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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

WEEKLY SUMMARY

Special Report

Communist China's Presence in Africa

State Dept. review completed.

Secret

№ 37

20 June 1969
No. 0375/69A

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COMMUNIST CHINA'S PRESENCE IN AFRICA

Despite the general failure of Communist China's once wide-ranging diplomatic efforts in the developing world, Peking has been able to maintain and expand a significant presence in a handful of African states. It has attached considerable importance to this remnant of conventional Chinese diplomacy during a period when Cultural Revolution excesses have disrupted its relations with most of the world. Peking has displayed a surprisingly low-keyed and circumspect diplomatic posture in its African foothold. Although its effort in these few African states is centered around a generally well-received aid program, its eagerness to cooperate with host African governments in support of black nationalist "liberation movements" has also redounded to Peking's favor. Because of these relatively favorable circumstances and Peking's rather bleak prospects elsewhere in the world, Africa probably will remain a major area of Chinese diplomacy. Any significant expansion of Chinese influence there appears unlikely, however, particularly in view of the competition Peking faces from foreign rivals and the poor image it continues to project throughout most of Africa.

BACKGROUND

In the early 1960s Peking began a large-scale effort to establish itself as a major influence on the African continent. Increasing numbers of African states were gaining independence and experimenting with a wide range of domestic and international policies, often radical in nature. Peking hoped to encourage such radical tendencies and establish an "anti-imperialist" African bloc amenable to Chinese guidance. To this end the Chinese employed opportunistic and free-wheeling tactics aimed at developing a broad presence in a short time. Speed was essential because Peking's major rivals, the Soviet Union, the Western powers, and Nationalist China were also attempting to cultivate the Africans. Chinese diplomatic missions to Africa were increased; promi-

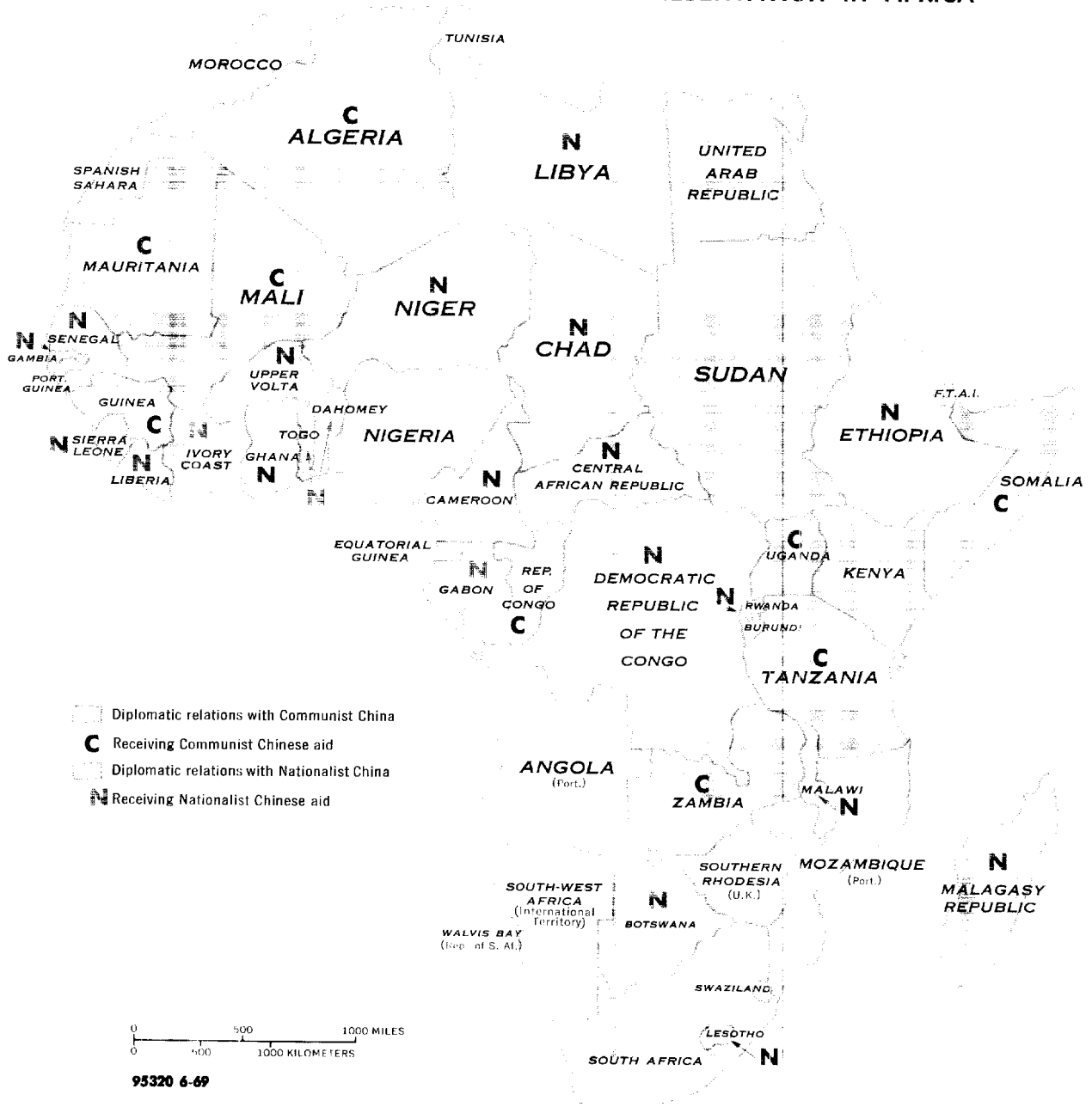
nent Chinese leaders, including Premier Chou En-lai and Foreign Minister Chen Yi, made extensive good will tours to drum up diplomatic support. African delegations were encouraged to visit Peking, and promising African "revolutionaries" were sought out and occasionally brought to China for training. Chinese radiobroadcasts were beamed to Africa with increasing frequency, and a large number of New China News Agency offices were established on the continent.

Bribery, subversion, and aid to anticolonial and radical organizations in Africa also were utilized. In Zanzibar, where Peking quickly gained significant influence within the government apparatus, over half of the ruling council was on Chinese retainer by the mid 1960s.

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COMMUNIST AND NATIONALIST CHINESE REPRESENTATION IN AFRICA



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Nevertheless, China's ambitious Africa effort soon ran into trouble. Many African leaders were anxious to maintain a position of nonalignment and became increasingly alienated by doctrinaire Chinese insistence that they adopt narrow anti-Soviet and anti-US positions. Moreover, Peking's heavy-handed and indiscriminate support of "revolutionary action" in Africa gradually aroused a deep suspicion of Chinese sincerity and intentions. The discovery of Chinese subversive activities in Burundi, Congo (Kinshasa) and Ghana served as a warning to these and other African governments.

The overthrow of governments friendly to the Chinese in a few other states painfully pointed out to Peking the risks involved in seeking influence in such politically unstable areas, and further limited China's presence on the continent. Additionally, many African leaders were accepting generous offers of economic and military assistance from Moscow and the West—offers which Peking apparently felt it could not match. In Algeria, for example, Peking's efforts were overwhelmed by a massive Soviet military and economic aid commitment.

The recall of diplomats and Peking's increasingly militant diplomacy during the early stages of the Cultural Revolution detracted further from China's position on the continent. Although the Chinese generally isolated their prime interests in Africa from the worst effects of the radical "Red Guard diplomacy," overbearing political tactics, including preaching Mao's thought and virulent attacks against the Soviet Union, strained Peking's relations with Congo (Brazzaville), Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco. Significant Chinese presence in Africa became limited to a mere handful of states.

Despite these setbacks, the Chinese have continued to maintain and develop a limited foothold in Africa, largely through a generally well-

received foreign aid program. At present, Peking is the strongest foreign presence in Tanzania, has a growing position in Zambia, and has aid programs in Guinea, Mali, Congo (Brazzaville), and Mauritania.

AFRICA'S SPECIAL ROLE IN CURRENT CHINESE FOREIGN POLICY

The Maoist world view assigns Peking the roles of leader of the world revolution, champion of "peoples liberation movements" and supporter of Afro-Asian nationalism against white racism, colonialism and neocolonialism. In terms of Chinese ideology, therefore, Africa has been and will remain important to Peking. At a time when China stands isolated to an unprecedented degree from the international community, it must take some comfort in its relative success in even a handful of African states.

The states of primary Chinese concern—Tanzania, Guinea, Zambia, Mali, Congo (Brazzaville), and Mauritania—are all ruled by nationalistic, independent-minded leaders. They do not take direction from any Western state or the Soviet Union, and have periodically agreed with Peking's point of view on certain world issues. These states have all encouraged Peking's support for African and Asian "people's liberation" movements, have publicly opposed US "imperialism and neocolonialism," and most have denounced the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia. A few of the more radical states, most notably Guinea, have enthusiastically praised the "success" of the Cultural Revolution in China.

As a result of these relatively favorable political circumstances, Peking's effort in Africa appears to be one of the few areas in which the Chinese leadership is generally agreed on strategy in foreign affairs. Even the staunchest advocate of "revolutionary diplomacy" in Peking could hardly fault China's efforts in the above six states

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which follow policies that correspond in varying degrees to the demands of Maoist ideology. On the other hand, the more pragmatic elements of the Chinese leadership, together with Foreign Ministry professionals, doubtless have welcomed the opportunity to demonstrate the effectiveness of conventional diplomacy in at least a limited area.

Moreover, Peking's current interest in these African states is also a reflection of its limited possibilities in other parts of the developing world. The Chinese have traditionally regarded the developing "third world" as the area of greatest opportunity for their diplomacy, but a combination of factors has critically limited Peking's sphere of effective activity in recent years. China's rigid ideological posture, as well as stepped-up competition from Moscow and strong US commitments, has blocked significant advances in Asia. In the Middle East, Peking's inability to back up its calls for an Arab "people's war" with substantial amounts of military and economic assistance has left these states within the Soviet pale, while the possible intrusion of Chinese revolutionary influence into Latin America has been effectively blocked by Peking's own blunders and by the presence of Castro's influence during the past ten years. As a result, the Chinese have apparently had little choice but to concentrate their efforts in the few states where competition is less intense.

For the most part, the Chinese have displayed a surprisingly low-keyed and circumspect diplomatic approach—moving ahead with a foreign aid program at a time when Chinese foreign relations elsewhere were largely paralyzed. Some African leaders have criticized Western and Soviet aid programs as too expensive and elaborate. By contrast, Peking's relatively simple, labor intensive, and inexpensive projects have met with approval. Chinese technicians work hard and live

closer to African standards than do their Western and Soviet counterparts—a fact generally noted with appreciation by the host governments. Most importantly, Chinese personnel have not engaged in the level of provocative propaganda activity which, during the period of "Red Guard diplomacy," strained Chinese relations with other states throughout the world.

PEKING'S "DOLLAR" DIPLOMACY: A STRONG POSITION IN TANZANIA

"Unlike the imperialist countries of the West and the modern revisionists who are plundering the recipient countries in the name of "aid," Chinese assistance is designed to help recipient countries embark on the road of independent development and self-reliance. In accordance with Chairman Mao's teachings, the Chinese experts have been working hard and have forged a close friendship with the African workers."

*New China News Agency
6 February 1968*



Chinese Agricultural Specialist in Tanzania

Since 1962, China has steadily improved its relations with Dar es Salaam; Tanzania now is Peking's most important African base of operations and one of China's foremost "foreign friends." As in other African states of prime interest to Peking, success in Tanzania rests primarily on a well-run foreign aid program and a continued low-key diplomatic posture. China is the primary source of aid for Tanzania's military forces and a main source of that country's economic development aid. The Chinese work closely with Tanzanians in arming and training Mozambique guerrillas. In 1967, Peking agreed to construct the 1,200-mile TanZam Railroad from the Zambian copper mines to Dar es Salaam—a major project to which the Tanzanian Government attaches great importance. The Chinese are rapidly completing the detailed engineering survey for the line. In addition to some 350 Chinese technicians engaged in the railway survey in 1968, Peking had another 500 technicians and advisers in the country and has given Dar es Salaam about \$30 million in economic credits.

Tanzania's recent decision to terminate Canadian military assistance has left Peking with the dominant foreign role in all branches of Tan-

zania's security forces. Chinese aid has included small arms, trucks, antiaircraft guns, medium tanks, patrol boats, and landing craft. Commitments to future expansion of the Tanzanian armed forces include construction of a \$1.5 million army barracks complex, a factory to produce small arms, and the construction of a naval base at Dar es Salaam. Tanzania was offered MIG-17s and pilot training by Peking in 1967 but in the meantime was considering proposals from both the USSR and Canada. Dar es Salaam has now rejected these proposals making it likely that Tanzania will now be the fifth nation to receive Chinese Communist MIGs.

A GROWING ROLE IN ZAMBIA

Peking appears to view Zambia as one of its brightest prospects for future expansion. Although the Chinese had never before extended aid to the Lusaka government, in 1967 they gave it a \$16.8 million interest free loan for the construction of a road from Lusaka to western Zambia. Soon after, they agreed to build the TanZam railroad which will give the Zambians an outlet for their copper through friendly Tanzania rather than Rhodesia. By supplying technicians and workers for their projects, the Chinese have been



**Chinese Doctor
And Medical Personnel
In Tanzania**

increasing their presence in the country, and there now are more than 300 Chinese technicians there. Although President Kaunda generally resists large foreign influences in his country, he has sanctioned the Chinese presence. He has been pleased with their apparently well-managed work and the generous terms of Chinese aid, but he is aware of China's past record in Africa and undoubtedly will maintain a close surveillance.

CONTINUED SUCCESS IN GUINEA; UNCERTAINTY IN MALI

The radical Guinea Government has the longest history of Chinese assistance, dating back to 1959. Chinese relations with the Conakry regime have been cordial even though President Touré in recent years has sought to play East against West and Moscow against Peking. Through 1968 the Chinese had extended almost \$60 million in economic credits to the Guineans, of which almost \$38 million had been drawn. Peking further consolidated its position in Conakry by agreeing a year ago to help construct the 200-mile Guinea-Mali railroad—a project now in doubt because of the coup in Mali last November. Although the Chinese commitment in Guinea to date has consisted entirely of economic and technical assistance, an exchange of military delegations between Peking and Conakry last year indicated that Peking is making an effort to gain influence within the Guinean military, which has been receiving assistance from Soviet bloc nations.

Mali has been another major target of China's effort to gain influence in Africa, although the overthrow of the radical Keita government last November has cast considerable doubt on Peking's future status there. Since 1961 China has dispersed \$35 million of economic aid in Mali and at the end of 1968 had almost 900 technicians in the country. Since the fall of the Keita government and his replacement by a moderate

military regime, Peking has taken a more cautious and circumspect approach, avoiding any public comment on the new Malian leadership. With the exception of the Guinea-Mali railroad, however, the Chinese seem to be continuing to follow through on projects already under way, apparently in the hope of maintaining a presence in the country.

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The aid programs in Congo (Brazzaville) and Mauritania are smaller, but the Chinese nevertheless continue to demonstrate an active interest in both states. Elsewhere in Africa, however, significant Chinese presence and influence are almost



Chinese Technician in Guinea

nil. Soviet competition has been especially troublesome to Peking; Moscow's aid programs in Algeria and Somalia have served to undercut China's efforts there, and the Soviet presence in Congo (Brazzaville), Mali, and Guinea also represents a potential threat to Peking's position. Moreover, Nationalist China's persistent efforts to expand its presence on the continent have met with considerable success in recent years. This is, perhaps, the most dramatic reflection of Peking's general failure in Africa. At present the

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Nationalist Government is recognized by 21 African governments, and the Communists must find Taipei's limited but exceptionally efficient aid program especially galling.

ASSISTANCE TO REVOLUTIONARY GROUPS

Although state-to-state relations have been the primary sphere of Chinese activity in Africa, Peking has also used aid to African nationalist and other insurgent groups to develop its influence on the continent. In general, the assistance consists of varying amounts of small arms and financial support as well as Chinese sponsored guerrilla

"At present, the African people's revolutionary struggles against imperialism, colonialism, and neocolonialism are developing in depth. In conjunction with the anti-imperialist national revolutionary movements in Asia and Latin America, the national revolutionary movement in Africa is forcefully pounding and weakening the foundation of the rule of imperialism, colonialism, and neocolonialism and it is a component part of the anti-imperialist revolutionary front of our time."

*Vice Premier Hsieh Fu-chih, NCNA
26 April 1969*



Guerrillas in Portuguese Guinea with Chinese-made Arms

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training in Africa or China, political instruction, and propaganda support. Most of the Chinese-backed movements are small and to date have demonstrated little capability for successful revolutionary action. Nevertheless Peking's assistance has strengthened its ties to those African governments which are most committed to the black nationalist movements—notably Tanzania, Zambia, and Guinea.

The most effective insurgent group substantially supported by the Chinese is the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO). This relatively large Tanzania-based organization probably receives half of its military aid from China. FRELIMO has managed to gain control of small Mozambique areas which border on Tanzania. The Mozambique Revolutionary Committee, a much smaller, ineffective group based in Zambia which split from FRELIMO in 1964, also has received limited Chinese aid. In addition, the Chinese have extended token aid to the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola, which is dependent on the Soviet Union for most of its support.

Peking is a major supporter of the Zimbabwe African National Union, a small Rhodesian group which split from the larger Soviet-backed Zimbabwe African People's Union in 1963. In Guinea, the Chinese provide limited assistance to the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and the Cape Verde Islands, an anti-Portuguese nationalist group, despite the fact that the Soviet Union is this group's primary supplier. The Pan African Congress, a small Tanzania-based South African organization, also receives some token assistance.

Aside from African nationalist groups, Peking has recently given limited support to a small Ethiopian insurgency group, certain Congolese rebels opposed to the anti-Chinese Mobutu

regime in Kinshasa, and to Oginga Odinga, a dissident Kenyan politician. Last fall Peking belatedly endorsed Biafran independence and agreed "in principle" to supply aid to the rebel regime—a move primarily designed to please Tanzanian President Nyerere, a strong advocate of Biafra. Although Peking has been replacing Chinese arms given to Biafra by Tanzania, it has shown little interest in assuming a more direct involvement in the Nigerian civil war.

CONCLUSION AND PROSPECTS

"We get along very well with the Chinese. One either gets along well with them or one doesn't get along at all."

*Tanzanian President Nyerere
to Ambassador Burns
11 June 1969*

Because of its importance ideologically and Peking's rather bleak prospects elsewhere, Africa is likely to remain an area of major focus for Chinese diplomacy in the foreseeable future. Nevertheless, the short term prospect for a significant expansion of Chinese influence there appears negligible. In general, the conditions that caused the collapse of China's more ambitious and wider efforts in the early 1960s still prevail. China's image in Africa remains tarnished by the convulsive disorder of the Cultural Revolution, and Peking's continuing support for dissidents in their struggle against the black-ruled nations of Congo (Kinshasa) and Kenya probably has further reinforced the general African suspicion of Chinese intentions.

Moreover, China's position in the foothold it now enjoys is far from secure. Although the host governments have generally been ideologically appealing to the Chinese and receptive to Peking's advances, they have avoided any significant political commitments to Peking. On the contrary, the

Chinese generally have achieved a continuing presence in Africa simply by "paying off" certain African states with generous foreign aid offers. In general, the governments which have accepted assistance have been careful to maintain an independent posture while merely accepting the aid program best suited to their national interest.

On the plus side, China's low-keyed effort in these few African states demonstrates that, in reasonably auspicious circumstances, Peking is capable of effective diplomacy and suggests some

promise over the long term for Chinese diplomatic efforts throughout the developing Afro-Asian world. To date, however, Peking has shown little sign of trying to enhance its appeal by down playing indiscriminate championing of "peoples war" and abandoning its penchant for alienating potential friends for the sake of ideological principle. Until Peking is willing to abandon this militant and doctrinaire Maoist approach to foreign affairs, China's potential for leadership or even influence in Africa and elsewhere in the developing world will remain largely unrealized.

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