

# FMSO's Military DIME (M-DIME) Research Project

*Tracking Russian and Chinese military influence in states around the world*

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## Instruments of Chinese Military Influence in Mali

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## OVERVIEW OF FMSO'S M-DIME RESEARCH PROJECT

The Military DIME (M-DIME) Research Project is a dynamic effort from researchers at the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command's Foreign Military Studies Office (FMSO). Its goal is to provide Army leaders with a clear, comparative understanding of how China and Russia employ instruments of national power to obtain military influence around the world. The M-DIME framework is derived from the "DIME" concept, which classes instruments of national power into four types: Diplomatic, Informational, Military, and Economic. Based on this concept, the M-DIME framework gives more narrow attention to the instruments that China and Russia employ to gain military influence in third-party countries.

The M-DIME framework's purpose is to track and analyze the military influence of "Benefactor" countries (i.e. China and Russia) in select "Recipient" countries in Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, and South and South-east Asia. Benefactor countries are assumed to engage in activities that result in them having increased military influence in Recipient countries to gain leverage over global rivals, competitors, and adversaries; for China and Russia, this means the United States. Within this framework, "military influence" is defined as the ability of a Benefactor country to shape or alter the attitudes, behaviors, and capabilities of actors within—and entities associated with—the armed forces of Recipient countries.

**The M-DIME framework identifies 12 distinct instruments of national power employed by Benefactor countries to gain military influence in Recipient countries, three for each of the DIME categories. They are as follows:**

### DIPLOMATIC INSTRUMENTS

- D1 Defense-Related Diplomacy
- D2 International Military Education and Training
- D3 Soft Power Activities

### INFORMATIONAL INSTRUMENTS

- I1 Cultural and Media Outreach, Collaboration and Alignment
- I2 Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Support
- I3 Cooperation in Military Intelligence and Communications

### MILITARY INSTRUMENTS

- M1 Formal Bilateral Military Engagements
- M2 Shared Informal/Multilateral Military Engagements
- M3 Defense/Security Pacts and Agreements

### ECONOMIC INSTRUMENTS

- E1 Arms Transfers
- E2 Technology-Sharing and Joint Production Agreements
- E3 Trade and Cooperation in Strategic Commodities/Sectors

M-DIME analysis is based on qualitative assessments of Benefactor influence in Recipient countries along each of the 12 M-DIME instruments of influence. These assessments are made for the Benefactor's **Current Influence** (assessed as Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low, or Unobserved) and **Projected Influence** (assessed as **Increasing**, Steady, Decreasing, or Unknown). Current assessments are made based on activities from 2012 to the present, while future assessments are three-year forecasts.


The bulk of activities considered in the M-DIME Research Project involve members of the armed forces or defense sector personnel in both Benefactor and Recipient countries. Such activities include formal and informal military-to-military diplomacy, security cooperation engagements, and arms transfers. However, the M-DIME Research Project also tracks and analyzes Chinese and Russian activities that employ non-military instruments of influence but ultimately bear on the decision-making and capabilities of the Recipient country's armed forces. Such activities include Chinese and Russian collaboration with Benefactor states in media, communications technology, and strategic sectors.


The M-DIME Research Project's findings are derived from open-source research. Each M-DIME product is produced with the collaboration of analysts from across FMSO, frequently with the assistance of non-Department of Defense subject matter experts coming from academia, think tanks, and the private sector. Given its basis in open-source research, the M-DIME Research Project has an inherent limitation. It cannot track Chinese and Russian military influence activities that are deliberately kept secret. Consequently, assessments of Chinese and Russian influence based on instruments for which secrecy is important or where information would typically be classified by the Benefactor or Recipient countries—for instance, military-technology sharing or intelligence collaboration—are acknowledged to be made with low confidence. In certain cases, assessments are not made where open-source data is considered inconclusive.


In sum, the M-DIME Research Project is a tool for U.S. Army and U.S. Government personnel to better understand the instruments of national power employed by China and Russia to gain global military influence and the impact these activities have on U.S. national security interests. Over time, FMSO will expand the body of research and assessments based on this framework, increasing its comparative value across Benefactor and Recipient countries.

## KEY ASSESSMENTS

**China’s current M-DIME influence in Mali is assessed as Low.** Some of the most important instruments for China’s influence in Mali include:


 **Soft Power Activities (D3).** Military/diplomatic soft power activities are integral to the relationship between the two countries and have largely taken place under the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). Under the umbrella of the MINUSMA, China has been able to expand its influence through local infrastructure projects.














 **Shared Informal/Multilateral Military Engagements (M2).** Chinese multilateral engagements have been dominated by MINUSMA, which included only the second deployment of People’s Liberation Army (PLA) combat troops for multilateral efforts. PLA combat missions in Mali provided a practical test for Chinese military forces in a hostile environment.

 **Cultural and Media Outreach, Collaboration, and Alignment (I1).** China’s approach to achieving stability in Mali has also improved its image throughout the country. China operates one Confucius Institute in Mali, funds several education centers focused on trade skills, and enjoys a high approval rating (approximately 92 percent) among the Malian population.

**China’s projected M-DIME influence in Mali is assessed as Decreasing.** Some of the most important instruments contributing to China’s projected decline in influence in Mali include:

 **Shared Informal/Multilateral Military Engagements (M2).** Multilateral military engagements are the most likely instrument to suffer as a result of Mali’s decision to end the MINUSMA effort. China’s use of shared informal/multilateral military engagements enabled it to project influence in other instruments, such as using PLA troops to secure educational facilities and infrastructure projects. The PLA withdrawal will likely cause other Chinese influence efforts in Mali to suffer.

 **Soft Power Activities (D3).** Chinese soft power activities are also likely to experience a decline in the next three years as Mali further pivots away from foreign influence aside from Russia. China’s Belt and Road Initiative had already suffered due to political instability, and there will likely be less physical security available without the presence of PLA troops. China also participated in building projects with military engineers to spread influence, which will cease in the future.

| DIPLOMATIC / INFORMATION  |           |   | MILITARY / ECONOMIC   |           |  |  |  |  |
|---|-----------|---|---|-----------|--|--|--|--|
|  | <b>D1</b> | Defense-Related Diplomacy                           |   | <b>M1</b> | Formal Bilateral Military Engagements              |  |  |  |
|  | <b>D2</b> | International Military Education and Training       |  | <b>M2</b> | Shared Informal/Multilateral Military Engagements  |  |  |  |
|  | <b>D3</b> | Soft Power Activities                               |  | <b>M3</b> | Defense/Security Pacts and Agreements              |  |  |  |
|  | <b>I1</b> | Cultural/Media Outreach, Collaboration, Alignment   |  | <b>E1</b> | Arms Transfers                                     |  |  |  |
|  | <b>I2</b> | Information/Communications Technology Support       |  | <b>E2</b> | Technology-Sharing, Joint Production Agreements    |  |  |  |
|   | <b>I3</b> | Cooperation in Military Intelligence/Communications |  | <b>E3</b> | Trade/Cooperation in Strategic Commodities/Sectors |  |  |  |
| CURRENT DEGREE OF INFLUENCE   |           |   | PROJECTED FUTURE DEGREE OF INFLUENCE  |           |  |  |  |  |
| Very High   | High      | Medium  | Low   | Very Low  | None/Unobserved                                    | Increasing  | Steady  | Decreasing  |

## INTRODUCTION TO CHINA-MALI MILITARY RELATIONS

Diplomatic relations between China and Mali date back to 1960, when the latter won its independence from France. Mali's ruler at that time, Modibo Keita, was openly pro-China, hosting the first visit of former Chinese Premier Chou En-Lai in 1963.<sup>1</sup> Their bilateral military cooperation began in 1966 when visits between defense ministers occurred.<sup>2</sup> From 1979-2002, China's involvement with Mali was largely economic, with Beijing investing \$58 billion into the country while also participating in humanitarian efforts.<sup>3</sup> Several other military visits by high-ranking Chinese officers occurred in the 1990s and early 2000s.<sup>4</sup> Bilateral military relations evolved in 2013 when PLA troops were added to the UN MINUSMA effort. Since the start of that mission, Chinese military influence in Mali evolved to include a range of activities, including direct PLA involvement in military infrastructure improvements, medical care, and combat training.<sup>5</sup> The relationship between the two countries was strong until the 2020 coup, with Chinese President Xi Jinping meeting multiple times with the now-former President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita.<sup>6</sup>

Mali has experienced domestic political and military turbulence since 2020 as a result of the back-to-back military coups that put Colonel Assimi Goïta in charge of the transitional government.<sup>7</sup> The coups were, in part, due to continued armed conflict with terrorist organizations and rebel groups, a lack of ability by the government to provide basic resources, and months of unresolved protests.<sup>8</sup> China opposed a change in government by force and publicly called for a peaceful resolution to the conflicts.<sup>9</sup> France's Operation Barkhane (2014-2022), another mission to help stabilize Mali, had deployed approximately 4,500 troops across the Sahel.<sup>10</sup> Due to the declining popularity of the French, rising anti-colonial sentiment, and a perceived failure to accomplish its counterterrorism goals, French military forces and other Western partners were expelled from Mali by

the new military junta, opening up the opportunity for other countries to exert influence.<sup>11 12</sup> China has announced its goal of modernizing Africa, even while its expanded presence has exposed PLA troops to a hostile environment due to an increase in Islamic extremism.<sup>13</sup>

Like other countries in the region, such as Burkina Faso or the Central African Republic, Mali is increasingly important to the United States as it seeks to counter the expanding influence of Beijing.<sup>14</sup> The current U.S. National Security Strategy notes that China is trying to reshape the international order and use technological improvements to increase its sphere of influence.<sup>15</sup> The U.S. Embassy in Mali notes that a primary goal for the United States is improving stability through economic growth, and that what happens inside Malian borders affects the greater region of the Sahel.<sup>16</sup> While China also voted to adopt the UN resolution ending MINUSMA efforts in Mali, Beijing released a statement shortly after stating it would continue to support Mali in safeguarding Mali's sovereignty and national security through both multilateral and bilateral channels.<sup>17</sup>

**MALI AT A GLANCE**

|                                 |  |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Capital                         | Bamako <sup>18</sup>   |
| Population                      | 23,457,965 (2023 estimate) <sup>19</sup>   |
| GDP per Capita                  | \$2,100 (2021 estimate) <sup>20</sup>  |
| Head of Government              | Colonel Assimi Goïta <sup>21</sup>   |
| Head of State                   | Colonel Assimi Goïta <sup>22</sup>   |
| Minister of Defense             | Colonel Sadio Camara <sup>23</sup>   |
| Chief of General Staff          | Oumar Diarra <sup>24</sup>   |
| Military Expenditure (total)    | \$515 million (2022 estimate) <sup>25</sup>  |
| Military Expenditure (% of GDP) | 3.5% (2022 estimate) <sup>26</sup>   |
| Armed Service Branches          | <b>Malian Armed Forces</b> (Forces Armées Maliennes or FAMA): Land Forces (l'Armée de Terre), <b>Air Force</b> (l'Armée de l'Air); <b>National Guard</b> (la Garde Nationale du Mali or GNM); <b>General Directorate of the National Gendarmerie</b> (la Direction Générale de la Gendarmerie Nationale or DGGN) <sup>27</sup> |
| Active Armed Forces Personnel   | 35,000 (2023 estimate) <sup>28</sup>   |

## D - DIPLOMATIC INFLUENCE

China's use of diplomatic instruments to gain military influence in Mali was once stronger but has declined since the 2020 and 2021 coups. China's use of soft power activities has been its most important instrument, especially via Mali's participation in the BRI and China's soft power activities through the MINUSMA peacekeeping mission. High-level military interactions have been sparse since President Keita was overthrown in the 2020 coup.



### D1 - Defense-Related Diplomacy

**Current Influence: Medium**

**Projected Influence: Decreasing**

- **China had consistent security cooperation visits with Mali prior to the latter's military coups in 2020 and 2021.**
  - » High-level diplomatic meetings took place between China and Mali almost annually.
  - » Former Chinese Premier Li Keqiang met with former President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita in 2014 during a visit to China.<sup>29</sup>
  - » Former President Keita has also met with President Xi. A meeting took place in Johannesburg between the two during the Forum on China Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2015, where Xi stated that "development holds the key to solving all problems."<sup>30</sup>
  - » In 2015, then Defense Minister Tieman Coulibaly traveled to China to meet General Fan Changlong, Vice Chairman of China's Central Military Commission.<sup>31</sup>
  - » In 2016, Rear Admiral Guan Youfei traveled to Mali to showcase strengthening ties in training military personnel.<sup>32</sup>
  - » A Chinese special envoy, including President Xi and Vice Chairperson of the Committee of the National People's Congress Zheng Jianbang, also traveled to Bamako to celebrate the Inauguration of President Keita in 2018.<sup>33</sup>
  - » In August 2018, former President Keita also traveled to Beijing and met with Xi where China referred to Mali as an "old friend" and reaffirmed its commitment to developing the country.<sup>34,35</sup>
- **Under the new Malian regimes, there has been no open-source reporting about security cooperation or head-of-state visits between the two countries.**
  - » Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbinn noted in April 2023 China's continued dedication to ongoing UN peacekeeping operations in countries such as Mali but provided no indication of any intended meetings between officials.<sup>36</sup>
  - » This lack of overt cooperative visits stands in contrast to the bilateral diplomatic partnership of the previous administration.
- **China's influence via this instrument is likely to decrease over the next three years, given the apparent cessation of military diplomacy following the 2020 Mali coup.**



### D2 - International Military Education and Training

**Current Influence: Low**

**Projected Influence: Steady**

- **While China does conduct International Military Education and Training (IMET) activities in Mali, these appear to be minimal.**
  - » China has provided annual training slots for foreign military officers to train in Chinese military academies, though Mali sends only approximately 10 participants annually.<sup>37</sup> Reports on the quality of training for African officers are mixed. Students attending the PLA National Defense University stated that direct interaction with their Chinese counterparts was limited and the quality of higher-level courses was lower than similar training provided by the United States.<sup>38</sup>
  - » The CCP hand-picks certain Malian Army officers to interview for its publications. In 2022, the Chinese Ministry of Defense published an interview with a Malian military officer who praised the performance of the PLA soldiers.<sup>39</sup>
  - » A previous interview of a Malian Army captain, who had spent a year at China's Army Service College studying military engineering, emphasizes the socialist values he received rather than the actual military training.<sup>40</sup>

- **In addition to traditional IMET efforts, Chinese military peacekeeping contingents also focus on medical training.**
  - » Chinese MINUSMA personnel hosted technical training in Gao, Mali, in February 2022. With the scarcity of medical resources in Mali, the technical training was well-received by the local population.<sup>41</sup>
- **Although multiple countries have begun withdrawing training programs and support due to the increasing influence of Russian private military companies and the deteriorating security situation, Beijing has not indicated an intention to stop providing IMET support.<sup>42</sup> Thus, China’s influence efforts via this instrument look likely to remain steady over the next three years.**



**D3 - Soft Power Activities**

**Current Influence: High**

**Projected Influence: Decreasing**

- **China’s primary means of soft power influence in Mali is through its Belt and Road Initiative, through which it has exerted significant influence in Mali.**
  - » PLA troops being sent to Bamako as part of the MINUSMA multilateral effort coincided with Mali joining the BRI in 2019.<sup>43</sup> A ceremony was held in Bamako in July 2019 and was attended by Malian Foreign Minister Tiébilé Dramé and Ambassador Zhu Liying.<sup>44</sup>
  - » As a result of the deal, China plans to improve 1,228km of highway in Mali at a cost of approximately \$1.49 billion. The primary goal is to increase trade and improve the link between Mali and Senegal.<sup>45</sup>
  - » China’s BRI in Mali has suffered because of Mali’s political instability, as well as terrorist attacks that have negatively impacted other projects in the country.<sup>46</sup>
- **In addition to their combat role, PLA troops, as part of the MINUSMA effort, had been tasked with conducting infrastructure improvements and securing Chinese development projects throughout Mali.**
  - » Chinese military engineers regularly conduct infrastructure improvements in Mali, including an April 2023 emergency repair to the Gao International Airport.<sup>47</sup>
  - » China has been a vocal advocate of Malian counterterrorism missions and bolstering the MINUSMA partnership.<sup>48</sup>
  - » Chinese engineers also constructed air defense bunkers for a hospital in 2022.<sup>49</sup>
- **Many of the soft power activities conducted by the PLA were part of the MINUSMA multilateral effort. Due to the Malian government requesting the end of this effort, this instrument is projected to decrease in the next three years.<sup>50</sup>**





# I - Informational Influence

China's use of informational instruments to gain military influence in Mali is visible, though not particularly pronounced in scope. China's influence primarily comes from Chinese educational centers and positive public opinion likely derived from modernization efforts, although these efforts are often hindered by attacks from violent non-state actors. The PLA has also been involved in publishing propaganda directed at Mali through film and a Confucius Institute. No evidence of Chinese support for military ICT was found during open-source research.



## I1 - Cultural and Media Outreach, Collaboration, and Alignment

**Current Influence: Medium**

**Projected Influence: Steady**

- **Malian media usually portray China in a positive light due to the latter's involvement in infrastructure projects and peacekeeping efforts.**
  - » Beijing is very intentional about publicizing its modernization efforts in Mali, referencing China's involvement in infrastructural and agricultural improvements during public appearances between foreign ministers.<sup>51</sup>
  - » China also partners in public cultural exchanges like the Chinese Ambassador Cup football match.<sup>52</sup> Chinese Ambassador to the UN Dai Bing reaffirmed China's mission in Mali in 2023, stating, "It is necessary to increase investment in peacebuilding, support Mali in implementing projects in agricultural development, infrastructure construction, education and health and other fields."<sup>53 54</sup>
  - » Open-source research indicates that China's positive media messaging is reciprocal. Malian news agency, *aBamako*, praised a December 2023 diplomatic trip to China, led by Foreign Minister Abdoulaye Diop, to discuss diverse economic and development partnerships on large-scale projects in Mali.<sup>55</sup>
  - » In 2022, the Chinese military published a propaganda video in Mali titled "PLA," which is available on the web page of the Chinese Embassy in Mali.<sup>56</sup> The video was to commemorate the 77th anniversary of China's victory in the 'World Anti-Fascist War'. Soldiers of the PLA are depicted in their capacity as UN peacekeepers providing humanitarian assistance to civilians.<sup>57 58</sup>
  - » Citizens surveyed by the AfroBarometer noted a 92 percent favorable opinion of China, with 56 percent considering its development projects "somewhat" or "very" effective.<sup>59 60</sup>
- **To further its cultural influence, China opened the first Confucius Institute in Mali in 2018, and funds three other education centers throughout the country.**
  - » Southwest Forestry University and the Bamako Humanities University unveiled Mali's first Confucius Institute, noting that "Chinese is a must for young people in the 21st century."<sup>61</sup>
  - » China's primary education projects in Mali consist of the Centre de Formation Professionnelle in Senou, Centre Universitaire de Kabala, and the Centre Pilote Agricole in Baguineda.
  - » These education centers are primarily focused on providing technical skills to Malian citizens, training them in carpentry, masonry, and construction while being directly funded by China.<sup>62</sup> Sources indicate many of these programs are underutilized.<sup>63</sup>
- **While China continues programs such as the Confucius Institute, cultural exchanges, and tries to maintain a favorable public opinion through modernization efforts, there is no open-source information to indicate a substantial shift in this instrument over the next three years. Thus, it is expected to remain steady.**



## I2 - Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Support

**Current Influence: Low**

**Projected Influence: Steady**

- **The Malian ICT sector has struggled despite contracts with Chinese tech companies like Huawei and ICT project funding from Chinese banks.**
  - » In 2015, Mali signed a \$62.5 million contract with telecom manufacturer Huawei for the construction of a national broadband network and supply fiber to the country.<sup>64</sup>
  - » The project was supposed to be completed in 15 months but suffered several setbacks due to harsh terrain and security concerns throughout the country.<sup>65</sup> As of 2020, Huawei had been granted multiple extensions on the project while many Malian citizens still relied on mobile network internet connections.<sup>66</sup>
  - » In 2023, Huawei continued improvements by adding data centers and cloud services throughout Mali, while still struggling to fully implement a national broadband network.<sup>67 68</sup>
  - » In 2018, the Malian government introduced the "Mali Numerique 2020" (Mali Digital 2020), a comprehensive fiber network project in urban areas of Mali along with interconnecting government entities through fiber.<sup>69</sup> China funded the project with a loan of approximately \$164 million through the Export-Import Bank of China, a state-owned entity.<sup>70 71</sup>

- **While China has suffered some setbacks in gaining influence in Mali's ICT sector, sources indicate that its influence via this instrument will remain steady as Mali adjusts to its new government and tries to address more immediate security concerns.**

» The vocational training centers in Mali funded by the Chinese have both direct and indirect effects on ICT, and Beijing has shown interest in continuing these projects. The centers train Malian citizens in technical skillsets that are meant to allow for continued development throughout the country.<sup>72</sup>



### **I3 - Cooperation in Military Intelligence and Communications**

**Current Influence: Unobserved**

**Projected Influence: Unknown**

- **There is no publicly available information about Chinese attempts to cooperate with Mali in military intelligence and communications.**
- **Projected Chinese influence via this instrument is unknown because of the lack of observed bilateral activities.**

## M - Military influence

China's use of military instruments to gain influence in Mali is evident, though mostly limited to one sphere: multilateral engagements, typically in support of peacekeeping and counterterrorism operations. Both Chinese combat and non-combat personnel were in Mali until recently as part of the UN MINUSMA mission. This critical component of their relationship is under significant change, however, given the end of MINUSMA and the withdrawal of UN troops by 31 December 2023.



### M1: Formal Bilateral Military Engagements

**Current Influence: Unobserved**

**Projected Influence: Unknown**

- ***There is no publicly available information about Chinese attempts to cooperate with Mali in formal bilateral military engagements.***
- ***Projected Chinese influence via this instrument is unknown because of the lack of observed bilateral activities.***



### M2: Shared Informal/Multilateral Military Engagements

**Current Influence: High**

**Projected Influence: Decreasing**

- ***The PLA's participation in MINUSMA had been ongoing since 2013 to help a struggling Mali against terrorist groups and Tuareg rebels. This had been the primary instrument to spread Chinese military influence in Mali since 2013.***
  - » After the military coup in 2012, Mali was struggling with a failing African-led International Support Mission to Mali. China acknowledged the growing terrorist threat in the region and supported the UN effort to introduce the MINUSMA.<sup>73</sup>
  - » Its participation in MINUSMA was only the second time China had deployed combat troops as part of a UN peacekeeping effort.<sup>74</sup>
  - » The initial deployment included 395 personnel consisting of a police unit, an engineering unit, a medical unit, and an additional 170-soldier protection unit of the People's Armed Police.<sup>75</sup>
  - » While China's participation in the peacekeeping effort is not directly related to a combat role, one Chinese peacekeeper was killed and four others were wounded in a terrorist attack in 2016.<sup>76</sup>
  - » Experts state that part of the rationale for the PLA's participation in MINUSMA was to train Chinese troops in a hostile environment, as well as to increase military/diplomatic influence throughout Africa.<sup>77</sup>
- ***China's multilateral military involvement in Mali has been its most direct and visible instrument of M-DIME influence, though its approach is different from Western nations and largely focused on non-combat missions.***
  - » After the death of a PLA soldier, many operations were limited to the area surrounding their base in Gao, though the PLA was still able to display and test new technology, such as improved infantry fighting vehicles and Type 95-1 rifles.<sup>78</sup>
  - » Most operations undertaken by the PLA were focused on emergency infrastructure repairs, providing routine and emergency medical aid, and defensive exercises.<sup>79 80 81 82</sup>
  - » In addition to these soft power activities, PLA troops also conduct live-fire exercises, responses to mock terrorist attacks, and other combat-oriented missions.<sup>83</sup>
  - » In 2017, PLA troops carried out a multilateral military medical exercise in conjunction with other UN forces and the Malian military.<sup>84</sup>
- ***Chinese private security companies (PSCs) are present in Mali for the protection of Beijing's economic interests, but they do not participate in the same type of combat operations that companies from countries such as Russia do, resulting in a negligible gain of military influence.***
  - » Chinese PSCs are reported to be active in Mali.<sup>85</sup> Many PSCs are operated and staffed by former members of the PLA to provide security for Chinese businessmen and infrastructure projects in which China has a vested interest, such as oil and gas pipelines.<sup>86</sup>
  - » Unlike other private security groups, Chinese law requires that its PSCs be unarmed, requiring them to work alongside local militias, multilateral forces, and local governments, largely in a consulting capacity.<sup>87 88</sup>
  - » Chinese PSCs have occasionally skirted the weapons ban by forming new companies in their host countries. Due to numerous security concerns, primarily in African countries, Beijing has considered changing its weapons policy for PSCs protecting important assets, such as those related to the BRI.<sup>89</sup>

- ***In June 2023, Goïta's government requested the end of the MINUSMA peacekeeping effort, leading to the complete withdrawal of troops by 31 December 2023. The end of this multilateral effort and the removal of Chinese peacekeeping troops suggest a substantial decrease of Chinese influence in this instrument over the next three years.***<sup>90 91</sup>

» On 19 June 2023, ahead of the vote on an important constitutional referendum in the country, the ruling military junta requested the immediate withdrawal of MINUSMA troops.<sup>92</sup>



### **M3: Defense/Security Pacts and Agreements**

***Current Influence: Very Low***

***Projected Influence: Steady***

- ***Beijing has only signed one known defense and security pact with Mali.***
  - » The only formal security cooperation agreement occurred between the two countries in 2013 in the form of a military logistical agreement. This agreement accompanied a large batch of uniforms that the PLA delivered to the Malian Army.<sup>93</sup>
  - » Instead of defense/security cooperation agreements, China appears to be focused on economic agreements focusing on industry.<sup>94</sup>
- ***There was no open-source information located to suggest a change in this instrument in the next three years, thus it is expected to remain steady.***

## E - Economic Influence

China's use of economic instruments to gain military influence in Mali is perceptible, primarily through trade in strategic commodities. While China does not conduct a significant number of arms transfers, it has been an important trading partner with Mali regardless of the ruling government. China's primary focus in the Malian economy has been on rail development and trade in the agricultural and energy sectors.



### E1: Arms Transfers

**Current Influence: Low**

**Projected Influence: Steady**

- **China gains little influence in Mali via arms sales: only four known arms transfers with Mali have occurred between 2012 and 2023.**
  - » In April 2023, Mali received an arms shipment from China that mostly included logistical vehicles, ambulances, tactical vehicles, as well as some small arms and combat equipment.<sup>95</sup>
  - » In 2021, China delivered an order of seven WZ-551 armored personnel carriers.<sup>96</sup>
  - » In 2017, China delivered an order of three Tiger armored patrol vehicles and an additional order of two Y-12 light transport aircraft.<sup>97</sup>
  - » In a one-off transaction, China also sold Mali some logistics-related military equipment in 2012-2013.<sup>98</sup>
- **Instead, Mali procures most of its arms from Russia.**
  - » From 2012-2023, approximately 80 percent of military equipment in Mali originated from Russia.<sup>99</sup> Since 2020, these purchases have increased, with Malian officials like Foreign Minister Diop stating they would continue to buy Russian equipment.<sup>101</sup>
- **No developments suggest that China's low overall volume of arms sales to Mali will change substantially over the next three years; thus, Chinese influence via this instrument is projected to remain steady.**



### E2: Technology-Sharing and Joint Production Agreements

**Current Influence: Very Low**

**Projected Influence: Steady**

- **There are only two publicly known instances of formal joint production agreements between China and Mali, but these are each nearly a decade old.**
  - » In 2013, China signed a generic agreement titled the "Economic and Technological Cooperation Agreement Between the Government of the People's Republic of China and the Government of the Republic of Mali." The agreement largely involved infrastructure and business development projects.<sup>102</sup>
  - » In 2014, during a visit to China by former President Keita, a series of cooperation agreements were signed to "increase trade and economic cooperation with African countries to promote joint development."<sup>103</sup> One agreement was for joint production on a 900km railway linking Bamako and Conakry in Guinea. An additional rail agreement was made for renovations on the Bamako-Dakar railway.<sup>104</sup>
- **Although there have not been any recent formal joint production agreements, China continues to reaffirm its commitment to the development and modernization of Mali. There is currently no open-source information to suggest a change in this instrument in the next three years.**



### E3: Trade and Cooperation in Strategic Commodities/Sectors

**Current Influence: Medium**

**Projected Influence: Increasing**

- **Despite regime changes, China continues to publicly promote cooperation with Mali in several strategic sectors, including renewable energy, agriculture, and public health.**
  - » In 2022, Foreign Minister Wang Yi assured Malian Foreign Minister Diop of China's commitment to cooperate in hydropower stations, solar energy projects, agricultural technology, and public health initiatives.<sup>105</sup>
  - » China is increasingly turning to countries like Mali for agricultural products such as sesame seeds, avocados, cashews, and chili, providing a needed stimulus for the Malian economy.<sup>106</sup>
- **China has also capitalized on some of the rich resources Mali has to offer, entering into agreements for the mining and refining of lithium, a metal crucial in the defense sector.<sup>107</sup>**
  - » In September 2023, Chinese lithium company Ganfeng committed to investing \$138 million to control the Goulamina project. As part of the deal, Ganfeng gains exclusive rights to sales initially, maintaining 70 percent of sales rights as the project continues.<sup>108</sup>
  - » In addition to control and sales rights, the agreement opened bilateral talks about Mali having the ability to sell lithium crude ore to China.<sup>109</sup>
- **Given that trade between China and Mali has steadily increased, China's ability to gain influence via this instrument is expected to increase over the next three years.**
  - » Trade between the two countries has increased at an annual rate of nearly 13 percent from 1995 to 2021.<sup>110</sup> With China's focus on Mali's agricultural and mineral resources, future cooperation in this instrument is likely to occur, especially as other areas of influence with direct military involvement decrease.

## CONCLUSIONS

***China's current M-DIME influence in Mali is assessed as Low. China wields some military and diplomatic influence throughout Mali, including its past participation in the UN MINUSMA, but primarily focuses on infrastructure building and modernization efforts.*** Beijing lacks influence in other areas, such as arms sales, which are nearly monopolized by Russia. Terrorist attacks carried out by radical Islamist groups and rebel factions in northern Mali have continually disrupted Chinese efforts throughout multiple spheres of influence. Soft power activities are a key instrument in Chinese M-DIME influence in Mali due to Beijing's commitment to modernization and infrastructure improvements, which were largely carried out by PLA personnel on multilateral missions (D3). Significant investments have also been made in the development and protection of Beijing-sponsored educational institutions. While many soft power activities have been in conjunction with the multilateral MINUSMA effort, the PLA also focuses on hospital modernization and sanitation improvements. Finally, China has also recognized the rich natural resources Mali has to offer and has secured rights to mine and process lithium, a critical metal for numerous defense applications (E3).<sup>111</sup> Although China's overall influence in Mali is low, its actions mirror Beijing's goals in other countries to "reshape the international order in favor of one that tilts the global playing field to its benefit,"<sup>112</sup> usually in direct opposition to the goals of the United States. The U.S. National Security Strategy notes that China typically tries to achieve its goals, not through direct military intervention, but through economic gains and technological cooperation, as demonstrated in countries like Mali.<sup>113</sup>

***China's projected M-DIME influence in Mali is assessed as Decreasing. In the next three years, Chinese military influence in Mali is likely to be through informational and economic instruments rather than direct military involvement due to the conclusion of MINUSMA and the withdrawal of PLA troops.*** China has released public statements on its commitment to modernization and investment in multiple African countries, including Mali. Most of its attention, however, had been placed on multilateral military engagements and diplomatic soft power activities through PLA involvement with the UN mission. The ruling junta in Mali demanded an end to the MINUSMA effort, which included Chinese troops, effectively ending the most significant conduit for Chinese military influence in Mali. Still, the overall perception of China in Mali appears positive due to Beijing's focus on increasing the quality of life for the average Malian citizen. China is likely to focus on industry, education, and modernization, which would likely require some security presence to deter radical militants to be successful. It is unclear whether that security would take the form of Chinese PSCs or local forces. In the next three years, China will likely try to increase its influence through continued infrastructure improvements in the ICT sector and by using Chinese companies like Huawei to make further formal agreements with the current government (I2). Additionally, China will likely try to increase trade with Mali in sectors such as agriculture and renewable energy (E3) due to the decrease in influence suffered at the conclusion of the MINUSMA.

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