TO: Deputy Assistant Secretary for Central Africa and Public Diplomacy Elizabeth Fitzsimmons

FROM: Andrew Caughey

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RE: To Adapt to China’s African Outreach, Highlight Security Partnerships in Public Diplomacy

**Executive Summary**

Beijing’s increasingly assertive foreign policy aims to develop economic and security partnerships by pursuing “win-win” policies via the Belt and Road initiative. State media contrasts these relationships with alleged U.S. unilateralism to cultivate soft power, undercutting U.S. public diplomacy and soft power in Africa. Though China’s partnerships may one day be truly comprehensive, for now its public diplomacy is focused on economic development, and state media downplays military activity in Africa. This is an opportunity for U.S. public diplomacy: while welcoming China’s investment, the State Department should deepen African security partnerships and promote their positive impact in the region to strengthen U.S. influence and counter Beijing’s narrative.

**Background: China’s Transition to Assertive Policy in Africa**

Until recently, China preferred to “hide strength and bide time” while the country developed. Xi has push a more active foreign policy in Africa, opening China’s first overseas military base in Djibouti and launching the 2013 Belt and Road Initiative, which has partnered with 39 African nations aims to expand trade networks to China with multi-billion dollar infrastructure projects and loans.

**Data and Methods: Text Analysis Contextualized with Qualitative Research**

China’s public diplomacy often describes foreign policy initiatives as “win-wins.” State whitepapers and think tank reports explain that this message is designed to publicly contrast with alleged “zero-sum” U.S. foreign policy. Text scraping analysis of the term “win-win” in state media headlines shows the Party regularly highlights economic cooperation in Africa; however, despite developing closer military ties, state media rarely features articles on China’s security initiatives in Africa.

**Center U.S. Security Benefits in Public Diplomacy Campaign to Contrast With Beijing**

China’s uses “win-win” rhetoric to allay fear about its rise and contrast with the US

* State-media frames the U.S. as a dangerous hegemon and China as a helpful developing peer
* This undercuts U.S. public diplomacy and facilitates China’s pursuit of deeper economic and security partnerships in the region

Despite growing security ties in Africa, state media is hesitant to highlight military activity publicly

* China’s U.N. peacekeeping participation and basing show growing Sino-African military ties
* Beijing’s top leaders and policies call for the PLA to provide win-win public security goods
* Still, state media has downplayed military cooperation relative to economic outreach

U.S. public diplomacy can fill this gap by emphasizing positive contributions to African security

* Public diplomacy should highlight military support for popular initiatives, like preventing the spread of Ebola, to draw a subtle contrast with Beijing’s outreach in the region
* Pursuing military and civilian cultural exchanges on security issues could further deepen ties

**Monitor China’s Soft-Power Outreach and Draw Contrasts with Public Diplomacy**

State media’s “win-win” messaging is a “win-win” for Beijing – it cultivates partnerships abroad and paints the U.S. as an outmoded, threatening hegemon. This messaging, though, constrains Beijing’s ability to promote its growing military ties; the State Department should contrast Beijing’s message by promoting its own positive contributions to regional security with robust public diplomacy.