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

**1. Background**

This project examines how major powers establish influence and access in a great power competition setting. We use military basing as a measure of access, and study how it is affected by influence campaigns. We compare the efforts of the United States and China in building influence in current and prospective base-host countries. The United States relies heavily on foreign bases for projecting power globally, while China has until recently avoided them. However, China has increasingly shown interest in establishing military access abroad. China has also established a large economic presence in many potential host countries, creating influence that could potentially jeopardize U.S. military access. As our previous work has argued, even in non-democratic countries, the lack of consent of the local population can increase the cost that major powers pay for military access.

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 primary 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 demonstrating 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 shape public perceptions (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 host country interactions with rival third-party countries moderate the effects of this contact. 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 power projection by studying foreign military bases, a fundamental expression of power projection. Existing work has neither provided a comparative perspective on basing powers nor related basing to other forms of influence. This is particularly relevant in the current great power competition 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. 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 publics and elites perceive and respond to different instruments of influence used by the United States and China. It will underscore the challenges major powers face in a democratizing world where they need to garner support from 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 essential because the costs and benefits of basing can affect the public and government officials (elites) 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. The United States has a military presence in Kenya, while China has a significant economic presence that U.S. policymakers worry might jeopardize U.S. access. The Solomon Islands and Cambodia are cases where China may seek 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. We have recently concluded a pilot study in Kenya, where we begin to explore how China’s economic footprint affects support for the U.S. military presence. Preliminary results show that even in the areas with a larger U.S. military presence, locals are more likely to have interacted with a Chinese citizen than an American one. They also show a significant portion of the population who (erroneously) believe that China has already established a military presence in Kenya and view it positively.

The broader project’s 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. Access to elites will be established through a snowball methodology, which has proven fruitful in our past work (Allen et al. 2022).

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

The estimated project costs, including survey work, conferences and workshops, research assistant salaries, faculty summer salaries, and university indirects come to approximately $500,000.

**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 publicly share all available data through Dataverse within a year of project completion. Beyond an academic audience, there are clear stakeholders for the results of this project in the U.S. government and military communities. Results will prove helpful to anyone involved in the planning or execution of foreign military deployments. We have several established contacts in the Department of Defense and the Department of State to whom we could reach out to aid in disseminating results.