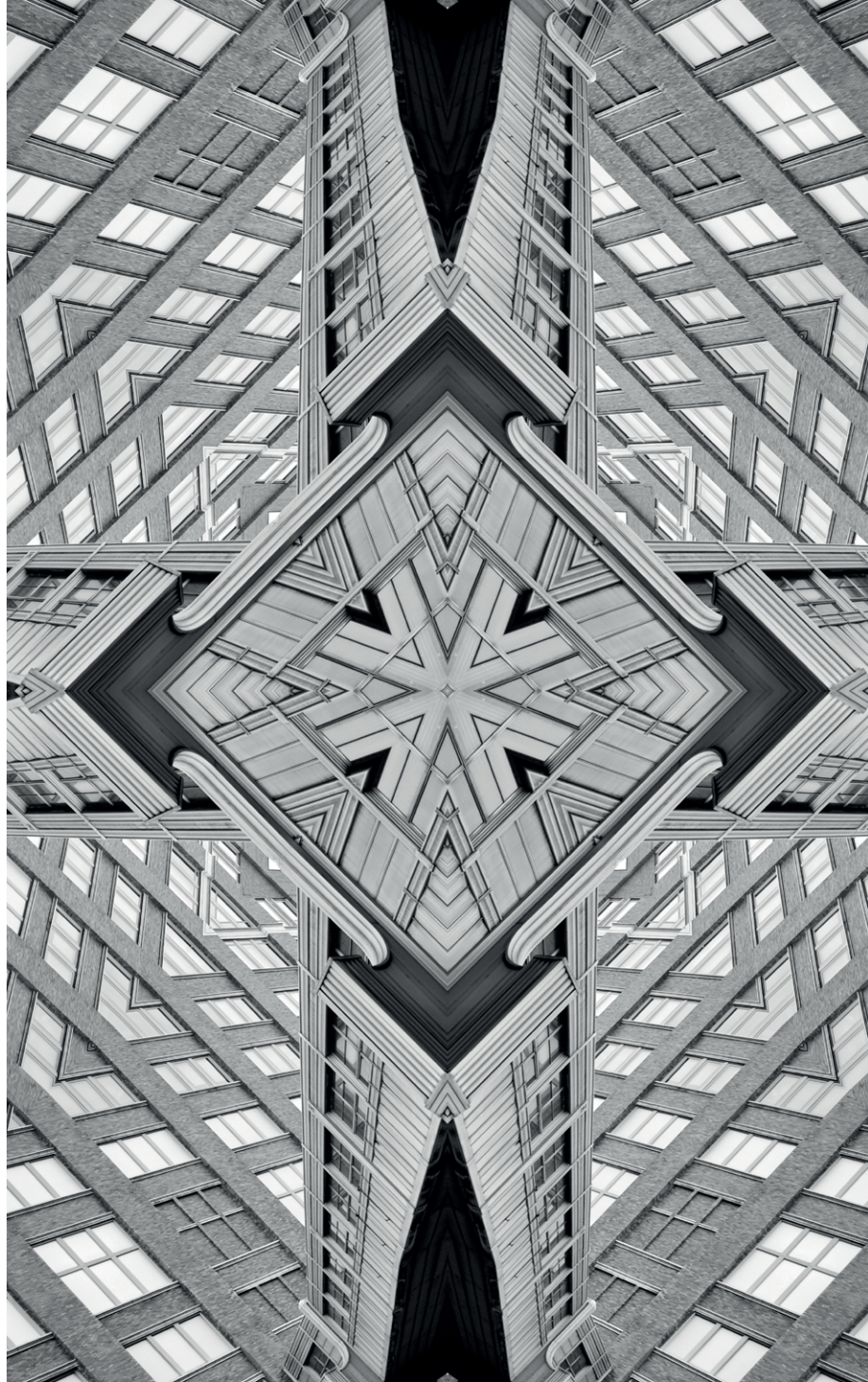


Issue

Brief

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Africa Pivots to China's Global Security Initiative

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Abstract

As geopolitical tensions rise, African nations are increasingly aligning with Chinese President Xi Jinping's Global Security Initiative. The framework, which promotes non-interference, respecting sovereignty, and development-focused security, is appealing to African countries as an alternative to Western-led interventions. Through military cooperation, peacekeeping missions, counterterrorism assistance, and non-conditional security aid, among others, China is deepening its strategic footprint on the continent, which also complements its Belt and Road Initiative. As Africa pivots towards China's security vision, this shift challenges Western influence, reshaping global power dynamics on the continent.

On 5 September 2024, in his keynote at the 9th Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), Chinese President Xi Jinping stated:

“Modernization is an inalienable right of all countries. But the Western approach to it has inflicted immense suffering on developing countries. [...] China and Africa’s joint pursuit of modernization will set off a wave of modernization in the Global South and open a new chapter in our drive for a community with a shared future for mankind.”¹

Xi underscored China’s and Africa’s “modernisation” as “just and equitable, open and win-win”, “people-centred”, “diverse and inclusive”, “ecofriendly”, and “underpinned by peace and security”—characteristics often branded as the “China model”. At the same event, Xi set new precedents for China-Africa ties by elevating China’s bilateral relations with all African countries that recognise the People’s Republic of China (all 53 countries except Eswatini) to at least the “strategic level”, characterising China-Africa bilateral relations as an “all-weather China-Africa community with a shared future for the new era,”^a proposing a new China-Africa trade and investment agreement, and committing to training African leaders.²

Over the past decades, China’s relations with Africa have grown significantly, driven by economic cooperation, infrastructure development, and diplomatic ties. Through initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the FOCAC, China has become Africa’s largest trading partner and a key investor in sectors such as mining, energy, telecommunications, and transportation. China follows a “non-interference” policy, offering loans and investments with fewer political conditions than those from the United States (US) or international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund or the World Bank. China, unlike the West, also does not pressure African governments on issues like good governance, democracy, human rights, or political transparency, making it an attractive partner for many African nations.

As China’s footprint in Africa expands through trade, infrastructure, military cooperation, and other exchanges, its evolving role as a security actor or guarantor will shape the continent’s geopolitical landscape, raising both opportunities and challenges for African states and beyond. In this regard, particularly in the context of Xi’s Global Security Initiative (GSI), the question is why China wants to play a larger role in African security.

a Until now, China used the phrase “all weather” only in characterising its ties with its ally, Pakistan.

Xi's Global Security Initiative

In April 2022, at the Annual Conference of the Boao Forum for Asia, Xi Jinping proposed the GSI (全球安全倡议) framework as a new approach to international security. It is one of three initiatives, alongside the Global Development Initiative (GDI) and the Global Civilization Initiative (GCI). In the context of global peace and stability, Xi proposed the “Chinese solution” to global security challenges, stating:

“Security is the precondition for development. We, humanity, are living in an indivisible security community. It has been proven time and again that the Cold War mentality would only wreck the global peace framework, that hegemonism and power politics would only endanger world peace, and that bloc confrontation would only exacerbate security challenges in the 21st century. To promote security for all in the world, China would like to propose a Global Security Initiative.”³

In the face of growing threats of “unilateralism, hegemony and power politics, and increasing deficits in peace, security, trust, and governance,” the GSI, in Beijing’s view, is “yet another global public good offered by China and a vivid illustration of the vision of a community with a shared future for mankind in the security field.”⁴ In offering a fundamental solution to eliminating “the peace deficit” by contributing Chinese perspectives to meeting international security challenges, the GSI, according to Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Le Yucheng,^b aims to:

“Take the new vision on security as the guiding principle, mutual respect as the fundamental requirement, indivisible security as the important principle, and building a security community as the long-term goal, in order to foster a new type of security that replaces confrontation, alliance, and a zero-sum approach with dialogue, partnership, and win-win results.”⁵

The GSI Concept Paper released in February 2023 says its goal is “to eliminate the root causes of international conflicts, improve global security governance, encourage joint international efforts to bring more stability and certainty to a volatile and changing era, and promote durable peace and development in the world.”⁶

b This idea was provided by Le Yucheng in his keynote speech at “Seeking Peace and Promoting Development: An Online Dialogue of Global Think Tanks of 20 Countries” in Beijing on 6 May 2022.

Table 1: The “Six Commitments” of GSI

Stay committed to the vision of common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security.
Stay committed to respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries.
Stay committed to abiding by the purposes and principles of the UN Charter.
Stay committed to taking the legitimate security concerns of all countries seriously.
Stay committed to peacefully resolving differences and disputes between countries through dialogue and consultation.
Stay committed to maintaining security in both traditional and non-traditional domains.

Source: Compiled from the GSI Concept Paper

Even before launching the GSI, Beijing had pledged to play an active role in maintaining world peace, security, and stability in various capacities, as outlined in the White Papers of 2014, 2014, and 2019 (see Table 2).

Table 2: China’s Interests in World Peace and Stability

White Paper	Year	Agenda for China’s Armed Forces
The Diversified Employment of China’s Armed Forces ⁷	April 2013	To promote dialogue and cooperation on maritime security, participate in UN peacekeeping missions, engage in international counterterrorism cooperation, protect international merchant shipping, contribute to disaster relief operations, conduct joint exercises and training with foreign counterparts, conscientiously assume international responsibilities, and play an active role in maintaining world peace, security, and stability.

Xi's Global Security Initiative

White Paper	Year	Agenda for China's Armed Forces
China's Military Strategy ⁸	May 2015	China's armed forces will engage in extensive regional and international security affairs and promote the establishment of mechanisms for emergency notification, military risk precaution, crisis management, and conflict control. As national strength grows, China's armed forces will intensify their participation in operations such as international peacekeeping and humanitarian assistance, striving to shoulder more international responsibilities and obligations, provide more public security goods, and contribute to world peace and common development.
China's National defence in the New Era ⁹	July 2019	China's armed forces will fulfil their international responsibilities and obligations, providing public security goods to the international community to the best of their capacity. They actively participate in UN peacekeeping operations, vessel protection operations, and international efforts in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief; strengthen international cooperation in arms control and non-proliferation; play a constructive role in the political settlement of hotspot issues; jointly maintain the security of international passages; and collaborate on responding to global challenges such as terrorism, cybersecurity, and major natural disasters, thus contributing positively to building a community with a shared future for mankind.

Source: Author's own

The above areas are outlined in the 2023 GSI Concept Paper, which emphasises security challenges such as terrorism, cybersecurity, biosecurity, transnational organised crime, public health, drug trafficking, nuclear proliferation, emerging technologies, AI and data security, climate change, and international policing.

In assessing Xi's conception of the GSI, it becomes imperative to factor in the following key aspects:¹⁰ first, the GSI was launched amidst rising insecurity and growing resentment towards China, starting with the COVID-19 pandemic and continuing over China's position on the Russia-Ukraine war, against the backdrop of Beijing's "no limits" friendship with Moscow.

Xi's Global Security Initiative

Second, the elements of the framework convey a unified view that caters to China's interests. For example, "respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries" can be interpreted as respecting China's sovereignty claims over the South China Sea, East China Sea, the Himalayan border with India, and Taiwan.^c The phrase "non-interference in internal affairs" signals "non-interference" in China's internal matters related to Xinjiang, Tibet, and Hong Kong.^d Meanwhile, the statement "reject the Cold War mentality, oppose unilateralism, and say no to group politics and bloc confrontation" serves as a way of denouncing any minilateral or multilateral groupings that China is not part of, such as the QUAD and AUKUS.

What has also become characteristic of China's involvement is its conflict mediation and peacebuilding efforts in alignment with GSI principles, such as proposing a '12-Point Peace Plan' in 2023¹¹ and appointing a 'Special Envoy for Peace Talks'^e to mediate the Russia-Ukraine conflict,¹² brokering peace between Saudi Arabia and Iran,¹³ and mediating between Palestinian factions amidst the recent Gaza conflict by signing the Beijing Declaration.¹⁴

With the GSI, China seeks to centralise its position as a world power within the reform process of global security approaches and mechanisms.

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- c China claims the South China Sea through its "nine-dash line" (upgraded to the ten-dash line in 2023), which overlaps with the sovereignty claims by the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Vietnam. On the East China Sea, China has a dispute with Japan over the Diaoyu islands (Senkaku islands in Japanese). On the Himalayan border with India, China has an unresolved boundary dispute along the Line of Actual Control. With regard to Taiwan, China sees it as a 'renegade province'.
- d Under its non-interference policy, China opposes foreign involvement in its internal matters, such as Xinjiang, Tibet, and Hong Kong, which China strictly treats as purely domestic matters and off-limits for foreign discussion or intervention.
- e In 2023, China appointed Li Hui, who was China's deputy foreign minister from 2008 to 2009 and served as China's ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary to Russia from 2009 to 2019, as the Special Envoy for Peace Talks.

Africa in China's GSI Calculus

China's interests in Africa are driven by four objectives:¹⁵ first, politically, China seeks Africa's support for its "One China" policy and its foreign policy agendas in multilateral forums such as the United Nations. Second, economically, China sees Africa as a source of natural resources and market opportunities. Third, from a security standpoint, political instability in Africa causes concerns for China's strategic interests. Finally, China sees an opportunity for the success of the "China model" in non-democratic African countries (such as Zimbabwe, Sudan and South Sudan, Angola, and Rwanda), which indirectly supports China's political ideology against Western democratic ideals.

In recent years, China's role as a security guarantor in Africa has grown, driven by its strategic interests, economic investments, and deepening ties with African states. There is a clear trend of increased Chinese interest in and engagement with African security both directly and indirectly. For instance, in his keynote speech at the opening ceremony of the 2024 FOCAC Summit, Xi Jinping, pledging the "Partnership Action for Common Security", declared:

"China is ready to build with Africa a partnership for implementing the GSI and make it a fine example of GSI cooperation. We will give Africa RMB1 billion yuan of grants in military assistance, provide training for 6,000 military personnel and 1,000 police and law enforcement officers from Africa, and invite 500 young African military officers to visit China. The two sides will conduct joint military exercises, training and patrol, carry out an "action for a mine-free Africa," and jointly ensure the safety of personnel and projects."¹⁶

To implement the 10 partnership actions, Xi promised that the Chinese government will provide RMB 360 billion in financial support over the next three years—RMB 210 billion in credit lines, RMB 80 billion in assistance in various forms, and at least RMB 70 billion in investment by Chinese companies in Africa.¹⁷ China's involvement in African security has significantly increased. For instance, since 2008, the Chinese military has dispatched 44 escort task forces to the Gulf of Aden and Somali waters and conducted joint anti-piracy exercises with countries like Nigeria and Cameroon, contributing to maritime safety and regional stability. Even before the launch of the GSI, China had actively participated in international peace conferences related to the Sahel, South Sudan, and the Horn of Africa.¹⁸

Africa in China's GSI Calculus

In highlighting Beijing's position, Chinese Ambassador to Somalia Fei Shengchao stated:

“China believes that the more turbulent the international situation is, the more difficulties and challenges Africa faces, the more we must pay attention to the voices of African countries and increase our support and assistance to Africa. As a good brother of African nations, China will continue to stand with Africa, firmly support Africa in maintaining peace and security, firmly support Africa in achieving economic recovery, firmly support Africa in defending its legitimate rights and interests, and make due contribution to Africa's independence and sustainable development.”¹⁹

This highlights Africa's special place in China's GSI calculus, as evident from the GSI Concept Paper, which categorically mentions Africa among its 20 “priorities of cooperation”, stating:

“Support the efforts of African countries, the AU and sub-regional organizations to resolve regional conflicts, fight terrorism and safeguard maritime security, call on the international community to provide financial and technical support to Africa-led counter-terrorism operations, and support African countries in strengthening their ability to safeguard peace independently. Support addressing African problems in the African way and promote peaceful settlement of hotspots in the Horn of Africa, the Sahel, the Great Lakes region and other areas. Actively implement the Outlook on Peace and Development in the Horn of Africa, promote the institutionalization of the China-Horn of Africa Peace, Governance and Development Conference, and work actively to launch pilot projects of cooperation.”²⁰

In addition, among the five “platforms and mechanisms of cooperation”, China aims to leverage two Africa-linked mechanisms: the China-Horn of Africa Peace, Governance, and Development Conference, established in June 2022, to promote regional and global peace and stability, and the China-Africa Peace and Security Forum, to deepen security-related exchange and cooperation.

Africa in China's GSI Calculus

The first meeting of the China-Horn of Africa Peace, Governance, and Development Conference was held in June 2022,^f where China's special envoy to the Horn of Africa,^g Xue Bing, expressed Beijing's interest to "provide mediation efforts for the peaceful settlement of disputes based on the will of countries in this region." He acknowledged the "complicated and intertwined ethnicity, religion, and boundary issues" that could be "difficult to handle, as many of them dates back to colonial times."²¹ The second meeting was held in June 2024 in Beijing, where China's Vice Foreign Minister Chen Xiaodong stated that China is willing to work with the Horn of Africa countries to turn the region into a "horn of peace, development, and prosperity", working towards building a high-level China-Africa community with a shared future.²²

Meanwhile, the China-Africa Peace and Security Forum provides a common platform for military officials from both sides to convene and discuss issues of mutual interest, serving two primary goals: consolidating strategic communication networks between Chinese and African defence departments and exploring ways to align African militaries and security architecture with China's GSI.

For the most part, the security dimension of China-Africa cooperation has involved the deployment of troops for UN peacekeeping missions, training African military and security personnel, and conducting counter-piracy operations. However, in recent years, the scope has broadened to include conflict mediation, counterterrorism, policing and law-enforcement cooperation, and military training (see Table 3).

f According to the Joint Statement, the countries agreed to a peaceful resolution of regional problems, jointly address natural disasters, and uphold a coordinated approach to combat cyber security, terrorism, illegal arms, and human trafficking, among others.

g The Horn of Africa countries include Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia, Uganda, and Djibouti.

Table 3: China's Security Engagements with Select Countries in Africa

Country	Year(s)	Type of Engagement	China's Aid and Support	Agenda
Angola	2015-Present	Defence cooperation	Angola has received arms supplies and logistical support for its military, often in exchange for oil deals or infrastructure projects funded by China.	Military aid packages
Cameroon	2018-Present	Counter-piracy and maritime security	Aid in securing the Gulf of Guinea, with equipment donations and security training against piracy.	Maritime patrol boats and security training
Djibouti	2017-Present	Military base	China's only overseas military base, strategically located near the Bab al-Mandeb Strait, supports peacekeeping and anti-piracy operations in the region.	PLA Military Logistics Base in Djibouti
Ethiopia	2018-Present	Cybersecurity and surveillance support	Partnerships in cyber infrastructure development, telecommunications, and training, with Chinese companies like Huawei and ZTE aiding government capabilities.	Huawei and ZTE telecom partnerships

Africa in China's GSI Calculus

Country	Year(s)	Type of Engagement	China's Aid and Support	Agenda
Ghana	2019- Present	Police equipment and training	Assistance in equipping and training police, focusing on public safety and security in urban areas.	Police vehicle donations and equipment
Kenya	2015- Present	Maritime security and anti-piracy	China has aided in maritime security to protect trade routes, including technical support and naval cooperation.	Anti-piracy training missions
Mozambique	2020- Present	Counterterrorism support	China has supported anti-terrorism efforts in Mozambique's northern regions, providing training and intelligence-sharing.	Training initiatives against insurgency
Namibia	2018- Present	Peacekeeping training	China has trained Namibian military personnel for participation in UN peacekeeping missions.	Training programmes for peacekeepers
Nigeria	2014- Present	Defence equipment and training	China provides military equipment, training for counterterrorism, and collaboration on intelligence to combat Boko Haram.	Police and military equipment supply
Sierra Leone	2014- Present	Public health security	China assisted in establishing emergency response mechanisms and providing medical aid, particularly during the Ebola outbreak.	Medical supplies and aid programmes

Africa in China's GSI Calculus

Country	Year(s)	Type of Engagement	China's Aid and Support	Agenda
South Sudan	2012-Present	Peacekeeping	China has deployed troops in UN peacekeeping missions to stabilise the region and protect oil interests.	United Nations Mission in South Sudan
Sudan	2008-Present	Peacekeeping and oil security	China provided peacekeeping forces and engaged in protecting oil infrastructure amid conflict.	Troops in Darfur as part of United Nations-African Union Mission in Darfur
Zambia	2016-Present	Police training and community policing	China has trained local police forces to improve security, particularly in areas with high Chinese business activity.	Police training initiatives
Zimbabwe	2015-Present	Military equipment and training	China has provided military equipment and trained local forces, bolstering security capabilities.	Military hardware and training

Source: Author's own

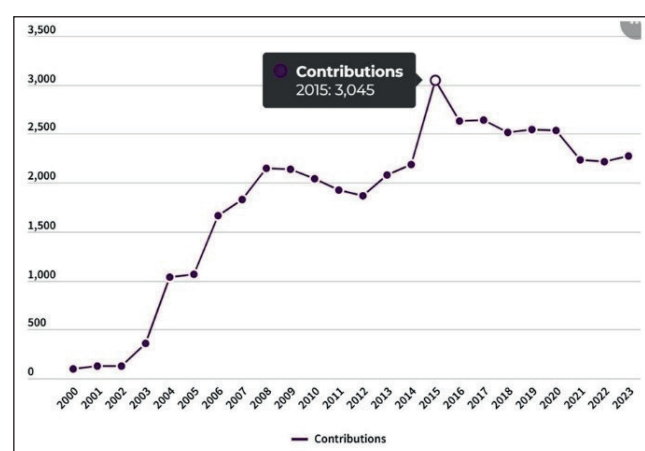
As per the above mapping, China's engagements with Africa are primarily in five areas: UN peacekeeping missions, multilateral initiatives, arms sales and military cooperation, non-traditional security threats, and conflict mediation and resolution.

First, China has expanded its participation in UN peacekeeping missions (see Figure 1). Today, China is the 10th largest contributor of troops and police (with 2,274 personnel) and the second largest financial supporter (accounting for nearly 19 percent of UN peacekeeping programme funding),^h providing

^h While the US remains the largest financial contributor to UN peacekeeping efforts, it ranks 84th out of 123 contributing countries in terms of deployment of personnel.

more peacekeepers than all UN Security Council Permanent members combined.²³ In 2018, China established its Peacekeeping Affairs Centre. In 2020, Beijing issued a white paper on “China’s Armed Forces: 30 Years of UN Peacekeeping”, stating that “China’s Blue Helmets have become a key force in UN peacekeeping” and “China’s armed forces have expanded the composition of their peacekeeping troops from single service to multiple military branches”, with efforts “extended beyond conflict prevention to building lasting peace.”²⁴

Figure 1: China’s Troop and Police Contributions to UN Missions, 2000-2023



Source: Lambert²³

The UN currently runs 15 peacekeeping missions, with the majority in Africa, where China has actively participated (see Table 4). In highlighting China’s contribution to UN peacekeeping missions in the last 30 years, the 2020 white paper posits that China has:

“Contributed 111 engineer units totaling 25,768 troops to eight UN peacekeeping missions in Cambodia, the DRC, Liberia, Sudan, Lebanon, Sudan’s Darfur, South Sudan, and Mali. These units have built and rehabilitated more than 17,000 kilometers of roads and 300 bridges, disposed of 14,000 landmines and unexploded ordnance, and performed a large number of engineering tasks including leveling ground, renovating airports, assembling prefabricated houses, and building defence works. Twenty-seven transport units totaling 5,164 troops were dispatched to the UN peacekeeping missions in Liberia and Sudan. They transported over 1.2 million tons of materials

and equipment over a total distance of more than 13 million kilometers. Eighty-five medical units of 4,259 troops were sent to six UN peacekeeping missions in the DRC, Liberia, Sudan, Lebanon, South Sudan, and Mali. They have provided medical services to over 246,000 sick and wounded people. Three helicopter units totaling 420 troops were sent to Sudan's Darfur. They completed 1,951 flight hours, transported 10,410 passengers and over 480 tons of cargo in 1,602 sorties.”²⁶

Table 4: China’s Participation in UN Peacekeeping Missions in Africa

UN Mission in Africa	Country/Region in Africa	Time (Ongoing/ Ended)
United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara	Western Sahara	1991-Present
United Nations Mission in Liberia	Liberia	2003-2018 (ended)
United Nations Operation in Burundi	Burundi	2004-2006 (ended)
United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire	Côte d'Ivoire	2004-2017
United Nations-African Union Mission in Darfur	Darfur	2007-2020
United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo	Democratic Republic of Congo	2010-Present
United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei	Abyei (Sudan-South Sudan border)	2011-Present
United Nations Mission in South Sudan	South Sudan	2011-Present
United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali	Mali	2013-Present

Source: Author's own

Second, China has further enhanced its military ties with Africa through arms exports, military training and education, and joint exercises. From 2019 to 2023, Africa’s major arms suppliers were Russia (24 percent), the US (16 percent), China (13 percent), and France (10 percent). With a 19 percent share

Africa in China's GSI Calculus

of sub-regional arms imports, China surpassed Russia (17 percent) to become the largest supplier of major armsⁱ to Sub-Saharan Africa.²⁷ Besides, at the 2024 FOCAC summit, Beijing pledged US\$50 billion to Africa over the following three years, with US\$140 million dedicated to security cooperation, including training 6,000 military personnel and 1,000 law enforcement officers, along with bringing 500 young African military officers to China for training. As part of its military diplomacy, China conducts the 'Peace Unity'^j joint exercise with Tanzania (Mozambique joined in 2024), a counterterrorism and counter-piracy drill, and 'Exercise Transcend' with Tanzania, a joint military exercise focused on the Marine Corps held in 2023.

In addition, China has played a mediation role in various African conflicts, including the Darfur region in Sudan in 2007; Zimbabwe, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Rwanda in 2008; South Sudan in 2013; and Djibouti in 2017. China also supported African Union-led mediation efforts in the Ethiopia-Tigray conflict from 2020 to 2022. In 2017, China established its first overseas military base in Djibouti to support anti-piracy operations and peacekeeping missions and to protect Chinese investments and citizens. For instance, scholars argue that the base in Djibouti plays a significant role in ensuring that China's vision of a maritime sea route which is in line with its BRI is realised.²⁸ Furthermore, the 2021 Dakar China-Africa Action Plan 2022-2024, from the 8th FOCAC Summit, identified military and police cooperation, counterterrorism, and law enforcement as strategic priorities between China and Africa.²⁹ Additionally, China has expanded its network of defence attaches in Africa³⁰ as part of a broader strategy to increase its military and security cooperation with African nations.

Therefore, China's security role in Africa has expanded from peacekeeping to that of military partnerships shaped by Beijing's pragmatism. In linking the GSI to Africa, at the 11th Xiangshan Forum in 2024, Chinese Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, Chen Xiaodong stated:

"In the Horn of Africa, in support of regional countries to tackle security, development and governance challenges, China has proposed and worked with these countries to step up the implementation of the Outlook on Peace and Development, mediated actively on hotspot issues and provided humanitarian assistance."³¹

i These include drones, rockets, artillery, armoured vehicles, aircraft, firearms, ammunition, missiles, space systems, radar, and electronic warfare system.

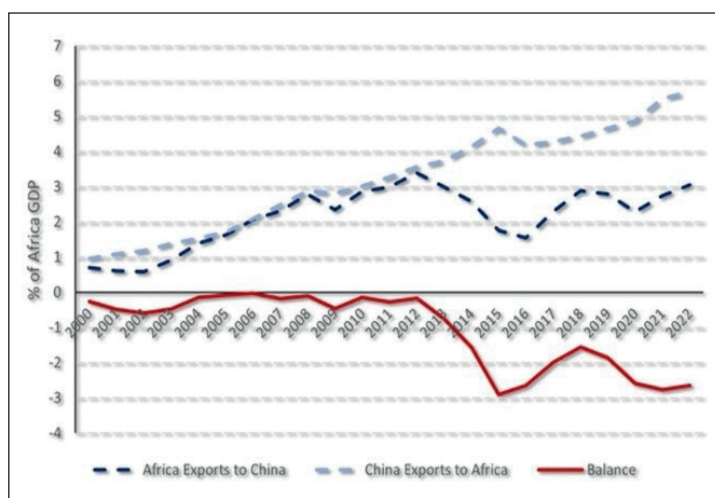
j The Peace Unity 2024 marked the fourth joint military exercise between Tanzania and China, after exercises in 2014, 2019-20, and September 2023.

GSI Complements China's Stakes in Africa

GSI complements China's long-standing engagement with Africa, ranging from military cooperation (as discussed earlier) to trade and infrastructure development. With its expanding role as a UN peacekeeper, China has been able to establish a soft military presence in Africa, where it is primarily engaged in infrastructure investment and resource extraction. Besides, forums like the FOCAC serve as platforms where security and development goals, including those of the GSI, are integrated.

What stands out is that by making significant investments in Africa, China has surpassed the US, both in terms of volume and impact. China is Africa's largest trading partner,^k with China-Africa trade reaching a record high of US\$282.1 billion in 2023, a 1.5-percent increase year-on-year.³²

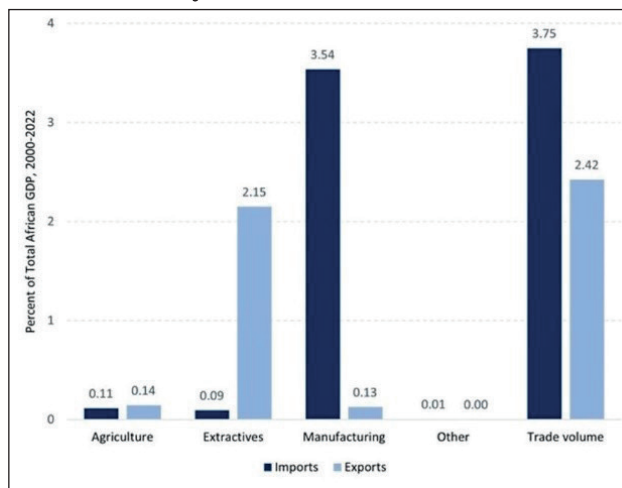
Figure 2: China-Africa Trade Balance, 2000-2022



Source: Moses³³

^k China was Africa's largest trading partner for 15 consecutive years until 2023.

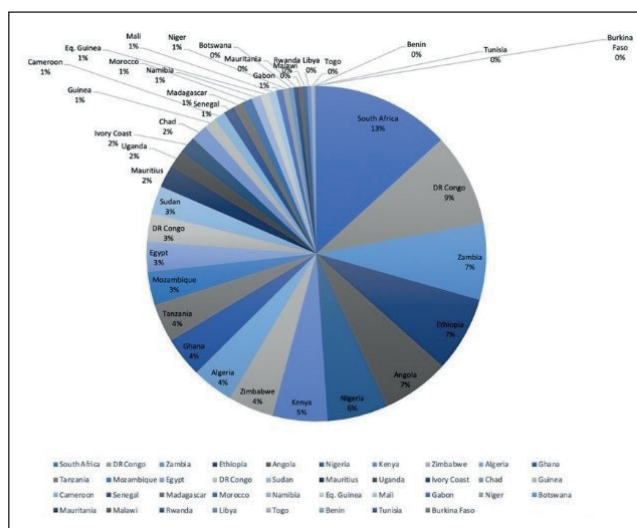
Figure 3: Africa's Exports and Imports to China by Sector



Source: Moses³⁴

In foreign direct investment (FDI), China is again the largest provider of FDI to Africa, roughly double the level of American FDI.³⁵ Additionally, China is by far the largest lender to African countries. In Africa's total external debt,¹ China's share grew from 1 percent in 2000 to 13 percent in 2022, given vast infrastructure lending to African countries.³⁶

Figure 4: Share of Chinese FDI in Africa

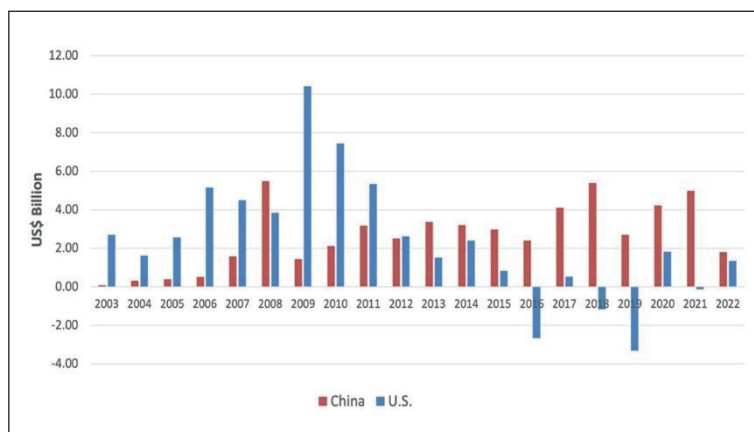


Source: Yu³⁷

¹ Africa's debt stock to China includes Angola (US\$6.69 billion), Zambia (US\$5.73 billion), Egypt (US\$5.21 billion), Nigeria (US\$4.29 billion), Côte d'Ivoire (US\$3.85 billion), Cameroon (US\$3.78 billion), South Africa (US\$3.43 billion), and the Republic of Congo (US\$3.42 billion).

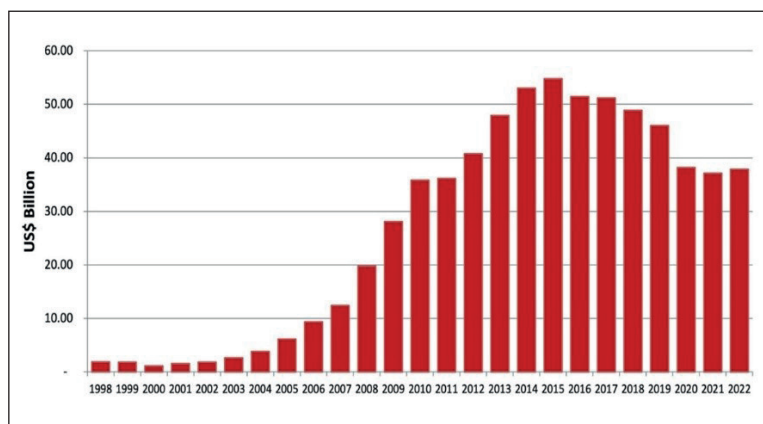
In 2003, the annual FDI flow from China to Africa was approximately US\$75 million. By 2022, it peaked at US\$5 billion, representing about 4.4 percent of the region's total FDI. Since 2023, Chinese FDI flows to Africa have exceeded those from the US (see Figure 5). The top five African destinations for Chinese FDI in 2022 were South Africa, Niger, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, and Côte d'Ivoire.³⁸ In 2021, at the 8th FOCAC Summit, China committed US\$10 billion in private FDI for the 2022-2025 period.³⁹ In 2024, at the 9th FOCAC Summit, China committed to providing Africa with RMB 360 billion in financial support over the next three years, including no less than RMB 70 billion in investments by Chinese companies.⁴⁰

Figure 5: Chinese FDI Flow vs. US FDI Flow in Africa (2003-2022)



Source: China Africa Research Initiative⁴¹

Figure 6: Gross Annual Revenues of Chinese Companies' Construction Projects in Africa



Source: China Africa Research Initiative⁴²

In 2022, the gross annual revenues of Chinese companies' engineering and construction projects in Africa totalled US\$38 billion, with Nigeria, Angola, Algeria, Egypt, and the Democratic Republic of Congo accounting for 41 percent of all Chinese companies' construction project gross annual revenues in Africa.⁴³ Besides, China has made significant investments in Africa's energy sector, aiming to promote the continent's development (see Table 5) and ensure its resource security by making significant inroads into Africa's mineral sector, particularly in the exploration and extraction of critical minerals (see Table 6).

Table 5: China's Key Energy Projects in Africa

Energy Type	Project	Country
Hydropower	Kariba South Bank Expansion Project	Zimbabwe
	Bui Dam	Ghana
	Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam	Ethiopia
Solar Power	Garissa Solar Power Plant (one of Africa's largest solar plants)	Kenya
Wind Energy	De Aar Wind Farm (One of South Africa's largest wind energy projects supported by Chinese companies)	South Africa
Oil and Gas Exploration	Investments in oil fields	Angola
	Partnership in oil extraction and pipeline development	South Sudan
Natural Gas	Investments in liquefied natural gas	Mozambique
	Partnership in gas extraction and processing	Algeria
Coal Power	Morupule B Power Station	Botswana
Geothermal Energy	Menengai Geothermal Plant	Kenya
Nuclear Energy	El Dabaa Nuclear Power Plant	Egypt

Source: Author's own

Table 6: China's Mineral Extraction in Africa (Select Countries)

Country	Mineral	Usage in Industry	Role Played by China
Angola	Diamonds	Jewellery, Electronics industry	China is a key buyer of Angolan diamonds.
Democratic Republic of Congo	Cobalt	Batteries for electric vehicles	China is the largest importer and processor of cobalt from the Democratic Republic of Congo.
Gabon	Manganese	Steel production, batteries, and chemical applications	Gabon is the key supplier of manganese for China's steel industry.
Guinea	Bauxite	Aluminium production for the aerospace, construction, and packaging industries	China is the largest importer of bauxite from Guinea.
Madagascar	Graphite	Steelmaking and anodes in lithium-ion batteries	China dominates graphite extraction and processing from Madagascar.
Mozambique	Graphite	Batteries and industrial applications	China is increasing its investments in high-grade graphite in Mozambique.
Namibia	Uranium	Nuclear energy production	China is a major investor in uranium mining projects in Namibia.
South Africa	Platinum Group Metals	Electronics, catalytic converters, and hydrogen fuel cells	China is a major partner in platinum and palladium mining in South Africa.
Tanzania	Rare Earth Elements	Electronics (used in various high-tech products like smartphones and computers), magnets for wind turbines	China is a key player in rare earth exploration and extraction in Tanzania.
Zambia	Copper	Electronics, electrical wiring, construction	Chinese companies are among the largest players in Zambia's copper mining industry.
Zimbabwe	Lithium	EV batteries, electronics, renewable energy storage	China is a key investor and miner in Zimbabwe's lithium sector.

Source: Author's own

Moreover, Africa is central to Xi's BRI, with 53 African countries participating as of 2024.^m The *China Belt and Road Initiative Investment Report 2023* suggests that investments in Africa grew by an impressive 114 percent, totalling US\$21.7 billion—a surge driven by China's strategic investments, particularly in the port and shipping sectors, where construction contracts in Africa increased by 47 percent in 2023 alone.⁴⁴ In the port sector, China is the largest infrastructure construction player in Africa (as well as in most of the developing world). Estimates suggest that Chinese firmsⁿ held a 61 percent market share for such contracts in 2020, up from less than 10 percent in 2002.⁴⁵

Table 7: Select BRI Infrastructure Projects in Africa

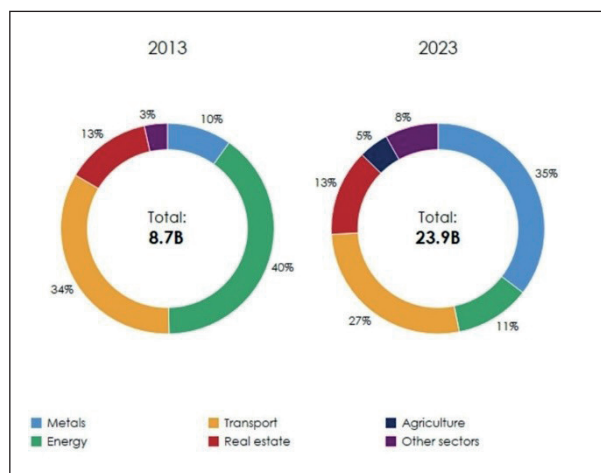
Project	Country	Sector	Cost
Mombasa-Nairobi Standard Gauge Railway	Kenya	Railways	US\$3.6 billion
Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway	Ethiopia and Djibouti	Railways	US\$4.5 billion
Lagos-Kano Expressway	Nigeria	Railways	
Port of Lamu Development	Kenya	Port	US\$ 3 billion
Lekki Deep Sea Port	Nigeria	Port	US\$1.5 billion

Source: Author's own

^m The 53 countries include: Algeria, Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burundi, Cabo Verde, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo, Republic of Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, São Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

ⁿ The China Communications Construction Corporation (CCCC) has been by far the most prominent player in the African port construction space, winning contracts in at least 38 ports.

Figure 7: China's BRI Investments in Africa, 2013 vs 2023




Source: Kluiver, 2024⁴⁶

To summarise, China's engagement in Africa's peace and security agenda is driven by four main interests:⁴⁷ First, to protect its trade market and its investments, as most of China's investments are in conflict-prone regions of the continent. Second, by playing an active role in Africa's peace and security, China seeks to boost its image as a peacemaker and as a valuable actor in the global arena. Third is the domestic political imperative to protect its citizens abroad as, in Africa, Chinese nationals are engaged in various activities such as mining, construction projects, trade and others. Fourth, it also provides China with the opportunity to gain practical experience in dealing with emerging security threats and challenges in the global world.

Conclusion

China's expanding security role in Africa is driven by its pragmatic choice to prioritise its economic and strategic interests. Beijing is aware that any instability in Africa would be detrimental to its trade and investments, including its BRI projects. In this regard, the GSI aligns with China's desire to protect its economic interests in Africa, particularly investments in infrastructure and natural resources. This strategy also plays a key role in countering the West's influence in the region and establishing China as the primary player in ensuring stability and security in Africa. With the GSI, China aims to position itself as a champion of world peace and security, in contrast to the existing US-led international order, by offering 'Chinese solutions' to world problems.

Given this, the GSI raises concerns about China's intention and its impact on African countries. Whether Xi Jinping's GSI can offer a 'Chinese solution' to Africa's problems remains questionable. More crucially, it will test the ability of African countries to engage with China on their terms, prioritising their national interests. Therefore, only time will tell whether the GSI is just another Chinese rhetoric in the name of 'shared destiny'. 

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Endnotes

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