**Collaborative Research: Access and Influence? U.S. and Chinese Military Presence and Popular Support in Host Countries**

**1. Background**

In recent years, there has been growing interest among scholars, policymakers, and practitioners in the potential transition of world affairs from a period of unipolar hegemony to one of multipolar great power competition. States like China and Russia are poised to emerge as competitors with the United States as they seek to reshape existing global institutions, from global trade to regional security configurations. Such global transitions are neither immediate nor determinant, and the behaviors of both great powers and the states they try to bring into their spheres of influence will shape the future course of global politics.

The ability to project military power abroad is a central means by which states exert influence in international politics, allowing them to defeat adversaries and reassure allies across large distances (Levy and Thompson 2010; Markowitz and Fariss 2013; Blankenship and Lin-Greenberg 2022). The lifeblood of power projection is foreign military bases, which allow states to control territory, forward deploy resources and personnel, and resupply their forces (Harkavy 1989; Posen 2003). Basing access, however, is often precarious. In the contemporary period, states rely on the consent of host governments to build and maintain their overseas military presence. This contrasts with earlier periods when states often secured bases through force, coercion, and formal empire (Schmidt 2020).

Host-state consent to great power basing is affected by two sets of forces—*internal* and *external.* Internally, great powers can have their bases challenged by domestic audiences within a host country who oppose the foreign military presence. Internal challenges are rooted in both abstract ideas about the infringement upon the host country’s sovereignty and the direct negative effects that bases impose on their environments, including noise, environmental pollution, traffic congestion, and crime committed by the basing power’s servicemembers. Basing countries have various policy tools to attempt to address these challenges. These include using financial incentives to curry favor—for example, building infrastructure for the host population and hiring local labor—as well as taking steps to ensure that the host population has positive, rather than negative, social interactions (Allen et al. 2020; Blankenship and Joyce 2020; Martínez Machain et al. 2022).

External forces can include rival powers that seek to undermine a basing country’s efforts by building up their support in a host country. These efforts can be passive or active. For example, a rival power may actively seek to provide inducements (economic or otherwise) to convince policymakers within a host state to block access to a rival power seeking to build or expand a new military base. Alternatively, external forces affecting basing may be more passive if they are related to existing economic structures or relationships. For example, this would be the case if a rival’s economic engagement crowds out the incentives the basing country offers or if their positive image makes the sender look worse by comparison (Joyce and Blankenship 2023).

The systematic study of overseas military basing, how it affects and how it is affected by host populations, is still in its infancy. The research largely focuses on the United States after World War II. However, the expansion of China’s overseas bases in recent years poses a unique research question that will help us advance basic science research in international relations: “How do states gain military access for power projection?” Previous theories of overseas basing and access rely on U.S., Russian, and Western European models of military deployments rooted in a colonial model of territorial control and power projection.

Alternatively, China has pursued an access model of foreign influence in a world dominated by U.S. bases. As Kardon (2022) noted, China has established sites that perform “base-like functions,” such as dual-use commercial ports. Existing work finds that when setting up new military bases abroad, states tend to avoid their rivals’ spheres of influence (Nieman et al. 2021). Given that U.S. hegemony has defined the last three decades, most potential basing sites for China are perceived as provocative by the United States. China has thus followed a different power projection model that better fits with a strategy of avoiding confrontation and building political, economic, and military influence (Doshi 2022). While China does have a permanent military base in Djibouti (the People’s Liberation Army Support Base, established in 2017), much of its military expansion is instead focused on establishing military access to other states’ existing military or commercial installations. For example, in December of 2023, the first Chinese military vessels docked in Cambodia’s Ream Naval base, which had recently been renovated through Chinese grant funding (Gan 2023).

To answer the question of how different states gain military access for power projection, we compare the efforts of the United States and China in building influence in current and prospective basing and military-access countries. As host countries democratize, the consent of the local population becomes crucial in determining military access. China has, until recently, avoided the U.S. model of relying heavily on foreign bases for projecting power globally. However, it has established a large economic presence in many potential host countries, which may generate more goodwill and less resentment than a military presence. This, in turn, poses challenges for the U.S. basing network.

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 access and 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 military interactions are more or less effective in building goodwill and support for hosting a foreign military presence.

Our research project moves away from a traditional military-basing framework of overseas power projection. It moves towards a holistic understanding of military access in the US-Chinese great power competition context. The two militaries’ soft power-building capabilities will underlie the success and failure of each country as they seek to expand where they can use territory for military objectives. While military basing has been the primary means of projecting power since the end of World War II, this new phase of competition will shift how we understand negotiations over power projection and access between major and minor powers.

**2. Theory and Significance**

This project draws on and contributes to two bodies of scholarship. The first is the politics of foreign military bases and access, which has extensively studied the domestic politics of basing and great power competition for bases but has traditionally done so separately. This project fills this gap by providing evidence how great power competition shapes the domestic foundations of support for basing. The second is the literature on power, influence, and competition in international politics, which studies how countries use a variety of economic, political, and military tools—including foreign aid, arms sales, and military training—to achieve goals ranging from favorable votes in the United Nations to assistance during wartime. This literature, however, has largely neglected military bases and access as an outcome of interest. This project thus contributes to our understanding of the uses and limits of economic, political, and military tools as instruments of foreign policy influence.

**A. The Politics of Foreign Basing**

Early scholarship on bases focused on understanding how great powers use, acquire, and compete for bases. Perhaps most notably, Robert Harkavy’s (1982, 1989, 2007) work offered sweeping accounts of great power bases over eight centuries, with particular emphasis on how the United States and Soviet Union attempted to acquire their bases and deny them to each other using a variety of economic, political, and military tools. Other scholars focused primarily on the United States, attempting to chronicle the scope and purpose of the vast U.S. basing network during and after the Cold War (Sandars 2000; Vine 2015; Moore and Walker 2016). This body of scholarship, however, is largely descriptive and atheoretical, and almost exclusively focused on government-to-government interactions.

More recently, scholars have opened the black box of basing relationships to explore how domestic politics in host countries can shape the political viability of overseas bases and how basing countries, in turn, can adapt. Kent Calder (2007), Alexander Cooley (2008), and Andrew Yeo (2011) all shed light on how domestic anti-base movements can pressure host governments to evict foreign militaries, particularly during periods of democratic transition. Building on this work, Allen, Flynn, Martínez Machain, and Stravers explore the microfoundations of domestic support for foreign bases using surveys across fourteen countries, with findings suggesting that positive economic and social interactions between U.S. personnel and the host population can build support for the U.S. military presence (Allen et al. 2020; Martínez Machain et al. 2022).

These two strains of literature have mainly remained separate, leaving a gap in our understanding of how great power competition can shape the foundations of domestic support for hosting foreign bases. This competition can be directly military, as in the case of U.S.-Soviet competition for bases during the Cold War (Harkavy 1982; Nieman et al. 2021). But it can also be broader, with rivals seeking political and economic influence across the same countries. For example, China has primarily sought influence with economic tools, perhaps most notably through its Belt and Road Initiative, which has financed some USD 500 billion in infrastructure globally since 2008. In turn, China has only acquired one foreign military base in Djibouti and primarily relies on access to infrastructure like ports through the ownership rights of state-owned enterprises, rather than bases, to project power (Kardon 2022; Kardon and Leutert 2022). But there is evidence that this may be changing, with China seeking base rights in countries across Asia, Africa, and even the Americas (Hudson, Nakashima, and Sly 2023; Strobel and Lubold 2023). And even where China does not seek bases, its economic footprint poses problems for the United States, as it can use its influence and economic leverage to deny U.S. access. In Kenya, for example, U.S. officials have indicated their alarm at the country’s willingness to hire a Chinese construction firm to complete upgrades to a joint Kenya-U.S. counterterrorism base unless the United States pays for the upgrades itself (Phillips 2023).

The proposed project attempts to fill this gap by exploring how military, social, and economic contact with multiple rival countries shapes those rivals’ ability to curry influence and ultimately acquire and maintain foreign base access. In doing so, it sheds light on additional mechanisms through which great power competition can shape foreign bases beyond government-to-government interactions. It also explores how countries’ influence attempts can be undermined (or not) by those of rival countries. Moreover, it also expands our understanding of great power competition for bases beyond the literature’s disproportionate focus on U.S.-Soviet Cold War relations. In the current environment, competition for bases 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.

While military basing has been a centuries-old practice, the methods of securing basing access have evolved rapidly. Traditionally, the ability to deploy troops in another’s territory primarily arose from conquest and colonialism. After World War II and into the period of decolonization, globally aligned alliances and regime change provided a path for the United States and the Soviet Union to have long-term military access (or control) over other’s territories. While the collapse of the Soviet Union led to a withdrawal of Russian bases in most places, the United States expanded its network to include most of the globe in its unipolar moment.

Notably, the United States basing network seemed to give it unfettered access to regions of interest. In the lead-up to the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, the US maintained between 2,000–3,000 troops in Turkey. Yet upon requesting the use of Turkey as a launching pad for its invasion, the Turkish parliament unexpectedly refused the US request. While not the first time a basing country has limited US usage, this was a clear marker that the global role of the United States was shifting. This instance also affirms that access is an ongoing political and bargaining process that requires consent from the granting state.

China’s current international strategy focuses more on access than on basing itself (Kardon 2022). While China has notable gains in overseas basing, its military access diplomacy is growing more rapidly. Access has two unique dimensions to it. First, unlike military asset goods like a military base, it is not observable until used by one party. As previously noted, much Chinese access focuses on dual-use installations such as commercial ports that may dock military vessels if needed. Second, states that grant access can decide to revoke it when the accessing party attempts to use it. As such, it offers a unique commitment problem if it does not involve material commitments by the hosting state (Fearon 1995). This second aspect makes it a dynamic good that competing parties can lobby for access (creating their own rent-seeking dynamic) or lobby to deny a competitor access.

**B. Power, Influence, and Competition in International Politics**

Scholars have long been interested in the sources of power and influence in international relations. Perhaps the most-studied source of power in international relations and political science is changing other actors’ incentives to make it rational for them to comply with an actor’s preferences (Dahl 1961). Aside from the threat or use of force—which has over time become a less common means of securing foreign bases (Lake 1996; Schmidt 2020)—states can incentivize other actors to cooperate through economic tools of statecraft like foreign aid. Indeed, a large body of literature suggests that states often use tools of economic statecraft like foreign aid to buy foreign policy influence and secure access to bases (Carter and Stone, 2015; Alexander and Rooney, 2019; Blankenship and Joyce, 2020; Joyce and Blankenship, 2023).

More broadly, beyond changing other actors’ incentives, states can attempt to elicit cooperation through what Joseph Nye (1990, 2004) called “soft power,” which refers to the variety of ways in which an actor can influence others by persuading them to adopt its preferences as their own, often by attracting them with a favorable image. The foreign aid literature provides evidence of how foreign policy can build soft power for a country, but that effect is conditional. Notably, a recent study of US and Chinese aid to 38 different African countries shows a link between US aid and support for the United States. However, Chinese aid either did not affect support or actively reduced it (Blair et al. 2022). This divergence suggests that similar policies do not necessarily yield similar effects for major powers competing for public approval, and highlights the need for direct investigation to see how such interventions may uniquely affect host-state civilians.

Overseas military deployments can also be a source of soft power (Atkinson 2014). First, the most obvious way military deployments can encourage soft power is through humanitarian missions where service members assist with health care or disaster relief. These acts build support for the basing country as it is clear that the assistance comes from that base power (Flynn et al. 2019). Second, and more difficult to observe, service members integrated into overseas communities can build soft power. Everyday, routine behavior by service members on and off base creates potential points of interaction that build support for a basing country’s mission in a host country. Research finds that interactions with service members can reduce stereotypes, build goodwill, and humanize a deployed force such that contact alone can produce positive assessments of a foreign-deployed army (Allen et al. 2023). States with an active, non-isolated presence actively build support for their presence with local populations.

Additionally, existing scholarship indicates rival providers can undermine states’ influence attempts. The literature on foreign aid and economic statecraft, for example, suggests that states and international organizations like the World Bank are less able to make their assistance conditional on policy concessions when recipients have alternative sources of aid and financing (Dunning 2004; Bueno de Mesquita and Smith 2016; Woods 2008; Kastner and Pearson 2021; Watkins 2022). Similarly, the presence of multiple sources of soft power communicating competing sets of values can undermine an actor’s ability to persuade targets to adopt their own values (Joyce, 2020).

This project contributes to this literature by offering evidence on the relative importance of different forms of power (hard and soft) coming from different sources (military and non-military) and different actors (the United States and China).

**C. Research Objectives and Hypotheses**

We propose a one-year project to study how US-China competition shapes their ability to gain and maintain access for power projection. Our project will conduct two nationwide surveys in countries that host Chinese or American military bases: Djibouti and Cambodia. Additionally, we will conduct fieldwork and interviews in Djibouti, which hosts both an American and a Chinese presence.

* **Overarching Research Question:** *How do states gain access for power projection?*

Much of this work is exploratory. For example, we know relatively little about how people view China’s foreign military presences, as most of the existing literature has focused on China’s purely economic footprint. Similarly, while existing literature has studied public perceptions of economic inducements like foreign aid, and how contact with military personnel shapes public perceptions of the country that stations them, we know little about the relative effects of economic and social contact with military personnel and non-military civilians.

* Descriptive Research Questions
  + To what extent are members of the public aware that the United States and China have a military presence in their countries?
  + To what extent do members of the public and elites in actual or potential base host countries support the United States and China having a military presence in their countries?
  + To what extent do members of the public and elites in actual or potential base host countries hold favorable views of the United States and China?
  + Do members of the public and elites have more positive views of interactions with a country’s military personnel or civilians, all else being equal?

Additionally, we test a series of hypotheses on how exposure to contact with the U.S. and Chinese citizens and commerce shapes public and elite views on the United States, China, and their foreign military presence. These hypotheses are relatively uncontroversial and based on existing findings. The first two hypotheses on contact and soft power derive from the literature. Research suggests positive public diplomacy can improve foreign perceptions of a sending state (Goldsmith et al., 2021; Mattingly and Sunquist, 2022). A recent wave of literature suggests that this can also be true of military contact, with studies finding that contact with US military personnel improves foreign perceptions of the United States (Martinez Machain 2019; Flynn et al. 2019; Allen et al. 2020, 2022).

The third and fourth hypotheses are rooted in the literature on basing and foreign aid. Research on foreign aid suggests aid can increase public support for the donor (Goldsmith et al., 2014; Blair et al. 2022) and secure policy concessions for the donor (Bueno de Mesquita and Smith, 2007; Carter and Stone, 2015; Alexander and Rooney, 2019). Similarly, economic tools are a central means by which states secure host consent for their foreign military bases, and a number of studies have found that exposure to economic benefits increases support for a country’s military presence and positive views of that country (Allen et al. 2020, 2022; Blankenship and Joyce 2020; Joyce and Blankenship 2023).

* Theoretical Hypotheses
  + Positive (negative) interactions with citizens of one country will increase (decrease) positive views of that country.
  + Positive (negative) interactions with citizens of one country will increase (decrease) support for hosting that country’s military.
  + Exposure to economic benefits from one country will increase positive views of that country.
  + Exposure to economic benefits from one country will increase support for hosting that country’s military.

Finally, we test an additional hypothesis rooted in existing literature but yet to be empirically tested, which focuses on the dynamics of US-China competition. Bases can bring a variety of negative externalities like crime, noise, pollution, traffic, and, more broadly, a perception that a country’s sovereignty is being infringed upon (Cooley 2008; Yeo 2011; Hikotani et al. 2022). As a result, bases are more desirable to the extent they bring tangible benefits to offset their negative effects. In some cases, these benefits take the form of security guarantees, but in the cases we’re focusing on, those benefits are primarily economic. Thus, if a foreign competitor can offer the same economic benefits, the host’s need to accept a foreign base is lower, which may decrease support for that base (Joyce and Blankenship, 2023). Indeed, the evidence suggests that the United States and China often use their aid competitively to curry influence and secure policy concessions for themselves while denying them to each other (Vadlamannati et al. 2023; Joyce and Blankenship 2023).

* + Exposure to economic benefits from one country will decrease support for hosting the other country’s military.

**3. Preliminary Findings**

In September 2023, we developed and deployed a preliminary survey to test the feasibility of our survey instrument and collect initial results related to our theoretical concept of interest. We limited the pilot survey in theoretical and sample scope due to budget constraints and it is an initial test. We deployed the survey in English and Swahili to 1023 Kenyans via cellphone. The survey contained 25 questions about demographics and topics related to our hypotheses. Specifically, we asked questions related to both perceived and behavioral indicators of U.S. and Chinese influence by the respondents and how they perceived both actors. In addition to looking at great power influence, we also included control questions to measure that influence versus influence by other regional and colonial actors. We collected the full sample over six days.

The initial sample contained useful distributional characteristics. First, most respondents were in the 20–29 age bracket, while the next two largest groups were in the subsequent 10–year brackets. The full sample ranged from 18–69. Purposefully, we over-sampled Mombasa due to its size and possibility for international influence. Half of the responses came from Mombasa. The sample slightly skewed Male and, while most people reported their primary language being Swahili, most respondents opted to take the survey in English.

**4. Broader Impacts**

The project has several impacts on scholarship. First, it enhances scholarly understanding of influence in the security domain. How to get other people (or states) to do what one wants represents a central challenge in international security. While coercion—the threatened or limited use of force to persuade an adversary to do one’s bidding—is well-studied, soft power is much less understood in the security domain. This project explores the interpersonal and economic underpinnings of influence, shedding light both on the soft power sources of influence and on their effects. More broadly, most studies of influence in international relations are dyadic, focusing on an influence-seeking state and a target. In practice, however, third-party states can undermine influence. Great powers regularly seek to acquire influence for themselves and to deny it to their rivals. We move beyond dyadic conceptions of influence to explore the effects of multiple influence-seekers on public and elite opinion in host states.

Second, this project enhances understanding of sovereign bargaining over basing access. In the 21st century, a common way that states acquire basing access is to pay for it. Yet to date there is little work on the economic drivers of basing. This project provides new data and theory on the different ways that states buy access, contrasting base rents paid into regime coffers with economic incentives distributed into host societies. Importantly, this work provides a first cut at measuring the economic impact of basing on host societies—a question with theoretical and real-world implications for lower income states where bases may have an outsized economic impact.

Additionally, this project has implications for US national security policymakers as well as policymakers in base host countries. First, US national security policymakers openly perceive China’s growing economic reach as a potential threat to US influence and access. Yet, unanswered questions remain as China’s investments in other countries have grown. For example, are these investments perceived by receiving populations as exploitative, or does contact with Chinese people and Chinese money increase goodwill? And, crucially, does this goodwill come at the expense of US access in those same countries? This project will provide micro-level data that enable policymakers to assess these kinds of questions.

Second, by shedding light on the interactions and benefits that host populations derive from contact with sending states, this project provides evidence that may increase the agency of host governments, allowing them to pursue more tailored arrangements with sending states that better serve the needs of host populations.

Finally, this project will have impacts on our campuses, providing educational opportunities for diverse student bodies. The project includes a mentoring plan for a research assistant, who will learn the tools and techniques of survey and interview research. Moreover, we will use this project to host several teaching events on our respective campuses, including a methodological workshop on experimental design in surveys and research presentations for the general community to disseminate our results, lessons learned, and methodological insights.

**5. Technical Plan and Methodology**

The project follows a two-pronged approach to understanding the phenomena of interest and follows our previous research strategy (Allen et al., 2022). The first strategy to assess influence and perception within the states of interest is to conduct large-scale surveys. We will deploy a survey to 2,250 people in Cambodia and Djibouti through cell phone text messages (Short Messaging Service/SMS). This survey will mirror the survey we deployed to Kenya and provide inter-state comparability with our pilot project.

This approach is important because the costs and benefits of basing can affect the public and government officials differently. The project focuses on three countries: Djibouti, Kenya, and Cambodia. 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. Cambodia is a case where China may seek military access while the United States attempts to counter Chinese influence. In Kenya, where we conducted a pilot study, we explored how China’s economic footprint affects support for the U.S. military presence. 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 assess the interaction of U.S. and Chinese military presence directly, as it is the only country where both powers have bases.

The Kenyan pilot project has facilitated the refinement of our instrument. The two surveys we will deploy with NSF funding will model the questions we developed for that survey while also introducing an experimental component. With the original questions, we ask several questions to build relevant demographic profiles of the respondents, including questions about gender, age, primary language, education level, income, and whether they have studied abroad. We then transition to questions about their perception of Chinese and U.S. influence in their country in economic and military terms. Given that our causal model involves contact with foreign nationals and economic reliance upon foreign nationals, we ask about their experiences in both realms. Finally, we assess for other vectors of foreign influence, including films, television programs, sporting events, app use, and whether they have studied abroad in a foreign country.

Our series of questions aims to measure and test our propositions from above. The survey provides correlational evidence of the relationship between host-state civilian contact with foreign nationals and their views of the Great Powers. The additional questions about regular and social media consumption give us additional information about the cross-pressures of the campaigns of influence from the United States and China.

Our experiment will be pre-registered and deployed with both surveys. Within the experiment, we will provide a prompt with a control and intervention treatment. The primary experiment will field a question that 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. This experiment will allow us to assess whether the demographic and influence questions we asked help frame whether a respondent interprets action by various actors.

For our second approach, the team will conduct a series of elite surveys in Djibouti. We chose Djibouti as the site for fieldwork as it is the place that allows for military access by multiple countries and a higher chance for civilian interactions with foreign military personnel. Djibouti is a rare case where a U.S. and Chinese military base in the same country is close to each other. While the uniqueness of the situation may disqualify Djibouti as a generalizable case for fieldwork, it is important for a few reasons. First, dual-access cases are likely to increase in the future. Djibouti may represent a wave of countries seeking favor from multiple countries simultaneously. Various countries in the Cold War, like Egypt, sought policies that led to support from the United States and the Soviet Union instead of being a client of one major power. Djibouti may be a model for other countries in the near future.

Second, other countries would exclude interactions with either the U.S. or China. While looking at exclusive access cases is useful, we are interested in both countries’ influence campaigns, and Djibouti offers the opportunity to examine each country within the same context. Third, importantly for basic science, we can assess the ground game of each actor within the country and whether one country is more capable of influence than another. Assessing whether influence is a zero-sum or positive-sum game cannot be done in isolation, and Djibouti allows us to see the direct competition between the two powers.

The surveys provide useful data for quantitative assessment but are limited in the depth they can provide. Elite surveys provide qualitative texture to quantitative data by allowing free-form responses to a series of questions that try to undercover the mechanisms we are interested in. The team will use a snowball sampling method to target an initial population of local politicians, diplomats, U.S. service members, journalists, and activists that likely interact with or have domain over basing and access within Djibouti. The interviews are semi-structured. We begin with anticipated questions but allow the interview to flow based on the interviewee’s experience and responses. Semi-structured interviews allow for follow-up questions on facets we did not anticipate or are unique to an interviewee. For the snowball method of interview sampling, we ask each interviewee for additional contacts and use that to build out our sample.

We propose sending most of the team to do fieldwork so that we have at least two people in each interview, allow for inevitable travel sickness episodes, and schedule concurrent interviews when needed. We also will include remote interview capabilities in our IRB proposal if we cannot meet with a person physically or there is an unforeseen delay due to national or international issues. We have experience shifting a project to remote interviews due to disruption during a previous interview series from the COVID-19 pandemic. However, given the reluctance of willing participants for remote interviews and the better interview interactions that arise from in-person interviews, the remote options are a contingency plan.

From this data collection project, we have three waves of analysis. The first wave will use hierarchical Bayesian models with the survey data to control for country-level, county-level, and individual-level variations among respondents. Using this model, as we have done previously, we can assess the correlations of influence and perception between contact, economic reliance, and other influence projects on individuals’ perceptions of each country and their military. This observational regression allows us to build initial evidence about whether, in aggregate, there is a relationship between how the military behaves with a country and how people view the military. Second, our experiments allow for causal analysis between experiences and views. By pre-registering and deploying an experiment, we can see how different frames and country contexts elicit people’s views of the United States and China. We use differences of means comparisons and more advanced regression models to determine how we measure various attributes that condition the treatment effect. Finally, the fieldwork will provide context and texture to our quantitative results by allowing for first-hand accounts of each country, with Djibouti in particular, and to theory-build both for the current project as well as how the domain of competitive consent is developing in one of the most contested countries between the U.S. and China.

**6. Deliverables**

**A. Scholarly Outputs**

We plan to complete the following deliverables. All data collected for the project will be made publicly available by the project’s completion date (regardless of the publication status of any of the deliverables) as detailed in our data management section. This will allow researchers and community members to build from our research.

* Three nationally representative surveys in Kenya, Djibouti, and Cambodia compare the local populations’ perceptions of U.S. and/or Chinese military installations in their territories and their views on influence campaigns by both major powers.
* (At least) two peer-reviewed articles submitted to top journals such as Security Studies, the American Journal of Political Science, or the American Political Science Review.
* One article submitted to a policy-oriented outlet, such as Foreign Affairs.
* (At least) two articles targeting high-impact outlets aimed at policy and general audiences, such as The Conversation or War on the Rocks.

**B. Dissemination**

Dissemination to Scholars: Our main way of disseminating the findings from this project to the academic community will be through the production a series of peer-reviewed articles (discussed under the scholarly outputs section). To publicize these findings, we will present our research at academic conferences such at the ISA, APSA, and Peace Science annual meetings. In addition, research team members will present this research at invited workshops and guest lectures. The members of this team have a strong record of being invited to participate in such events (as an example, in 2023 Martinez Machain participated in four invited guest lectures and four invitational academic workshops…). We will also disseminate our findings to the academic community through blog posts in outlets such as Good Authority (formerly The Monkey Cage), E-International Relations, and The Political Quarterly, which are aimed mainly at scholarly audiences and for which we have previously written for. We will also produce a publicly available data dashboard that makes all gathered data available to other researchers at the time of the project’s completion, regardless of the publication status of our working papers. The data will also be made available through Harvard’s Dataverse platform.

Dissemination to Policy Makers: This team is particularly well-positioned to disseminate findings to policy makers. We have extensive experience on this front, with team members having briefed the U.S. Department of Defense, the Department of the Navy, and U.S. Strategic Command, as well as having attended American University’s Bridging the Gap workshop, and presented research at military installations such as [Mike A’s base presentations here]. We thus can use our existing contacts to create opportunities to reach relevant policy practitioners, particularly those in the defense community in the United States. We thus plan to disseminate our findings to policy practitioners through briefings and research presentations. We will specifically aim to give invited talks and briefings at defense and military-related institutions, targeting middle-level policy practitioners. We will also disseminate our findings to the academic community through blog posts in a outlets such as War on the Rocks, Defense One, and The Conversation, which are aimed at policy and general audiences and for which we have previously written for.

**7. Project Team and Management**

**A. Team Management**

The principal investigator on this project is Brian Blankenship (University of Miami). Michael Allen (Boise State University), Michael Flynn (Kansas State University), Renanah Miles Joyce (Brandeis 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 team will organize workflow and communication through email and Discord, a threaded-chat program that allows file sharing, collaboration, and real-time text and voice conversation. Additionally, the team will have a standard biweekly meeting to discuss immediate and long-term issues, evaluate project progress, and remedy any existing shortfalls in expectations through additional delegation or re-assignment of work. The sessions will occur on Zoom.

**B. Relevant PI experience, education, and project management roles**

**Brian Blankenship** is an Assistant Professor of Political Science, University of Miami. Research studies how countries bargain over the distribution of the costs and benefits of security cooperation and how great powers, and in particular the United States, use economic and security inducements to influence their partners. Blankenship has published widely on US foreign policy, military alliances, and foreign basing, including on issues related to defense burden-sharing, alliance reassurance, and US-China competition for bases. Blankenship has served as Principal Investigator on funded work related to defense burden-sharing and nuclear nonproliferation from the Stanton Foundation. His methodological training is in quantitative and qualitative methods. Blankenship’s primary responsibilities will be in developing theory, designing the survey, managing and mentoring the undergraduate research assistant, leading the development of relevant public articles, coordinating the project’s academic output, managing the budget in coordination with University of Miami Office of Research Administration, monitoring funded research progress, leading official reporting compliance, co-managing communication with survey firms and contacts in Djibouti, and delegating additional work to capture any shortfalls in productivity.

**Renanah Joyce** is an Assistant Professor of Politics at Brandeis University. Research examines the causes and consequences of great power security cooperation. Joyce has published widely on US foreign policy, security assistance, and competition for foreign basing. Joyce regularly advises US policymakers and practitioners on the policy implications of her research. Joyce has experience conducting public opinion and elite surveys, as well as experience conducting fieldwork in sub-Saharan Africa. Moreover, Joyce has access to US government networks of security cooperation practitioners (both military and civilian), drawing both on her previous research as well as her experience working in the Department of Defense prior to entering academia. Joyce will contribute to all aspects of the project, with particularly attention to theory development, survey design and implementation, and conducting elite interviews in the field.

**Michael A. Allen** is a Professor in the School of Public Service, Boise State University. Research addresses the positive and negative externalities of US troop deployments and the conflict and cooperation between asymmetric actors in the international system. Allen has published widely in assessing the effects of troop deployments, including defense expenditures, regional influences on troop deployments and defense expenditures, service members’ effect on crime rates, and surveys on how troop deployments affect perceptions of the US military, government, and people. Allen has served as Principal Investigator on funded work related to troop deployments (FOA#W911NF-18-1-0087). His methodological training is in quantitative methods. Allen will engage in theory building, writing, research design, managing Boise, leading the development of relevant public articles, coordinating the project’s academic output, managing the budget with Boise State OSP, and quantitative and qualitative analysis. He will also conduct fieldwork in Djibouti. The Boise State University provides Allen with office space and all software and computer equipment necessary to carry out the analysis.

**Carla Martinez Machain** is a Professor of Political Science at the University at Buffalo. Her research focuses largely on U.S. foreign policy, specifically on great power competition in the realm of military basing agreements, as well as on on the use of military deployments as a power projection tool. Martínez Machain’s research has been published in key Political Science journals and is frequently cited by those studying military basing agreements and foreign military training. Martinez Machain has experience with interviewing members of the military in her previous research and has an extensive network among military practitioners (as evidenced by the interviews referenced in her published work). She is trained in both quantitative and qualitative methods. She will engage in theory building, writing, research design, and quantitative and qualitative analysis. She will also conduct fieldwork in Djibouti. The University at Buffalo provides Martinez Machain with office space, access to a graduate research assistant, and all software and computer equipment necessary to carry out the analysis.

**8. Project Timeline**

Given the speed at which developments are occurring regarding Chinese increases in power projection, we aim to complete working drafts of all deliverables within one year. In order to achieve broad aims within a limited timeline we are relying on a large team of researchers who will all be devoting two months of full effort over the summer of 2025 to the project, as well as partial effort during the rest of the year.

* Fall 2024: Finalize survey and interview questions and hold a survey design workshop to pre-test the survey experiments. Present initial research design and preliminary pilot findings at academic conferences.
* Spring 2025: Administer surveys in Kenya and Cambodia. Begin writing manuscript drafts and present research at academic conferences.
* Summer 2025: Conduct fieldwork in Djibouti, administering surveys and interviews. Continue writing manuscript drafts.
* Fall 2025: Revise and finalize manuscript drafts, send out for review. Publish survey data in online dashboard and data repository. Write and disseminate policy-oriented articles.