of partners, while only 16 percent said they preferred partnerships with only one or two countries. Thus, even though it is generally not considered to be as good as Western PME in critical areas, Chinese PME will continue to be appealing to African militaries because it allows countries to diversify their partnerships.

Chinese PME is especially attractive to officers serving in the growing number of countries that have or are developing strategic relations with China. In such settings, having participated in a Chinese PME program can be an advantage in terms of career advancement and being looked upon favorably by the regime in power. Indeed, it is worth noting that countries with which China enjoys comprehensive strategic relations also happen to be its strongest PME partners and the largest recipients of Chinese weaponry. Such countries also host high-value Belt and Road Initiative investments, receive the largest amounts of Chinese overseas development assistance, and have the most intensive party-to-party ties with the CPC.

Seen by the PLA as a form of what it calls military political work, PME is used to reinforce and sustain preexisting relationships and to cultivate new ones, and these are not limited to military-to-military relations. Chinese PME is embedded within a larger framework designed to generate political support through a combination of party-to-party work, assistance with infrastructure projects, and multifaceted soft power campaigns, among other areas of engagement. Moreover, the content and delivery of Chinese PME at all levels faithfully reflect the ideology and worldview of the CPC, making PME part of the CPC's overall effort to promote China's governance model and practices as an alternative to those of China's strategic rivals.

**TABLE 1. AFRICAN VIEWS OF CHINESE AND WESTERN PROFESSIONAL MILITARY EDUCATION (PME)**

Aspects of PME	Chinese PME	Western PME
Associated prestige	Generally low, though higher levels of prestige are associated with schools that taught fighters who went on to liberate their countries, such as the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) Army Command College.	High. “It is instilled in us,” said one interviewee, “to send our best and brightest to Sandhurst or West Point” (or comparable institutions in France).
Subjects covered	Limited in number and scope, focusing on technical subjects such as computing, engineering, and informational technology. Coverage of subjects is largely confined within the bounds of the political and security perspectives and worldview of the Communist Party.	A broad range of subjects. In tune with changing global security trends, such as those involving the environment, technology, and demographics. Students are allowed to challenge existing concepts and form new ones. Technical training, however, is not always adaptable to local conditions in Africa; as one interviewee said, “Those guys [Americans] are too advanced; how do you adapt ‘networked warfare’ back home?”
Accreditation and conversion	Academic degrees are mostly confined to the Chinese military academic system. They do not convert internationally and are not internationally accredited.	Academic degrees are accredited by civilian accreditation associations, making them more rigorous. Degrees convert to civilian qualifications. Civilian institutions offer modules and, in some cases, entire academic paths. It is not unusual for officers to study entirely in civilian institutions.
Subsequent career paths	Career progression is mostly associated with the advantages of having been exposed to China and Chinese ideas and approaches. Most countries now value this exposure, given their growing links to China.	Numerous paths are opened up for further study in civilian institutions and for postmilitary endeavors such as international consulting and education.
Joint warfighting	Taught at the PLA’s National Defense University (NDU).	Taught at every level of PME, especially in the United States.
Integration with local students	Limited. Foreign and local students are segregated at the NDU. More interaction in schools below the NDU. Most time for relationship building is spent with instructors and other foreign students.	Occurs at every level of PME.
Strategic-level PME	Considered less prestigious than Western PME. Narrower in scope. Limited attention to critical analysis.	Stronger and more prestigious than Chinese PME. Teaches critical analysis and argumentation.

**Sources:** Desk research and interviews conducted in 2021 in East Africa with 20 officers from East, Southern, and West Africa. Additional data from external sources such as the US Army War College’s Annual Conference on the PLA, the National Bureau of Asian Research, and the China Aerospace Studies Institute at Air University at Maxwell Air Force Base in Alabama.

In light of all this, US policymakers and military educators should not underestimate the contribution that Chinese PME can make to advancing Chinese strategic interests on multiple fronts, particularly in light of China's stated goal of ramping up in-person military education and training after a two-year freeze prompted by the outbreak of COVID-19. Neither should they underestimate the ability of Chinese PME to increase the uptake of norms, values, and institutional practices based on the Chinese model. This ability is enhanced by ideological affinities: China and many African countries have a common history of anti-colonial struggles; China's suspicion of the West is shared by some in Africa, not least because of the history of Western European colonialism on the continent; and many African ruling parties share with the CPC a basic political outlook and employ some of the same governing practices.

To help counter this potential, the United States should take the following three measures. They are low in cost, can be taken almost immediately, and are tailored to African conditions and assessments.

**Expand PME opportunities for African officers as part of a package of targeted and continual human resource development.** The United States should dramatically increase the enrollment of African students in its military academies and of US students in African PME institutions if it is to compete favorably with China in the PME space.

However, increased PME engagements should be reinforced by other lines of effort. Through FOCAC, China offers a fully subsidized package of human resource training and capacity building that is popular with African countries, with PME constituting one component of that package. Chinese PME takes place alongside a host of other activities, such as visits to African countries by high-level Chinese officials, invitations for African officials to visit China, and trainings for a wide variety of professional groups, from media executives, to civil servants, and police and paramilitary personnel. Each activity is part of a larger, choreographed demonstration of China's engagement, hospitality, and presence. China takes great pains to make its partners feel valued and to send a message that Beijing is committed to the partnership.

The United States can learn from China's example by increasing and pooling PME and other human resource training, education, and capacity-building initiatives into a single program that can respond to African needs comprehensively and over the longer term, rather than through disconnected, short-term programs. The United States has the opportunity to work with African governments, the African Union, the private sector, civil society, civilian educators, and PME institutions to determine how to distribute this support among different sectors and different countries. Creating a cost-sharing system would enhance local ownership. Through such initiatives, US PME efforts will become part of a larger effort that makes US education and training (which are highly valued in Africa) available across multiple sectors of African society.

**Establish a system of senior resident African military fellows.** PME programs designed for African institutions continue to lack local ownership and to offer scant opportunity for African input regardless of which country provides them, including China. The United States should remedy this shortcoming and position itself more strategically by establishing a system to enable at least 10 senior African officers to spend one to two years in the United States working with PME counterparts to design programs aimed at developing African PME institutions. This low-cost system of military fellows could help set US PME apart from its competitors, which do not seem

to have considered such an idea. Moreover, it is plausible that China might not want to offer Africans a similar program because what they design might not reflect CPC values and interests.

**Support democracy and human rights.** As noted above, the Afrobarometer surveys show that Africans support democracy and want militaries that respect human rights, defend constitutions rather than regimes, and support the democratic process. Hence, the governance models promoted in the Chinese PME system are incompatible with the aspirations laid out in Afrobarometer reports. The content of US PME—which emphasizes that militaries should respect democratic constitutions and embrace a democratic ethos—aligns more closely with African preferences and values. The preservation of such values, which are enshrined in African Union conventions and most African constitutions, is sorely needed at present, given the democratic backsliding that has occurred in many African countries over the past decade and the negative role militaries have played in those events.

However, what is taught in US academies should be reinforced by renewed and vigorous whole-of-government efforts to support democracy. The temptation to put democratic values aside for short-term security and stability or for the sake of stopping countries from “pivoting” to China ultimately undermines the effectiveness of US PME and the values it teaches. It should be recalled that prodemocracy movements in Africa decry China for failing to advance democracy, but they also decry Western countries when they fail to live up to their values. China’s ideological challenge against Western norms, values, ideas, and practices is increasingly systematic. The United States faces the challenge of intensifying its bilateral engagements with African militaries, PME institutions, governments, and civil societies with the goal of promoting democracy, human rights, and the transparency standards Africans have set for themselves.

# Notes

1. The “Political Work Regulations” of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) outlines the human dimensions of the PLA as an institution, the human dimensions of warfare, and civil-military relations in the People’s Republic of China. It broadly includes party functions, operational functions such as public affairs and information operations, and administrative functions such as professional military education. It has been revised seven times since 1963. A copy of the current version is not available online.
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