

**STATEMENT FOR
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BUREAU OF AFRICAN AFFAIRS
and
DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY AND CHINA COORDINATOR RICK WATERS,
BUREAU OF EAST ASIAN AND PACIFIC AFFAIRS
“Great Power Competition Implications in Africa:
The Chinese Communist Party”
HOUSE FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON AFRICA
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Chairman James, Ranking Member Jacobs, distinguished members of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa: thank you for the opportunity to testify today and thank you for your consistent, bipartisan focus on Africa and our nation’s approach to the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in Africa.

Our relationship with the PRC is among the most complex and consequential of any in the world, and we recognize the unique challenges it poses to achieving U.S. objectives worldwide, including in Africa.

The PRC is also the only competitor with the means and intent to reshape the international order. We see proof of this point across the globe and in Africa. We continue to implement the core pillars of our PRC strategy: “Invest, Align, Compete.”

Our Africa policy is about Africa, not the PRC. The United States is focused on building enduring partnerships with African nations. We cannot expect to advance our global foreign policy priorities without the partnership of African governments, institutions, and peoples. African countries are our partners in pursuing shared global and regional priorities —from ending the acute phase of the COVID-19 pandemic and building back a more inclusive global economy, to tackling the climate crisis and building resilience while creating opportunities in clean energy, to advancing democracy and promoting respect for human rights around the world, to working toward lasting peace and security.

This is the framework through which we approach our engagements with Africa. The U.S.-African Leaders Summit last year and the Administration's high-level visits to the continent since demonstrate how seriously the Administration views our bilateral and multilateral engagements with African partners.

We aim to improve African options, not limit them. Part of ensuring that African governments and publics have options is ensuring that U.S. companies can compete on an even playing field. We push back on coercive practices that undermine our interests and those of our African partners, and instead promote fair practices, high standards, and equitable economic growth. Our focus is on strengthening local capacity and working with our allies and partners to promote economic growth that is sustainable, and inclusive over the long term. We partner with African nations to reinforce environmental standards, protect workers' rights, combat trafficking in persons, and support anti-corruption measures such as transparency and respect for the rule of law.

We work with all sectors of African society to build strong institutions, further democratic principles and practices, and promote respect for human rights. We aim to maintain and grow our partnerships with the governments and people of Africa. We highly value the strong people-to-people relationships we have with our African partners.

At the same time, we recognize the serious challenges the PRC can pose in Africa. We are concerned by unsustainable debt throughout the continent and increasing risks of debt distress within many countries. These risks are made more acute by limited transparency surrounding debt generally and the terms and conditions of certain loans. The PRC's lack of transparency, disregard for workers' rights and environmental standards, and willingness to engage in corrupt business practices do not advance the economic and development goals of our African partners. We are concerned about Beijing's information manipulation efforts to amplify preferred narratives and to suppress voices it deems critical of the PRC or CCP. These practices threaten the integrity of open and vibrant media ecosystems across Africa, and the PRC is taking advantage of financially unsustainable media outlets to shape its image. We are also concerned about the PRC's attempts to build up its security infrastructure in Africa to project military power farther afield.

The reality is the PRC is a global strategic competitor. We push back on corrupt or coercive practices that undermine our interests and those of our African partners while offering viable alternatives in collaboration with our partners. We ask that everyone play by the same set of rules. We want to ensure that all countries, including in Africa, make their own choices, free from coercion and based on the best interest of their people. This is our approach throughout the world.

We have also instructed our diplomats to engage on this challenge in Africa. We have made a consistent and concerted effort to share information with our partners to reinforce the scale and scope of the environmental, labor, and corruption risks, among others, posed by the PRC in Africa – and the necessity of our unity in confronting them.

We do not seek conflict with the PRC, and we are ready to work together on areas where our interests align – from climate change and public health to food security, counter-narcotics, and more. Similarly, for example, with refugee assistance and migration: alongside likeminded partners, we will continue to call on the PRC to increase its nominal support to UN agencies and humanitarian organizations, to ensure an equitable and effective response in the face of rising humanitarian needs globally.

More broadly, we bear no illusions about the road ahead. This competition will intensify. The stakes couldn't be higher.

Our Africa Bureau is working closely with the Office of China Coordination (“China House”), which opened its doors last December to guide a shift in how the State Department makes, manages, and messages policy on the PRC.

China House helps us better harmonize efforts across our bureaus and our embassies worldwide. It grows our capabilities to share information more quickly, sharpen our communications more effectively, and adapt to developments in real time. It ensures that data and intelligence flow in all directions – moving back and forth between China House, our posts, our bureaus at headquarters, and our diplomats throughout the globe. It ensures that we see the PRC for what it is: a challenge that touches virtually every issue under the sun – security, trade, technology, human rights, and more.

China House serves as a force multiplier for our Department's leadership on the PRC. It is a key piece of Secretary Blinken's broader modernization agenda, as we seek to apply the right resources to the big-picture issues of our time, from the PRC to cybersecurity and digital diplomacy to public health.

For our country, the PRC is a generational challenge, and this challenge is a top priority at the State Department. We will maintain open lines of communication, so we can keep miscalculations from veering into conflict and responsibly manage the competition between our countries. We will compete vigorously with the PRC while managing that competition responsibly. And we will always make clear that our Africa policy is about Africa and building enduring relationships with African nations.

The Administration's commitment to upholding our interests and values, collaborating with our partners, and defending global principles will remain steadfast.

There are few issues where Bipartisan action is more critical. In coordination with this Subcommittee and with your colleagues across Capitol Hill, we are confident that we can sustain the resources and implement the policies we need to improve U.S.-African partnerships, raise awareness of the PRC's corrupt or coercive practices in Africa, counter those practices, and advance our country's national interests.

Thank you.