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## GEOPOLITICAL AND GEOECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS OF PRC'S CONTROL OVER AFRICAN PORTS

### ГЕОПОЛІТИЧНІ ТА ГЕОЕКОНОМІЧНІ НАСЛІДКИ КОНТРОЛЮ КНР НАД ПОРТАМИ АФРИКИ

#### Volodymyr Manzhola

Doctor of Historical Sciences, Professor at the Department of International Relations and Foreign Policy, Educational and Scientific Institute of International Relations, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv,

email: [mvi.mva@clouds.iir.edu.ua](mailto:mvi.mva@clouds.iir.edu.ua)

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-8832-8800>

#### Oleksandr Bazar

PhD Student of the Department of International Relations and Foreign Policy, Educational and Scientific Institute of International Relations, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv,

email: [olesbazar@gmail.com](mailto:olesbazar@gmail.com)

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-4382-5616>

#### Володимир Манжола

доктор історичних наук, професор кафедри міжнародних відносин і зовнішньої політики Навчально-наукового інституту міжнародних відносин Київського національного університету імені Тараса Шевченка,

email: [mvi.mva@clouds.iir.edu.ua](mailto:mvi.mva@clouds.iir.edu.ua)

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-8832-8800>

#### Олександр Базар

Аспірант кафедри міжнародних відносин та зовнішньої політики Навчально-наукового інституту міжнародних відносин Київського національного університету імені Тараса Шевченка,

email: [olesbazar@gmail.com](mailto:olesbazar@gmail.com)

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-4382-5616>

**Abstract.** *The article explores the geopolitical and geoeconomic consequences of the PRC's control over Africa's port infrastructure. The relevance of the study derives from the transformation of maritime logistics into a foundation for Beijing's economic resilience and a tool for shifting the global balance of power. The author identifies the specifics of the Chinese approach to Africa, which is based on control over maritime logistics hubs. This approach allows for the monopolization and guaranteed stability of supply chains for critical materials, grants priority access to natural resource extraction, enables influence over the continent's foreign trade, and facilitates the adaptation of commercial ports for the needs of the PLA Navy through "dual-use" infrastructure.*

*Methodologically, the study is based on a systems approach utilizing qualitative methods, including case studies, content analysis, discourse analysis, and comparative analysis. The findings demonstrate that the PRC views African ports as a tool to ensure priority access to strategic resources and to build closed logistics cycles protected from Western sanction pressure and potential blockades. It is proven that the continent's commercial ports are perceived by the PRC as potential "strategic strongpoints," which are becoming key elements in forming China's asymmetric maritime power and reshaping the security architecture in the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. It is established that the PRC is capable of altering the global balance of power by projecting military force below the threshold of formal securitization through its control over African ports.*

**Keywords:** *geopolitics, geoeconomics, People's Republic of China (PRC), Africa, logistics infrastructure, ports, Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Maritime Silk Road (MSR), foreign trade, export, transport corridors, critical minerals, supply chains, maritime power, power projection, strategic strongpoints, PLA (People's Liberation Army), maritime geostrategic points, Djibouti, Kenya, Nigeria, Angola, Atlantic Ocean, Indian Ocean, balance of power.*

**Анотація.** *Стаття присвячена дослідженню геополітичних та геоекономічних наслідків контролю КНР над портовою інфраструктурою Африки. Актуальність статті зумовлена трансформацією морської логістики у фундамент економічної стійкості Пекіна та*

*інструмент зміни глобального балансу сил. Автор визначає специфіку китайського підходу до Африки, що базується на контролі над морськими логістичними вузлами, та дозволяє монополізувати та гарантувати стійкість ланцюгів постачання критичних матеріалів, оптимізувати пріоритетний доступ до видобутку природних ресурсів, впливати на зовнішню торгівлю країн континенту, та адаптовувати комерційні порти для потреб військово-морських сил НВАК за допомоги інфраструктури «подвійного призначення». Методологічно дослідження ґрунтується на системному підході із застосуванням якісних методів — кейс-стаді, контент-аналізу, дискурс-аналізу та компаративного аналізу. Результати роботи демонструють, що КНР сприймає порти Африки як інструмент, що забезпечує пріоритетний доступ до стратегічних ресурсів та дозволяє вибудовувати замкнені логістичні цикли, захищені від санкційного тиску Заходу та можливих блокад. Доведено, що комерційні порти континенту сприймаються КНР як потенційні «стратегічні опорні пункти», що стають ключовими елементами формування асиметричної морської могутності КНР та зміни архітектури безпеки в Атлантичному та Індійському океанах. Встановлено, що КНР здатен змінювати глобальний баланс сил, проектуючи військову силу нижче порогу формальної сек'юрітизації завдяки контролю над портами Африки.*

**Ключові слова:** *геополітика, геоекономіка, Китайська народна республіка (КНР), Африка, логістична інфраструктура, порти, «Пояс і шлях» (BRI), Морський шовковий шлях (MSR), зовнішня торгівля, експорт, транспортні коридори, критичні матеріали, ланцюги постачання, морська сила, проектування сили, стратегічні опорні пункти, НВАК, морські геостратегічні точки, Джибуті, Кенія, Нігерія, Ангола, Атлантичний океан, Індійський океан, баланс сил.*

**Introduction.** The foundation of the PRC's economic development and its gradual emergence as a superpower was built upon Deng Xiaoping's economic liberalization and the country's accession to the World Trade Organization, which facilitated its integration into the global economy. China succeeded in international markets, becoming a global manufacturing hub and the world's largest exporter, by leveraging access to cheap labor, a vast domestic market, advanced infrastructure, state-sponsored incentives and subsidies for both state-owned and private enterprises to capture new markets. These factors incentivized Western companies to relocate production to China, providing Beijing with access to modern technologies.

However, at the current stage, control over trade-critical logistics infrastructure and critical minerals plays an equally vital role in China's economic expansion. These factors become particularly significant amidst geopolitical uncertainty driven by the trade wars between China and the United States. The "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI) serves as the umbrella platform for achieving Beijing's economic objectives abroad. A critical component of this initiative is the "Maritime Silk Road" (MSR) - maritime transport corridors connecting China to Europe, relying on the port infrastructure of Indonesia, Malaysia, India, Sri Lanka, Kenya, Djibouti, and other coastal nations. Over 80% of global trade is conducted via maritime routes, underscoring the strategic significance of ports in the contemporary world economy (*Eurasia Review, 2026*).

African ports play a pivotal role as transit points for China's trade with Europe within the MSR framework, as well as for other transport corridors and Africa's own trade with the rest of the world. The majority of Africa's foreign trade - estimated at 84% by the MCB Group - is conducted with extra-continental states (*MCB Group, 2025*). This creates a precondition where external actors who establish control over logistics infrastructure gain significant influence over the continent's nations, which they can leverage to achieve their own geoeconomic and geopolitical objectives. For over a decade, China has been the most proactive player in this sphere.

**Purpose of the Study.** The purpose of this article is to determine the geopolitical and geoeconomic impact of the People's Republic of China's control over African ports, their role in securing supply chains of critical materials, and in maintaining export volumes amidst tariff wars with the United States, potential sanctions, or armed escalations. Additionally, the study analyzes the strategic utilization of dual-use port infrastructure within the framework of the "Maritime Silk Road" and its influence on the expansion of China's maritime power. Special attention is paid to the challenges and prospects for the global balance of power, particularly in the context of competition

between China and the U.S. in the Atlantic Ocean and the Indo-Pacific region.

**Literature Review.** The topic of the PRC's infrastructural expansion and the role of African ports within the "Maritime Silk Road" (MSR) has been the subject of numerous academic studies covering the geopolitical and geoeconomic dimensions of such activities.

Among the key works is Diego Pautasso's article, "Africa and the New Maritime Silk Road" (*Brazilian Journal of African Studies*, 2016), in which the author reveals the strategic importance of the African continent within the "Belt and Road Initiative," emphasizing the significance of port infrastructure in Egypt, Djibouti, and Kenya for controlling key maritime trade corridors. This work underscores Beijing's ambition to strengthen its global presence through maritime logistics infrastructure.

The article by Muhammad Sabil Farooq, Tongkai Yuan, Jiangang Zhu, and Nazia Feroze, "Kenya and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road: Implications for China-Africa Relations" (*China Quarterly of International Strategic Studies*, 2018), analyzes Kenya's role as a strategic maritime hub and a key partner for the PRC in East Africa through the implementation of flagship infrastructure projects. This research highlights how Chinese investments in port infrastructure provide priority access to the natural resources of recipient countries.

The report by Peter A. Dutton, Isaac B. Kardon, and Conor M. Kennedy, "Djibouti: China's First Overseas Strategic Strongpoint" (*U.S. Naval War College*, 2020), examines the integration of the PRC's economic and military interests in Djibouti, which have transformed the country into a strategic "gateway" to African markets and resources. The authors describe how the creation of a favorable economic and political ecosystem laid the groundwork for the deployment of the first permanent overseas PLA Navy base, providing vital logistical support to protect China's global interests and allowing it to project maritime power into the Indian Ocean.

Lungani Hlongwa's study, "China's Maritime Silk Road Initiative: a quest for sea power" (*South African Journal of Military Studies*, 2020), considers the MSR as China's instrument on its path toward superpower status, emphasizing the inseparable link between control over maritime logistics and the country's economic prosperity. The author argues that Beijing utilizes logistics infrastructure as a covert yet powerful means of power projection, justifying this by combining classical maritime power theory with an analysis of critical logistics and mobility.

Overall, existing publications indicate that the "Maritime Silk Road" is perceived not merely as a commercial project but as a tool for achieving geopolitical and geoeconomic objectives. Many works describe the initiative's impact on resource access and trade with African nations. Some works note how China uses economic influence to achieve geopolitical goals and how ports facilitate power projection. At the same time, there is a lack of research concerning the synergy between PRC's control over maritime logistics and all other dimensions of China's policy in Africa and its cumulative geopolitical and geoeconomic consequences.

In this study, the author seeks to fill this gap by systematizing the reasons for China's establishment of control over African ports and examining how control over the continent's maritime logistics infrastructure promotes geoeconomic goals - specifically, the formation of a closed-loop cycle for critical materials. Furthermore, the study explores how this control allows China to influence the foreign policy of local governments and utilize commercial infrastructure for PLA Navy needs to asymmetrically expand maritime power and achieve geopolitical objectives. The novelty of this research also lies in the analysis of how China's achievements in one of the aforementioned areas enhance capabilities in others, highlighting a holistic system of influence in Africa based on port control.

**Methods.** The application of a systems approach allowed for demonstrating how control over ports reinforces the PRC's successes across various dimensions of its engagement in Africa and how these dimensions mutually reinforce one another. This same approach highlighted that establishing control over ports is part of a holistic policy aimed at forming an extensive network of "**strategic strongpoints**".

The author actively utilized **qualitative methods**, integrating tools such as **case studies** of ports in Kenya, Angola, Nigeria, Djibouti, and other countries as models of economic and military expansion. Furthermore, **content analysis** was applied to statistical data from the Belt and Road Initiative, the General Administration of Customs of the PRC, and Lloyd's List reports. This was

complemented by a **discourse analysis** of China's primary defense documents - specifically the White Paper on Defense and "The Science of Military Strategy." Finally, **comparative analysis** was employed to examine China's port activities in East Africa versus those on the Atlantic coast, assessing their respective roles in Beijing's broader geopolitical objectives.

**Main results of the research.** As of early 2025, Chinese state-owned and private enterprises held stakes - often controlling ones - in 78 ports across 32 African countries: 35 in West Africa, 17 in East Africa, 15 in Southern Africa, and 11 in North Africa (*Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2025*). Consequently, Beijing exerts influence over more than a third of the continent's commercial ports, effectively dominating the sector. For comparison, the PRC operates or holds stakes in only about one-tenth of the ports within the European Union (*Gresh, 2023*).

Kenya stands as one of the primary focal points of the PRC's efforts to establish control over logistics infrastructure on the continent. Kenyan ports play a vital role in the "Maritime Silk Road" and are pivotal to China's ambitions to compete with India in the Indian Ocean (*Itimoudis, 2024*). Nairobi actively secures Chinese loans and investments to fund infrastructure projects, many of which are operated by Chinese firms upon completion. A prime example is the Port of Mombasa, the linchpin of maritime logistics in East Africa.

Lamu Port in Kenya, constructed by the China Communications Construction Company (CCCC), has become one of the largest in Africa and a cornerstone of the Lamu-South Sudan-Ethiopia Transport Corridor (LAPSSET). This project - one of the continent's most massive infrastructure undertakings - includes pipelines, railways, and airports (*Woldearegay, 2025*). While LAPSSET assists landlocked countries in stimulating trade, the logistics remain controlled by China, granting its companies prioritized access to local markets. Port investments are closely coordinated with China's efforts to ensure its companies lead the construction and modernization of inland logistics networks under Belt and Road Initiative.

China is also intensifying its presence in West Africa. Lekki Port in Nigeria, where the Chinese firm China Harbour Engineering Co. (CHEC) holds a 54% stake, has already emerged as one of the region's largest logistics hubs (*Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2025*). The PRC invested \$1.5 billion into the construction of this deep-water port through the China Development Bank (*Bloomberg, 2025*). Among Beijing's likely next objectives is the expansion of exports through less congested ports along the Gulf of Guinea.

The construction of new facilities is only one facet of China's logistical strategy. Other activities include securing concessions in exchange for loans, investments, or infrastructure projects. In Tanzania, for instance, the state-owned China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation is financing the \$1.4 billion TAZARA railway project in exchange for a 30-year concession, granting the company control over the Port of Dar es Salaam and its revenues (*The National Interest, 2025*).

China realizes returns of up to 1,300% on its investments in African port infrastructure, as it often gains the authority to determine service costs and other port dues (*PwC, 2018*). This allows Beijing to flood African markets with its own goods under preferential terms, effectively stifling competitors within the domestic markets of African states. Furthermore, China derives significant profit from the handling of local exports.

China remains Africa's largest trading partner, with trade volumes growing annually, driven in part by Beijing's heavy investments in the continent's logistics infrastructure. According to data from the General Administration of Customs of the PRC, Chinese exports to African countries in 2025 amounted to \$225 billion (a 25.8% increase compared to 2024). Meanwhile, African exports to China reached \$123 billion in 2025 (a 5.4% increase compared to 2024) (*South China Morning Post, 2026*).

Consequently, the PRC expanded its trade surplus by \$40 billion, rising from \$62 billion to \$102 billion. This export expansion is partially linked to the necessity of reorienting goods away from the American market due to ongoing tariff wars with the United States. Prospective measures by Washington and Brussels to reduce dependence on Chinese products are expected to further drive China's efforts to expand and modernize port infrastructure in Africa to facilitate exports to alternative markets.

Dependence on Chinese infrastructure, in turn, inclines African nations to support Chinese interests. Therefore, from the perspective of the PRC's geopolitical objectives and pure commercial gain, further actions by Beijing aimed at the construction, acquisition, and operational control of

African ports are to be expected.

The Chinese model of providing loans collateralized by infrastructure assets also extends to African ports (*Observer Research Foundation, 2024*). This carries a significant risk of "debt-trap diplomacy," where the continent's nations may face the loss of port ownership to China. At the same time, a significant reduction in the volume of lending for infrastructure projects has been observed since 2022, as the PRC now prioritizes direct investment and projects led by Chinese companies (*Itimoudis, 2024*).

Under the "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI), Chinese investments and infrastructure financing in Africa totaled \$21.7 billion in 2023 (*Itimoudis, 2024*), \$29.2 billion in 2024 (*One Road Group, 2025*), and reached a staggering \$80 billion in 2025 (*Green Finance & Development Center, 2026*). Africa has emerged as a primary destination for China's overseas investment in recent years.

Since the initiative's launch in 2013, China has spent \$1.4 trillion on infrastructure projects abroad, with investment and financing levels increasing annually since 2020. In 2025 alone, total BRI expenditures reached \$213.6 billion (*Green Finance & Development Center, 2026*). Given the gradual slowdown of the PRC's domestic economy, increasing foreign investment is a logical strategy to secure expanded access to emerging markets, with Africa representing one of the largest and most relevant among them.

Interestingly, since 2023, new Chinese investment in African logistics infrastructure has significantly decreased. This suggests that the current level of access is deemed sufficient by Beijing. Since 2013, Chinese companies have participated in the construction or engineering of at least 55 ports across the continent (*Itimoudis, 2024*).

China switched to integrating its port infrastructure with the extractive industry. Control over export infrastructure - specifically maritime routes, through which the absolute majority of Africa's trade with extra-continental partners is conducted - translates into priority access for the PRC to the natural resources of African nations. In 2025, a record year for Beijing's investment in Africa, China financed two major deals in the energy sector: a \$23 billion project to extract an additional 200,000 barrels of oil per day by 2030 in the Republic of the Congo, and the construction of an industrial park with gas processing facilities in Nigeria valued at \$20 billion (*Green Finance & Development Center, 2026*).

African ports also play a vital role in accessing critical materials, for which global demand is rapidly accelerating. The PRC controls approximately 70% of global rare earth element (REE) mining and 87% of their processing, despite China itself holding only 35% of the world's REE reserves (*AidData, 2024*). Chinese companies are aggressively acquiring mining assets abroad, spending \$32.6 billion in this sector under the Belt and Road Initiative in 2025 alone (*Green Finance & Development Center, 2026*).

Africa is a primary target for such activities, as it holds approximately 30% of the world's proven reserves of critical materials (*UNECA, 2024*). Of China's 166 overseas mining projects, 66 are located in Africa - more than in any other region. Chinese firms have invested \$3.5 billion in copper mining in Zambia and have committed to investing an additional \$5 billion by 2031. Mining in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the world's largest cobalt producer, is almost entirely controlled by Beijing, with 24 of the 33 exporting companies being Chinese. Among the major mining assets acquired by China in recent years are the Goulamina lithium mine in Mali and the Ngualla rare earth mine in Tanzania (*Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2025*). Crucially, the PRC generally refrains from building processing facilities within Africa, thereby maintaining total control over the value-creation chain.

Port infrastructure under Beijing's control guarantees the logistics of extracted critical materials, directing them to the PRC's processing plants. For instance, cobalt, lithium, and copper mined in the DRC and Zambia are transported via Chinese-financed railways to Chinese-controlled ports, including Dar es Salaam in Tanzania, Lobito in Angola (under a 20-year concession), Durban in South Africa (where Shanghai Zhenhua Heavy Industries is involved in port expansion), and Mombasa in Kenya, among others (*Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2025*).

Frequently, natural resource extraction by Chinese companies serves as repayment for loans used to build infrastructure, which is also constructed by Chinese firms. This occurs under so-called Resource-Backed Financing (RBF) agreements. Beijing has concluded such deals with the DRC,

Angola, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, Sudan, South Sudan, and Equatorial Guinea. These agreements often undervalue the resources, further inflating China's already significant profits. For example, the DRC's largest copper and cobalt deposit is 68% owned by Beijing in exchange for just \$7 billion in infrastructure investment (*Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2025*).

Control over ports also helps the PRC ensure the resilience of critical material supply chains in the event of sanctions and prevents Western companies from accessing extraction or transportation. Overall, China has spent over half of the funds invested in African logistics to secure an integrated supply chain for critical materials - primarily lithium, cobalt, and copper from Zambia and the DRC, and oil from Angola. For example, Beijing financed the \$1.5 billion reconstruction of the railway corridor from the cobalt belt in southern DRC to the port of Lobito (*RUSI, 2024*). Given Beijing's significant investments in oil extraction in the Republic of the Congo and gas processing in Nigeria, similar activity is expected in these countries. Stable energy supplies will be critical in the event of U.S. and European sanctions resulting from a potential escalation regarding Taiwan.

According to Lloyd's List, Chinese companies hold stakes in, own, or operate terminals in 34 of the world's 100 busiest ports. In total, the PRC controls over 90 deep-water ports globally (*Bloomberg, 2025*). This network allows Beijing to secure trade flows in the event of military conflict in the Indo-Pacific region, with Chinese-controlled African ports serving as a key element of this network.

Beijing also utilizes commercial ports in Africa under its control to meet the needs of the PLA Navy (PLAN). A prime example is the Doraleh Port in Djibouti, constructed by China and the UAE, which was repurposed to accommodate naval vessels almost immediately after its opening in 2017 (*Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2025*). The PRC negotiates the stationing or servicing of its naval vessels with continental nations that are economically and politically dependent on Chinese support.

Many of the deep-water ports constructed, expanded, or modernized by China were either modified or originally designed with a "dual-use" specification, ensuring that PLAN vessels can dock and receive necessary maintenance (*Itimoudis, 2024*). This specifically applies to ports such as Lekki in Nigeria, Kribi in Cameroon, Bata in Equatorial Guinea, and Bagamoyo in Tanzania (*Stars and Stripes, 2025*). While this civil-military dual specialization raises concerns among Western nations, particularly the United States, it does not yet allow for the formal classification of these sites as overseas naval bases.

These ports possess the capacity to host a significant number of PLAN ships if required. For instance, Walvis Bay in Namibia can accommodate up to eight destroyers; Luanda in Angola is capable of receiving any large Chinese warship; and Port Victoria in the Seychelles can host two Chinese corvettes (*Stars and Stripes, 2025*). The Port of Mombasa in Kenya can accommodate two corvettes and a guided-missile destroyer while providing refueling services for any class of naval vessel (*RUSI, 2024*).

Over the past few years, PLAN vessels have visited nearly forty African ports where Chinese companies hold stakes, spanning East, Southern, West, and North Africa. Nations that have hosted Chinese naval vessels include South Africa, Madagascar, Tanzania, Mozambique, the Republic of the Congo, Nigeria, Gabon, Côte d'Ivoire, and Morocco (*Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2025*).

China's 2019 Defense White Paper discussed the development of "overseas logistics facilities" aimed at facilitating the PLAN's transition from "near-seas defense" to "far-seas protection," leveraging the infrastructure of the Belt and Road Initiative to promote the PRC's global interests (*State Council of the PRC, 2019*). Furthermore, in the 2020 edition of *The Science of Military Strategy*, Beijing underscored the PLAN's ambition to establish a stable presence in the "two oceans" - the Pacific and the Indian (*Science of Military Strategy, 2020*).

Ports capable of hosting the Chinese Navy fall under the Chinese strategic concept of "strategic strongpoints" (*zhanlüe zhidian*), which are essential for supporting overseas operations (*Kennedy, 2019*). The location of the PLAN's currently sole overseas military base is strategically vital, situated on the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, through which a significant portion of the world's oil is transported. The establishment of the base in Djibouti, combined with port investments in East Africa, is part of a holistic Chinese strategy to exert influence over maritime chokepoints and protect its sea lines of communication (SLOCs) (*Singh, 2025*).

The military base in Djibouti, in synergy with Chinese-controlled commercial ports capable of

dual-use functions, provides the PRC with the ability to deploy naval forces over great distances and influence strategically important maritime routes through the Bab-el-Mandeb, Hormuz, Malacca, and Mozambique Straits. For example, the strategic positioning of Mombasa and its refueling capabilities allow the PRC to counteract a potential blockade of the Malacca Strait by adversaries. Thus, ports controlled by Chinese companies serve as a tool for altering the regional security architecture in the Indian Ocean.

New "strategic strongpoints" are likely to emerge in West Africa, where Chinese companies hold more than half of the shares in three key ports: Kribi in Cameroon, Lekki in Nigeria, and Lomé in Togo. Additionally, due to their strategic locations and capacity to host warships, the ports of Luanda in Angola, Walvis Bay in Namibia, and Dar es Salaam in Tanzania remain highly significant for the PRC (*Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2025*). These potential "strategic strongpoints" provide critical access to both the Atlantic and Indian Oceans.

The PRC's significant influence over West African port infrastructure holds substantial potential to challenge U.S. dominance in the Atlantic Ocean. The capacity to utilize even a fraction of the 35 regional ports where Chinese companies hold stakes for PLAN vessel port calls and military exercises enables Beijing to influence transport corridors in the Eastern Atlantic when necessary. The expansion of PRC influence in the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea following the establishment of the PLAN military base in Djibouti underscores the threat to the United States should a Chinese base emerge in the Gulf of Guinea.

The PRC's presence in the port infrastructure of the South African Atlantic coast is particularly substantial, primarily in Angola. Beyond the deep-water Port of Luanda, China controls the ports of Lobito, Caio, and Barra do Dande (*RUSI, 2024*). All of these facilities possess the potential to be repurposed for military objectives.

The establishment of a permanent PLAN naval base in West Africa would allow the PRC to project power across the entire Atlantic Ocean, posing a direct threat to U.S. national security. Under such a scenario, Chinese nuclear-powered submarines could potentially operate within reach of the U.S. East Coast (*RUSI, 2024*). Evidence suggests that China has already explored options for hosting a naval base, notably in Gabon (*Center for Maritime Strategy, 2025*) and Equatorial Guinea. (*Bloomberg, 2025*)

The relatively limited U.S. military presence in the Atlantic compared to the Pacific, which has served as the primary theater for countering military threats for decades, only exacerbates the strategic risk for Washington (*Congressional Research Service, 2023*). If the U.S. decides to expand its naval presence in the Atlantic to counter this expansion, it would be forced to redeploy forces from the Indo-Pacific, thereby shifting the balance of power in that theater in the PRC's favor.

Consequently, the emergence of a PLAN military base in West Africa would inevitably weaken the U.S. positions in maritime balance of power: either China gains the capacity to project power across the Atlantic, or U.S. positions in the Pacific are compromised. Both scenarios would facilitate Beijing's achievement of its broader geopolitical objectives, such as securing control over Taiwan.

The U.S. maintains significantly less influence over West African port infrastructure than the PRC and would face considerable difficulties in potentially deploying its own naval forces in the Gulf of Guinea in response to Beijing's actions. For instance, despite U.S. efforts to expand access to the African market through the key regional port of Lomé in Togo, the local government opted to prioritize cooperation with Russia, signing a military agreement that, beyond joint exercises and technical support, grants the Russian Navy unimpeded access to this strategic maritime port (*Maritime Executive, 2025*).

Admittedly, the U.S. and its NATO allies currently maintain overall naval superiority over the PRC and preserve the foundational infrastructure for both defensive and offensive operations. However, the Chinese strategy of expanding control over port infrastructure bolsters the country's maritime power by blurring traditional perceptions of sea power that rely solely on fleet size and formal naval bases.

**Conclusions.** Control over Africa's maritime logistics infrastructure plays a pivotal role in the economic development and the achievement of the PRC's geopolitical objectives at the current stage. Beijing's construction of, acquisition of stakes in, or procurement of concessions for more than one-third of Africa's commercial ports facilitate its efforts to establish control over key supply chains and

the extraction of natural resources. This, in turn, grants expanded access to domestic markets, allowing them to be saturated with Chinese goods under preferential terms. Such significant economic leverage in Africa enables the PRC to expand its influence in global trade and increase the political dependence of continental nations to further its geopolitical goals.

The strategic importance of African ports continues to grow due to the trade wars between China and the United States. Beijing has already reoriented a portion of its exports, previously destined for the U.S. market, toward local African markets. In recent years, Africa has also become a primary destination for Chinese foreign investment focused on the extraction of critical materials. Port infrastructure on the continent ensures the resilience of China's supply chains for these materials in the event of international sanctions.

The reduction in expenditures on logistics infrastructure projects in Africa, and within the Belt and Road Initiative as a whole, indicates that China has established a network of the desired density at both regional and global levels. This applies equally to port infrastructure. Concurrently, as resistance to Chinese control over logistics grows within the "political West," Beijing is expected to compensate for potential asset losses in those countries by expanding its control over ports in the Global South, including Africa.

Commercial deep-water ports in Africa - constructed, expanded, or modernized by Chinese firms - are also utilized for the docking and servicing of PLAN vessels due to specific technical characteristics. African nations that are economically and politically dependent on Beijing generally do not oppose such dual-use applications.

China's defense doctrine documents indicate a transition from "near-seas defense" to "far-seas protection," relying on "overseas logistics facilities." African ports hosting or servicing PLAN vessels are essential elements of the Chinese concept of "strategic strongpoints" (*zhanlüe zhidian*), which are necessary to support operations in the Pacific and Indian Oceans, maintain control over maritime geostrategic chokepoints, and secure key trade corridors.

The PRC is already altering the regional security architecture in the Indian Ocean through its control of African ports and is actively seeking to establish "strategic strongpoints" on Africa's Atlantic coast. This would allow China to project power across the entire Atlantic Ocean. A potential expansion of China's military presence in the Atlantic would shift the global balance of power and facilitate Beijing's pursuit of its strategic objectives, such as securing control over Taiwan.

Beijing's policy regarding the control and dual-use of African ports allows the PRC to gain geopolitical advantages by acting below the threshold of formal securitization. Despite the United States maintaining superiority in conventional naval power, port control asymmetrically bolsters Beijing's maritime strength.

The novelty of this research lies in the conceptualization of the PRC's strategy in the asymmetric development of maritime power, the formation of political influence, and the economic exploitation of counterparty nations based on the control of port logistics. However, the sustainability of this strategy will depend on Beijing's ability to withstand active countermeasures from the U.S. and the EU, including potential sanction pressure or new tariff wars. Future research should focus on analyzing the long-term viability of this model and its capacity to adapt to new geopolitical challenges, such as an escalation surrounding Taiwan or shifts in U.S. strategy in the Atlantic and Indo-Pacific regions.

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