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

**1. Background**

This project examines how social and economic contact with citizens of foreign countries contributes to the establishment of foreign military presence or access. We compare the efforts of the United States and China in building influence in current and prospective base-host countries. As host countries democratize, the consent of the local population—which may have concerns about crime, pollution, and infringement on sovereignty—becomes crucial in determining military access. The United States relies heavily on foreign bases for projecting power globally, while China has until recently avoided them. However, China has established a large economic presence in many potential host countries, which may generate more goodwill and less resentment compared to a military presence, but has also sparked controversy.

Therefore, this project focuses on two sets of independent variables: economic versus social contact, and military versus non-military contact. We analyze their effects on two main outcome variables: public and elite perceptions of China and the United States, and support for hosting a foreign military presence from these countries. This project builds upon previous findings, which demonstrate that countries use financial incentives to garner public support for basing (Blankenship and Joyce 2020), and that social and economic contact with military personnel can both positively and negatively shape public perceptions of their presence (Allen et al. 2022).

**2. Rationale and Significance**

This project has three overarching goals. First, it aims to understand how social and economic contact with foreign military forces shapes perceptions of the sending country and support for its military presence in the host country. Second, it seeks to assess how the effects of this contact are moderated by host country interactions with rival third party countries. Third, it compares the impact of military contact to non-military contact to determine whether non-military contact is more or less effective in building goodwill and support for hosting a foreign military presence.

Achieving these goals is important for three reasons. First, it contributes to the literature on foreign basing, which has extensively examined the domestic politics of bases, including the effects of interpersonal contact on support for foreign bases. However, these studies have not provided a comparative perspective on basing powers. This is particularly relevant in the current context where China’s primary international engagement is through its Belt and Road infrastructure projects.

Second, research on great power competition for overseas bases has mainly focused on the United States and the USSR, which is valuable but limited in understanding the dynamics of Sino-American competition. The new competition occurs in a world characterized by strong norms of sovereignty and democratization. Therefore, understanding the mechanisms that govern the consent of domestic populations toward foreign military basing and deployments is crucial for comprehending how great powers establish international and domestic orders. This project highlights unique features of the China-US relationship and presents new hypotheses on the interaction between democratic and autocratic powers in their competition for international influence.

Third, the project’s findings will enhance our understanding of the microfoundations of power and influence by evaluating how both publics and elites perceive and respond to different instruments of influence used by the United States and China. It will underscore the challenges faced by major powers in a democratizing world where they need to garner support from both elites and publics of minor powers.

**3. Project Methods and Workplan**

The project will use public surveys and elite interviews to understand perceptions of the United States and China. This approach is important because the costs and benefits of basing can affect the public and government officials differently. The project will focus on four countries: Djibouti, Kenya, Cambodia, and the Solomon Islands. In Djibouti, both the United States and China have a military presence. In Kenya, the United States has a military presence while China has a significant economic presence that US policymakers worry might jeopardize US access. The Solomon Islands and Cambodia are cases where China may be seeking military access while the United States attempts to counter Chinese influence.

These cases allow us to examine how different types and levels of contact with the United States and China influence perceptions. In Kenya, where we have recently concluded a pilot study that will be part of our funding proposal, we will explore how China’s economic footprint affects support for the US military presence. The Solomon Islands and Cambodia will help us understand how competing influence attempts shape support for Chinese military presence in cases where neither country has an existing (or officially acknowledged) military presence. Finally, Djibouti allows us to directly assess the interaction of US and Chinese military presence, as it is the only country where both powers have bases.

The surveys and interviews will gather responses on the frequency and nature of contact with and financial benefits from the United States and China. We will examine if interactions with military personnel or non-military citizens influence views of the sending country, and if this effect varies across major powers. Surveys will include several experiments to assess attitudes toward the United States and China. For example, an experiment will present vignettes of actions by the United States, China, or a non-basing major power, and respondents will evaluate their views of these actions.

Our timeline for completing the project is as follows:

* Year 1: Finalize survey and interview questions and hold a survey design workshop to pre-test the survey experiments.
* Year 2: Conduct fieldwork in Djibouti and Kenya, administering surveys and interviews.
* Year 3: Repeat fieldwork in the Solomon Islands and Cambodia.

**4. Project Team and Budget**

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. All have published on topics related to power projection and influence and have extensive methodological skills, including fieldwork and survey experience in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Europe.

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.

**5. Dissemination**

We plan to disseminate our findings through academic conferences, academic journal publications, policy-oriented articles, blog posts, and presentations to practitioners. We will also produce a publicly available data dashboard that makes all gathered data available to other researchers within a year of project completion.