## Concept Paper: “Access and influence? US and Chinese military presence and popular support in host countries”

## Background

This project studies how social and economic contact with citizens of foreign countries can build the influence needed to establish a foreign military presence or access. We do so by comparatively analyzing US and Chinese efforts to build influence in current and prospective base-host states. As base-host states democratize, the consent of the host population—which may have concerns about crime, noise, pollution, and sovereignty infringement—becomes more important in determining who gets and keeps military access. The United States relies heavily on foreign bases to project power abroad, while China has until recently avoided them. At the same time, China has built a large economic footprint in many prospective base host countries that could produce more goodwill and less resentment than a military presence, but has also been the source of controversy.

The project thus focuses on the effects of two sets of independent variables—economic versus social contact, on the one hand, and military versus nonmilitary contact, on the other—on two main outcome variables—public and elite perceptions of the foreign powers (China and the United States) and support for hosting a foreign military presence from those countries. This project builds on our past research, which shows that countries use infusions of spending to entice public support for basing (Blankenship and Joyce 2020) and that social and economic contact with military personnel can both positively and adversely shape public perceptions of the presence (Allen et al. 2022).

## Rationale and Significance

The overarching goals of this project are threefold. First, it sets out to understand how social and economic contact with foreign military forces shape perceptions of the sending country and support for its military presence in the host country. Second, it aims to assess how the effects of such contact are moderated by the competing effects of host country contact with rival third party countries. Third, it compares the effects of military contact to nonmilitary contact in order to see whether nonmilitary contact is more or less effective in building goodwill and support for hosting a foreign military presence.

Achieving these goals would be important for three reasons. The first is that doing so would contribute to the literature on foreign basing. While there is an extensive body of work on the domestic politics of bases, including on the effects of interpersonal contact on support for foreign bases, none of these studies have provided a comparative basing power perspective. This is an increasingly important question in an environment where China’s main form of international engagement is through its large Belt and Road infrastructure projects.

Second, research on great power competition for overseas bases focuses on the United States and the USSR (Harkvay 1989; Nieman et al 2021). Though a valuable starting point, it would be a mistake to overly rely on this Cold War model to understand the dynamics of Sino-American competition. This new competition occurs in a world characterized by strong norms of sovereignty and democratization. In this environment, understanding the mechanisms governing the consent of domestic populations towards foreign military basing and deployments is necessary to understand how great powers build international and domestic orders. This project highlights the unique characteristics of the China-U.S. relationship and presents new hypotheses on how democratic and autocratic powers interact as they face a future in which they compete for international influence.

Third, the project’s findings will provide a better understanding of the microfoundations of power and influence by evaluating how publics and elites view and respond to different instruments of influence by the United States and China. It will further emphasize how major powers find themselves in an increasingly democratizing world where they need to build support among both the elites and publics of minor powers.

## Project Methods and Workplan

In pursuit of these objectives, the project will rely on a combination of public surveys and elite interviews to gain a holistic sense of perceptions of the United States and China, given that the benefits and costs of basing can accrue differentially to the public and officials in government.

The project will in turn focus on four countries where the United States and China either have, do not have, or seek military access. First is Djibouti, where both countries have a military presence. Second is Kenya, where the United States has a military presence and China does not, but where China has a heavy economic presence that American policymakers worry might jeopardize U.S. military access. Third are Cambodia and the Solomon Islands, where evidence suggests that China may be seeking military access and the United States is attempting to counter Chinese influence.

These cases allow us to test how different types and intensity of contact with the United States and China shape perceptions of them. Kenya, where we will have conducted a pilot study, allows us to test how China’s economic footprint shapes support for the U.S. military presence, while Cambodia and the Solomon Islands allow us to test how competing influence attempts shape support for Chinese military presence in cases where neither country has an existing military footprint. Finally, Djibouti allows us to directly test how the effects of U.S. and Chinese military presence interact in the only country to date where both powers have bases.

In the surveys and interviews, respondents will answer a battery of questions regarding the frequency and nature of contact with and financial benefits from the United States and China. The surveys allow us to test whether the nature of interactions with military personnel or non-military citizens influences individuals’ views of the basing country and whether that effect varies across major powers. Surveys will also include several experiments to assess attitudes toward the United States and China. For example, a question will present respondents with a vignette regarding actions taken by either a) the United States, b) China, or c) a non-basing major power. Respondents will then evaluate how positively or negatively they view these actions.

Our timeline for completing the project is as follows. In Year 1, we will finalize the survey and interview questions and hold a survey design workshop to pre-test the survey experiments. In Year 2, we will conduct fieldwork in Djibouti and Kenya, fielding surveys and interviews in both countries. In Year 3, we will do the same in the Solomon Islands and Cambodia. We plan to disseminate the findings in years 2 and 3 through both presentations at academic conferences and publications in academic journals, along with publication of policy-oriented articles and blog posts and presentations to practitioners.

The principal investigator on this project is Renanah Miles Joyce (Brandeis University). Michael Allen (Boise State University), Brian Blankenship (University of Miami), Michael Flynn (Kansas State University), and Carla Martinez Machain (University at Buffalo) will serve as co-PIs. The total estimated project costs including survey work, conferences and workshops, research assistant salaries, faculty summer salaries, and university indirects come to approximately $1.15 million USD.

* Specify how you will carry out the proposed project. What methodology will you use? How will this work as a collaborative project?
  + Division of labor across project team members
    - All team members will participate in survey design, data analysis, and writing.
    - Each fieldwork trip will include 2-3 researchers
* Provide a timeline for the proposed project activities.
  + Year 1: finalize survey questions and design survey experiments. Hold a survey design workshop and pre-test the survey experiments
  + Year 2: case-focused work in Djibouti and Kenya. Field surveys in person in each country, and present interim findings at academic conferences
  + Year 3: case-focused work in Solomon Islands and Cambodia. Field surveys in person in each country and present findings at academic conferences

## Project Team

* Who will serve as the project director? Describe their qualifications.

Renanah Miles Joyce (Brandeis University) will serve as PI, and therefore as the default project director, though all co-PIs will assist with administrative tasks as well.

* Who will serve as project team members? How will the background and experiences of the project team members benefit the project?

Michael Allen (Boise State University), Brian Blankenship (University of Miami), Michael Flynn (Kansas State University), and Carla Martinez Machain (University at Buffalo) will serve as co-PIs. All have published on topics related to power projection and influence and have extensive methodological skills.

## Budget

* What are your estimated project costs?
  + Estimated project costs including survey work, conferences and workshops, research assistant salaries, faculty summer salaries, and university indirects come to approximately $1.15 million USD

## Evaluation

* Explain how you will determine whether the project is meeting expected objectives. Describe the benchmarks for evaluating ongoing activities and the criteria for assessing the impact of the project.
  + Surveys will be evaluated by completion by a representative sample of the country’s population
  + Fieldwork will be evaluated by the completion of target number of interviews in country
  + Deliverables will include a series of journal articles and a publicly available data dashboard that makes all gathered data available to other researchers within a year of the project’s completion.

## Dissemination

* How will you disseminate project findings? Dissemination activities might include the publication of journal articles, presentations at conferences, or workshops with colleagues.
  + Publication of journal articles
  + Presentations at conferences
  + Publication of policy-oriented articles and blog posts
  + Presentations to practitioners