

China's Expanding Role in African Peace and Security: A Systematic Review with a Nigeria Case Study and Implications for International Security

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Direct Research Journal of Social Science and Educational Studies



Vol. 14(3), Pp. 87-113, October 2026,

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<https://journals.directresearchpublisher.org/index.php/drjses>; <https://www.ajol.info/index.php/drjses>

Review Article
ISSN: 2449-0806

Received 9 July 2026, Accepted 25 September 2026 Published 6 October 2026

ABSTRACT

Background. China has shifted from a largely economic partner of African states to a multifaceted security actor, with consequences for peacekeeping, strategic competition and global security governance. *Objective.* This PRISMA 2020-guided systematic review, with particular attention to Nigeria, asks (RQ1) how the literature characterises the nature, drivers and instruments of China's engagement in African peace and security; (RQ2) what evidence shows about its scale and direction; and (RQ3) what the implications are for international security. *Methods.* Records were identified through keyword searches built from three concept blocks (China, Africa, and security), publisher-platform searches and citation chaining, then screened against explicit eligibility rules, including a verifiable DOI. Sixty-two studies published between 2009 and 2026 were coded by theme, case and instrument, and combined with indicators from United Nations (UN), Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) and Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) sources. Two lenses, securitisation of overseas interests and norm evolution, were applied to seven cases. *Findings.* (1) The literature has grown quickly since 2016 but is uneven: 22 of the 62 studies concern peacekeeping, only 4 address arms, private security and cyber-security combined, and only 1 is devoted to China–Nigeria security cooperation. (2) China's engagement widened from UN peacekeeping to naval escorts (2008), the evacuation of about 35,000 citizens from Libya (2011), a base in Djibouti (2017), and arms and training. (3) UN peacekeeping personnel fell from a peak of 3,084 (2015) to 1,862 (June 2025), while China's share of Africa's major-arms imports rose from 9.8 per cent (2018–2022) to 18 per cent (2020–2024). (4) The 2024 FOCAC plan commits RMB 1 billion in military grants and training for 6,000 military personnel and 1,000 police. (5) In Nigeria, China has engaged without any peacekeeping role, supplying armoured vehicles, tanks, patrol boats, aid and training, and signing a 2025 agreement to localise ammunition production; the dedicated study finds limited alignment with Nigeria's insecurity priorities, and Nigeria pursues self-reliance. (6) Securitisation of overseas interests explains where China acts (Libya, the Gulf of Aden, Djibouti, Nigeria), while norm evolution explains how it behaves inside UN missions (Darfur, South Sudan, Mali); together they indicate an interest-led, norm-framed approach. (7) The literature divides into contributor, interest-protector, critical, African-agency and competition readings, each partly supported by the cases. (8) Evidence on civilian-protection outcomes and African agency is thin compared with evidence on motives and institutions. *Conclusions and implications.* For international security, the findings point to a gradual reshaping of peacekeeping norms, competition at key maritime and logistical nodes, and governance gaps in arms, private security and cyberspace. Recommendations, with timeframes and indicators, are offered for African institutions (including Nigeria), China, the UN, external partners, researchers and funders.

Keywords: China; Africa; Nigeria; peace and security; UN peacekeeping; security assistance; arms transfers; Djibouti; human security; great-power competition; international security; systematic review



Citation: Ndanusa, L.. (2026). China's Expanding Role in African Peace and Security: A Systematic Review with a Nigeria Case Study and Implications for International Security. *Direct Research Journal of Social Science and Educational Studies*. Vol. 14(3): 87-113.
<https://doi.org/10.4314/drjses.v14i3.6>

INTRODUCTION

Africa has become one of the principal arenas in which the changing distribution of power in the international system is observed and contested. For much of the post-Cold War period China's African presence was understood mainly in terms of trade, investment and infrastructure finance. That picture has changed. A growing body of scholarship documents how China now deploys peacekeepers, maintains a military support base, trains and equips African security forces, and articulates security initiatives alongside its development agenda (Kaczmarek, 2022; Lammich, 2025; Zürcher, 2020).

This shift matters beyond the continent. Africa hosts a large share of UN peacekeeping operations, contains strategically significant sea lanes, and is the site of overlapping security partnerships involving the United States, European states, Russia, Gulf states and regional organisations. China's deepening role raises questions about the future of multilateral peace operations, the balance of power and the norms of intervention and sovereignty (Coleman & Job, 2021; Kim, 2024; Meierding & Sigman, 2021).

The literature is dispersed across security studies, area studies, peacekeeping research and international relations, and it reaches divergent conclusions. Some authors stress continuity in China's discourse of non-interference and win-win cooperation (Carrozza, 2021; Gitlitz, 2023), while others show that practice has moved beyond non-interference (Alden & Large, 2015; Hodzi, 2019; Gazibo & Lema, 2022). Others examine the strategic logic of basing and security assistance (Cabestan, 2020; Carrozza & Marsh, 2022; Sun & Zoubir, 2021) or question whether China's claims to a distinctive human-security approach hold (Hwang & Black, 2020; Peter & Wang, 2024). A structured synthesis, anchored in practical evidence of what China does in specific African cases, is needed.

Nigeria receives particular attention in this review. It is Africa's largest economy and hosts thousands of Chinese citizens (Voice of America, n.d.), it was the largest sub-Saharan importer of major arms in 2019–2023, with 16 per cent of the sub-region's imports (SIPRI, 2024), and it faces a long insurgency in the north-east (Lenshie et al., 2024; Onuoha et al., 2020). Unlike South Sudan or Mali, Nigeria has no UN peacekeeping mission with Chinese participation, so it tests whether China's security role extends beyond peacekeeping to bilateral cooperation. The review is organised around two theoretical lenses, and Nigeria also appears across the paper: in the keyword strategy of the methodology, the dedicated Nigeria case in the results, the interpretation and discussion, the highlights, and the recommendations.

The review addresses three research questions, and the methodology is built to answer each of them:

RQ1. How has the scholarly literature characterized the

nature, drivers and instruments of China's engagement in African peace and security?

RQ2. What does practical evidence (deployments, bases, arms transfers, pledges and specific country cases, including Nigeria) show about the scale and direction of this engagement?

RQ3. What are the implications for international security, and where are the gaps in current knowledge?

The article is organised as follows. The conceptual background comes first, followed by the methodology, which presents the databases, keywords, inclusion procedure and PRISMA flow diagram. The results then present the evidence extracted from the literature and from official data, including a dedicated Nigeria case, and the interpretation follows. The discussion compares the literature and the cases, and ends with the principal findings and the highlights of the review. Limitations and future research, recommendations and the conclusion complete the paper.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Background

Security actors and the provision of security in Africa

Understanding China as a "security actor" requires moving beyond military deployments. The literature treats security engagement as spanning peace operations, bilateral military cooperation, arms transfers and training, diplomatic consultation, private security provision, and the protection of overseas citizens and assets (Carrozza & Marsh, 2022; Ghiselli, 2021; Kaczmarek, 2022; Spearin, 2022). Whether China can be regarded as a *leading* security actor in the Global South remains open (Kim, 2024).

Norms, non-interference and the security–development nexus

China's official narrative links security with development. Gitlitz (2023) characterises this as a "two wins" approach, and Carrozza (2021) shows how the security–development nexus has allowed official discourse to remain stable while practice changed. Alden and Large (2015) argue that Chinese policymakers have reinterpreted liberal peacebuilding in ways that move beyond non-interference, while Hodzi (2019) and Gazibo and Lema (2022) describe adaptive pragmatism. Earlier work traces how China's attitude to UN peacekeeping and the Responsibility to Protect evolved (Chen, 2009; Chen, 2016; Job, 2016).

Human security

The human-security concept, centred on the protection of individuals as well as states, has been used to test whether China’s practice matches its rhetoric. Hwang and Black (2020) question the image of China as both a victimised state and a visionary leader, Peter and Wang (2024) examine Chinese approaches within and outside UN peacekeeping in South Sudan, and Foot (2020) situates China’s stance on human protection within its beliefs, power and image concerns.

Great-power competition and the international order

A further strand situates China’s role within geopolitical change. Cabestan (2020) reads the Djibouti base as a microcosm of competition with the United States; Carrozza and Marsh (2022) relate arms and training assistance to influence-seeking; Meierding and Sigman (2021) note that Africa is a focal point for research on great-power influence. By contrast, Coleman and Job (2021) consider how Africa and China together may shape UN peacekeeping beyond the liberal international order, and Karlsrud (2019) places the shift from liberal peacebuilding towards stabilisation in context. Soares de Oliveira and Verhoeven (2018) stress that African sovereignty and political order shape what external intervention can achieve. Figure 1 integrates these strands into the analytical framework used to code the evidence: drivers shape instruments, whose effects have implications for international security.

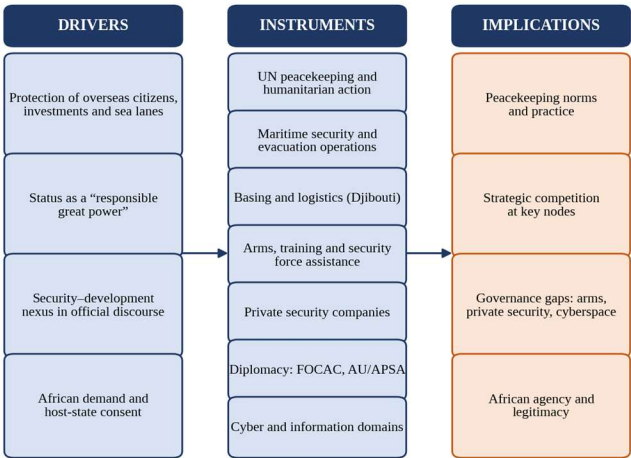


Figure 1. Analytical framework: drivers, instruments and implications of China’s African security engagement. Source: Author’s synthesis of the reviewed literature.

Theoretical lenses for the review

Two theoretical lenses, both drawn from the reviewed literature, are used to organise the evidence and to test its

Official Publication of Direct Research Journal of Social Science and Educational Studies. Vol. 14, 2026, ISSN: 2449-0806

explanatory value. They are complementary: the first explains *where and why* China acts, and the second explains *how* it acts and how it justifies action (Figure 1 and Table 1).

Lens 1: securitisation of overseas interests. As Chinese citizens, investments and trade routes expand abroad, threats to them are increasingly framed as security problems, which pulls the state towards new instruments such as naval escorts, evacuation, basing and bilateral assistance (Ghiselli, 2021). Studies of Libya, the Gulf of Aden and Djibouti fit this logic: protection of nationals strains strict non-interference (Shesterinina, 2016), participation varies with threats to economic interests (Wu, 2025), and a base can secure “latent power” (Sun & Zoubir, 2021). The lens predicts that Chinese security activity concentrates where its people and assets are at risk and where host consent exists, and that assistance to host states is calibrated to those interests rather than to the host’s wider security priorities (Carrozza & Marsh, 2022; Krukowska, 2024).

Lens 2: norm evolution and norm-making. China is neither simply a norm-taker nor a norm-breaker. It reinterprets principles such as non-interference and sovereignty through consent-based, consultative and development-linked practice, and presents change as continuity (Alden & Large, 2015; Carrozza, 2021; Chen, J., 2009; Gazibo & Lema, 2022; Hodzi, 2019). The lens predicts that expansion occurs first within UN-framed and consent-based channels, that official discourse stays stable while practice shifts, and that Chinese and African preferences may converge to shape peacekeeping practice (Coleman & Job, 2021).

Scope condition: African agency. Both lenses operate within limits set by host states, which choose partners, negotiate terms and use competition among external actors (Soares de Oliveira & Verhoeven, 2018; Styan, 2020). The discussion applies the lenses to the cases, and Table 13 shows how fit is rated.

METHODOLOGY

Review design and how the methodology answers the research questions

The review follows the PRISMA 2020 statement (Page et al., 2021), and the literature search is reported in line with the PRISMA-S extension (Rethlefsen et al., 2021). Each research question is paired with a data source, an extraction field and an analytical method, so that the methodology yields an answer to every question (Table 2). RQ1 is answered by coding and thematically synthesising the 62 included studies. RQ2 is answered by extracting

Table 1. *Theoretical lenses, propositions and expected evidence*

Lens	Core claim	Propositions tested	Expected evidence	Key sources
Lens 1: Securitisation of overseas interests	Threats to citizens, assets and sea lanes abroad are framed as security issues and drive new instruments	P1a: activity concentrates where Chinese interests are at risk. P1b: instruments diversify towards naval, basing and bilateral tools. P1c: assistance is calibrated to Chinese interests	Evacuations, naval escorts, bases, arms and training in places with Chinese citizens or investments	Ghiselli (2021); Shesterinina (2016); Wu (2025); Sun & Zoubir (2021)
Lens 2: Norm evolution and norm-making	China reinterprets non-interference and sovereignty through consent-based, consultative, development-linked practice, framed as continuity	P2a: expansion first within UN-framed channels. P2b: stable discourse as practice changes. P2c: Chinese–African convergence may shape peacekeeping practice	Incremental UN deployments; discourse of continuity; “consultative” approach	Alden & Large (2015); Chen, J. (2009); Carrozza (2021); Coleman & Job (2021)

Note: Propositions are the author’s operationalisation of the cited literature.

Table 2. *Alignment of research questions, data, methods and outputs*

Research question	Data used	Extraction and analysis	Output (section)
RQ1: nature, drivers and instruments	62 included studies (journal articles, chapters, books)	Coding of each study by primary theme, instrument, driver, case and stance (Figure 1 framework); narrative thematic synthesis; frequency counts	Characteristics and thematic map (4.1–4.2); interpretation (5.1)
RQ2: practical evidence of scale and direction	Quantified indicators from UN, SIPRI, FOCAC and secondary summaries; case evidence reported in the studies, including the Nigeria case	Evidence matrix by instrument and by country case; descriptive trend comparison of personnel and arms shares; cross-check between sources and studies	Evidence by instrument and case table (4.3–4.4); interpretation (5.2)
RQ3: implications and gaps	Interpretations reported across studies; evidence matrix; coding of stance	Cross-study comparison of positions on China’s impact; testing of propositions P1–P2 against each case (Table 13, Figure 11); mapping of implications to evidence; strength-of-evidence rating; gap analysis	Comparison, theory fit and implications (6.1–6.5); principal findings (6.6) and highlights (6.7); gaps (7)

Note: The framework in Figure 1 is used for coding drivers, instruments and implications.

quantified indicators and case evidence from the studies and from official sources, and organising them in an evidence matrix by instrument and country case, with Nigeria treated as a designated case. RQ3 is answered by a cross-study comparison of the interpretations of China’s impact and by mapping the implications that the studies and indicators support, with a judgement of evidence strength.

Databases and information sources

Three kinds of source were used (Table 3). First, the review started from a reference set supplied by the author from an earlier phase ($n = 21$). Second, additional records, including Nigeria-specific records, were identified by keyword searches of the open web index and of the publisher platforms that host the main journals in the field: Taylor & Francis Online, Cambridge Core, Oxford Academic, SAGE Journals, SpringerLink and Brill. Third,

backward citation chaining was applied to the reference lists of two recent key papers (Frimpong, 2025; Wu, 2025). The search syntax in (Table 3) can be replicated in the Web of Science Core Collection and Scopus.

Keywords and search strategy

Keywords were organised in three concept blocks, and a record had to match at least one term from each block in its title, abstract or keywords to be considered (Table 4). Block A captures the actor (China), Block B the region and named cases (Africa), and Block C the security instruments (peace, peacekeeping, military, arms, security assistance, anti-piracy, human security, mediation, private security, cyber). Terms within a block were combined with OR and the blocks with AND. Case names in Block B (Nigeria, Djibouti, South Sudan, Mali, Darfur, Libya) were included so that case-specific studies were not missed. Nigeria-specific terms (Nigeria, Boko Haram, Lake Chad,

Table 3. Information sources and search syntax

Source	Role	Search syntax or procedure	Use in this review
Web of Science Core Collection	Replication syntax	TS=((China OR Chinese OR PRC OR Beijing OR PLA) AND (Africa OR "African Union" OR "Horn of Africa" OR Sahel OR Nigeria OR "Boko Haram" OR "Gulf of Guinea" OR Djibouti OR "South Sudan" OR Mali OR Darfur OR Libya) AND (peace OR peacekeeping OR security OR military OR "arms transfer" OR "security assistance" OR "anti-piracy" OR "human security" OR mediation OR "private security" OR counterinsurgency OR counter-terrorism OR cyber)); filters: English; article, review, book chapter; 2009–2026	Provided for replication
Scopus	Replication syntax	TITLE-ABS-KEY with the same three blocks and filters	Provided for replication
Publisher platforms (Taylor & Francis, Cambridge, Oxford Academic, SAGE, Springer, Brill)	Targeted search and DOI verification	Concept-block queries such as "China peacekeeping Africa", "China arms transfers Africa", "China Djibouti base", "China Libya evacuation", "China anti-piracy Gulf of Aden"	Executed
Citation chaining	Backward chaining	Reference lists of Wu (2025) and Frimpong (2025) screened against Table 4	Executed
Author-supplied set	Seed records	19 substantive studies and 2 methodological references from the earlier phase	Included

Table 4. Keyword blocks used to identify and include literature

Block	Concept	Search terms (combined with OR)
A	Actor	China; Chinese; PRC; Beijing; PLA; "People's Liberation Army"
B	Region and cases	Africa; "African Union"; "Horn of Africa"; Sahel; Nigeria; "Boko Haram"; "Lake Chad"; "Gulf of Guinea"; Djibouti; "South Sudan"; Sudan; Darfur; Mali; Libya; Somalia; "Gulf of Aden"; Congo; Liberi
C	Security domain	peace; <i>peacekeeping</i> ; "peace operations"; security; military; "arms transfer"; "arms sales"; "security assistance"; "security force assistance"; "anti-piracy"; "human security"; mediation; "private security"; "non-interference"; counterinsurgency ; counter-terrorism ; cyber*

Note: The same blocks were used for database syntax (Table 3) and for screening titles, abstracts and metadata.

Table 5. Eligibility criteria and decision rules

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Keyword match	At least one term from each of blocks A, B and C in title, abstract or keywords	Missing any block
Scope	China's role in African peace, security, peacekeeping, military or security cooperation, mediation, human security or related international-security dimensions	Purely economic analyses of China–Africa relations; studies not focused on China or on security
Publication type	Peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly chapters and academic books	Opinion pieces, news commentary and non-scholarly material (used only as data sources for the practical evidence)
Language and period	English; 2009–2026	Other languages; outside window
Identifier	Active DOI verified at the publisher page or Crossref-linked record	No verifiable DOI
Metadata	Complete bibliographic details	Incomplete details that prevent citation

Gulf of Guinea) were added to Block B and counter-terrorism terms to Block C so that Nigerian cooperation with China was searched explicitly.

Inclusion procedure and eligibility criteria

Literature was included through a five-step procedure applied to every record: (1) keyword match in all three

blocks (Table 4); (2) scope check, requiring a substantive focus on China and African peace and security; (3) publication-type check; (4) DOI verification, requiring an active DOI shown on the publisher page or a Crossref-linked record; and (5) metadata completeness (authors, year, outlet, volume or chapter details). Records that failed any step were excluded and the reason was recorded (Table 5).

Study selection and PRISMA flow diagram

Figure 2 shows the selection process. In total 72 records were identified: 21 from the author-supplied set and 51 shortlisted from keyword searches and citation chaining. No duplicates were found. Screening against Tables 4 and 5 excluded six records: three without a verifiable DOI (an arms-transfer study, a neo-colonialism study and a 2026 special-issue introduction), one with incomplete bibliographic details, and two outside scope (a general arms-trade study not focused on China, and a global-governance study not focused on Africa or security). The remaining 66 records were verified and all were retained: 62 substantive studies, two context sources on Nigeria's counterinsurgency (Lenshie et al., 2024; Onuoha et al., 2020), which are used as background and not coded, and two methodological references. Raw hit counts per query were not logged, so the identification box reports shortlisted records.

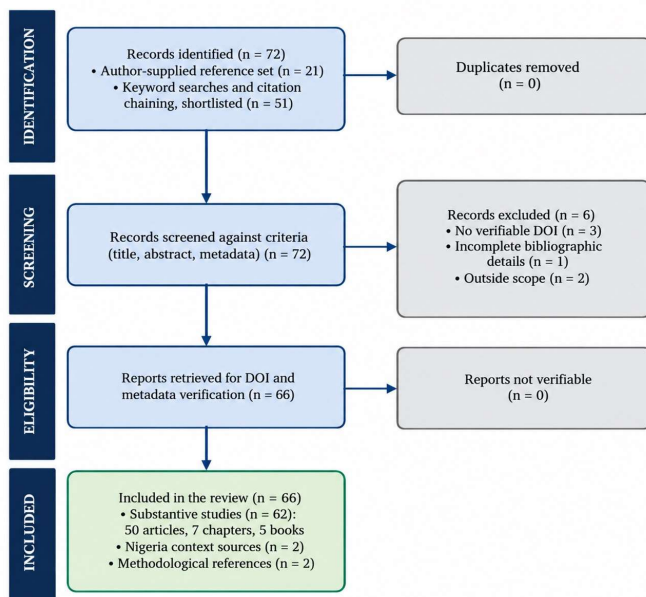


Figure 2. PRISMA 2020 flow diagram of study selection, Note: Counts reflect the assembly of the corpus in this review.

Data extraction and coding

For each included study the following fields were extracted from the title, abstract and publisher metadata: authors, year, outlet and type (article, chapter, book); primary theme (eight categories, Table 6); security instrument(s); driver(s) of Chinese engagement; explicit country or case focus; stance on China's impact (contributor, interest-protector, critical, African-agency, descriptive); any quantified evidence; and whether the study supports, qualifies or challenges the propositions of Lens 1 or Lens 2 (Table 1). Each study was assigned one primary theme,

and cases and instruments could be multiple. For RQ2, quantified indicators were extracted from UN, SIPRI and FOCAC documents, with the date, unit and source recorded.

Synthesis and appraisal

Because the studies are heterogeneous and largely qualitative, a narrative thematic synthesis was used, supported by frequency counts and an evidence matrix, rather than meta-analysis. Studies were not excluded on appraisal grounds. Instead, the volume, design and source quality of the evidence behind each implication were used to assign the strength-of-evidence ratings.

RESULTS

Presentation of the Extracted Evidence

Characteristics of the included studies

The 62 substantive studies comprise 50 journal articles, 7 book chapters and 5 books, published between 2009 and 2026. Publication is concentrated after 2016, with 8 studies in 2018, 9 in 2019, 8 in 2020 and 7 in 2021, which shows rapid growth of scholarly attention (Figure 3). By theme, peacekeeping and protection norms dominate (22 studies, 35 per cent), followed by basing, maritime security and overseas protection (10), the evolution and legitimization of China's security role (7), overviews (7), great-power competition (6), human security (5), with two studies each on security assistance, arms and private security, and on cyber-security and narratives, and one on China–Nigeria security cooperation (Figure 4). The Nigeria-specific literature is therefore thin: besides the dedicated study (Rindap, 2026), Nigeria appears mainly within overviews (Krukowska, 2024; Lammich, 2025). Table 6 lists each study with its focus and theme.

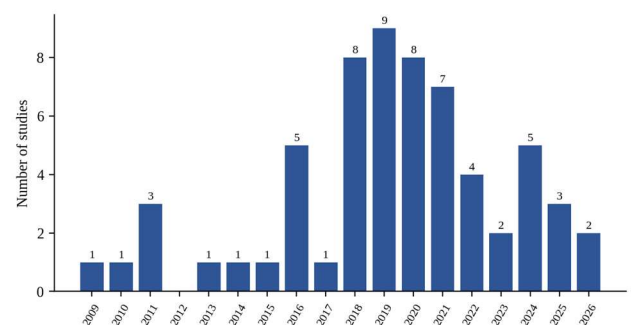


Figure 3. Publication years of the included studies (n = 62). Source: Author's coding of the included studies.

RQ1 results: nature, drivers and instruments

Nature: The studies describe an engagement that is

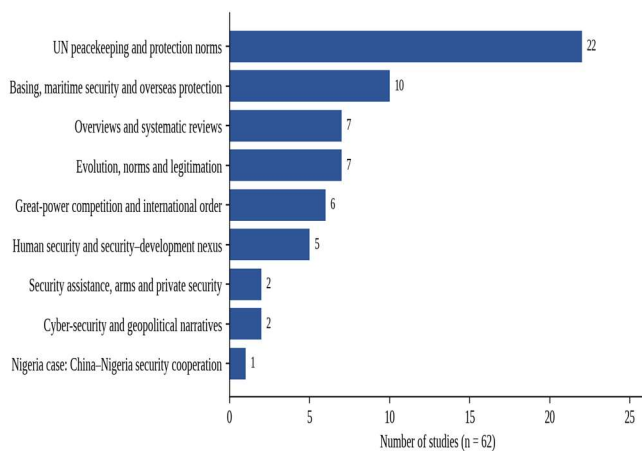


Figure 4. Distribution of the included studies by primary theme. Source: Author's coding of the studies in Table 6; one primary theme per study.

gradual and multilateral in form. Zürcher (2020), Wu and Taylor (2011) and Hirono (2011) trace a path from refusal to engagement in peacekeeping, Alden and Large (2015) show a shift from non-interference rhetoric to practices that permit a more substantive security role, and Lammich (2025) and Kaczmarek (2022) describe a widening repertoire. Overview and book-length treatments frame this as a multi-instrument relationship in which security is now one strand of China–Africa ties (Abegunrin & Manyeruke, 2020; Alden & Jiang, 2019; Benabdallah & Large, 2018; Dike & Owusu, 2024; Eisenman & Shinn, 2023). In peacekeeping, He (2019) and Montenegro (2021) document the policy change and the 1990–2019 record, Kwon (2020) the humanitarian dimension, Mlambo et al. (2019) the contested benefits for continental security, and Sandler (2017) the wider question of burden sharing and effectiveness.

Drivers: Four drivers recur. The first is protection of economic interests and citizens abroad (Wu, 2025; Ghiselli, 2021; Sun & Zoubir, 2021). The second is status and responsibility as a major power (Foot, 2014; Fung, 2019; Fang et al., 2018). The third is the security–development nexus in official discourse (Carrozza, 2021; Gitlitz, 2023). The fourth is African demand and host-state consent (Ganchev, 2019; Styran, 2020; Coleman & Job, 2021).

Instruments: Seven instruments are identified: UN peacekeeping, maritime security and evacuation, basing, arms and security force assistance, private security, institutional diplomacy with the African Union and FOCAC, and cyber and information domains. The study counts in Figure 4 show that peacekeeping is studied far more than assistance, arms or cyber, so the evidence is uneven across instruments.

Case focus: Studies with an explicit case focus concentrate on the Gulf of Aden (4), South Sudan and

Sudan (4), Mali (3), Djibouti (3), Nigeria (1), Libya (1) and the Horn of Africa (1) (Figure 5). Nigeria is the least studied of the major cases in relation to the scale of Chinese arms deliveries. Most other studies treat Africa as a whole.

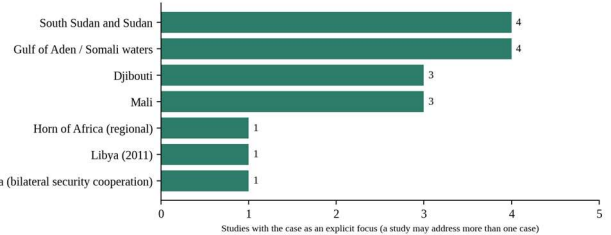


Figure 5. Case focus of the included studies

Source: Author's coding from titles and abstracts; a study may address more than one case. Nigeria is counted for the dedicated China–Nigeria study.

RQ2 results: practical evidence of scale and direction

Practical evidence on instruments is summarised in Table 7 and Figures 6 to 8, using official and institutional data listed separately from the DOI-bearing references.

Peacekeeping: China had five personnel in UN peacekeeping in 1990, peaked at 3,084 in mid-2015 and had 1,862 in June 2025, roughly 40 per cent below the peak (Figure 7). Of the 2025 total, 1,776 were troops, 48 staff officers, 24 experts and 14 individual police. The decline coincides with the closure of missions in which China was present (Table 8). China is the largest contributor among the permanent members of the Security Council and the second-largest financial contributor (Institute for Security and Development Policy, 2018). It pledged in 2015 an 8,000-strong standby force and a US\$1 billion fund over ten years (China Power Project, n.d.).

Arms transfers: China accounted for 9.8 per cent of African imports of major arms in 2018–2022 (SIPRI, 2023), 13 per cent in 2019–2023 (SIPRI, 2024) and 18 per cent in 2020–2024 (SIPRI, 2025). In sub-Saharan Africa it supplied 19 per cent in 2019–2023, narrowly overtaking Russia, and 22 per cent in 2021–2025, delivering to 23 states (SIPRI, 2024, 2026; Figure 8). SIPRI measures volumes of deliveries, not values, and sub-Saharan Africa accounted for only 2.2 per cent of global arms imports. RQ2 results: country cases and instances of Chinese involvement

Table 10 collates the main instances in which China has stepped in, starting with Nigeria and then the cases involving UN missions, evacuation, naval operations and basing, and combines deployment evidence with the studies that analyse each case. Nigeria case: how China has stepped in on security and peace

Why Nigeria: Nigeria is a priority case for three reasons.

Table 6. *Studies included in the thematic synthesis (n = 62)*

Study	Focus	Primary theme
Alao & Alden (2018)	China's evolving approach to the African Peace and Security Architecture	Evolution, norms and legitimization
Alden & Jiang (2019)	Debt, industrialisation and security in China–Africa relations	Human security and security–development nexus
Alden & Large (2015)	China's engagement with security norms in Africa; gradualism and reframing of peacebuilding	Evolution, norms and legitimization
Alden & Zheng (2018)	China's changing role in peace and security in Africa	Evolution, norms and legitimization
Abegunrin & Manyeruke (2020)	China's military involvement and peacekeeping in Africa	UN peacekeeping and protection norms
Barber (2018)	Lesson-learning in China's relations with Sudan and South Sudan, 2005–2013	Evolution, norms and legitimization
Barton (2013)	Engaging China in the Indian Ocean against Somali piracy	Basing, maritime security and overseas protection
Benabdallah & Large (2018)	China and African security: overview chapter	Overviews and systematic reviews
Cabestan (2018)	China's participation in the UN mission in Mali and wider security involvement	UN peacekeeping and protection norms
Cabestan (2020)	Djibouti base as microcosm of China–US competition and new bipolarity	Basing, maritime security and overseas protection
Cannon (2024)	Maps, flags and security narratives; reframing China's influence in Africa	Cyber-security and geopolitical narratives
Carrozza (2021)	Official discourse legitimising China's growing African security role	Evolution, norms and legitimization
Carrozza & Marsh (2022)	Security force assistance: arms, training and influence	Security assistance, arms and private security
Chen, J. (2009)	Norm-change explanation of China's shifting attitude to UN peacekeeping	UN peacekeeping and protection norms
Chen, Z. (2016)	China and the Responsibility to Protect	UN peacekeeping and protection norms
Cho (2019)	China's participation in UN peacekeeping since the 2000s	UN peacekeeping and protection norms
Coleman & Job (2021)	Africa and China shaping UN peacekeeping beyond the liberal order	UN peacekeeping and protection norms
Coleman & Williams (2021)	Future evolution of peace operations as states shape them	UN peacekeeping and protection norms
Csunyó (2026)	Interests behind cyber-attacks targeting Africa attributed to the region	Cyber-security and geopolitical narratives
Dike & Owusu (2024)	Systematic review of China–Africa relationships	Overviews and systematic reviews
Eisenman & Shinn (2023)	China's relations with Africa: a new era of strategic engagement	Overviews and systematic reviews
Fang et al. (2018)	China's evolving motivations and goals in UN peacekeeping	UN peacekeeping and protection norms
Foot (2014)	The UN as China's venue of choice in the Xi Jinping era	Great-power competition and international order
Foot (2020)	China, the UN and human protection: beliefs, power, image	Human security and security–development nexus
Fung (2016)	Explaining China's deployments to UN peacekeeping operations	UN peacekeeping and protection norms
Fung (2019)	China and intervention at the UN Security Council	Great-power competition and international order
Ganchev (2019)	China's "consultative" peacekeeping in Sudan/South Sudan and Mali	UN peacekeeping and protection norms

Table 6 Contd.

Gazibo & Lema (2022)	From non-interference to adaptive pragmatism in China's security policy	Evolution, norms and legitimization
Ghiselli (2018)	Peacekeeping and anti-piracy missions as lenses on China's rise	Basing, maritime security and overseas protection
Ghiselli (2021)	Securitisation and the protection of China's overseas interests	Basing, maritime security and overseas protection
Gitlitz (2023)	Security and development as the "two wins" of China's African strategy	Human security and security–development nexus
Hirono (2011)	China's charm offensive and peacekeeping: Cambodia and Sudan	UN peacekeeping and protection norms
Hodzi (2019)	The end of China's non-intervention policy in Africa	Evolution, norms and legitimization
Hwang & Black (2020)	Questioning China's human-security approach in Africa	Human security and security–development nexus
Job (2016)	Normative stances on R2P of Brazil, India and China	UN peacekeeping and protection norms
Kaczmarek (2022)	China as a security actor in Africa	Overviews and systematic reviews
Karlsrud (2019)	From liberal peacebuilding to stabilisation and counter-terrorism	Great-power competition and international order
Kim (2024)	Can China lead as a security actor in the Global South?	Overviews and systematic reviews
Kwon (2020)	Chinese humanitarian action within UN peacekeeping missions	UN peacekeeping and protection norms
Lammich (2025)	Policies, strategies and implications of China's evolving security engagement	Overviews and systematic reviews
Lanteigne (2019)	China's UN peacekeeping in Mali and comprehensive diplomacy	UN peacekeeping and protection norms
Leake (2020)	China's peace and security engagement in the Horn of Africa	Basing, maritime security and overseas protection
Lin-Greenberg (2010)	Assessment of China's anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden	Basing, maritime security and overseas protection
Meierding & Sigman (2021)	Mechanisms of international influence in great-power competition	Great-power competition and international order
Mlambo et al. (2019)	Benefits of China's military peacekeeping presence for continental security	UN peacekeeping and protection norms
Montenegro (2021)	Thirty-year assessment of China in UN peacekeeping (1990–2019)	UN peacekeeping and protection norms
Peter & Wang (2024)	Human security within and outside UN peacekeeping: South Sudan	Human security and security–development nexus
Sandler (2017)	Burden sharing and effectiveness in peacekeeping	UN peacekeeping and protection norms
Shesterinina (2016)	China, Libya and protection norms, including the 2011 evacuation	Basing, maritime security and overseas protection
Shinn (2016)	Comparing China's and the US's engagement with Africa	Great-power competition and international order
Singh (2011)	PLA participation in UN peacekeeping as military diplomacy	UN peacekeeping and protection norms
Soares de Oliveira & Verhoeven (2018)	Sovereignty, statehood and political order in Africa	Great-power competition and international order
Spearin (2022)	Chinese private security companies and UN peacekeeping demand factors	Security assistance, arms and private security
Styan (2020)	Djibouti, the Maritime Silk Road and China's first overseas base	Basing, maritime security and overseas protection

Table 6 Contd.

Sun & Zoubir (2021)	Djibouti as anchorage for China's "latent power"	Basing, maritime security and overseas protection
Frimpong (2025)	China's UN peacekeeping role and norm revision in Africa	UN peacekeeping and protection norms
He (2019)	China's rise and its changing policy on UN peacekeeping	UN peacekeeping and protection norms
Wu, H. (2025)	Decision-making in China's counter-piracy campaign in the Gulf of Aden	Basing, maritime security and overseas protection
Wu & Taylor (2011)	From refusal to engagement in peacekeeping in Africa	UN peacekeeping and protection norms
Krukowska (2024)	China's security relations with Africa: UN peacekeeping, small arms exports and technology	Overviews and systematic reviews
Rindap (2026)	China's economic and strategic engagement and its implications for security challenges in Nigeria	Nigeria case: China–Nigeria security cooperation
Zürcher (2020)	China as a peacekeeper: past, present and future	UN peacekeeping and protection norms

Note: Study labels follow the reference list. Themes are the author's coding from titles and abstracts.

Table 7. Evidence of China's peace-and-security engagement in Africa, by instrument

Instrument	Practical evidence	Sources
UN peacekeeping	1,862 uniformed personnel worldwide in June 2025 (rank 8; 1,776 troops); peak of 3,084 in mid-2015; more than 80% of contributions in Africa as of 2017; about 1,030 troops in South Sudan in 2025	UN DPO (2025); China Power Project (n.d.); Providing for Peacekeeping (n.d.); Newsweek (2025)
Maritime security	PLA Navy escorts in the Gulf of Aden since December 2008; participation explained by threats to economic interests, international expectations and host-state receptiveness	Wu (2025); Lin-Greenberg (2010); Ghiselli (2018); Barton (2013)
Protection of citizens abroad	Evacuation of about 35,000 nationals from Libya in 2011, the first PLA Navy evacuation operation	Collins & Erickson (2011); Shesterinina (2016); Ghiselli (2021)
Basing and logistics	PLA support base in Djibouti established in 2017, China's first overseas military base	Cabestan (2018, 2020); Styan (2020); Sun & Zoubir (2021)
Arms and assistance	About 18% of Africa's major-arms imports in 2020–2024 and 22% of sub-Saharan imports in 2021–2025; first comprehensive collation of Chinese security force assistance	SIPRI (2025, 2026); Carrozza & Marsh (2022)
Training and grants	2024 pledge of RMB 1 billion in military grants, training for 6,000 military personnel and 1,000 police, and 500 young officers invited to China	FOCAC (2024)
Private security	Demand factors may draw Chinese private security companies into UN peacekeeping contexts	Spearin (2022)
Cyber and information	Analysis of cyber-attacks attributed to the region and of competing narratives of Chinese influence	Csunyó (2026); Cannon (2024)
Bilateral security cooperation: Nigeria	Armoured vehicles, tanks, artillery and patrol boats; military aid and training; policing and intelligence support; 2025 agreement to localise ammunition production	Krukowska (2024); Rindap (2026); Al Jazeera (2022); The Africa Report (n.d.); Military Africa (2025); Militarnyi (2025)

Note: "UN DPO" is the United Nations Department of Peace Operations.

It is Africa's largest economy and hosts thousands of Chinese citizens (Voice of America, n.d.). It was the largest sub-Saharan importer of major arms in 2019–2023, with 16 per cent of regional imports (SIPRI, 2024), and Krukowska (2024) lists it among the six largest recipients

of Chinese arms exports to Africa, with about 10 per cent. And it faces a long insurgency by Boko Haram and related groups in the north-east, in which military operations have been widely criticised for corruption, low morale and weak intelligence (Onuoha et al., 2020; Lenshie et al., 2024).

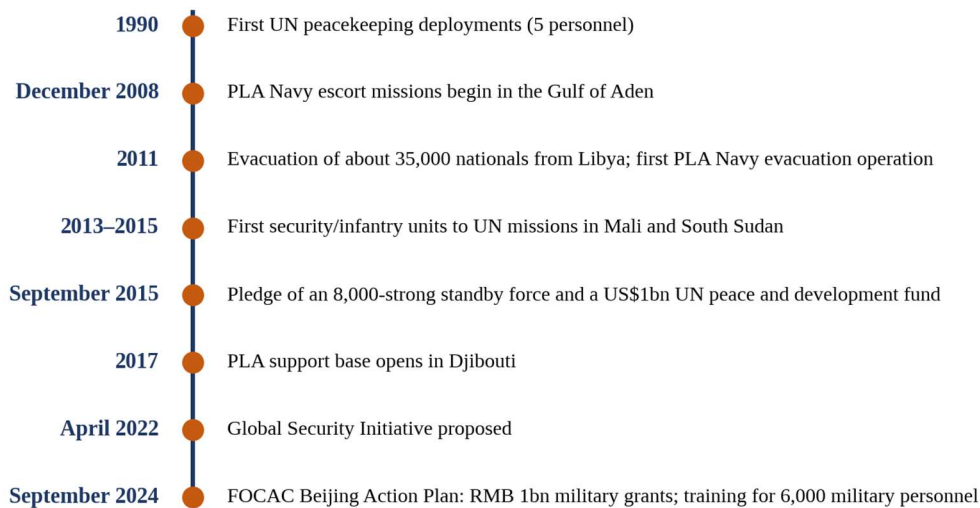


Figure 6. Milestones in China's peace-and-security engagement relevant to Africa, 1990–2024

Sources: China Power Project (n.d.); Collins & Erickson (2011); Cabestan (2018); Institute for Security and Development Policy (2018); Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (2024); Wu (2025). The Global Security Initiative is referred to in the FOCAC Beijing Action Plan (2025–2027).

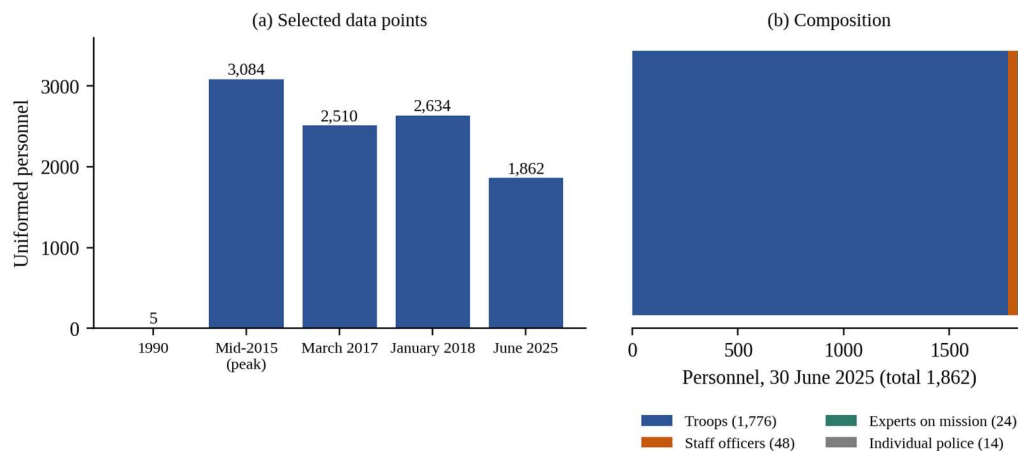


Figure 7. Chinese uniformed personnel in UN peacekeeping: selected data points and composition in June 2025

Sources: China Power Project (n.d.) for 1990 and 2015; Providing for Peacekeeping (n.d.) for March 2017; Institute for Security and Development Policy (2018) for January 2018; UN DPO (2025) for June 2025. Data points are not an annual series and cover all missions, not only those in Africa.

The peacekeeping dimension: China has no UN peacekeeping contingent in Nigeria, and Nigeria is not a UN mission host. China's involvement is therefore bilateral and regional rather than peacekeeping in the narrow sense. The peacekeeping link is indirect: Chinese programmes have trained Nigerian military and security personnel for UN peacekeeping missions, among other areas (TheCable, n.d.); China's own peacekeepers have served in West African missions (UNMIL in Liberia until 2018 and MINUSMA in Mali until 2023; Table 8); and Lammich (2025) notes that China supports the military

apparatus of states such as Nigeria that take part in regional and African Union security structures, although new Chinese military-cooperation formats appear largely independent of that regional engagement.

Forms of involvement: Five forms of Chinese involvement stand out (Figure 9, Figure 10 and Table 11).

Arms and equipment: Nigeria received 272 armoured vehicles from China in the five-year period covered by SIPRI's 2021 report (Al Jazeera, 2022). Chinese CS/VP3

Table 8. Chinese personnel in African UN missions, March 2017, and current status

Mission	Location	Chinese personnel, March 2017	Status
UNMISS	South Sudan	1,061 (1,050 troops, 7 police, 4 experts)	Ongoing; about 1,030 troops in 2025
MINUSMA	Mali	398 troops	Mission closed in 2023
MONUSCO	DR Congo	234 (221 troops, 13 experts)	Ongoing
UNAMID	Darfur, Sudan	235 troops	Mission closed in 2020
UNMIL	Liberia	141 police, 1 troop	Mission closed in 2018
MINURSO	Western Sahara	12 experts	Ongoing

Sources: Providing for Peacekeeping (n.d.) for 2017; Newsweek (2025) citing UN data for UNMISS in 2025.

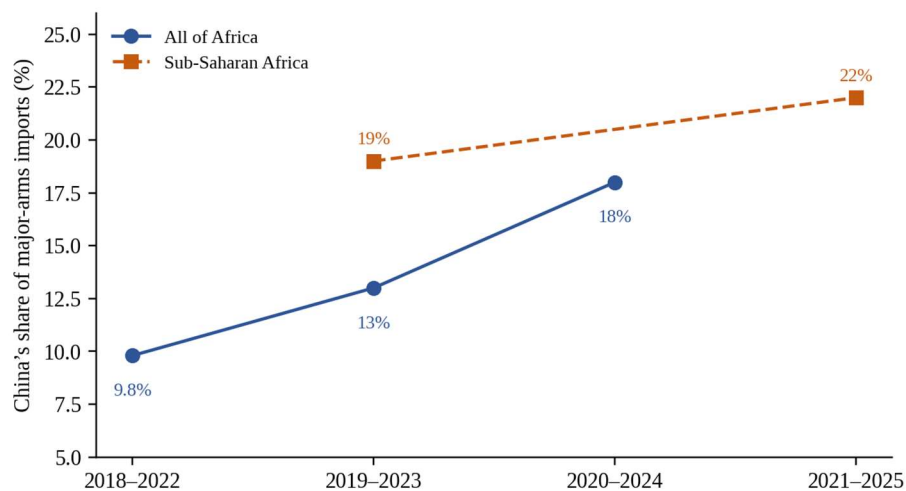


Figure 8. China's share of major-arms imports to Africa and sub-Saharan Africa (per cent) Sources: SIPRI (2023, 2024, 2025, 2026). Windows overlap and come from different fact-sheet editions; blank points were not available in the sources consulted.

Table 9. Quantified security commitments relevant to Africa

Date	Commitment	Source
September 2015	Standby peacekeeping force of 8,000; US\$1 billion China–UN Peace and Development Fund over ten years	China Power Project (n.d.)
September 2024	RMB 1 billion (about US\$140 million) in military grants; training of 6,000 military personnel and 1,000 police and law enforcement officers; 500 young African officers invited to China	FOCAC (2024)
September 2024	Joint exercises, training and patrols; demining initiative; Global Security Initiative partnership; cooperation on peacekeeping and counter-terrorism within the UN	FOCAC (2024)

armoured vehicles entered Nigerian service from 2014–2015, a US\$152 million contract with Norinco was signed in 2019, and the first battle tanks and self-propelled artillery arrived in April 2020 (The Africa Report, n.d.; Military Africa, 2025).

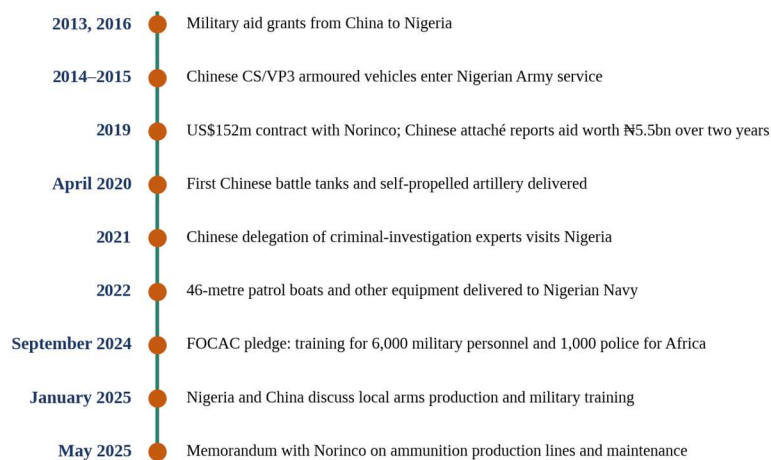
Military aid and training: China provided military aid grants in 2013 and 2016, and in 2019 its defence attaché said aid worth ₦5.5 billion had been given over two years; Nigerian officers train in China, and programmes cover law

and order, UN peacekeeping, anti-piracy and counter-terrorism (TheCable, n.d.).

Maritime security: China delivered 46-metre patrol boats to the Nigerian Navy in 2022 (Military Africa, 2025), a port call by three Chinese warships at Lagos was described as a friendly visit to address maritime threats in the Gulf of Guinea (Voice of America, n.d.), and Chinese forces have held joint anti-piracy exercises with Nigeria and Cameroon (Observer Research Foundation, n.d.).

Table 10. *Instances of Chinese peace-and-security involvement in African cases*

Case	Form of involvement and evidence	What the literature reports	Sources
Nigeria	No UN peacekeeping role; bilateral arms, military aid, training, patrol boats, policing and intelligence support, and 2025 localisation agreement	China's security help is real but limited in synergy with Nigeria's insurgency priorities; engagement advances Chinese interests; dependence risk; Nigerian push for self-reliance	Rindap (2026); Krukowska (2024); Lammich (2025); Carrozza & Marsh (2022)
South Sudan	Infantry battalion in UNMISS (about 1,050 troops in 2017; about 1,030 in 2025)	Consultative approach that links security and economic goals; lessons from Sudan–South Sudan relations; human-security approach questioned or assessed	Ganchev (2019); Barber (2018); Peter & Wang (2024)
Mali	Security/infantry unit in MINUSMA (398 troops in 2017); mission closed 2023	First major step into UN security roles; analysed as comprehensive diplomacy and part of wider engagement	Cabestan (2018); Lanteigne (2019); Ganchev (2019)
Darfur (Sudan)	Troops in UNAMID (235 in 2017); mission closed 2020	Shift from refusal to engagement; “charm offensive” reading; lesson-learning	Hirono (2011); Wu & Taylor (2011); Barber (2018)
DR Congo, Liberia, Western Sahara	MONUSCO (234), UNMIL police (141) and MINURSO experts (12) in 2017	Part of the general rise in UN contributions and its motives	Providing for Peacekeeping (n.d.); Fung (2016); Cho (2019)
Libya (2011)	Evacuation of about 35,000 nationals, with a frigate redeployed from the Gulf of Aden	Protection of nationals abroad creates dilemmas for non-interference; part of securitisation of overseas interests	Collins & Erickson (2011); Shesterinina (2016); Ghiselli (2021)
Gulf of Aden and Somali waters	Naval escort missions since December 2008	Participation depends on threats to economic interests, expectations and host receptiveness; early assessment and EU engagement	Wu (2025); Lin-Greenberg (2010); Barton (2013); Ghiselli (2018)
Djibouti	PLA support base opened 2017; Maritime Silk Road port development	Microcosm of US–China competition; secures “latent power”; small-state agency; no necessary “debt trap”	Cabestan (2020); Sun & Zoubir (2021); Styant (2020)
Horn of Africa (regional)	Mix of diplomacy, UN contributions and basing	Interplay of big-power responsibility and geopolitical interest	Leake (2020)
Continent-wide assistance	Arms deliveries (SIPRI), training and grants (FOCAC 2024), security force assistance	Aims to strengthen relations and protect economic interests; no evidence of supplanting other providers	Carrozza & Marsh (2022); SIPRI (2025, 2026); FOCAC (2024)

**Figure 9.** *Milestones in China–Nigeria security cooperation, 2013–2025.* Sources: TheCable (n.d.); the Africa Report (n.d.); Military Africa (2025); Agate Radio TV (2025); Militarnyi (2025); Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (2024). Dates reflect the secondary sources cited and should be checked against official records.

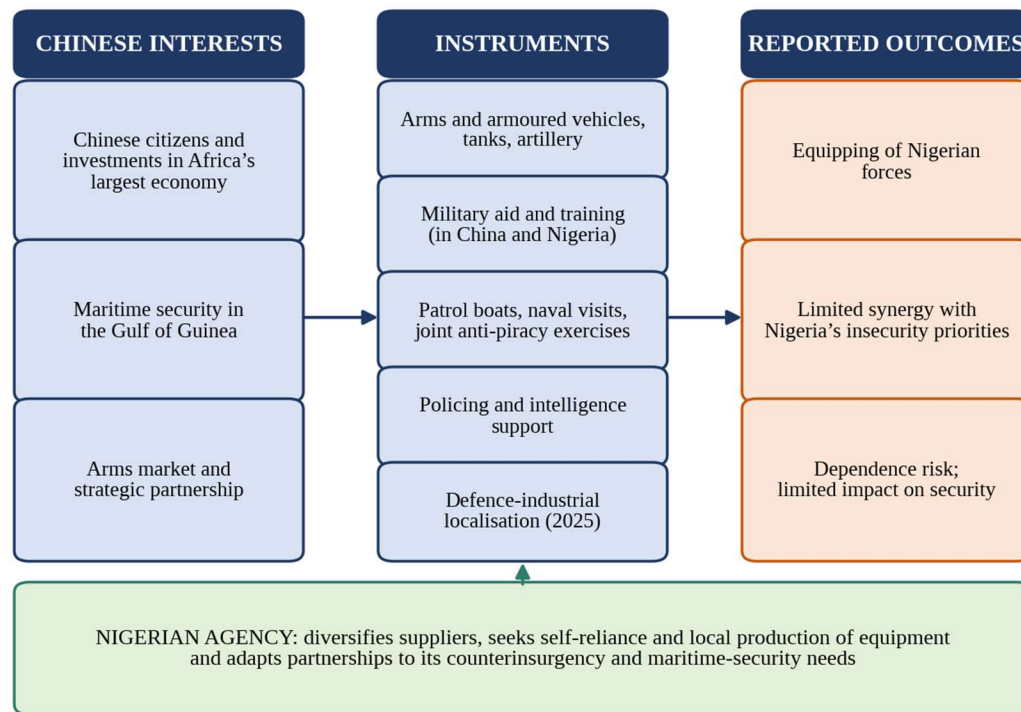


Figure 10. China–Nigeria security cooperation: interests, instruments and reported outcomes. Source: Author's synthesis of Rindap (2026), Krukowska (2024) and the secondary sources in Figure 9.

Policing and intelligence. A Chinese delegation of criminal-investigation experts visited Nigerian agencies in 2021 (TheCable, n.d.), and China is reported to provide training and intelligence collaboration against Boko Haram (Observer Research Foundation, n.d.).

Defence-industrial localization: In January 2025 Nigeria's foreign minister said Nigeria wanted to work with China to domesticate production of military equipment (Agate Radio TV, 2025), and in May 2025 Nigeria signed a memorandum with Norinco on ammunition production lines, maintenance, modernisation and training, with Nigerian officials aiming to make Nigeria a regional maintenance hub (Militarnyi, 2025).

What the literature says: Dedicated scholarship is thin. Rindap (2026) finds that China has provided weapons, intelligence and training, but that curtailing insecurity does not appear to be a major priority of Nigeria–China security relations, that non-interference limits engagement, and that the two countries should renegotiate their terms to reflect Nigeria's security needs. Krukowska (2024) argues more generally that China's security engagement in Africa advances its economic and political interests with limited impact on African security, and that African partners should avoid further dependence. Carrozza and Marsh (2022) place such assistance within efforts to strengthen long-term relations and protect economic interests, without

evidence of supplanting other providers.

Nigerian agency: Nigeria is not a passive recipient. The Nigerian defence chief identified arms procurement as the military's tightest bottleneck, and the government has presented localisation with Chinese support as a route to self-reliance, while also seeking other partners (Agate Radio TV, 2025; The Africa Report, n.d.). This fits the agency reading of the literature (Soares de Oliveira & Verhoeven, 2018; Styan, 2020).

RQ3 results: implications reported in the literature

Four categories of implication are reported. Peacekeeping norms and practice are discussed in the largest number of studies (Coleman & Job, 2021; Frimpong, 2025; Karlsrud, 2019; Zürcher, 2020). Strategic competition at key nodes is discussed mainly in Djibouti and arms studies (Cabestan, 2020; Carrozza & Marsh, 2022; Meierding & Sigman, 2021). Governance gaps in arms, private security and cyberspace appear in a small number of studies (Csunyó, 2026; Spearin, 2022). African agency and legitimacy are addressed by a few studies (Soares de Oliveira & Verhoeven, 2018; Styan, 2020). The gaps follow the unevenness already shown in Figure 4: the least-studied instruments are those with the most pressing governance questions.

Table 11. *Evidence of China's security involvement in Nigeria, by instrument*

Instrument	Evidence	Sources	Type of source
Arms and equipment	Nigeria among the six largest recipients of Chinese arms in Africa (about 10%); 272 armoured vehicles in a five-year SIPRI period; MRAPs from 2014–2015; US\$152m Norinco contract (2019); tanks and artillery (April 2020)	Krukowska (2024); Al Jazeera (2022); The Africa Report (n.d.); Military Africa (2025)	Peer-reviewed; news summaries of SIPRI data
Military aid and training	Grants in 2013 and 2016; ₦5.5bn aid over two years (2019 attaché); training in China; programmes on UN peacekeeping, anti-piracy, counter-terrorism	TheCable (n.d.); FOCAC (2024)	News; official plan
Maritime security	46 m patrol boats (2022); Chinese warship port call at Lagos; joint anti-piracy exercises with Nigeria and Cameroon	Military Africa (2025); Voice of America (n.d.); Observer Research Foundation (n.d.)	News; think-tank
Policing and intelligence	Criminal-investigation experts (2021); intelligence collaboration against Boko Haram	TheCable (n.d.); Observer Research Foundation (n.d.)	News; think-tank
Defence-industrial localisation	Norinco memorandum on ammunition lines, maintenance and training (May 2025); Nigerian push for local production (January 2025)	Militarnyi (2025); Agate Radio TV (2025)	News
Assessment of effect	Security help is real but of limited synergy with Nigeria's insecurity priorities; interests-driven; dependence risk	Rindap (2026); Krukowska (2024)	Peer-reviewed

Note: Much of the Nigeria evidence comes from news and institutional summaries, which is itself a finding about data scarcity. It should be replaced or confirmed with Nigerian defence-ministry, Chinese official and SIPRI database records before submission.

INTERPRETATION OF THE RESULTS

Interpretation of RQ1: what kind of security actor is China in Africa?

The results show a security actor whose engagement is incremental, interest-linked and multilateral in form. The recurrence of four drivers indicates that no single motive explains the engagement: protection of interests explains basing and naval operations, status explains UN contributions, the security development nexus explains the discourse, and African consent explains the pattern of where China acts. The concentration of studies on peacekeeping partly reflects data availability, because UN deployments are public, whereas the less visible instruments are less studied. The thematic map therefore reflects both China's behaviour and the visibility of that behaviour to researchers.

Interpretation of RQ2: scale and direction

The practical evidence points in two directions at once. In UN peacekeeping, China's personnel have fallen since 2015 as missions closed, and its presence is concentrated in a single large battalion in South Sudan. In arms, training and basing, indicators point upward: China's share of African arms imports roughly doubled between 2018–2022 and 2020–2024, and the 2024 FOCAC package adds grants and training. The direction is therefore a rebalancing from UN-framed contributions towards

bilateral and regional instruments, although the evidence is based on selected data points and shares of small markets and should not be read as a complete series. The cases confirm that China acts where its interests and host consent coincide (South Sudan, Djibouti, the Gulf of Aden) and responds reactively where citizens are at risk (Libya).

Interpretation of RQ3: implications and gaps

The implications reported in the literature are broadly supported but unevenly evidenced. The evidence is strongest for peacekeeping, where deployment data and many studies agree, moderate for strategic competition, where it relies heavily on the single case of Djibouti, and limited for governance gaps and African agency, where studies are few. This pattern defines the research agenda set out under limitations and future research.

Interpretation of the Nigeria case

Nigeria shows that China's security role is no longer confined to UN missions. China stepped into Nigeria through arms, training, maritime support and, since 2025, defence-industrial localisation, not through peacekeeping. The pattern fits the interest-protector reading, because Chinese citizens, investments and Gulf of Guinea shipping are at stake, and the agency reading, because Nigeria seeks self-reliance and diversified suppliers. It fits the critical reading in that the one dedicated study finds limited synergy with Nigeria's insecurity needs (Rindap, 2026).

Because Nigeria is Africa's largest economy and a major arms importer, a deepening of this relationship would carry weight for West African security and for competition among external suppliers. The thin scholarly base, however, means that conclusions about Nigeria rest more on secondary sources than conclusions about South Sudan or Djibouti.

DISCUSSION

Comparing the literature on China's impact in Africa

The studies fall into four positions on China's impact (Table 12). The contributor reading holds that China's consultative, consent-based and development-linked approach complements existing peace operations and may help them evolve (Coleman & Job, 2021; Ganchev, 2019; Gitlitz, 2023; Zürcher, 2020). The interest-protector reading holds that deployments and bases follow the protection of economic interests and citizens, and that security activity is calibrated to threats to those interests (Fung, 2016; Sun & Zoubir, 2021; Wu, 2025; Leake, 2020). The critical reading questions whether China's claims to a distinctive, human-centred approach are borne out and points to accountability and civilian-protection deficits (Hwang & Black, 2020; Peter & Wang, 2024). The agency reading shifts the focus to African states and shows that host governments shape and benefit from the engagement (Styan, 2020; Soares de Oliveira & Verhoeven, 2018). A fifth, competition-oriented strand sees the engagement mainly as a contest with the United States (Cabestan, 2020; Cannon, 2024; Shinn, 2016), although Carrozza and Marsh (2022) find no evidence that China is trying to supplant other providers. Comparing the cases in which China has stepped in. The cases help to reconcile these positions because each emphasises a different aspect of the same behaviour.

Nigeria: Nigeria is the clearest case of China stepping in outside UN peacekeeping. Evidence from arms, aid, training, patrol boats and the 2025 localisation memorandum shows steady, bilateral and interest-linked support (Al Jazeera, 2022; Military Africa, 2025; Militarnyi, 2025). The assessments differ. Rindap (2026) concludes that the cooperation is limited in synergy with Nigeria's counterinsurgency needs and constrained by non-interference, Krukowska (2024) concludes that China's engagement serves its own interests with limited security impact for Africa, and Lammich (2025) places Nigeria among states whose military China supports while Chinese cooperation formats follow their own strategic logic. At the same time, Nigerian officials frame localisation as self-reliance, which supports the agency reading. Compared with South Sudan, where China is inside a UN mission, and Djibouti, where it has a base, Nigeria shows

influence exercised through supply and training, with fewer Chinese personnel on the ground and a larger role for Nigerian choices. The Nigeria case is also the one in which the gap between delivery of equipment and measurable security outcomes is most visible, because Nigeria's own counterinsurgency record is affected by corruption, morale and intelligence weaknesses that equipment alone cannot solve (Onuoha et al., 2020; Lenshie et al., 2024).

South Sudan: The deployment of an infantry battalion shows China accepting a combat-capable role inside a UN mission. Ganchev (2019) reads the Sudan and South Sudan engagement as consultative, with security tied to economic goals, while Peter and Wang (2024) examine how its human-security approach differs inside and outside peacekeeping. The case therefore supports both the contributor and critical readings, depending on whether one looks at the act of deployment or at the protection of civilians.

Mali: The Mali deployment was a first step into a high-risk mission. Cabestan (2018) treats it as part of a broader security involvement, and Lanteigne (2019) as comprehensive diplomacy. Its closure in 2023 shows the limit of a UN-based approach when the mission itself ends, a point the contributor reading rarely addresses.

Darfur: Hirono (2011) and Wu and Taylor (2011) present Darfur as a moment of transition from refusal to engagement, and Barber (2018) shows learning from the Sudan–South Sudan relationship. Together they suggest that China's present practice rests on adaptation to earlier criticism.

Libya: The 2011 evacuation demonstrates a reactive, citizen-protection logic. Shesterinina (2016) argues that this logic poses dilemmas for strict non-interference, and Ghiselli (2021) links it to securitisation of overseas interests. It strengthens the interest-protector reading and challenges the claim that non-interference is absolute.

Gulf of Aden: The naval campaign shows how China's participation is conditioned by interests, expectations and host receptiveness (Wu, 2025), and it has been assessed as a test of China's rise (Ghiselli, 2018; Lin-Greenberg, 2010). It is also an instance of cooperation with other navies and with the EU (Barton, 2013), which weakens the pure competition reading.

Djibouti: The base is the case on which competition and interest readings meet. Cabestan (2020) stresses rivalry with the United States, Sun and Zoubir (2021) stress the protection of latent power, and Styan (2020) adds that small states have agency and that a debt-trap assumption is not warranted. The same facility is thus evidence for three positions, which indicates that the interpretation depends on the analytical frame rather than on the facts.

Table 12. Comparison of positions on China's impact in African peace and security

Position	Core claim	Representative studies	Cases most cited	Main limitation
Contributor to peace	Consultative, development-linked approach complements UN and AU efforts	Coleman & Job (2021); Ganchev (2019); Gitlitz (2023); Zürcher (2020); Mlambo et al. (2019)	South Sudan, Mali	Limited evidence on outcomes for peace
Interest-protector	Security activity follows economic interests and citizen protection	Wu (2025); Sun & Zoubir (2021); Fung (2016); Ghiselli (2021); Leake (2020); Krukowska (2024)	Nigeria, Gulf of Aden, Djibouti, Libya	May under-state genuine multilateral contribution
Critical / human security	Claims of a distinct approach do not meet human-security standards	Hwang & Black (2020); Peter & Wang (2024); Foot (2020); Rindap (2026); Krukowska (2024)	South Sudan, Nigeria	Few cases; depends on yardstick used
African agency	Host states shape the terms and gain leverage	Styan (2020); Soares de Oliveira & Verhoeven (2018)	Djibouti, Nigeria	Small number of studies
Great-power competition	Engagement is part of rivalry with the United States	Cabestan (2020); Cannon (2024); Shinn (2016); Meierding & Sigman (2021)	Djibouti	Competition not always evidenced by behaviour

	Securitisation of overseas interests	Norm evolution and norm-making
Nigeria	Strong	Partial
South Sudan	Partial	Strong
Mali	Partial	Strong
Darfur (Sudan)	Partial	Strong
Libya (2011)	Strong	Partial
Gulf of Aden	Strong	Partial
Djibouti	Strong	Limited

Figure 11. Explanatory fit of the two theoretical lenses across seven cases. Note: Ratings (strong, partial, limited) are the author's qualitative judgement from the studies and data in Table 10 and should be revisited after full-text confirmation.

Explaining the cases: which theory fits where

The two lenses introduced earlier explain different parts of the evidence (Table 13 and Figure 11). Securitisation of overseas interests fits best where Chinese citizens, investments or sea lanes are at stake: the Libya evacuation, the Gulf of Aden, Djibouti and Nigeria (Ghiselli, 2021; Shesterinina, 2016; Sun & Zoubir, 2021; Wu, 2025; Krukowska, 2024). Norm evolution fits best where China moved step by step inside UN missions: Darfur, South Sudan and Mali (Hirono, 2011; Wu & Taylor, 2011; Ganchev, 2019; Cabestan, 2018; Lantaigne, 2019), and it is reinforced by evidence of stable discourse alongside changing practice (Carrozza, 2021; Alden & Large, 2015).

Nigeria is the most informative test. It supports P1 because Chinese interests and Gulf of Guinea security motivate arms, patrol boats and naval engagement, and because the dedicated study finds that insecurity is not a major priority of the relationship (Rindap, 2026). It qualifies P2 because no UN-framed channel is used and non-interference appears to limit engagement rather than evolve (Rindap, 2026). It also shows the scope condition of African agency, since Nigeria seeks localisation and self-reliance. Djibouti fits Lens 1 but fits Lens 2 least, since a base is not a norm-based activity (Cabestan, 2020; Styan, 2020). The combined reading is an *interest-led, norm-framed* engagement: interests determine where China acts, norms and discourse shape how it justifies and

Table 13. *Application of the lenses to the cases*

Case	Lens 1: securitisation of overseas interests	Lens 2: norm evolution	Combined reading
Nigeria	Strong: Chinese citizens and investments, Gulf of Guinea security, arms market (P1a–P1c)	Partial: no UN-framed channel; non-interference limits engagement	Interest-led bilateral support with limited security synergy; Nigerian agency
South Sudan	Partial: economic interests linked to security	Strong: combat-capable role inside UNMISS; consultative approach (P2a)	Norm-framed deployment with interests in the background
Mali	Partial: protection of nationals and interests	Strong: first major UN security step (P2a)	UN-framed step tied to wider diplomacy
Darfur (Sudan)	Partial: interests in Sudan	Strong: refusal to engagement (P2a, P2b)	Norm change under criticism
Libya (2011)	Strong: evacuation of citizens (P1a)	Partial: protection of nationals strains non-interference	Interest-led, norm-straining
Gulf of Aden	Strong: threats to economic interests (P1a, P1b)	Partial: UN-authorised, cooperative	Interest-led, multilateral in form
Djibouti	Strong: base secures “latent power” (P1b)	Limited: base is not norm-based	Interest and competition; host agency

Note: P1 and P2 refer to the propositions in Table 1.

Table 14. *Implications for international security and strength of the evidence*

Implication	Evidence base	Strength (author’s judgement)
Reshaping of peacekeeping norms and practice	UN deployments; consultative approach; norm studies (Coleman & Job, 2021; Ganchev, 2019; UN DPO, 2025)	Moderate: strong on deployment, weaker on norm outcomes
Strategic competition at key nodes	Djibouti and Maritime Silk Road studies; arms-share data (Cabestan, 2020; Styan, 2020; SIPRI, 2025)	Moderate: dominated by a single case
Governance gaps in arms, private security and cyberspace	Security force assistance collation; private-security demand; cyber attribution (Carrozza & Marsh, 2022; Spearin, 2022; Csunyó, 2026)	Limited: few studies and data constraints
African agency and legitimacy	Host-state agency and sovereignty studies (Styan, 2020; Soares de Oliveira & Verhoeven, 2018)	Limited: under-researched relative to Chinese policy

Note: Strength ratings are qualitative judgements from the volume, design and source quality of the evidence and should be revisited after a formal appraisal.

sequences its actions, and host-state agency determines what is delivered.

Assessing the impact of China on African peace and security

Taken together, the evidence supports a differentiated assessment. On *capacity*, China contributes troops, medical and engineering units, training and equipment, and funding to the UN (Institute for Security and Development Policy, 2018; FOCAC, 2024). On *norms*, it supports consent, sovereignty and development-linked stabilisation, which may complement or dilute liberal peacebuilding depending on the viewpoint (Coleman & Job, 2021; Karlsrud, 2019). On *protection*, the evidence is the weakest, with critical studies pointing to gaps (Hwang & Black, 2020; Peter & Wang, 2024). On *governance*, arms and private security raise oversight questions for which data are limited (Carrozza & Marsh, 2022; Spearin, 2022). The overall impact is therefore neither simply

stabilising nor simply destabilising; it depends on the instrument, the case and the yardstick. This also fits the broader systematic review of China–Africa relations, which highlights the need for more attention to African perspectives (Dike & Owusu, 2024).

Implications for international security

Three implications follow, and Table 14 rates the strength of evidence for each. First, China’s consent-based, consultative approach may reshape peacekeeping norms and practice, but its weight depends on the mission map, which has shrunk since 2015. Second, strategic competition at maritime and logistical nodes such as Djibouti raises risks of incidents and gives host states leverage, although the evidence for outright competition is mixed. Third, growth in arms, training and private security creates governance gaps, and attribution problems complicate cyber-security analysis (Csunyó, 2026). A fourth, cross-cutting implication concerns African agency:

outcomes depend on how African states and the African Union engage with several external partners (Alao & Alden, 2018; Soares de Oliveira & Verhoeven, 2018).

Principal findings of the review

This section brings together the principal findings, organised by research question (Table 15). Each finding states what the review found, the evidence behind it and how firmly it is supported. Three overall findings stand out. First, China's security role in Africa has widened beyond UN peacekeeping into naval, basing, arms, training and, in Nigeria, defence-industrial cooperation, and it is best understood as interest-led and norm-framed rather than as either a simple contribution to peace or a simple instrument of rivalry. Second, the practical evidence shows a rebalancing from multilateral to bilateral and maritime instruments, with peacekeeping numbers falling while arms shares and training pledges rise. Third, the weakest part of the evidence concerns outcomes: little is known about whether Chinese deployments, arms and training have improved civilian protection or local security, which is the main reason why the Nigeria case, where equipment is delivered at scale but effects are unclear, deserves further study.

Highlights of this review

- (i) The literature on China's African security role has grown quickly since 2016; of the 62 studies reviewed, 22 concern peacekeeping, only 4 concern arms, private security and cyber-security combined, and only 1 is dedicated to China–Nigeria security cooperation.
- (ii) China's engagement widened from UN peacekeeping to naval escorts (2008), citizen evacuation (2011), a base in Djibouti (2017), arms and training.
- (iii) UN peacekeeping personnel fell from a peak of 3,084 (2015) to 1,862 (June 2025), while China's share of Africa's major-arms imports rose from 9.8% (2018–2022) to 18% (2020–2024).
- (iv) Nigeria: China has stepped in without any UN peacekeeping role, through armoured vehicles, tanks, patrol boats, aid, training and a 2025 agreement to localise ammunition production; the dedicated study finds limited synergy with Nigeria's insecurity priorities, and Nigeria pursues self-reliance.
- (v) The 2024 FOCAC plan commits RMB 1 billion in military grants and training for 6,000 military personnel and 1,000 police.
- (vi) Two lenses organise the evidence: securitisation of overseas interests explains where China acts (Libya, Gulf of Aden, Djibouti, Nigeria), and norm evolution explains how it moves inside UN missions (Darfur, South Sudan, Mali); the combined reading is interest-led and norm-framed.
- (vii) The literature divides into contributor, interest-protector, critical, African-agency and competition

readings; cases show each is partly right.

(viii) Evidence on outcomes for civilian protection and on African agency is thin compared with evidence on motives and institutions.

(ix) The main implications for international security are a gradual reshaping of peacekeeping norms, competition at key nodes and governance gaps in arms, private security and cyberspace.

Limitations and Future Research

The review is restricted to English-language scholarly publications with a verified DOI, which may omit work in other languages and policy research. Records were coded from titles, abstracts and metadata, so characterisations should be confirmed against the full texts. The searches were run on publisher platforms and the open web index, with Web of Science and Scopus syntax provided for replication, and raw hit counts per query were not logged. The Nigeria evidence rests largely on news and think-tank summaries because only one dedicated peer-reviewed study was found, and two Nigerian counterinsurgency studies are used as context only. The practical evidence comes from non-peer-reviewed official and institutional sources, several indicators are selected data points rather than complete series, and some figures (such as the Libya evacuation and the 2025 UNMISS strength) are reported by secondary summaries. Security is fast-moving, and developments after the search date are not captured. Future research should address:

Outcomes and effectiveness of Chinese contributions for conflict dynamics and civilian protection.

African perspectives and agency, including the African Union and regional economic communities.

Nigeria and West Africa: data-based studies of Chinese arms, training and localisation in Nigeria using Nigerian defence records and interviews, and of Chinese maritime activity in the Gulf of Guinea.

Cases beyond Djibouti, to test whether it is representative.

Less visible instruments: arms transfers, training and private security, with better data linking deliveries to conflict datasets.

Mediation and diplomacy, including cooperation with the African Union's peace and security architecture.

Cyber and information domains, with rigorous approaches to attribution, and **comparison** with other external actors.

Table 15. *Principal findings of the review, by research question*

RQ	Finding	Key evidence	Strength of support
RQ1	F1. China's engagement is incremental and multi-instrument, driven by four recurring drivers: protection of interests and citizens, status as a major power, the security–development nexus and African consent	Coding of 62 studies; Alden & Large (2015); Carrozza (2021); Wu (2025); Ganchev (2019)	Strong: broad agreement across studies
RQ1	F2. The literature is uneven: peacekeeping 22 of 62 studies; security assistance and arms 2; cyber and narratives 2; Nigeria 1	Figure 4; Table 6	Strong: direct count
RQ2	F3. UN peacekeeping personnel rose from 5 (1990) to 3,084 (2015) and fell to 1,862 (June 2025), about 40% below the peak; missions in Liberia, Darfur and Mali have closed and one large battalion in South Sudan remains	UN DPO (2025); China Power Project (n.d.); Providing for Peacekeeping (n.d.); Newsweek (2025)	Moderate: selected data points, not a full series
RQ2	F4. Naval, evacuation and basing instruments have grown: Gulf of Aden escorts since 2008, about 35,000 citizens evacuated from Libya (2011), Djibouti base (2017)	Wu (2025); Collins & Erickson (2011); Cabestan (2018, 2020); Styan (2020)	Strong: consistent across sources
RQ2	F5. China's share of Africa's major-arms imports rose from 9.8% (2018–2022) to 18% (2020–2024), and to 22% of sub-Saharan imports in 2021–2025; the 2024 FOCAC plan adds RMB 1bn in military grants and training for 6,000 military personnel and 1,000 police	SIPRI (2023, 2024, 2025, 2026); FOCAC (2024)	Moderate: volume shares of a small market; pledges are not delivery
RQ2	F6. In Nigeria, China has stepped in bilaterally, outside peacekeeping, with armoured vehicles, tanks, patrol boats, aid, training, policing support and a 2025 localisation agreement; Nigeria is among the six largest recipients of Chinese arms in Africa	Krukowska (2024); Al Jazeera (2022); The Africa Report (n.d.); Military Africa (2025); Militarnyi (2025)	Moderate: relies on secondary sources
RQ2	F7. The dedicated Nigeria study finds limited synergy between Chinese security help and Nigeria's insecurity priorities, and Nigeria pursues self-reliance and diversified suppliers	Rindap (2026); Krukowska (2024); Agate Radio TV (2025)	Limited: one dedicated study
RQ3	F8. Five positions (contributor, interest-protector, critical, African-agency, competition) are each partly supported; conclusions depend on the instrument, the case and the yardstick	Table 12; case comparison in the discussion	Strong: pattern across cases
RQ3	F9. Securitisation of overseas interests best explains Libya, the Gulf of Aden, Djibouti and Nigeria; norm evolution best explains Darfur, South Sudan and Mali; the combined reading is interest-led and norm-framed	Table 13; Figure 11	Moderate: author's qualitative ratings
RQ3	F10. China's impact is clearest on capacity, contested on norms, least evidenced on civilian protection, and raises governance gaps in arms, private security and cyberspace	Hwang & Black (2020); Peter & Wang (2024); Spearin (2022); Csunyó (2026)	Moderate to limited
RQ3	F11. Main implications for international security: gradual reshaping of peacekeeping norms; competition at key nodes; governance gaps; African agency as the cross-cutting condition	Table 14	Moderate for the first two; limited for the others

Note: Strength ratings are the author's qualitative judgement from the volume, design and source quality of the evidence.

Recommendations

The recommendations are the author's proposals, derived from the results, the interpretation and the theory-based discussion. Because China's engagement is interest-led and norm-framed, practical recommendations aim to (a) make interests and instruments transparent, (b) tie

assistance to protection and accountability standards, and (c) strengthen the bargaining position and agency of African partners.

Practical recommendations by actor

Table 16 sets out actions, timeframes and indicators, and

Table 16. *Practical recommendations, timeframes and indicators of success*

Actor	Practical action	Timeframe	Indicator of success	Linked evidence
African governments and the African Union	Publish an annual register of Chinese-origin arms, training and aid, reconciled with SIPRI data	0–12 months	Public register issued each year; gaps with SIPRI explained	SIPRI (2025, 2026); Carrozza & Marsh (2022)
African governments and the African Union	Use standard clauses in defence-industrial agreements: maintenance, spares, quality assurance, technology transfer and end-use monitoring	1–3 years	Share of agreements with all clauses; equipment availability rates	Krukowska (2024); Militarnyi (2025)
African governments and the African Union	Hold an annual AU–China security consultation linked to APSA needs assessments within the FOCAC 2025–2027 plan	1–3 years	Consultation held; priorities adopted in plan reviews	Alao & Alden (2018); FOCAC (2024)
African governments and parliaments	Strengthen parliamentary and audit oversight of defence procurement and external assistance	1–3 years	Committee reviews; audit findings published	Onuoha et al. (2020); Lenshie et al. (2024)
China	Publish a consolidated annual report on security cooperation with Africa (arms, training, aid, base arrangements) and on delivery of FOCAC pledges	0–12 months	Report issued; pledge delivery tracked against RMB 1bn and 6,000-personnel targets	FOCAC (2024); Lammich (2025)
China	Introduce human-rights and end-use due diligence for arms and assistance and publish the criteria	1–3 years	Criteria published; denials or conditions reported	Carrozza & Marsh (2022); Hwang & Black (2020)
China	Register and oversee Chinese private security companies operating in Africa under recognised international standards	1–3 years	Register and licensing rules in place	Spearin (2022)
China and training providers	Add civilian-protection, humanitarian-law and conduct modules to all training under the FOCAC pledge	0–12 months	Share of trainees completing modules; post-training evaluation	Peter & Wang (2024); Kwon (2020); FOCAC (2024)
China and the United Nations	Align the 8,000-strong standby force and the peace and development fund with clear protection mandates and performance indicators	3–5 years	Readiness reports; protection benchmarks in contributions	China Power Project (n.d.); Coleman & Job (2021)
United Nations, AU and China	Hold regular trilateral reviews of mission design and mandates where Chinese units serve	1–3 years	Reviews held; lessons adopted in mandates	Zürcher (2020); Coleman & Williams (2021)
United States, European and other partners	Deconflict and share maritime information in the Gulf of Aden, Djibouti and the Gulf of Guinea; support African-led training	0–12 months	Joint deconfliction mechanisms; shared incident data	Barton (2013); Styan (2020); Cabestan (2020)
Arms-control and cyber-governance bodies	Improve reporting of arms deliveries to Africa and set evidence standards for cyber attribution	3–5 years	Reporting coverage; attribution guidelines	SIPRI (2025); Csunyó (2026)
Researchers and funders	Fund open datasets and African-led, outcome-oriented studies of Chinese security assistance, including Nigeria and West Africa	3–5 years	Datasets released; peer-reviewed outcome studies	Limitations and future research; Rindap (2026)

0–12 months	1–3 years	3–5 years
Publish annual register of Chinese-origin arms, training and aid (African states)	Standard clauses for localisation MoUs: maintenance, spares, quality, end-use	Independent evaluation of training and equipment outcomes in Nigeria
Add civilian-protection and IHL modules to all FOCAC-funded training	Annual AU–China security consultation linked to APSA needs assessments	Review Chinese peacekeeping contribution against protection-of-civilians benchmarks
Set up Nigeria–China joint committee with annual review	Registration and oversight of Chinese private security companies	African-led research programme on Chinese security assistance
Agree open data template for external security assistance (AU, UN, SIPRI)	Coordinate Gulf of Aden / Guinea naval activity with regional operations	Multi-source maintenance base to reduce supplier dependence

Figure 12. Implementation roadmap for the practical recommendations. Source: Author's synthesis of Table 16.

Figure 12 shows the sequencing.

Practical roadmap for Nigeria

Nigeria needs its own sequence of actions because China's involvement there is bilateral, interest-led and rapidly growing. The following steps are proposed:

Make deliveries visible. The Ministry of Defence should publish an annual summary of Chinese-origin equipment, training and aid, and reconcile it with SIPRI data and parliamentary records (Al Jazeera, 2022; Military Africa, 2025).

Write enforceable terms into the localisation agreement. The May 2025 memorandum with Norinco should be converted into an implementing agreement that fixes maintenance training for Nigerian technicians, spare-parts supply, quality assurance, serviceability reporting and end-use monitoring (Militarnyi, 2025; Krukowska, 2024).

Match assistance to counterinsurgency needs. Rindap (2026) concludes that terms should be renegotiated to reflect Nigeria's security needs; priorities include intelligence, mobility, logistics and maintenance rather than platforms alone, and measures against corruption, low morale and weak intelligence that undermine operations (Onuoha et al., 2020; Lenshie et al., 2024).

Official Publication of Direct Research Journal of Social Science and Educational Studies. Vol. 14, 2026, ISSN: 2449-0806

Create a bilateral joint committee. A Nigeria–China security committee should meet annually with indicators such as equipment availability, trained-personnel retention and training evaluation, and should report to the National Assembly.

Integrate maritime cooperation with regional frameworks. Chinese patrol boats, naval visits and exercises should be coordinated with Nigeria's Deep Blue Project and the Yaoundé Architecture, with information-sharing among Gulf of Guinea navies (United Nations Security Council, n.d.; Observer Research Foundation, n.d.).

Add protection standards to training. Place civilian-protection, humanitarian-law and conduct modules in all courses attended in China or delivered by Chinese trainers (FOCAC, 2024; Peter & Wang, 2024).

Keep suppliers diversified. Maintain multi-source maintenance and spare-parts arrangements to avoid dependence (Krukowska, 2024; The Africa Report, n.d.).

Sequencing and priorities

Transparency measures and training standards can be introduced within twelve months and cost little, so they should come first. Contract clauses, joint consultations and oversight reforms need one to three years because they

require negotiation. Evaluation, readiness benchmarks and research programmes need three to five years to produce evidence (Figure 12).

Conclusion

This review answered three questions through a transparent, PRISMA-guided method. On RQ1, the literature depicts an incremental, interest-linked and multilateral security actor driven by protection of interests, status, the security–development nexus and African consent. On RQ2, the practical evidence shows a rebalancing from UN peacekeeping, where personnel fell from 3,084 to 1,862 between 2015 and 2025, towards naval, basing, arms and training instruments, with a 2024 package of RMB 1 billion in military grants and training for 6,000 military personnel. On RQ3, the main implications for international security are a gradual reshaping of peacekeeping norms, intensified competition at key nodes and governance gaps in arms, private security and cyberspace, with African agency as the cross-cutting condition. The comparison of cases in Nigeria, South Sudan, Mali, Darfur, Libya, the Gulf of Aden and Djibouti, read through the lenses of securitisation of overseas interests and norm evolution, shows an interest-led, norm-framed engagement in which Nigeria illustrates bilateral support outside peacekeeping, limited synergy with local security needs and strong Nigerian agency. Competing interpretations are each partly right, and that conclusions depend on the instrument, the case and the yardstick. Outcome-oriented evidence and African perspectives remain the main gaps. Acting on the practical recommendations in (Table 16) and the Nigeria roadmap would help African institutions, China and international partners to turn a growing security presence into more accountable and effective contributions to peace.

Declarations

Author contributions: The author conceived the study, designed the review protocol, coded the studies, analysed the evidence and wrote the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency.

Conflict of interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Data availability: All data analysed are drawn from the published studies and public sources listed in the reference list and the data-source list. The coding of the included studies is shown in Table 6, and the search syntax is given in Table 3.

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