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## *Is China Winning the War for Africa?*

While traveling in Africa in the 1980 and 1990s, I was surprised to see Chinese crews building roads, schools, and houses. Although at the time this meant little to me, I later realized it was part of a policy of Chinese insertion into the African countries' economies. Historically, the African continent has been plundered by foreign powers, mainly but not exclusively European, who have extracted valuable resources, corrupting African elites, and destroying feeble attempts at democracy throughout the continent. On January 17, 1961, Patrice Lumumba was assassinated. He was the first legally elected prime minister of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

Ludo De Witte, an author of a book about this event, called Lumumba's murder "the most important assassination of the 20th century." It was carried out with the joint complicity of the American and Belgian governments, which used Congolese accomplices and a Belgian execution squad. This assassination forever changed the African continent's political landscape and its economic and political prospects.

China's approach is different from that of the traditional colonial powers. Its main interests in the African continent are twofold: searching and exploiting oil and mineral resources, and creating new markets for Chinese goods. In addition, building and repairing infrastructure provides jobs for Chinese technicians and laborers.

Unlike other big powers, China has shown relatively minimal interference in the domestic affairs of African countries, while at the same time providing generous aid and loan packages. As Clifton Pannell, Director of the Center for Asian Studies at the University of Georgia said, "Its oft-stated policy in dealing with African states is to stress the notion of

mutual benefits, and it has long promoted itself as a partner in solidarity with African states in opposition to colonialism and economic dependency.”

### **Aid to local economies**

Not everybody in Africa is happy about China’s presence on the continent. Although China employs Africans in some of its economic endeavors, many locals resent China’s competition with local factories and entrepreneurs. China, however, has a steady policy of providing assistance and training in agricultural techniques and public health issues.

At the 2018 Beijing Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation which took place in Beijing, President Xi Jinping unveiled eight major initiatives which included purchasing more African goods and encouraging Chinese companies to expand investments to promote industrialization in Africa. Other major areas of cooperation are energy, information, transportation and use of water resources. To ensure the proper development of these initiatives, China will provide \$60 billion in support for Africa’s development.

President Xi Jinping encouraged these countries to join in building the Belt and Road Initiative to achieve common developmental goals. In the financial area, China promised support through the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the New Development Bank, and the Silk Road Fund. In addition, Xi Jinping pledged to provide 50,000 government-funded scholarships for African youngsters and invited 2,000 of them to visit China.

### **Medical aid**

China’s medical aid to Africa started in 1963 when it sent 100 healthcare workers to Algeria after it gained independence from France, and has been steadily increasing its numbers since then. By 2014, China was spending about \$150 million annually in medical aid to African countries. China now ranks among the top 10 bilateral global health donors to the continent.

Although the exact number is unknown, China has dispatched several Chinese medical teams (CMT) to Africa and assisted in the construction of health facilities and training of African healthcare workers. It has also provided medical equipment and drugs. It is estimated that by 2014 China had helped build 30 hospitals and 30 malaria prevention and control centers, and trained over 3,000 healthcare workers from several African countries.

Malaria is one of the main diseases the Chinese are trying to help prevent and control. China has donated over \$26 million in anti-malarial drugs to 35 African countries. China also provided important aid to control the Ebola epidemic that killed more than 11,000 people between 2013 and 2016 and has helped in the prevention and control of HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases.

In its medical aid to Africa, China makes use of its own experience as a developing country, limitations and advantages included. At the same time, China uses its assistance in public health to strengthen its diplomatic relations with African governments.

### **Military assistance**

Although in the past China mainly targeted economic trade and assistance to Africa, Beijing is increasingly developing policies aimed at strengthening military ties in order to gain a stronger geopolitical influence and expand weapons sales in the continent. In that regard, China has been extremely active in selling small arms and light weapons to several African countries.

President Xi Jinping promised to provide \$100 million of free military assistance to the African Union to support the establishment of the African Standby Force and the African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crisis. In addition, the Chinese government has invited thousands of African military officials to China for workshops and training courses.

“The concern from a lot of partners is exactly what role China is going to be playing in the region and how it is going to exist with existing military organizations and security forums,” said Duncan Innes-Ker, Asia Regional Director at the Economist Intelligence Unit. Those who ignore China’s assertive policies in Africa will do so at their own risk.