China's Security and Economic Engagement in West Africa

Constructive or Destructive?

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Abstract: Chinese officials tend to claim that Chinese economic and security activities in Africa are based on the principles of equality and mutual benefits (win-win), thus they are generally beneficial to the nation-building and development of African countries. Drawing on the case study of Ghana, this article argues that China's commitment to enhancing the capacity of national security agencies, fighting against piracy, strengthening maritime security, and promoting intelligence sharing in West Africa have been, in general, constructive. However, anti-Chinese sentiments mainly triggered by the involvement of Chinese migrants in illegal gold mining activities in Ghana and other West African countries have been destructive, with serious security ramifications for not only Ghana, but also the entire region that has a history of violent conflicts closely related to extraction of natural resources.

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China's astonishing and unremitting economic and security activities in Africa, particularly in the past one and a half decades, have sparked lasting debates about the impact of Chinese engagement on the continent's long-term peace and development. Chinese officials usually espouse the view that their economic and security engagement has been constructive and has generally enhanced stability and economic growth in the continent.¹ In contrast, some critics contend that China's engagement especially in the security realm has been more destructive than constructive.² This study explores the security implications of China's economic engagement in Ghana. It argues that there is a strong link between some aspects of China's economic engagement, particularly the involvement of Chinese nationals in illegal small-scale gold mining, and the sense of insecurity in African countries.

In recent years, a growing number of foreigners, predominantly Chinese nationals, have been involved in illegal gold mining activities — commonly known in local parlance as “*galamsey*,” meaning “gather them and sell.”³ *Galamsey* has been associated with the horrendous destruction of the environment, including water bodies and farmlands, the rise in crime and violence, and the surge in trafficking and use of narcotic drugs such as cocaine and methamphetamine, with far-reaching implications on the national security of Ghana and some other African countries. Due to *galamsey* activities, Ghana is increasingly becoming a key node in narcotic trafficking transit, mostly targeted by *galamsey* miners who use it to survive long hours in the harsh mining environment. Besides, proceeds from *galamsey* are often diverted to other crimes.⁴ The perceived centrality of Chinese actors in

¹Interview with diplomats of the Chinese Embassy, Accra, July 22, 2016.

²Enuke Chuka, “China's Military Presence in Africa: Implications for Continental Instability,” *Sacha Journal of Policy and Strategic Studies*, Vol. 1 No. 1 (April 2011), pp. 68–81.

³T. Aubynn *et al.*, “Mainstreaming Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining: A Background to Policy Advocacy,” draft report, May 2010, Ghana Chamber of Mines, Accra.

⁴Edward Burrows and Lucia Bird, “Gold, Guns and China: Ghana's Fight to End Galamsey,” Joyonline.com, June 13, 2017, <http://www.myjoyonline.com/opinion/2017/June-13th/gold-guns-and-china-ghanas-fight-to-end-galamsey.php>.

illegal small-scale gold mining and criminal networks is closely related to Ghana's national (as well as regional) peace and stability. On the one hand, China's commitment to strengthening the capacity of national security agencies and sharing intelligence have been constructive. On the other hand, the growing anti-Chinese sentiments and mistrust engendered by the illegal involvement of Chinese nationals have not only been destructive, but would also threaten to undermine the gains made in the areas of security and development cooperation.

This article first elaborates on the evolution of China's security cooperation with Africa and Ghana in particular since the 1950s, and then moves on to examine the thorny issue of illegal gold mining based on the fieldwork involving Chinese businesses and mine workers, Ghanaian policy-makers, security experts, civil society activists mostly in the mining sector, as well as scholars using semi-structured interviews.⁵ In the third section, it conducts some analysis on the implications of illegal gold mining for peace and security in Ghana and West Africa. Finally, the article concludes with a highlight on the relationship between the growing sense of insecurity and illegal gold mining activities in West Africa.

China-Ghana Security Cooperation in a Nutshell

In his address to the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) regarding a new security concept on September 23, 2009, then Chinese President Hu Jintao stated that

Security is neither isolated nor a zero-sum game and neither absolute. There is no security and stability in a country where there is no peace and global and regional stability. We should embrace a new security thinking featured by mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality and coordination.⁶

⁵Fieldwork was conducted in Dunkwa Offinso in the Central region in May 2015, and with Chinese diplomats of the Chinese Embassy, Accra (July 22 and 29, 2016); and Ghanaian policy-makers in Accra from July 10–29, 2016. In total, 40 interviews were conducted using a semi-structured questionnaire.

⁶Permanent Mission of the People's Republic of China to the United Nations, "Hu Jintao Addresses the General Debate of the 64th General Assembly Session."

In this spirit and in particular within the context of the Forum for China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) and China's National Defense Policy launched in 2000 and 2006 respectively, China is increasingly interested in — and paying more attention to — the security situation in Africa through its peacekeeping missions, building the capacity of security agencies, intelligence sharing and joint counter-piracy operations.⁷ By doing so, China has not only contributed to Africa's peace and security processes, but also considerably enhanced its image as a power with a great sense of responsibility. China's growing involvement in Africa's security has led some African countries such as Ghana, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Sudan, and Ethiopia, among others, to extend invitations to China to help with their security-related issues, including building the capacity of their military and police, provision of equipment and joint counter-piracy operations, and intelligence sharing in the fight against terrorist groups.⁸

As a matter of fact, China's military relations with Africa including Ghana can be traced back to the early 1950s. During that period, China offered massive support to the revolutionary and independence movements in Africa. The Asian-African Conference at Bandung, Indonesia was central to the development of the Sino-African relationship.⁹ The conference was dominated by issues of colonialism, imperialism and the hegemonic position of the Western powers. China subsequently intensified its military assistance, including the training of liberation groups fighting for freedom and independence. In return, many African countries supported China's efforts to become a member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and endorsed the "One China" policy. Ghana's first President Kwame Nkrumah and his Chinese counterpart championed African unity and the anti-colonial struggle in Africa. During the former's visit to China in 1961, President Nkrumah and Premier Zhou Enlai signed the *Ghana-China Treaty of Friendship*¹⁰ and also issued a joint communiqué on August 18, 1961, which affirmed their opposition to imperialism and pledged their full support for the anti-colonial struggle in Africa. In 1964, Ghana signed an

⁷Interview with diplomats of the Chinese Embassy, Accra, July 22, 2016.

⁸*Ibid.*

⁹Bruce D. Larkin, *China and Africa 1949–1970: The Foreign Policy of the People's Republic of China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), p. 90.

¹⁰"Treaty of Friendship," *Peking Review* August 25, 1961, p. 7.

agreement with China "for the provision of military equipment and advisers for Ghana's 'freedom fighters.'" ¹¹ Ghana thus became a base for Chinese military instructors to train guerrilla fighters. ¹²

China and many African countries have developed robust military relations for decades.

In the post-Cold War era, China's military engagement in Africa has gained prominence, following a radical change in Beijing's foreign and security policy directions. The new policy direction was influenced by both domestic and global factors. In particular, the reform and opening-up initiated by Mr. Deng Xiaoping in the late 1970s had a profound impact on Chinese foreign

and security policy, including the active involvement of Chinese troops and personnel in international peacekeeping operations. ¹³ In a White Paper entitled *China's National Defense in 2006*, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) was charged with the responsibility of "implementing the military strategy of active defense." The PLA's major functions and responsibilities are to take the initiative to prevent and defuse crises and deter conflicts and wars, take part in international security cooperation, strengthen strategic coordination and consultation with major powers and neighboring countries, and conduct bilateral or multilateral joint military exercises and play an active part in maintaining global and regional peace and stability. ¹⁴ The policy provides justification for China to use its military force outside the country's borders, including sending troops to UN peacekeeping operations in Africa. The defense policy was further bolstered when China and Africa enhanced the working level of the FOCAC. In the historic Johannesburg Summit of FOCAC in December 2015, the China-Africa strategic partnership

¹¹Donovan Chau, *Exploiting Africa: The Influence of Maoist China in Algeria, Ghana, and Tanzania* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2014).

¹²Freedom fighters from other African colonies also received training in China.

¹³Gill Bates and Huang Chin-hao "China's Expanding Role in Peacekeeping Prospects and Policy Implications," SIPRI Policy Paper (Stockholm: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, November 2009), <https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/files/PP/SIPRI25.pdf>.

¹⁴Chuka, "China's Military Presence in Africa: Implications for Continental Instability."

was upgraded to a comprehensive strategic and cooperative partnership,¹⁵ underpinned by “Ten Key Cooperation Plans” for implementation in the following three years, of which security was one of the key goals.¹⁶

Ghana has substantial amounts of natural resources such as gold, diamond, bauxite and oil, but lacks technologies and capital to exploit these resources. In contrast, China is short of these resources which it badly needs for expanding industries, and it boasts the technologies, capital, and know-how to help Ghana harness these resources. Given that peace and stability are of paramount interests to both China and Ghana, China has attached serious importance to matters of peace and security in Ghana in recent years. Toward this end, China has made substantial investment in Ghana through the provision of equipment, offices and accommodation facilities to security agencies, increasingly engaging in joint counter-piracy operations and intelligence sharing with Ghana.

Back in April 2007, Jia Qinglin, then Chairman of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), visited Ghana and signed agreements that included a \$30 million concessional loan for the Dedicated Communications Project for the security agencies. China has also given technical assistance to Ghana under various bilateral agreements to augment the equipment of the Ghana Armed Forces (GAF). China’s growing military and security cooperation with Ghana included the construction of an office complex for the Ministry of Defense with a \$7.5 million Chinese grant.¹⁷ In addition, China sold military equipment to Ghana to boost the country’s security and peacekeeping capabilities. For example, in September 2008, the President of Ghana signed \$160 million agreements with the Chinese government to equip the GAF and enhance Ghana’s peacekeeping capabilities. China’s investment in residential accommodation is in line with the Ghanaian government’s efforts to equip, modernize, and uplift professional capabilities, as well as to improve the welfare and living conditions of the Armed Forces for more efficient service in safeguarding and upholding the

¹⁵Embassy of the People’s Republic of China, “The Reference Material Compilation on the Johannesburg Summit of FOCAC,” December 2015.

¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷Issac Idun-Arkhurst, “Ghana’s Relations with China,” SAIIA Report (Johannesburg: South African Institute of International Affairs, 2008), <http://www.saiia.org.za/research-reports/268-china-africa-policy-report-no-3-2008/file>.

sovereignty of Ghana. Early in March 2004, Wei Jianguo, then Chinese Vice-Minister of Commerce visited Ghana and commissioned new Chinese-built military police barracks at Burma Camp in Accra.¹⁸ The barracks, christened as "China Town," consist of modern accommodation units, built from a Chinese loan facility of \$3.8 million.¹⁹ In addition, China has offered its support in terms of grants and loans to the GAF for some of its major projects and hardware acquisition. For example, in March 2004, China offered military assistance grants of 10 million RMB to the GAF to help with the service's mobility problems. The grant was for the purchase of vehicles to beef up the GAF's transportation needs as well as peacekeeping operations.²⁰

China and Ghana have also been collaborating on maritime security. The former provided military equipment to Ghana to enhance maritime security, while Ghana's Navy has offered strong support to China against piracy in the Gulf of Guinea.²¹ Discussions are ongoing between China and Ghana for training and support for Ghana's newly created Anti-Terrorism Task Force/Unit,²² to combat the rising security challenges in the country and the sub-region. The Chinese government and Poly Technologies Incorporated (PTI) have also been supporting the GAF.²³ Currently, PTI has an office in Accra.²⁴ In October 2011, Ghana purchased two 46-meter patrol vessels from China's PTI as part of a larger drive to modernize its navy.²⁵ The vessels were expected to be used to combat piracy and increase maritime security off Ghana's coast to defend the country's exclusive economic zone. In September 2008, Ghana signed a \$39.86 million contract with PTI for two vessels. The boats, named *Chemle* and *Ehoo*, were launched in April

¹⁸"New Military/Police Barracks Commissioned," Ghana News Agency, March 11, 2004, <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/New-Military-Police-barracks-commissioned-53634>.

¹⁹*Ibid.*

²⁰*Ibid.*

²¹Interview with diplomats of the Chinese Embassy, Accra, July 29 2016.

²²*Ibid.*

²³*Ibid.*

²⁴*Ibid.*

²⁵"Ghana Orders Two Patrol Vessels from China," Ghana Web, October 13, 2011, <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Ghana-orders-two-patrol-vessels-from-China-221609>.

2011 and commissioned during a visit to Beijing by Ghana's then Defense Minister Lieutenant General Joseph Henry Smith.²⁶

In addition, following a request made by the Ghanaian Parliament to the Chinese government, China supported Ghana in beefing up the security of the Ghanaian Parliament by donating advanced security equipment valued at \$300,000 in April 2016. The donation in Accra by Yu Zhengsheng, Chairman of the CPPCC, included three sets of wall-held metal scanners, three sets of X-ray baggage scanners, hundreds of sets of hand-held metal scanners

China's military assistance has empowered Ghana's security forces in their domestic and maritime missions.

and three sets of human body metal detectors, which would enable the Ghanaian Parliament to strengthen security within its precincts.²⁷

Chinese Migrants and Gold Mining in Ghana

Though negligible two decades ago, China's trade with Africa has increased from about \$10 billion in 2000 to \$220 billion in 2014, reaching close to \$300 billion by 2015.²⁸ In Africa, Chinese businesses can be found in both formal and informal sectors. In the informal sector, there are more than 1 million Chinese migrant traders.²⁹ As Howard French observes, within a decade, over a million new Chinese migrants "have rapidly penetrated every conceivable walk of life: farmers, entrepreneurs building small and medium-sized factories, and practitioners of the full range of trades, doctors, teachers, smugglers, prostitutes."³⁰ French argues further that those new

²⁶*Ibid.*

²⁷"China Supports Ghana Parliament to Tighten Security," Ghana Business News, April 18, 2016, <https://www.ghanabusinessnews.com/2016/04/18/china-supports-ghana-parliament-to-tighten-security/>.

²⁸"China-Africa Trade Approaches \$300 Billion in 2015," *China Daily*, November 10, 2015, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/business/2015-11/10/content_22417707.htm.

²⁹Ethics Institute of South Africa, "Africans' Perceptions of Chinese Business in Africa: A Survey," August 2014, https://www.tei.org.za/phocadownloadpap/Research_Reports/AfricanPerceptionSurveyChineseBusinessWEBSITEVERSION.pdf.

³⁰Howard French, *Second Continent: How a Million Migrants are Building a New Empire in Africa* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2014), p. 5.

immigrants often serve as “a powerful link in a phenomenon of chain migration that draws relatives, acquaintances, girlfriends, and spouses in their wake.”³¹ According to French, it is the actions and conduct of these Chinese migrants — most of them anonymous — that will ultimately determine China’s image in the region and relationship with Africa, rather than the state-owned enterprises and big projects that dominate the headlines of China’s engagement in Africa.³² The new migrants, he notes, are the primary architects shaping this momentous new relationship, “helping [to] build networks that loop back home, channeling goods and products and capital via informal circuits that very often escape official control or even accounting.”³³

Since 2000 and in particular 2005, West Africa in general, and Ghana in particular, has become a major destination for a significant number of Chinese migrants in search of better opportunities and economic fortune. Chinese nationals have been involved in a wide range of legal and productive economic activities including investments in the fields of financing, interconnection, energy, infrastructure, public health systems, and industrialization, among others. China’s economic cooperation with the regional body, Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and developmental assistance and investments in the region have yielded substantial benefits to economic development and the transformative agenda being pursued by many countries in the region. Meanwhile, it is a truism that one of the major sub-sectors where Chinese migrants have set their sights is artisanal gold mining, i.e., *galamsey*. This is significant because historically, foreign participation in small-scale gold mining activities mainly involved immigrants from the neighboring West African countries such as Nigeria, Niger, Mali, Benin and Togo. Although Section 83 of the *Mining and Minerals Act* (2006) forbids non-Ghanaians from doing any form of small-scale mining in Ghana, Chinese actors, including individuals, groups and firms, have been in close collaboration with Ghanaians investing substantial funds into mining and introducing more sophisticated technologies. Furthermore, they have employed many Chinese migrant workers and Ghanaians.³⁴ The

³¹*Ibid.*, p. 6.

³²*Ibid.*, p. 5.

³³*Ibid.*

Chinese community working in mining areas is highly organized and hierarchical, with one kingpin allegedly employing over 300 Chinese migrant workers as well as a number of Ghanaians.³⁵

Although the exact number of Chinese migrants in Ghana and West Africa in general are unknown, it is estimated that several thousands of Chinese have left their villages in search for better opportunities in resource extraction and mining activities in Burkina Faso, Togo, Senegal, Nigeria, Guinea and Ghana. Ghana, the second largest gold producer in Africa after South Africa, has become a preferred destination for many of the Chinese migrants prospecting for gold since 2008. It is illustrated in a report in the 2013 *South China Morning Post* that nearly 50,000 illegal prospectors have left China for Ghana since 2005 to engage in mining activities.³⁶ The report states that "three years ago Chinese miners operated about ten small gold mines in Ghana, but that number has now grown to about 2,000."³⁷ In 2013, the Ghana Immigration Service deported more than 4,500 Chinese nationals who were involved in illegal mining activities. The death of a 16-year old Chinese boy in October 2012 during a police crackdown on illegal miners in the Ashanti region resulted in outrage and protests in China.³⁸ The Immigration Service indicates that most of the Chinese migrants in illegal mining use tourist visas to enter Ghana while others use unapproved routes as a result of the vast and porous borders in the region,³⁹ arousing serious concerns among security experts and policy-makers about the potential security ramifications for the region. Hundreds of Chinese illegal miners have been arrested and tried in court.⁴⁰ More arrests have been made since President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo launched a nationwide

³⁵*Ibid.*

³⁶"Low Costs and Huge Profits Irresistible Lure for Chinese to Mine Ghana's Gold," *South China Morning Post*, June 7, 2013, <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/1255126/low-costs-and-huge-profits-irresistible-lure-chinese-mine-ghanas-gold>.

³⁷*Ibid.*

³⁸Nick Chiles, "Ghana Police Detain Illegal Chinese Mine Workers, Killing 16-Year-Old Boy," *Atlanta Black Star*, October 15, 2012, <http://atlantablackstar.com/2012/10/15/ghana-police-detain-chinese-mine-workers-killing-16-year-old-boy/>.

³⁹"Low Costs and Huge Profits Irresistible Lure for Chinese to Mine Ghana's Gold."

⁴⁰Irena Ansah Pobee and Mary Gyekyawaa Gyekye, "7 Chinese, 3 Ghanaians Arrested for Illegal Mining," *Graphic Online*, April 5, 2017, <https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/7-chinese-3-ghanaians-arrested-for-illegal-mining.html>.

campaign to stop illegal mining in January 2017.⁴¹ Within Chinese migrant communities in both rural and urban mining areas, advertisements and slogans in Mandarin are quite common while Chinese soap operas have become very popular in Chinese restaurants.⁴²

More fascinating is the fact that most of the migrants come from particular counties in China, one of which is known as Shanglin County in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. This county has a history of gold mining but that is currently not viable. Some of the migrants have found wealth in Ghana. As stated by a Chinese migrant in the *South China Morning Post*, "After working at a gold mine for a year, many of these Chinese workers go back to Shanglin and recruit their own teams." To be able to set up their business in Ghana, "they borrow money from banks and apply for a three-month travel visa. Then they return to Ghana and set up a new mining operation." The small-scale mining sector has been the preferred destination especially for thousands from Shanglin county for a number of reasons. As an informal sector, entrance into the sector requires relatively small amounts of investment to start a mining business with a huge po-

tential to reap massive profits within a short period. In practice, artisanal and small-scale gold mining operations require the use of "labor-intensive, low-tech mineral exploration and processing."⁴³

The *South China Morning Post* reveals how Raymond Xie, an English teacher at a university in Guangxi quit his job in 2012 to join the illegal gold mining business in Ghana. Xie and his partners spent about 3

million RMB (HK\$3.76 million) to set up a small mine in Obuasi in the Ashanti region, and within a short period made a fortune. Xie's mine produces about 150 grams of gold a day; after deducting costs, the profit is

Thousands of Chinese migrants are reported to be involved in illegal gold mining in Ghana.

⁴¹"10 Chinese Illegal Miners Arrested in Tarkwa," Citifmonline.com, July 19, 2017, <http://citifmonline.com/2017/07/19/10-chinese-illegal-miners-arrested-in-tarkwa/>.

⁴²Edward and Bird, "Gold, Guns and China: Ghana's Fight to End Galamsey."

⁴³Gavin Hilson, "Artisanal Mining, Smallholder Farming and Livelihoods Diversification in Rural Sub-Saharan Africa: An Introduction," *International Development*, Vol. 23, No. 8 (November 2011), pp. 1031–1041.

about \$2,900. This profit is huge considering that most young men from his hometown in Shanglin County could only earn 1,000 RMB (roughly \$150) a month or less as farmers, but they could make about ten times that much in Ghana. Xie's views were corroborated by interviews with some Chinese migrants at Dunkwa-Offinso in the Central region of Ghana, an area experiencing massive illegal gold mining activities. A Chinese mine worker revealed during the interview that "most of the Chinese migrants are mine workers but left China to explore for better economic opportunities in gold mining because the mines in their hometown had been depleted and were no longer viable."⁴⁴ Through regular communication with other Chinese mine workers in Ghana, they heard of the opportunities in gold mining in Ghana and were subsequently recruited by their relatives or friends to Ghana. Fieldwork for this article revealed that there were different categories of Chinese workers in the artisanal and small-scale mining sector. Some were regularly in sight and actively involved in mining, while others served as supervisors and gave directives to the Ghanaian workers, or sold equipment and performed services on broken-down equipment. Their clients are both Ghanaians and non-Ghanaians who used Chinese technology and equipment for mining. Yet a few others served as financiers or gold-brokers in underground businesses, having formed partnerships with local small-scale miners.

Implications for Peace and Security in West Africa

As a conspicuous issue, illegal mining or *galamsey* is of great relevance to peace and security in West Africa and also to China-Africa relations. First of all, irresponsible *galamsey* activities orchestrated by foreigners, particularly Chinese nationals in Ghana, and their Ghanaian collaborators, including powerful Ghanaian politicians, security personnel and traditional authorities, have aggravated insecurity in Ghana and beyond. Part of Chinese investment in the mining sector is used to purchase not only the equipment but also weaponry and ammunition to protect themselves.⁴⁵ For example,

⁴⁴Interview with an anonymous Chinese miner, Dunkwa-Offinso, May 2015.

⁴⁵Kwadwo Kyeremeh, "Galamsey Menace: The Failure of Mining Governance System," Ghana Talks Business, March 23, 2017, <http://thebftonline.com/business/mining/23569/galamsey-menace-the-failure-of-mining-governance-system.html>.

the police in the Central region of Ghana have linked the increase in armed robberies in the region to the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. The weapons used in such robberies have been traced to guns originally brought in by the Chinese to protect themselves while mining in the bush and in their residences. The guns fell into the hands of criminals after they were abandoned by the Chinese during the clampdown on illegal miners by the national task force particularly in 2012 and 2013.⁴⁶

Illegal small-scale gold mining activities involves major risks. According to Xie,

We are frequently threatened and robbed by local gangs, and also need to bribe local officials and policemen in return for necessary cover. The Chinese embassy in Ghana only has ten Chinese employees and is of little help when we are robbed and even killed. In order to protect ourselves, we buy shotguns to deter the robbers, I have never shot anybody, even though my site has been robbed twice.

Xie explained that "Ghana is so lonely and dangerous for Chinese but also full of opportunities and hope for people like us, who are young, ambitious but have no connections."⁴⁷ Our Chinese informants in Dunkwa-Offinso highlighted some of the dangers they face in the mining sector including theft, armed robbery and extortion of money from people who often pose as security agents. As put by Hui, "we have become target[s] because people know that we keep the money and gold on us for some time."⁴⁸ While acknowledging that they own guns, they claimed that they only use guns to ward off possible attacks by armed robbers. Despite the risks, our informants said their adventures in Dunkwa-Offinso have been very productive and rewarding.

Although Ghana has been described as an "oasis of peace and stability in West Africa," the security situation is fragile and fluid. The proliferation

⁴⁶Gordon Crawford and Gabriel Botchwey, "Conflict, Collusion and Corruption in Small-Scale Gold Mining in Ghana: Chinese Miners and the State," *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, Vol. 55, No. 4 (2017), pp. 444–470.

⁴⁷"Low Costs and Huge Profits Irresistible Lure for Chinese to Mine Ghana's Gold."

⁴⁸Chinese miner, Dunkwa-Offinso, May 2015.

of small arms and light weapons especially in the hands of unauthorized people including Chinese migrants is disturbing. For example, in November 2016, the police in Kumasi, Ashanti region of Ghana arrested a 32-year-old Chinese housewife, Lucy Tang, for selling arms and ammunition without a license.⁴⁹ They found four pump action guns, one Sig Sauer rifle and 70 rounds of 380 auto ammunition in her vehicle and another two foreign-made pistols, 37 pieces of Point 22 ammunition, 20 pieces of Point 25 ammunition and 11 Chinese passports in her residence. She claimed the foreign pistols belonged to her brother Sun Yunchang.⁵⁰

There have also been a number of arms-related violent clashes between illegal Chinese gold miners and aggrieved host communities, as well as other small-scale mining companies, resulting in casualties on both sides. For example, many conflicts involving Chinese illegal mining broke out in the concessional area of Finger Mining Limited, a small-scale mining company in the Ashanti region with legal rights, contributing to tensions in the Abodom community and its environs. On February 5, 2013, Xia Guixiang, an illegal Chinese miner, and others were arrested by the police for shooting and wounding three Ghanaians with an AK47 assault rifle. Aggrieved youths of the Abodom community of Bekwai in the Ashanti region complained about the rate at which the Chinese had been mining illegally in the area. They marched to the residence of the chief of the community, and accused him of collecting money from the Chinese and allowing them to operate illegally. From there, they marched to ransack the Chinese camp, taking away gold ore, black gold and money.⁵¹

Illegal mining is regarded as a catalyst for weapon proliferation and increasing violent crime in Ghana.

⁴⁹Kwesi Debrah, "Police Arrest Chinese for Illegal Sale of Arms," *Ghana Luv News*, November 1, 2016, <http://www.myjoyonline.com/news/2016/November-1st/police-arrest-chinese-for-illegal-sale-of-arms.php>.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*

⁵¹"Chinese Illegal Miner Shoots Three 'Intruders' in Ghana," *Vibeghana*, February 11, 2013, <http://vibeghana.com/2013/02/11/chinese-illegal-miner-shoots-three-intruders-in-ghana/>.

Sources from the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Center in Accra estimated that in 2015, there were about 2.3 million guns in civilian hands.⁵² The fact that some Chinese migrants involved in illegal mining wield guns without authorization to protect themselves makes it even more difficult for the government to effectively deal with this issue. For many analysts, conflicts over the exploitation of the country's resources, especially gold, could worsen land-based tensions or result in new conflicts that will not bode well for the country and the region in general. Secondly, illegal mining has devastating consequences on the environment, including pollution of water bodies and destruction of farmlands. In Ghana, mining is mainly done through surface mining, and frequent dredging by the *galamsey* operators using harmful toxic mercury and cyanide have polluted major rivers such as the Ankrobra, Bonsa, Pra, Offin, Butre, and Birim, Bia, Tano, Nini, Anum, Ayensu, and Densu. It has been reported that "147 of the 160 rivers in Obuasi (in the Ashanti region) and 117 others running through Tarkwa are highly polluted due to the mining activities in these two largest mining areas."⁵³ The destruction of water bodies, resources and the ecological environment in Ghana has broader regional ramifications including insecurity in neighboring countries. For instance, a number of Ghana's rivers crisscross the boundary with Cote d'Ivoire, hence polluted rivers in Ghana flow across into Cote d'Ivoire, polluting their rivers and underground source of water and threatening livelihoods.⁵⁴ Ivorian President Alassane Ouattara has complained to Ghana's Minister of Environment, Science and Innovation, Frimpong Boateng, that Ivorian rivers and water bodies were being polluted as a result of the activities of illegal miners in the western region of Ghana. This was echoed by President Akufo-Addo when he stated that "rivers, waters, forests don't know national boundaries; they run across nations. The activities of Ghanaian illegal miners are

⁵²Alice Adu, "Small Arms & Light Weapons Ghana's Struggle with Illegal Guns," Pulse.com, July 14, 2016, <http://www.pulse.com.gh/communities/bloggers/small-arms-light-weapons-ghanas-struggle-with-illegal-guns-id5256209.html>.

⁵³"Ghana Takes Action Against Illegal Chinese Miners," Institute for Security Studies August 23, 2013, <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/ghana-takes-action-against-illegal-chinese-miners>.

⁵⁴"Galamsey Could Escalate Tensions with Cote d'Ivoire — Kwesi Aning," Citi News, April 5, 2017, <http://citifmonline.com/2017/04/05/galamsey-could-escalate-tensions-with-cote-divoire-kwesi-aning/>.

jeopardizing the space of our neighbors.” The president expressed his concerns that “rivers that have been with us for centuries are drying up...” and reiterated his commitment to end this debacle.⁵⁵

The claim by President Akufo-Addo has been corroborated by Kwesi Aning, a security analyst, when he noted that a number of rivers polluted by illegal miners run into Cote d’Ivoire and are threatening the livelihoods of its nationals. For example, Cote d’Ivoire’s semi-public water distribution company SODECI shut down a water treatment plant because of the levels of pollution in the Bia River, which enters Cote d’Ivoire from the western region of Ghana.⁵⁶ Experts have expressed worries that the fight against illegal mining is at a critical juncture, and likely to deepen the existing friction between Ghana and Cote d’Ivoire. According to Kwesi Aning,

it could be something considerably more serious. We already have a couple of contentious issues with Cote d’Ivoire. We have the maritime boundary issue that is unsettled. We have land boundary issues. We have cocoa, rice and sugar smuggling issues. We have some of their earlier rebels in town. So the *galamsey* issue coming on top of all these unsettled and all these unresolved challenges could be considerably more dramatic.⁵⁷

Thirdly, widespread *galamsey* by Chinese and their Ghanaian collaborators has also increased insecurity in mining areas. Accidents associated with illegal mining such as collapsed pits, poisoning with mercury, and drowning are frequent occurrences. According to the *Ghana Business News*, annual reported deaths from illegal mining activities range between 200 and 400 per year.⁵⁸ For example, in 2010, illegal mining in Dunkwa-on-Offin claimed several miners’ lives, and destructed water bodies, crops, and farmlands, which then affected food production in the local economy. In September 2017, authorities of the Central Regional Hospital disclosed that they found increasing cases of kidney infection from persons linked to illegal mining. Hospital authorities attributed the condition to poor

⁵⁵*Ibid.*

⁵⁶*Ibid.*

⁵⁷*Ibid.*

⁵⁸Kyeremeh, “Galamsey Menace: The Failure of Mining Governance System.”

handling, exposure and unregulated use of mercury by small and artisanal mining companies. According to Dr. Daniel Asare, they were rushed from Tarkwa and other mining towns to the Hospital for kidney dialysis. "It is pathetic. . . 65 of them are on dialysis."⁵⁹

Illegal mining also leads to environmental degradation and threatens human safety in Ghana and West Africa.

As the public was concerned that *galamsey* was getting worse, the *Minerals and Mining (Amendment) Law* to provide strict and heavy sanctions for offenders who engage in illegal mining was passed by Ghana's parliament in 2014. The new law criminalizes illegal small-scale mining or *galamsey*. It also criminalizes the engagement of foreigners in small-scale mining operations and makes it an offense for a Ghanaian to employ or engage a foreigner to participate in illegal small

scale-mining activities. The law empowers the court to order the confiscation of assets and equipment and forfeiture to the state of any mineral extracted as a result of the offense, as well as conviction of the accused person(s). Despite the law, well-known and leading *galamsey* kingpins continue to operate. Aisha Huang, a notorious Chinese woman popularly known as the "Queen Mother of *galamsey*" operated with impunity under the protection of politicians, chiefs and security agencies. Her involvement in illegal mining activities not only degraded the environment, but reportedly caused the death of six children at Gyaman after they fell into open pits filled with water.⁶⁰

Through her Ghanaian collaborators, Aisha sometimes set up her fellow illegal Chinese miners, getting them arrested and then taking over their mining equipment.⁶¹ Furthermore, she is believed to have compromised the integrity of national security agencies and operatives in undertaking *galamsey*, in addition to accusations of her blackmailing powerful

⁵⁹"Galamsey Linked to Kidney Failures; 65 Cases Reported in Tarkwa," Joyonline.com, August 14, 2017, <https://www.myjoyonline.com/news/2017/August-14th/galamsey-linked-to-kidney-failures-65-cases-reported-in-tarkwa.php>.

⁶⁰"Aisha Huang is an NDC Member — Her Former Aid Reveals," Ghanaweb, May 20, 2017, <http://ghananewsonline.com.gh/aisha-huang-ndc-member-former-aid-reveals/>.

⁶¹*Ibid.*

Ghanaians with sex tapes secretly recorded. She allegedly meddled in Ghanaian politics, financing then incumbent National Democratic Congress (NDC) during the buildup to the 2016 elections by giving out money and printing T-Shirts. She allegedly has many wild dogs in her house and guns, which she often fired into the air at night to scare away potential armed robbers. She is also surrounded by several Ghanaian muscularly-built young men who terrorized people that opposed her illegal businesses, especially *galamsey*. She has “a lot of pretty Chinese ladies around her, whom she usually supplied to some of the Ghanaian big men that were very close to her.”⁶² In addition to the court trials, the National Security operatives are probing into circumstances of Aisha’s activities and the involvement of some security personnel. Apparently, illegal mining activities in Ghana and other West African countries thrive because of corruption in the government, the weakness of legal frameworks, and the existence of informal channels and networks. Many people, both local and foreign nationals, have thus taken advantage of the institutional failure and corruption in national and local governments to extract natural resources including gold.

As noted above, in some of the regional countries, especially Nigeria and Ghana, Chinese migrants’ exploitation of natural resources is beginning to generate widespread anti-Chinese sentiments and violence against them. Findings from the Afrobarometer Round 6 survey conducted in 2014/2015 in 36 African countries illustrate such sentiments. Although the study revealed that about two-thirds (63%) of Africans rated China’s economic and political influence as “somewhat” or “very” positive compared to only 15 percent who describe it as somewhat or very negative, there are major differences in respondent assessments of China’s influence. While China scored a remarkably favorable assessment in Mali (92%), Niger (84%), and Liberia (81%), it obtained relatively low assessment in Ghana (34%) and Algeria (33%). A major factor causing this negative assessment of China in Africa is resource extraction. A reasonably large number of respondents in Ghana (43%), Madagascar (37%), Gabon (22%) and Sierra Leone (20%) mentioned the injurious nature of China’s involvement in the extraction of resources such as environment degradation and destruction of livelihoods. Other factors contributing to a negative image of China include poor

⁶²*Ibid.*

Illegal activities of Chinese migrants are the major cause of anti-Chinese sentiments in West Africa.

quality of Chinese products (35%), the theft of jobs or businesses from locals (14%), and land grabbing (7%).⁶³ These negative findings are further corroborated by the 2014 Ethics Institute's survey, which shows that 53.9 percent of respondents described environmental responsibility of Chinese companies in Africa as negative compared to only 11.1 percent as positive.⁶⁴

West Africa has vast territories and borders that are poorly policed. The influx of Chinese miners into Ghana through neighboring countries such as Burkina Faso

reflects the ineffective control of Africa's porous borders which, in turn, has aggravated illegal activities such as trafficking of arms, humans, and drugs. The resurgence and activities of terrorist groups in West Africa have been a major concern for regional leaders and security experts. Recent terrorist attacks in Cote d'Ivoire, Mali and Burkina Faso indicate the fluid nature of the security situation in the region.⁶⁵ There are growing concerns among scholars and policy-makers that while the region has its fair share of problems with insecurity and instability, these illegal activities will aggravate organized crime and negatively influence politics by eroding the limited gains made in democracy, and thus engender political instability. The region is currently faced with activities and attacks from terrorist groups such as Boko Haram, Al-Qaeda in the Maghreb (AQIM), and the Movement for the Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), all of which operate across borders with impunity, without respect for human rights and sovereignty of the states in the region. The Boko Haram insurgency has a spillover effect in neighboring countries including Niger, Chad and Cameroon.

⁶³Lekorwe, Chingwete, and Samson, 2016.

⁶⁴Ethics Institute of South Africa, "Africans' Perceptions of Chinese Business in Africa: A Survey."

⁶⁵Richard Asante, "The State and Knowledge of Democracy and Governance in West Africa: A Critical Analysis," in Munyaradzi Mawere and Tendai Rinos Mwanaka, eds., *Democracy, Good Governance and Development in Africa* (Bamenda: Langaa RPCIG, 2015), pp. 157–192.

Illegal activities including organized crime, human and drug trafficking could also aggravate the surge in piracy in the Gulf of Guinea which remains a major concern particularly to West and Central Africa. The worst affected countries include Nigeria, Togo, and Cote d'Ivoire. In 2013, 29 out of 47 cases of piracy took place off the coast of Nigeria alone. Six ships were hijacked but subsequently released; 62 attacks were recorded on ships in West and Central Africa in 2011, and 60 in 2012. Between 2002 and 2011, 610 attacks occurred in the region.⁶⁶ The UN Resolutions 2018 (in 2011) and 2039 (in 2012) hence encouraged States of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and the Gulf of Guinea Commission (GGC) to embark on countering piracy and armed robbery at sea in the Gulf of Guinea, by conducting bilateral or regional maritime patrols consistent with relevant international laws and to develop and implement national and regional maritime security strategies.⁶⁷

Conclusion

This article examines the interface between illegal small-scale gold mining activities and insecurity in Ghana and West Africa. It demonstrates that there is a strong link between illegal gold mining and insecurity. China's economic and security engagement has the potential to enhance national security of Ghana and beyond, but the gains in security cooperation can only be sustained through clean and environmentally friendly mining practices. When gold mining is carried out illegally, it will not only jeopardize the environment, but also lead to growing crime, violence and diplomatic tensions and mistrust. Illegal gold mining will undermine any investment that has been made to enhance national security.

Admittedly, China's security cooperation with Ghana has brought substantial investment in equipment, offices and accommodation facilities for security agencies, sharing intelligence and joint collaboration against piracy in Ghana and West Africa in general. This has resulted in

⁶⁶United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, "Minerals and Africa's Development," December 2011, https://au.int/web/sites/default/files/newsevents/workingdocuments/14499-wd-overview_of_the_isg_report.pdf.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*

improvement of Ghana's national security. Ghana has been hailed as an oasis of peace and stability within the West African region. However, the involvement of Chinese nationals in illegal gold mining activities is likely to undermine the prevailing peace and stability in Ghana and West Africa, as well as the cordial China-Ghana relationship. Ghana, like many other countries in West Africa, is endowed with enormous untapped natural resources, including gold. Ghana is Africa's second largest gold producer and tenth in the world. The high gold prices in the international market since 2008⁶⁸ has contributed to the massive influx of migrants such as Chinese, Russians, and Nigerians. Most of the foreigners, however, are from China, in particular Shanglin County, popularly grouped the "Shanglin Gang." These Chinese migrants have set their sights on the Ghanaian *galamsey* sector, legally reserved for only Ghanaians.

In Ghana, the growing involvement of Chinese migrants in illegal gold mining has generated widespread anti-Chinese sentiments and clashes with local communities accusing the Chinese of looting natural resources, destroying the environment, competing with local Ghanaian small-scale miners, and failing to comply with local law. There have also been sporadic clashes between Chinese miners and security forces. The security concerns are driven by the fact that the Chinese miners enter Ghana through unapproved routes in neighboring countries such as Burkina Faso, Togo, and Cote d'Ivoire. This reinforces the dangers of the region's porous borders. The situation is likely to encourage organized crime and facilitate drug trafficking, among others.

In summary, the security threats emanating from illegal mining are two-pronged. For one, widespread anti-Chinese sentiments could undercut the positive relationship forged by China's legal business investment and the Chinese government's commitment to building the capacity of national security agencies, intelligence sharing, and joint participation in the fight against piracy and terrorism. For another, illegal gold mining could exacerbate social and political tensions, undermine democracy and governance, and facilitate organized crime and its attendant problems such as arms, human, and drug trafficking in Ghana and West Africa region. This concern is borne out of the fact that in the 1990s the region experienced a succession

⁶⁸Crawford and Botchwey, "Conflict, Collusion and Corruption in Small-Scale Gold Mining in Ghana: Chinese Miners and the State."

of violent conflicts and civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone that were linked to natural resources with serious repercussions for the entire region. Illegal mining is not just about security, but also has other important dimensions such as globalization and migration. Looking ahead, future research should pay particular attention to the migration and globalization dimensions of this problem.