Understanding the Mechanisms of International Influence
in an Era of Great Power Competition

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Abstract:
Amid growing speculation that the United States and China are destined for a more conflictual relationship, and that Russia is actively seeking to expand its global power, security scholars and professionals are increasingly interested in understanding the influence of great and rising powers throughout the world. However, in focusing primarily on power resources and international activities, existing scholarship on this subject has not adequately addressed how a state obtains and sustains international influence. To overcome this knowledge deficit, this article presents a framework for analyzing international influence that includes not only *power resources* and *influence activities*, but also a comprehensive set of *power mechanisms* that states mobilize to induce change in another state's behavior. The article applies the framework to U.S. security sector activities in Africa. The analysis, based primarily on interviews with U.S. defense attachés and security cooperation officers, shows how different types of activities mobilize different sets of power mechanisms. It reveals that activities that mobilize expertise, attraction, and recognition mechanisms have the greatest potential for developing and maintaining influence. The article concludes that, to obtain and sustain international influence, states must be more attentive to the mechanisms of power, rather than merely deploying their power resources.

Amid growing speculation that the United States and China are destined for a more conflictual relationship, and that Russia is actively seeking to expand its global power, security scholars and professionals are increasingly interested in questions about the influence of great and rising powers across various regions of the world. These concerns were embodied, for example, in the 2017 U.S. National Security Strategy (NSS), which called for the American foreign policy and defense community to shift its strategic focus from terrorism to "great power competition." Central to this strategic shift is an effort to counterbalance rising Chinese and Russian power in order to avoid being "left behind as other states use investment and project finance to extend their influence" (United States 2017, 39).

This instruction raises the question: How does the United States—or any country—obtain and sustain international influence? The NSS offers only vague guidance, proposing that the United States "mobilize resources," "capitalize on new technologies," and "incentivize reforms" (United States 2017, 39). Proposals in subsequent national security documents, like the National Defense Strategy (United States 2018) were equally imprecise.

International Relations (IR) scholars have also provided incomplete answers to this question. They have identified material and ideational sources of national power, as well as activities that states undertake to develop their power. They have also observed, often in large-N studies, that international activities such as foreign aid, trade, and security assistance, are sometimes correlated with desired outcomes, such as supportive votes in the UN General Assembly. However, existing studies do not fully explain *how* a state's resources and activities produce—or fail to produce—international influence. The difficulty of measuring influence has also led many researchers to elide between the activities that states undertake to cultivate influence and the successful development and exertion of influence. In short, the causal

mechanisms of international influence remain opaque. This knowledge gap would be of limited concern if influence were a marginal policy issue. However, its growing prominence in national security discussions makes it imperative to improve our understanding of how states obtain and sustain international influence.

To address this gap, our article disaggregates the influence development process and emphasizes the causal mechanisms that drive it. Like previous studies, our framework begins by identifying the *power resources* that an influencing state uses to engage in *influence activities* in a target state. Power resources are a state's material and ideational assets, including its military capabilities, economic wealth, power in international organizations, and cultural output. Influence activities are the actions that a state undertakes that may generate international influence. Next, the framework presents the *power mechanisms* that translate a state's resources and activities into influence. Building on the work of social psychologists John French and Bertram Raven, we describe five power mechanisms—reward, punishment, expertise, attractiveness, and recognition—and explain how these mechanisms generate influence in bilateral country-to-country relationships.

We apply our framework to U.S. security sector engagement in Africa, using qualitative methods to evaluate which power mechanisms are mobilized by different types of security sector influence activities. We focus on African states because they are purportedly easy cases for producing great power influence, in the sense that the power resources of countries such as the United States and China dwarf those of most African countries. Additionally, in contrast to the great power "backyards" of Latin America (the United States), East Asia (China), and the former Soviet Union and Central Asia (Russia), Africa is often perceived to be a relatively open playing

field in which foreign powers may extend their influence. Africa has also been a focal point for research on Chinese influence activities and is a likely locale for future great power competition.

We examine the security sector for three reasons. First, it should also be an easy case for generating U.S. influence, due to the United States' leading military and technological capabilities and the very large amount of money it spends on these activities. Second, while a growing literature examines security sector engagement, little of it has examined how these activities generate international influence, despite that being one of their core goals (Shapiro 2012). Third, countries' security sector engagements in Africa have expanded considerably in recent decades, such that they now entail a sufficient range of influence activities for us to examine all five power mechanisms.

Our analysis, based primarily on semi-structured interviews with current and former U.S. security cooperation officers and defense attachés, finds substantial variation in the range of power mechanisms mobilized by different influence activities. Of the United States' security sector activities, training programs and joint operations, rather than equipment provision or basing agreements, are most effective at mobilizing power mechanisms. Additionally, activities that mobilize the expertise, attractiveness, and recognition mechanisms are more likely to generate sustained international influence than activities that rely on the reward and punishment mechanisms. We posit that the former mechanisms are particularly important when targeted states have experienced a history of exploitation by more powerful international actors. These findings suggest that changing the emphases of U.S. security sector engagement could enhance the United States' international influence. More broadly, states that seek to build international influence should be more attentive to the mechanisms that their influence activities mobilize, and seek to understand which mechanisms are most resonant with different types of target states.

The article proceeds in four sections. First, we define influence and examine existing literature on great powers' efforts to cultivate it, including through security sector activities. Second, we present our mechanism-focused framework for analyzing influence development. In the third section, we apply the framework to U.S. security sector engagements in Africa, examining how different types of influence activities mobilize different power mechanisms, altering targeted states' inclinations to engage in desired behaviors. In the fourth section, we summarize our findings and discuss policy implications.

Developing Influence: What We Know

In IR scholarship, the term "influence" is often invoked in discussions of power. Although some theorists try to distinguish between the terms, this study embraces Robert Dahl's observation that, for the purposes of many analyses, "power" and "influence" can be used interchangeably (Dahl and Stinebrickner 2003, 12). Dahl identifies both as "influence terms," which describe "a relation among human actors such that the wants, desires, preferences, or intentions of one or more actors affect the actions, or predispositions to act, of one or more other actors in a direction consistent with—and not contrary to—the wants, preferences, or intentions of the influence-wielders" (Dahl and Stinebrickner 2003, 17).

Dahl's description of influence possesses a number of characteristics that are pertinent to this study. First, influence is relational; it pertains to an association between two actors, rather than being a property of one. In this way, Dahl's definition deviates from the "elements of national power" approach employed by many IR theorists, which measures national power in

terms of the resources possessed by a single state.[1] Second, influence is causal; the influencer (Actor A) produces a change in the behavior of its target (Actor B). Following Baldwin (2016, 42-43), we conceptualize "behavior" broadly. It encompasses "beliefs, values, attitudes, feelings, and predispositions," as well as actions. Changes to a target's behavior can therefore be actual or potential; Actor A has influence over Actor B when it produces a change in Actor B's behavior or when it has the capacity to do so. Third, influence is purposive. The influencer must be able to shift the target's behavior in its preferred direction, or at least a neutral direction, not merely change it.[2]

IR theorists have identified numerous material and ideational sources of state influence (Baldwin 2016, 92, 111). Speaking broadly, realists have generally focused on states' military power and the activities that employ that power, especially the threat and use of force (Baldwin 2016, chapter 5). However, they have also examined coercive tools of economic statecraft, like sanctions and asymmetric trade relationships. Liberals and constructivists have generally focused on economic, diplomatic, and ideational instruments, examining how states gain influence by shaping international institutions, norms, and other shared belief systems (Finnemore and Goldstein 2013).

Examining states' resources and activities alone, however, does not fully explain how they cultivate international influence or speak to the actual impact of their power. For example, scholars often assume that China's growing power resources and repertoire of international activities translate directly into influence (for example, Lum et al. 2008; Kurlantzick 2007).

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[1] See Morgenthau (1967[1948]) for a prominent example.

[2] Goh's definition of influence as "the act of modifying or otherwise having an impact upon another actor's preferences or behavior in favour of one's own aims" shares these characteristics (2016, 1).

However, studies by Goh et al. (2016), which evaluate the effectiveness of China's influence activities in Asian developing countries, demonstrate that China's ability to change targeted states' behaviors has been far more limited than alarmist literature about a "rising China" suggests.[3] Additionally, a powerful state's activities may generate influence in some policy areas and some target states, but not others, raising questions about when and how states obtain influence.

Answering these questions requires an examination of the mechanisms through which states generate influence. However, the widespread use of correlational methods to assess whether a particular type of influence activity is associated with a preferred target state behavior obscures these mechanisms' role. The extensive literature examining whether recipients of foreign aid align their UN General Assembly votes with those of the United States or China is one example of this approach (recently, Alexander and Rooney 2019; Strüver 2016). Researchers have also examined whether trade with the United States or China is associated with UN vote alignment or other indicators of political support (Carmody et al. 2020; Flores-Macías and Kreps 2013; Kastner 2016).

These correlational studies produce mixed conclusions about the association between states' activities and influence. For example, focusing on the security sector, Martinez Machain (2020) finds that countries are more likely to align with the United States' UN voting patterns when a greater share of their military participates in U.S. training programs. Blankenship and Joyce (2019) demonstrate that higher levels of U.S. military spending within a country, in the

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[3] For a similar approach, see Custer et al. (2018, 3) who study the influence of China's public diplomacy activities by evaluating how activities "translate discrete public diplomacy overtures into its desired end goal of influencing the perceptions, preferences and actions of foreign citizens in line with Beijing's interests."

form of procurement contracts, are also associated with greater UN voting concurrence. However, Sullivan et al. (2011) find that countries that receive more U.S. military assistance are less likely to cooperate with the United States. Sislin (1994) observes that the effects of U.S. arms transfers are conditional; they shift recipients' behavior when they aim to provoke foreign, rather than domestic, policy changes, and target civilian regimes that have no other arms suppliers.

These disparate findings underline the importance of studying the mechanisms through which different activities generate influence. Training, procurement contracts, military aid, and arms transfers are likely to mobilize different power mechanisms for recipient states, generating divergent levels of international influence. By focusing principally on power mechanisms, this article is also able to integrate existing strands of IR power research, which often examine individual mechanisms in isolation (for example, Nye 2004). Additionally, it avoids the ambiguities of previous studies, which frequently fail to distinguish between a state's influence activities and the power mechanisms they mobilize.[4]

An Influence Development Framework

This section presents a framework for analyzing international influence development that disaggregates the process and focuses on causal mechanisms (Figure 1). Our approach involves two actors: the *influencing state* (or *influencer*) that aims to acquire influence, and the *target*

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[4] For example, it is unclear whether "persuasion" (Dahl and Stinebrickner 2003, 39), "co-option" (Nye 2004, 2, 7), "institutional shaping" (Goh 2016, 14), "bargaining," and "agenda-setting" (Lim and Ferguson 2018, 309-310) are influence activities or mechanisms.

state that is the focus of these efforts. The framework begins, like most power analyses, with *power resources.*[5] Every influencing state has a variety of power resources at its disposal that it can use to develop international influence. These power resources may be material; a state's military, natural resource base, population, economic wealth, and technology are all power resources. Power resources may also be ideational; they include a state's culture, values, and political, legal, and educational systems. Lastly, power resources may be positional, such as a state's leadership in international organizations. Our framework gathers all of these power resources under the same heading, rather than dividing them into categories such as material versus ideational or hard versus soft, because there is no a priori reason to assume that one type of power resource is more successful than others at generating international influence (Baldwin 2016, 68).
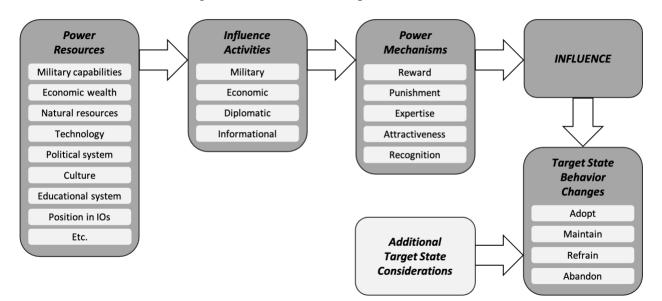
Figure 1: Influence Development Framework

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[5] These could alternatively be labeled "power assets, base values, or power bases" (Baldwin 2016, 67).

An influencer mobilizes its power resources through *influence activities*: actions that can cultivate international influence.[6] We group influence activities into four categories, based on the primary domain in which they are undertaken: military, economic, diplomatic, and informational.[7] Military activities include the threat or use of force, international basing, and security cooperation. Economic influence activities include trade practices, foreign direct investment, lending, and overseas development aid. Diplomatic activities include diplomatic recognition and a diplomatic presence, alliances, official visits, and support in international organizations. Informational influence activities include public diplomacy, international broadcasting, cultural exports, and educational opportunities.

An influencing state may undertake influence activities with the deliberate aim of obtaining or sustaining influence over a target state. These deliberate influence activities can have short- or long-term goals; an influencer may aim to generate international influence and precipitate an immediate change in the target's behavior or it may undertake these activities in order to develop influence that it can exploit in the future. However, influence activities can also be undertaken for other reasons—to advance national security goals, for example—but simultaneously generate international influence.[8] Our approach incorporates both deliberate and inadvertent influence activities.

In general, a state with greater and more diverse power resources can engage in more frequent, varied, and larger-scale influence activities than one that possesses fewer power

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[6] These could also be described as "means," "instruments" (Dahl 1957), "techniques" (Singer 1963, 426-427) or "tools of statecraft" (Baldwin 2016, 105, fn 4).

[7] These are the four modes of influence in the U.S. government's "DIME" framework.

[8] For a similar point, see Harsanyi 1962, 71.

resources (Holsti 1964, 185-186). However, simply engaging in a large volume of influence

activities does not guarantee that a state will obtain international influence. To be successful,

influence activities must activate power mechanisms. *Power mechanisms* are the bridge between

a state's influence activities and actual influence. They explain *why* a targeted state would adjust

its behavior in accordance with an influencer's preferences.

To integrate the diverse influence discussions that exist within IR, our framework builds

on a set of power mechanisms identified by social psychologists John French and Bertram Raven

(1959) in their analyses of the sources of power in interpersonal interactions.[9] French and Raven

describe five types of power that an influencer can employ to alter a target's behavior: reward,

coercive, expert, referent, and legitimate. We include the first four of these mechanisms in our

framework, labeling them *reward*, *punishment*, *expertise*, and *attractiveness*. We also add a fifth

mechanism, *recognition*.[10]

We describe these as mechanisms, rather than types of power, in part to distinguish them

from the power resources described above, but primarily because the term emphasizes *how*

influence is generated, rather than simply identifying the assets that a state can employ or the

activities it can pursue in its attempts to develop influence. We also note that the five

mechanisms fall into two general types: leverage mechanisms (reward and punishment) and

affective mechanisms (expertise, attractiveness, and recognition). The leverage mechanisms

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[9] French and Raven's mechanisms were discussed in some early IR power research, including Baldwin 1971 and Singer 1963.

[10] We do not included legitimacy because it arises from a target's belief that an influencer has the right to direct the target's behaviors: a dynamic that is likely to be substantially less common in an interstate context than an interpersonal context.

produce influence in a target state by changing the costs or benefits of complying with the influencer's preferences. Activities that raise the benefits of compliance or costs of non-compliance induce the target to abandon its original policy choice. The affective mechanisms, in contrast, generate influence by changing the target's perceptions of the influencer and of the states' bilateral relationship. Activities that highlight the influencer's admirable characteristics or that generate feelings of goodwill or closeness in the bilateral relationship increase the appeal of the influencer's preferred behaviors. The more an influence activity mobilizes any of the five mechanisms, the greater the influence it is likely to produce.

Before discussing each of the power mechanisms, it should be noted that neither the influencer nor the target state is a unitary actor. Moreover, the effects of power mechanisms can vary among actors within the same target state. We adopt the common convention among power researchers of presenting both the influencer and the target as unitary, for the sake of simplification and clarity (see Singer 1963, 420-421, 424 for an early example). However, in practice, we are focused on the governmental actors that are most central to the influence development process: in the influencing state, those that aim to cultivate international influence and, in the target state, those with decision-making authority, as it is their behavior that an influencer ultimately aims to affect.[11] The specific identities of these actors, within the influencing and targeted state, may therefore differ across issue areas.

The leverage mechanisms, reward and punishment, require little explanation. An influencer activates the reward mechanism by providing the target with something positive or by

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[11] An influencer may attempt to change a decision-maker's behavior indirectly, by shifting the behavior of other actors within the targeted state, who will then exert pressure on that decision-maker. However, decision-makers are likely to be an influencer's primary targets.

shielding it from something negative, thereby increasing the benefits of complying with the influencer's preferred behaviors. International influence activities that employ the reward mechanism include the provision of military equipment, preferential trade agreements, development aid, and support in international organizations. The punishment mechanism entails the threat or imposition of negative sanctions, which raise the costs of failing to comply with the influencer's preferences (French and Raven 1959, 152). Examples of international influence activities that employ the punishment mechanism include the use of military force, trade restrictions, and diplomatic censure.

Leverage mechanisms can produce international influence. However, influence activities that mobilize these mechanisms can be costly to implement, as they require the influencer to provide rewards or enact punishments, both of which can be substantial in scale. Moreover, the behavioral changes prompted by leverage mechanisms are not self-sustaining. A target is likely to revert to its former, initially preferred behavior as soon as the credible promise of rewards or threat of punishments are withdrawn (Raven 1993, 232-233).[12] The influencer must therefore persistently monitor the target's behavior for noncompliance, adding to the costs of influence activities that rely predominantly on reward or punishment to generate international influence. Lastly, the leverage mechanisms may create or exacerbate distributional tensions within a target state, as rewards and punishments often accrue to specific individuals or groups, creating clear winners and losers. This limits the range of target state actors the leverage mechanisms can affect.

In contrast, the affective mechanisms–expertise, attractiveness, and recognition–do not simply change the costs or benefits of compliance with the influencer's behavioral preferences.

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[12] For similar observations from IR, see Drezner (1999).

Instead, they generate influence by reshaping the target's perceptions of the influencer or of the states' bilateral relationship, in a more favorable way. In the expertise mechanism, influence arises from the target's respect for the influencer's knowledge or skills (French and Raven 1959, 155-156).[13] Since the target perceives the influencer as an expert, it regards the influencer's preferred courses of action as superior to its original behaviors.[14] Influence activities that highlight the influencer's information and proficiencies, like military training, educational exchanges, and technical assistance programs, engage the expertise mechanism. An influencer's ability to mobilize this mechanism, however, is limited to the areas in which it possesses recognized expertise. For example, if a state aims to garner influence by promoting educational exchanges, it must have a distinguished university system.

In the attractiveness mechanism, influence arises from the target's desire to identify with the influencer. The target wants to be like the influencer or become a member of its social, economic, or political circle. The target believes that it can achieve or maintain this sense of identification if it "behaves, believes, and perceives" as the influencer does (French and Raven 1959, 154). The more attractive the influencer is to the target and the more powerfully the target

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[13] Within IR, the expertise mechanism is most prominent in discussions of "epistemic communities" (Haas 1992).

[14] In later work, Raven (1965) asserted that there was a sixth power mechanism, related to expert power, which he labeled "informational power." The difference between expert and informational power is that, in the latter, the target independently recognizes the influencer's expertise, whereas, in the former, the influencer must persuade the target that its proposed course of action is superior to the target's current behavior. We exclude informational power from our framework for the same reason that French did in the pair's earlier work: because it is an action, rather than a mechanism.

wishes to emulate it, the more strongly this mechanism operates.[15] Any activities that highlight the influencer's attractive characteristics can mobilize this power mechanism. However, the types of activities that mobilize it most strongly are likely to vary by target state. Some targets want to emulate an influencer's culture or model of government, some its economic performance, and some its military power.

In French and Raven's work, the attractiveness mechanism (or "referent power") is one-sided; the target changes its behavior to become more like the influencer, but the influencer does not acknowledge any shift in the target's status. The final mechanism in our framework, recognition, adds reciprocity to the influencer–target relationship. The influencer activates this mechanism by identifying the target in a manner in which the target aspires to be recognized: as a reliable security partner, a stable environment for foreign investment, or a responsible member of the international community, to name a few examples in the international arena.[16] The influencer's recognition of the target's desired status creates a sense of goodwill toward the influencer and towards the states' bilateral relationship. This goodwill, coupled with the target's desire to maintain the influencer's recognition, encourages the target to align its behavior with the influencer's preferences. Influence activities that mobilize the recognition mechanism include a substantial diplomatic presence, visits by high-ranking officials, and joint military exercises.

The affective power mechanisms are less obvious than the leverage mechanisms. They nonetheless may be equally effective at generating international influence. The behavior changes

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[15] In addition to appearing in Nye's discussions of soft power, the attractiveness mechanism can contribute to the state socialization processes described by many constructivists (for example, Finnemore and Sikkink 1998).

[16] For a classic discussion of this recognition process, see Wendt 1992.

they provoke are also more likely to be self-sustaining than those produced through reward and punishment. As long as the target's perception of the influencer's expertise and attractiveness persist, and the influencer does not withdraw its recognition, the target will not revert to its former, undesired behavior. As a result, influence activities that mobilize the affective mechanisms are generally less costly to the influencer than those that rely on leverage, because of the lack of up-front costs to supply rewards or impose punishments, and the lack of long-term costs to sustain promises and threats. Additionally, the affective mechanisms are less likely to create explicit winners and losers, so they can producer broader influence within a target state.[17]

It is common for influence activities to mobilize multiple power mechanisms. For example, providing (or withholding) technical aid can engage all five mechanisms. The United States, or another influencer, may initiate or increase technical aid to reward a target for adopting a desired behavior or it may threaten to withhold the aid to punish an undesired behavior. Technical aid may also demonstrate the United States' expertise and may trigger the attractiveness mechanism, if the target would like to identify with the United States as an advanced, industrialized nation. Finally, technical aid can mobilize the recognition mechanism, if it is only offered to countries that possess certain capabilities or fulfill certain behavioral criteria, like adherence to human rights norms.

If an influencing state's activities successfully generate influence, the influencer can pursue four types of behavioral "changes" from its target: first, the target *adopts* the influencer's desired behavior; second, the target *maintains* a behavior that it otherwise would have jettisoned; third, the target *refrains* from adopting a behavior that it otherwise would have embraced and, fourth, the target *abandons* an undesired behavior. A target could undertake these adjustments in

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[17] We would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for this observation.

response to an explicit influencer request (*compliance*) or it could adopt them proactively, based on its knowledge of the influencer's preferences (*anticipatory compliance*).[18]

In general, the more power mechanisms that an influencer's activities mobilize, the greater its potential influence and the greater the likelihood that it can alter a targeted state's behavior. However, two caveats are in order. First, even a great deal of influence does not guarantee a change in a targeted state's behavior. As Dahl (1957) observes, Actor A's influence over Actor B is best measured in probabilistic terms; it is present to the degree that Actor A can increase the likelihood of Actor B adopting its preferred behavior. However, A's influence over B is only one factor that impacts B's decision making. For this reason, assessing international influence solely by examining targeted states' behavior is likely to produce misleading results.[19]

Second, target states may vary in terms of the value they attach to different power mechanisms. For example, one target may attach a great deal of importance to expertise, while another is more concerned with recognition. The amount of influence that an influencing state can generate, with regard to a specific target state, is therefore a function of both the degree to which the former's influence activities mobilize each power mechanism and the amount of value the latter attaches to each mechanism. In the following analysis, we bracket the target's level of interest in each power mechanism, to focus on influence activities' ability to mobilize each power mechanism. However, we consider targets' receptivity to be an important avenue for future research.

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[18] On anticipatory compliance, see Simon 1953, 505, 515.

[19] Focusing on immediate behavior changes also overlooks influence activities' potential long-term effects on targeted states.

Applying the Framework: U.S. Security Sector Engagement in Africa

In this article, we apply our framework to take stock of U.S. influence in eleven African countries. We concentrate our analysis on Africa for several reasons. First, over the last decade, Africa has emerged as a potentially important theater of great power competition. The United States, China, Russia, and other countries such as Turkey, India, and Brazil, have expanded their engagements in African countries across the military, economic, diplomatic, and informational domains. However, there is a significant gap in our understanding of how international influence attempts will shape the emerging geopolitical landscape in Africa. Moreover, while China's influence activities in Africa have attracted extensive scholarly attention, research on U.S. influence activities is more limited. As China and Russia expand their own security partnerships in Africa, there is growing concern among U.S. policymakers and strategists about diminishing U.S. influence.

Second, Africa represents relatively neutral ground for great power influence attempts. Whereas geographical proximity encourages the United States to cultivate influence in Latin America, China to pursue influence in East Asia, and Russia to court Central Asian and former Soviet Union states, none of the great powers has a geographic advantage or currently exerts a dominant influence in Africa. The United States must therefore earn its influence in the region, rather than take it for granted or assume that countries will align with the United States because they have no other viable choice.

Third, based on power resources and activities, Africa should provide relatively easy cases for exerting U.S. influence, due to the gap between the United States' resources and those of most African states, as well as the substantial U.S. investments in African countries over the

past twenty years. Through its efforts to support economic development, relieve poverty, advance democratic institutions, and counter the spread of violent extremism, the United States has forged partnerships that should encourage targeted states to adopt its preferred behaviors. Nonetheless, U.S. influence in Africa is not assured (Whitaker 2010). African elites have often employed "extraversion strategies" that seek to convert their country's external dependencies into domestic political power (Bayart and Ellis 2000). These strategies frequently subvert the objectives of international engagements in areas such as democracy promotion (Chabal and Daloz 1999), economic reform (Hibou 1999), and foreign aid (Jablonski 2014). In short, African countries present both opportunities and challenges for great power influencers, making them important cases in which to assess the different mechanisms of influence.

To reflect the United States' rising level of interest in Africa, we focused our investigation on U.S. engagement since 2008, the year that U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) became active. To diversify our analysis, we examined African states with a wide range of political systems, economic development levels, alignment histories, security concerns, and strategic significance to the United States. These were Algeria, Angola, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Morocco, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, and Tunisia. After identifying the power resources available to the United States to implement influence activities, we sought answers to two questions for each country.

First, what influence activities has the United States undertaken within the country, over the last decade? Here, we focused on U.S. influence activities in the security sector. This has been an important area of growth in U.S. activity on the continent. Over the last decade, the U.S. government has invested an average of $15 billion in security sector assistance annually and

considers these to be core influence activities (Reveron 2016, 128).[20] A growing literature has examined the effectiveness of security sector assistance in building partner countries' military capacities (Berman and Lake 2019; Biddle et al. 2018; Matisek 2018), as well as its impact on human rights practices (Atkinson 2014; Burchard and Burgess 2018; Omelicheva et al. 2017; Sullivan et al. 2020), democratization (Atkinson 2014), coups (Ruby and Gibler 2010; Savage and Caverley 2017), and other types of violence and instability in recipient states (Boutton 2019; Jadoon 2017). Yet, few studies have evaluated security sector activities' ability to generate international influence (for exceptions, see Allen et al. 2020; Martinez Machain 2020; Sislin 1994; Sullivan et al. 2011). The security sector also includes a sufficiently broad range of influence activities for us to evaluate the effectiveness of all five power mechanisms, yet is not so broad that activities are not comparable across countries.

Our second question was, which power mechanisms has each type of security sector influence activity mobilized? To answer both questions, we conducted semi-structured interviews with current and former U.S. security cooperation officers, defense attachés, and other Embassy staff in each of the eleven countries, asking them to describe U.S. interests, security sector programs, and target state responses. Where possible, we corroborated these responses with secondary sources. In the absence of corroboration from target state governments, we cannot have full confidence in our assessments. However, the personnel we interviewed are responsible for implementing security sector programs through sustained, close interactions with target state recipients and can observe targets' responses. They are therefore the U.S. personnel

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[20] Figure is based on USAID data on military assistance.

best poised to make these evaluations and we have little reason to believe that, in speaking to us, they would not offer their candid observations.[21]

Power Resources

The United States possesses extensive power resources that it can use to attempt to increase its international influence. Among these power resources are the world's strongest and most technologically sophisticated military, the world's largest economy, positions of power in many international organizations, expansive trade networks, a history of receiving immigrants and these immigrants' continuing connections to their home countries, widely recognized cultural exports such as the U.S. entertainment industry and professional sports leagues, and increasing usage of English as the world's *lingua franca*. It would be difficult to identify another country that currently approaches the breadth and depth of the United States' power resources. Accordingly, the United States can engage in a wide array of influence activities in the military, economic, diplomatic, and informational spheres.

Influence Activities

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[21] Interviewees were given the option of attribution or anonymity. Some agreed to be named whereas others preferred to be kept anonymous. To respect anonymity preferences, we refer to those individuals as U.S. Embassy Staff, [Country].

The United States' military and technological power resources, in particular, facilitate its engagement in a wide range of security sector influence activities in Africa. We group these activities into four categories: operations, basing, training, and equipment.[22] The first category, operations, includes military operations, such as recent campaigns to fight violent extremist organizations like Al-Shabaab in the Horn of Africa and the Islamic State in Libya, peacekeeping operations, and joint exercises, including the annual African Lion, Cutlass Express, and Flintlock multilateral exercises. Importantly, U.S. military operations in Africa are not typically directed at state actors. Instead, they seek to neutralize and defeat threats from non-state actors, especially those posed by violent extremist organizations. In the basing category, the United States' sole formal military installation in Africa is Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti, which currently hosts approximately 4000 U.S. and allied military and civilian personnel. However, over the last decade, the United States has also operated smaller "cooperative security locations" and "contingency locations" in at least fifteen other African countries (Schewe 2018).

Prominent U.S. military training programs, the third category of influence activities, include the International Military Education and Training (IMET) program, which enables foreign officers to pursue technical training or degrees at U.S. professional military education (PME) institutions. They also include the State Partnership Program (SPP), which pairs a U.S. state's National Guard with the armed forces of a partner country, and many ad-hoc short-term training programs in traditional security areas, like intelligence and counter-insurgency, and non-traditional security areas, such as public health and disaster response.

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[22] For additional overviews of U.S. security cooperation activities, see Fowler 2018; Kieh 2014; Reveron 2016, 131-141.

The fourth category, equipment programs, entails the transfer of U.S.-manufactured or procured weapons, vehicles, and other equipment to qualified recipient countries. These transfers are often undertaken through Foreign Military Sales (FMS), in which a partner country purchases equipment from the United States or a U.S.-designated manufacturer using its own funds, often with the U.S. government's coordination. The United States also provides grants to partner countries so they can purchase U.S. equipment through the Foreign Military Financing (FMF) program and transfers surplus military equipment to partners through the Excess Defense Articles (EDA) program.

The primary goal of all four types of security sector engagement is to advance the United States' security interests in Africa: combatting terrorism, maintaining regional stability, building partner capacity, and increasing interoperability with partner militaries. The extent to which U.S. security assistance has achieved these aims is mixed (Allen 2018; Griffiths 2016; Kieh and Kalu 2013; Piombo 2015; Watts et al. 2018). However, the question of the activities' effectiveness at achieving national security goals is different from the question of whether they have enhanced U.S. influence. The United States could accomplish the latter, without the former. The success of international influence attempts depends on how programs are executed, the power mechanisms they mobilize, and recipient states' receptivity to those power mechanisms.

Power Mechanisms

Each category of security sector activities mobilizes a different set of power mechanisms. Table 1 summarizes the findings from our eleven countries by identifying the power mechanisms mobilized by each category of activities. The darker the shading in a cell, the more strongly that

mechanism was mobilized. This section elaborates on these codings with representative examples drawn from our research. We examine each of the four categories— operations, basing, training, and equipment—in turn. Within each category, we discuss the affective mechanisms first, then the leverage mechanisms.

Table 1: Security Sector Influence Activities and Power Mechanisms

	Affective Mechanisms			*Leverage Mechanisms*	
	Expertise	**Attractiveness**	**Recognition**	**Reward**	**Punishment**
Operations					
Basing					
Training					
Equipment					

1. Operations

The first category of security sector activities, operations, mobilizes all three affective mechanisms. It can strongly mobilize the expertise mechanism. The technological superiority, global reach, and sheer capabilities that the U.S. military brings to bear in operations and exercises elicits immense respect among African military professionals.[23] The mid-level officer corps in many states, in particular, has come to "really respect the professionalism and

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[23] This was brought up in many of the interviews. Also authors' personal experiences, drawn from conversations with multiple senior African military officers.

capabilities of the U.S. military," which they see up close during joint exercises and operations.[24] As a result, those who participate in these programs "get the big picture" and "recognize the benefits of [U.S. security cooperation]."[25] This sense of respect for U.S. expertise encourages further, long-term cooperation as these officer rise up through the ranks.

Operations' ability to mobilize the expertise mechanism is nonetheless limited to areas in which the United States possesses expertise. In the early 2000s, for example, the United States lacked the human intelligence and language capabilities necessary for effective counter-terrorism activities in Somalia. Consequently, to conduct operations, the U.S. military relied on Ethiopia, whose "human intelligence network in Somalia far surpassed that of the US in sophistication and entrenchment" (Odinga 2017, 436). This dependence circumscribed U.S operations' ability to mobilize the expertise mechanism, which limited the Ethiopians' inclination to align their behaviors with U.S. preferences on other issues, such as maintaining a U.S. drone base at Arba Minch. The Ethiopians closed the facility in 2016, contrary to U.S. preferences (Odinga 2017, 443-444).[26]

Such limitations do not apply to the attractiveness mechanism, which is strongly activated by U.S. operational forces' general aura of prestige. As one former defense attaché to Ethiopia observed, "people just love the U.S. Air Force. They think it's cool."[27] Even countries like South Africa, which have been hesitant to engage with the U.S. military for historical and

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[24] Lieutenant Colonel Darrick Mosley and Major Michael Hutchins, U.S. Embassy Staff, South Africa, interview by authors, March 26, 2019.

[25] U.S. Security Cooperation Office Information Paper, received July 23, 2019.

[26] Colonel (ret) Bruce Sweeney, interview by authors, March 7, 2019.

[27] Sweeney.

geopolitical reasons, aspire to emulate the power and sophistication that U.S. forces display in operations. A 2013 U.S.–South Africa joint exercise called Shared Accord persuaded the skeptical public and political leaders to pursue further engagement with the United States, as it demonstrated that cooperation would help the South African National Defence Forces "beef up its military readiness" so it could undertake the more "ambitious and hazardous role" that it desired to play in the region (Spector 2013).

Operations can also strongly activate the recognition mechanism, but only if they are conducted jointly. As U.S. Embassy staff in numerous countries noted, African military personnel are eager to be treated as "true partners."[28] Inviting another country's military to participate in joint operations or exercises recognizes the partner force's capabilities. The larger the role played by a partner state, the more powerfully this mechanism operates. Morocco is a standout in this regard. The country has hosted AFRICOM's largest annual multinational exercise, African Lion, since 2003. The 2019 African Lion exercise included the deployment of F-16s, C-130s, and over 1200 personnel, and U.S. forces relied on the Royal Moroccan Air Force for transportation needs.[29] By involving Morocco so extensively in these operations, the United States recognized that it is capable of feats that many African militaries cannot replicate.[30] Cultivating this sense of "mutual trust [and] respect" helps sustain cooperation between the two countries.[31] Similarly, by recognizing South Africa's military capabilities, the Shared Accord

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[28] Staff at U.S. Embassy, Algeria, interview by authors, July 25, 2019; Staff at U.S. Embassy, Morocco, interview by authors, July 2, 2019; Mosley and Hutchins; Sweeney.

[29] Staff at U.S. Embassy Morocco, personal communication, July 19, 2019.

[30] Staff at U.S. Embassy, Morocco (interview).

[31] Staff at U.S. Embassy, Morocco, personal communication, January 31, 2021.

exercise reinforced the state's "own growing awareness of its current place and future role on the continent," generating "brothers-in-arm sentiment" and "goodwill" towards the United States (Spector 2013). This goodwill can persist for decades. In Tunisia, there are active-duty Tunisian F-5 pilots who fondly remember participating in bilateral exercises with the United States back in the mid-1990s.[32]

U.S. operations in Africa are less effective at activating the leverage-based mechanisms: reward and punishment.[33] Since the United States conducts operations primarily to advance its national security interests, it cannot credibly threaten to suspend them in order to punish a partner state. Nor can it use operations as a reward, since partner countries are aware that the United States is pursuing its own self-interest through these activities. As an example, the Nigerian government has been slow to meet U.S. human rights requests despite major U.S. contributions to operations in the fight against Boko Haram, as it is aware that the United States is unlikely to suspend its assistance.[34] In 2015, President Muhammadu Buhari openly criticized U.S. practices, saying that "the application of the Leahy Law Amendment by the United States government has aided and abetted the Boko Haram terrorists" (Joseph 2015). Despite this disparagement, the United States maintained its support. Similarly, the United States cannot credibly threaten to withdraw from joint intelligence operations with Ethiopia as punishment for undesired actions, because doing so would compromise U.S. counterterrorism initiatives (Odinga 2017).

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[32] Commander Ryan Guard, U.S. Embassy Staff, Tunisia, interview by authors, March 15, 2019.

[33] If operations targeted African states, rather than assisting them, they could activate the punishment mechanism.

[34] Colonel (ret.) Patrick Doyle, interview by authors, March 19, 2019; Staff at U.S. Embassy, Nigeria, interview by authors, July 16, 2019.

2. Basing

The second category of activities, basing, mobilizes a more limited number of power mechanisms. It does not mobilize the expertise mechanism, as it does not openly display U.S. capabilities. Basing could mobilize the attractiveness mechanism, if U.S. military personnel are able to engage, personally and economically, with the local population (Allen et al. 2020). However, at Camp Lemonnier, the United States' base in Djibouti, security restrictions preclude this engagement, preventing the mechanism's activation.

Basing and access agreements could mobilize the recognition mechanism by explicitly acknowledging a host state's sovereignty, strength, or dependability. However, U.S. access agreements in Africa have been criticized for failing to sufficiently recognize host states' sovereignty. For example, when the United States and Ghana established a Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA) in 2018, opponents lambasted its insufficient regard for Ghanaian sovereignty. One staunch critic of the agreement, Professor Joshua Alabi, explained his opposition by stating, "We have a nation's reputation to protect" ("Review: Ghana–US Defence Deal").[35] Similar concerns have been expressed in Algeria, where perceptions that the United States has not sufficiently recognized African sovereignty have produced strong opposition to a permanent AFRICOM presence on the continent (Zoubir 2011).

In contrast, basing can strongly activate the reward mechanism. By paying a host country for basing rights, the United States rewards a change in its behavior; the host allows the U.S. military to access its sovereign territory. Yet, this relationship is purely transactional. The United States' payments for access to Camp Lemonnier have not produced allegiances, loyalties, or

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[35] For an overview of the agreement, and analysis of the controversies surrounding it, see Sigman 2018.

ideological alignments between the governments of the United States and Djibouti.[36] Djibouti's cooperation therefore depends on ongoing rewards. If the United States fails to renew its lease at Camp Lemonnier, it will immediately lose its basing rights. As one former U.S. Embassy staff member told us, "The only [U.S.] leverage is more money."[37]

Despite its ability to activate the reward mechanism, basing does not mobilize the punishment mechanism. Since the United States requires access to foreign facilities to advance its national security interests, it cannot credibly threaten to withdraw from these sites. As a result, not only does the punishment mechanism fail to operate, but basing provides leverage to the host state. During renegotiation of the Camp Lemonnier base agreement in 2014, the Djiboutian government was able to extract double the amount in rent from the United States than it had been paying under the previous lease, due in part to U.S. concerns about China and Russia seeking bases in the country.[38]

3. Training

Training, the third category of security sector influence activities, mobilizes most of the power mechanisms. Training programs strongly mobilize the expertise mechanism because they highlight the United States' knowledge and skills. Signaling the high esteem in which African militaries hold the U.S. military education system, in countries such as Ghana, Kenya, and Uganda, receiving a degree from a U.S. PME institution is often required for promotion to higher

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[36] Staff at U.S. Embassy, Djibouti, interview by authors, March 12, 2019.

[37] Former staff of U.S. Embassy, Djibouti, interview by authors, March 15, 2019.

[38] Ibid.; Staff at U.S. Embassy, Djibouti (interview). The lease increased from around $30 million annually to around $60 million annually.

ranks.[39] Demand for these programs is so high that, in Ghana, "the U.S. could not guarantee the slots" at current funding levels.[40] Similarly, members of the Nigerian Army were "so impressed" by the training they received at U.S. military institutions "that they usually called for the expansion of the program to involve the other services—Navy and Air Force" (Arogbofa 2014, 180). In Senegal, training courses in the United States are highly valued by the Senegalese military and the graduates of these courses are accorded a high degree of respect and often rise to the highest positions.[41] Even Algeria, which is generally hesitant to engage with the U.S. military in security sector activities or accept training from foreign militaries, prioritizes U.S. IMET over similar trainings offered by other countries because of the high quality of U.S. military education and counter-insurgency training programs.[42]

Training also strongly mobilizes the attractiveness mechanism, as participation in these programs highlights the utility and appeal of replicating U.S. military capabilities. After a training in disaster response with the Ohio National Guard, Angolan General Jacques Raul praised the program, noting that "the knowledge we have gained corresponds with the objectives we want to implement in our country" (Mullen 2019). Having participated in one training program, partner countries tend to pursue more, to align their practices with those of the United States in other security areas. After engaging in counter-insurgency partnerships with the United

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[39] Maj. Rose Croshier, former security cooperation officer in Ghana, interview by authors, October 22, 2019; Staff at U.S. Embassy, Kenya, interview by authors, August 1, 2019; Mosley and Hutchins.

[40] Croshier.

[41] Staff at U.S. Embassy, Senegal, interview by authors, March 18, 2019.

[42] Staff at U.S. Embassy, Algeria (interview).

States, Algeria's military is now interested in obtaining U.S. cyber security training.[43] The Angolan government has expressed interest in U.S. support to develop a maritime-focused economy, set up a veterans' administration to help demobilize and reintegrate about 50,000 ex-combatants, and help prevent the spread of Ebola from the DRC.[44] By participating in U.S. training programs, target countries can emulate U.S. capabilities across an array of specialized areas, raising the value they attach to security cooperation with the United States.

Training programs can also strongly activate the recognition mechanism, when they treat participants as equals.[45] Accordingly, IMET placements that enable recipients to enroll in the same programs and receive the same degrees as U.S. service members strongly mobilize this mechanism, as does the SPP, which involves direct military-to-military engagements between the U.S. National Guard and partner state military forces. U.S. programs that "train the trainer" also convey substantial recognition, as the concept assumes that program participants can replicate U.S. capabilities. Recognition is particularly pronounced when training programs are reciprocal. To that end, the Algerian military insists that any training conducted by the United States for Algerians be coupled with Algerian training, provided for the United States.[46] In Ghana, U.S. military forces receive training in jungle warfare—something they cannot easily

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[43] Staff at U.S. Embassy, Algeria (interview).

[44] Staff at U.S. Embassy, Angola, interview by authors, July 23, 2019.

[45] Staff at U.S. Embassy, Senegal (interview).

[46] Staff at U.S. Embassy, Algeria (interview).

train for at home—from Ghanaian troops.[47] By participating in these programs, the United States signals that it recognizes partner states' military capabilities.[48]

U.S. training programs can also strongly mobilize the reward and punishment mechanisms because of their desirability and relatively discretionary nature. The United States can offer training opportunities as a carrot or threaten to withdraw them as a stick, to incentivize desired behavior. IMET programs are particularly effective in this regard because they are valued, not only for the educational opportunities they provide, but for the associated travel, especially to the United States and AFRICOM headquarters in Germany. Embassy staff in Ghana noted that "many senior officials have family in the U.S. and feel close to it. They want to continue to have a close connection." Similarly, Nigerian senior military personnel reportedly "love the U.S." and "want to travel there as much as possible."[49] This appeal produces second-order effects, which amplify training programs' reward and punishment potential. By selectively doling out training opportunities, recipient state elites can strengthen their personal or political networks. Kenyan military decision makers, for example, have responded especially favorably to U.S. training activities when those activities serve political or patronage networks in the government or military.[50] These dynamics can reinforce power disparities within states by creating clear winners and losers. As one former security cooperation officer from Ghana noted, "it is a lot of power for the person who decides how the money is spent and who gets to go."[51]

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[47] Croshier.

[48] This theme was emphasized in Ghanaian media coverage (for example, Zurek 2017).

[49] Staff at U.S. Embassy, Nigeria (interview).

[50] Staff at U.S. Embassy, Kenya, Interview by authors, July 23, 2019.

[51] Croshier.

4. Equipment

The final category of programs, equipment, strongly activates the expertise and attractiveness mechanisms. The U.S. military is widely perceived as the best-equipped in the world and its weapons and vehicles are in high demand. According to Embassy staff in Djibouti, the high quality of U.S. equipment helps the United States maintain its status Djibouti's preferred security partner.[52] The Kenyan Defence Forces have also been eager to purchase U.S. equipment because of its effectiveness in improving their force protection capabilities.[53] U.S. equipment also possesses significant prestige value. In Nigeria, U.S. Embassy staff reported that political and military leaders are eager to acquire "big shiny objects" from the United States.[54] In short, U.S. equipment is widely reported to make partner countries' militaries feel more capable and prestigious.

However, equipment programs largely fail to activate the third affective mechanism, recognition. The U.S. government must approve FMS, FMF, and EDA transfers, implicitly recognizing the recipients as acceptable partners. Yet, equipment programs also highlight recipients' lack of indigenous weapons production capabilities and their dependent status. They are not equal partners in these transactions and, if clumsily handled, equipment transactions can be seen as patronizing, especially by countries like Angola, South Africa and Algeria, which view themselves as capable U.S. partners rather than aid recipients.[55] Neither Algeria nor Angola

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[52] Staff at U.S. Embassy, Djibouti (interview).

[53] Staff at U.S. Embassy, Kenya (interview).

[54] Staff at U.S. Embassy, Nigeria (interview).

[55] Mosley and Hutchins; Staff at U.S. Embassy, Algeria (interview).

purchases or accepts any military equipment from the United States, and equipment programs in South Africa are extremely limited.

Surprisingly, we found that equipment programs' ability to activate the reward mechanism is also limited. Based on their appeal, U.S. equipment transfers should, in theory, function as a carrot, especially when equipment is provided *gratis*. However, in practice, it has been difficult for the United States to use equipment transfers to reward desired behavior. This is partly due to the programs' slow tempo; the time lag between equipment proposals and delivery can be months or even years and programs may be cancelled midstream.[56] In Ethiopia, the slow delivery of C-130E aircraft and Humvees caused the country's military leaders to view the United States as "an increasingly unreliable partner" (Odinga 2017, 442). Compatibility problems present another obstacle. Countries like Ethiopia, which historically relied on Soviet-style weaponry, are hesitant to replace it with U.S. or NATO-specification weapons, as the interoperability challenges posed by the new equipment would exceed its perceived benefits.[57] This issue is particularly salient with regard to the expensive and technologically complex military equipment, such as aircraft and armored vehicles, which the United States is known to provide. Lastly, limitations in recipient countries' logistical and maintenance capabilities compromise equipment transfers' utility as a reward. In Nigeria, inconsistent training on the use and maintenance of U.S.-supplied C-130s caused the aircraft to fall into disrepair, limiting their value to the state (Watts et al. 2018, 14).

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[56] Staff at U.S. Embassy, Djibouti (interview); Staff at U.S. Embassy, Kenya (interview); Staff at U.S. Embassy, Nigeria (interview).

[57] Sweeney.

For similar reasons, equipment programs are unable to mobilize the punishment mechanism. The United States has attempted to use transfers punitively, withholding or removing programs to induce changes in recipients' behavior. In Nigeria, human rights concerns have slowed or stopped several acquisition programs. The Obama administration cancelled the sale of Cobra attack helicopters to the Nigerian Air Force in 2014, due to human rights concerns (Blanchard and Husted 2018). Three years later, a deal to sell A-29 Super Tucano aircraft and weaponry was cancelled, after a Nigerian jet struck an internally displaced persons camp. However, the Nigerian government was unperturbed by the cancellations. As one former defense attaché explained, the Nigerians "wouldn't care if we stopped or if we switched priorities or programs. They just don't care that much."[58] In 2014, Nigerian Ambassador Adebowale Ibidapo Adefuye explicitly questioned the utility of U.S.-provided equipment, asking rhetorically, "how and why, in spite of the U.S. presence in Nigeria with their sophisticated military technology, Boko Haram should be expanding and becoming more deadly" (O'Grady 2014). Security concerns also blunt the United States' ability to use equipment programs punitively. If transfers are viewed as imperative for advancing national security interests, the United States cannot credibly threaten to withdraw them, regardless of recipients' behaviors (Sullivan et al. 2011).

Across the eleven African states we examined, each category of security sector influence activities–operations, basing, training, and equipment–consistently mobilized the same sets of power mechanisms (see Table 1). However, we also observed that target states vary in their receptivity to the five different mechanisms. Algeria, Angola, Ethiopia and South Africa–where current governments are led by political parties that won power in the wake of civil conflict– appear to place high value on recognition. In Nigeria and Djibouti, by contrast, interviewees

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[58] Doyle.

noted that decision-makers seem more interested in the material rewards they obtain from U.S. activities. Although systematic analysis of target state receptivity to the five mechanisms is beyond the scope of this article, we believe this is an important avenue for future research on the mechanisms of international influence.

Influence Successes and Failures

By identifying the power mechanisms activated by each type of security sector influence activity, our analysis revealed four key findings about the activities that are likely to enhance U.S. influence—and those that are not. Although these emerged from an examination of African states, we suspect that they apply more broadly, particularly in contexts where target states have a history of exploitation by more powerful international actors. In many African countries, responses to influence attempts are conditioned by centuries of exploitation by international actors (Ake 1996), suspicion about the militarization of U.S. foreign policy (Odion-Akhaine 2013), and resulting concerns about sovereignty and an ability to have an "independent say in world affairs" (Mazrui 1977, 6). We therefore expect these findings to be most relevant to states that have similar experiences with, and dispositions toward, international influencers.

First, we found that equipment programs are not as effective at enhancing U.S. influence as many commentators assert (Caverley et al. 2019). The delays associated with equipment transfers, recipients' inability to use or maintain U.S. systems, and mismatches between the equipment the United States supplies and recipient states' needs, compromise these activities' ability to mobilize either leverage or affective mechanisms and generate influence. That being said, no recipient state is likely to decline offers of U.S. military equipment, especially if they are

provided free of charge through the FMF or EDA programs. The United States should therefore initiate equipment programs judiciously, recognizing that, once implemented, they will be difficult to discontinue, without provoking significant target state ire. These programs should be reserved for capable states like Morocco, which the United States expects to partner with over the long-term. The United States should also attempt to tie equipment transfers to related programs that activate other power mechanisms, such as training partner forces in how to use the equipment.[59]

Second, our analysis found that, of the four categories of activities, training programs are the most effective at mobilizing power mechanisms. Training strongly activates all five power mechanisms and U.S. embassy personnel report high levels of participant state satisfaction with these initiatives. Of the United States' security sector training programs, those that treat participants as professional equals and facilitate face-to-face engagement with U.S. military personnel, like IMET, produce the most positive participant feedback. Notably, a U.S. embassy official in Kenya observed that "we can cut equipment without much consternation from the Kenyans, but cutting IMET would be very detrimental to our relationship."[60] At numerous embassies, officials noted that the continuation and expansion of these programs is likely to strengthen U.S. influence, based on the expertise they convey and their longer-term ability to cultivate shared networks, interests, and values.[61]

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[59] Staff at U.S. Embassy, Nigeria (interview).

[60] Staff at U.S. Embassy, Kenya (interview).

[61] Staff at U.S. Embassy, Angola (interview); Staff at U.S. Embassy, Morocco, personal communication, January 31, 2021.

Third, influence activities that primarily activate the leverage mechanisms—reward and punishment—are unlikely to produce sustained international influence. The leading example of this dynamic is basing. Although the Djiboutian government is presumably happy to collect revenue from the United States as a reward for leasing basing rights at Camp Lemonnier, these payments do not positively shift the government's perceptions of the United States or of the countries' bilateral relationship.[62] Similarly, operations or training that are undertaken on an apparent quid pro quo basis do not generate long-term influence, as any changes in recipient state behavior effected by these activities will cease, as soon as the operation or training program ends. This dynamic is especially evident where reward-based activities are vulnerable to capture by political elites, who may revert to earlier behaviors in order to provoke a new round of activities. This capture can limit the scope of U.S. influence attempts by creating or exacerbating distributional tensions within target states, as elites use rewards to enhance their power, at the expense of others. Activities that primarily mobilize the reward and punishment mechanisms can also invoke the fraught, often transactional relationships that have, over centuries, reinforced power-imbalanced and exploitative relations between great powers and African states.

Finally, our analysis speaks to the importance of recognition, as an under-appreciated power mechanism and influence-building tool. U.S. officials in South Africa, Angola and Algeria highlighted the importance of reciprocity in security sector engagement and the United States treating these countries "like the capable partners that they are."[63] In Senegal, the professionalism and respect that characterize U.S. treatment of the Senegalese military was cited

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[62] Staff at U.S. Embassy, Djibouti (interview).

[63] Staff at U.S. Embassy, Algeria (interview); Staff at U.S. Embassy, Angola (interview); Mosley and Hutchins.

as a primary factor influencing why Senegal "prefers doing business with the U.S."[64] In Kenya, officials attributed U.S. influence to the trust and mutual respect in which the two countries have invested over many years. The social capital generated through these activities makes continued partnership with the United States attractive to the Kenyans, yielding unparalleled access to the state's military leadership and maintaining the United States' status as Kenya's preferred source of training and equipment.[65]

From a social psychological and domestic politics standpoint, it is unsurprising that African military personnel and political leaders want to be recognized as the professional equals of U.S. forces, with agency, interests, and capabilities of their own; and that failure to do so can have negative impacts on the relationship. However, national strategy documents often overlook this, framing African states as passive recipients of U.S. influence attempts (United States 2017). To effectively cultivate international influence, the United States needs to shift away from this mentality, approaching African militaries as security partners, not pawns, in renewed competitions for regional power. Such a move would involve little cost to the United States and would elevate the satisfaction that African partners derive from U.S. security partnerships.

Together, these findings suggest that analyses of international influence ought to take not just resources and activities, but also the *mechanisms* of power more seriously. Attempts to assess international influence based on power resources alone, or on the volumes of aid and assistance provided by foreign actors, are likely to miscalculate these actors' influence. Instead, to accurately assess the state of play in emerging theaters of great power competition, it will be important to understand when and why foreign engagements bring about desired responses in a

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[64] Staff at U.S. Embassy, Senegal (interview).

[65] Staff at U.S. Embassy, Kenya (interview).

cost-effective and sustained way. Such an approach raises major questions about the efficacy of

global powers' attempts to extend their influence through the employment of rewards or

punishments without simultaneously advancing important yet intangible dynamics like expertise,

attractiveness, and recognition.

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