



## **China's Post-Cold War Foreign Policy towards Africa: A Diplomatic Clash**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper historically examines China's foreign policy towards Africa in the aftermath of the cold war and the threats it poses to other global players. The paper adopted qualitative methods and utilized both primary and secondary data which includes; textbooks, journals, newspapers, online news and interview respectively. The primary data used in this research is personal observation. The main finding of this paper was that China's foreign policy after the cold war was African market-friendly which is geared towards actualizing Chinese economic interest in resource-rich Africa. This however did not go well with other global players like the United States which also targets Africa as their potential market. It shows that Chinese successful economic diplomacy in Africa is detrimental to the United States' economic interest in the continent. It is thus the recommendations of this paper that African countries must strike a balance between these diplomatic clashes to give a wider room for choices to accelerate the continent's economic development.*

**Keywords:** Economic Diplomacy, Development, China, USA

### **1. Introduction**

Quest for security and national economic development remains the core foreign policy objective of any sovereign state. As such, nations often developed strategies for achieving these vital national interests. One of such strategies is interaction with the external environment. In fact, Nations for ages have been pursuing this vital national interest, on the one hand, some states expand their territorial power in form of imperialism and later colonialism in search of economic survival. On the other hand, the colonized states struggled for liberation from the shackle of colonialism to achieve independence and economic freedom. In the post-independence era, the imperialist tendencies resurface in the form of neocolonialism. This dual global phenomenon is historically linked to the Bandung conference of 1955, a conference of Asia/African continent designed to tame the tentacle of colonialism and neocolonialism in both continents. Unfortunately, years after independence, the influence of these erstwhile or former colonial masters still have an impact on the former colonies.

For instance, Khudori explicates the nexus between Africa and Asia and other parts of the World especially the global powers that colonized the two continents (Khudori, 2013). He argue further that; Africa-Asia, because in the continuous process of globalization following the expansion of capitalism, colonialism and imperialism started from Europe, Africa and Asia have something that they share mutually but not with other regions. They have been subjugated to the Western hegemony in the modern era, but survived its adverse



effects; Africa and Asia are the regions not yet uprooted by Western Civilization (Khudori, 2013). This position by Khudori is a clear testimony that African and Asian Nations have been granted political independence without corresponding economic emancipation as the continent's economic fortunes are to a greater extent a structural dependence on the west. It is against this background that China emerged with an aggressive economic roadmap and presented herself to the African States as an alternative economic crusader against continued economic exploitation or neo-colonialism without the continent's significant economic development. Thus, China's foreign policy toward Africa was channeled to improve the continental infrastructural decay which has been neglected by post-colonial political order, access to the international market and exchange of ideas and technology. This giant stride by China is largely responsible for its global economic expansionism and wide presence in Africa. In tracing the economic progress of China and predicting its expansionism, OECD in 2005 opined that China's economic transformation and its integration into the world trading system has been one of the most remarkable economic events in recent decades. It argues further that its economy has grown by almost 10% per annum over the past decade and is predicted to become the world's fourth economy in the next five years (OECD, 2005).

Widening economic and political interests of China, especially in a resource-rich but poorly developed African continent appeared to be a threat to other western powers especially America who often accused China of Re-colonizing the African continent. This diplomatic clash is enormously linked to the struggle by both players for economic opportunities and survival which is believed to be guaranteed in the African continent. It is on this note that Lloyd argues that China's government and commercial actors see in Africa a source for natural resource imports, a growing and relatively underutilized market for exports and investment, and an opportunity for Chinese firms to gain experience and increase domestic employment. In China's case, the pressure for economic growth is highlighted by the perceived links between economic performance, social stability, and continued CCP (Lloyd, 2015).

These collective gifts for the African continent which was the reason d'être for colonialism and politics of irredentism in the past continue to shape western economic strategy towards their economic development. This paper is thus designed to explicate the circumstances surrounding the Chinese economic and political dominance in Africa and the challenges it poses to America's strategic interest in the continent

## **2. Literature Review**

### *China's Post-Cold War Foreign Policy Thrust towards Africa: Historical Perspective*

Though China's relationship with Africa predates the cold war era, the country had in the past defined its foreign policy thrust to target Africa in its quest for domestic economic development. Establishing this fact, Shambaugh (2013), averred that after the establishment of the People Republic of China (PRC), the country has been developing



relations with almost all major African states. The diplomatic relations expanded via trade and cooperation agreements. China had been the largest foreign aid supplier to the African states than other Western states. “In terms of the distribution of China’s foreign aid, China’s white paper indicates that the lion’s share goes to Africa (45.7 percent), followed by Asia (32.8 percent), Latin America (12.7 percent), Oceania (4 percent) and others (4.5 percent)” (Shambaugh, 2013, p. 204). The gap of aid given to Africa by China and that of fellow Asian States is a justification that Africa has been the strategic interest of China.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of the US as superpower, there was renewed global order that shaped the thinking of most sovereign states towards achieving their national security and national economic interest. China thus intensified its relations with African states to pursue vital interests (natural resources) capable of transforming China’s economic wherewithal necessary for human development. Historicizing this phenomenon, Yun (2013) infers that;

*When People’s Republic of China (PRC) President Jiang Zemin visited Kenya, Ethiopia, Egypt, Mali, Namibia, and Zimbabwe in May 1996 as country’s government-controlled Media strongly emphasize Africa importance to Beijing foreign policy objectives. In sharp contrast to the west in general and United States in particular which continue to marginalize Africa, china emphasized establishing stronger ties around that continent.*

The Post-cold war era is the period of massive redefinition of China’s foreign policy to further achieve its national interest. This is perhaps a counter-strategy to fashion its economic dominancy over pre-cold war superpowers. Corroborating this, Yun further argues that the PRC had perceived itself as both a third force and alternative to the US and Soviet Union during the height of the Cold War when Africa was a battleground for the superpowers war rivalry. However, Beijing’s influence on the continents was constrained not only by Moscow and Washington but also by China’s internal weakness. Furthermore, China’s policy was shaped significantly by its relationship with the superpowers. The end of the Cold War, the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the retreat of the US and Russia from Africa have created greater opportunities for China to exert its influence to achieve its foreign policy goals (Yun, 2013).

Fundamentally, the trades between China and Africa after the cold war continue to flourish with a series of meetings and institutional framework or cooperation to intensify the relationship. One of these arrangements in recent times is Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). For instance, Obi (2010) argued that the growing profile of China in Africa reached a significant milestone on 4/5 November 2006, marked by the holding of the third ministerial meeting and first heads of state summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC)”(Obi, 2010, p. 186).



*China's Growing Economic Interest in Africa: Threat to the United States*

The United States has often portrayed itself as the most powerful global player, especially after the cold war. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of the Uni-Polar World has maintained the US global hegemony. The period has witnessed a massive spread of democracy with economic liberalization. Africa as former colonies with low capital and technological penury is the most targeted of the United State's new wave of democratization with an open market economy capable of promoting the United State's economic interest. However, the aggressive turnout of China to sustain its growing population and massive industries remained hostile to US interest as China's diplomacy of mutual economic benefit, as opposed to US economic exploitation, necessitated stronger Africa-China economic relations.

China's growing economic presence in Africa is hardly altruistic and is guided by the principle of "mutual benefit" to both sides. Under the framework of *resources for Development*, Beijing mobilizes its vast state financial resources to invest broadly in infrastructure projects across Africa and extract resources in return. Moreover, these investments generate multiple layers of benefits for China, including contracts for Chinese service companies, the relocation of labour-intensive, heavy-pollution industries from China, political favours extracted from African governments on foreign policy issues at multilateral forums such as the United Nations, and a positive international image of China being a *responsible stakeholder*. These motivations are particularly true in explaining China's interest in resource-poor African countries.

Chinese firms have been most active in building ports, roads and railways that will underpin integration and trade between African nations — an intention most recently exemplified across the continent in the landmark African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA). The AfCFTA recently launched its operational phase, and eventually intends to bring together all 55 African Union member states into the world's largest free trade area, spanning 1.2 billion people (Elliot, 2019). While no state is in a position to monopolize Africa's trade, China has risen to be the single largest state for both imports to and exports from African states (though it is second to the aggregated European Union in both). China had risen as a market for African exports from around 1 percent in 1995 to more than 15 percent in 2012. The United States is the third-most prevalent destination, with around 8 percent for exports to Africa, China's share has increased ninefold since 2000 (including a 21 percent rise in 2012), giving it a share of nearly 15 percent (Shinn and Brown, 2012). But the combined total value of African trade with the U.S. in 2017 was just \$39 billion, making it Africa's third-largest trading partner behind China and the European Union, according to figures compiled by the U.S. agency USAID (Elliot, 2019).

China's investment in Africa occurs in the broader context of Beijing's "Go Global" commercial strategy, intended to increase outgoing Chinese investment and commercial presence (Lloyd, 2015). China is an increasingly important player in the politics, economic



development and security of Africa. Historically, China has prioritized strong diplomatic relations and political ties with African states with an ideological aspiration anchored on the “solidarity among the Third World Countries.” However, since 2001, China’s pursuit in the continent has rapidly expanded into the economic arena, focusing on Africa’s rich natural resources to fuel China’s domestic growth (Lloyd, 2015).

In the past several years, China has become exceptionally active in Africa, with a stream of high-level visits, large commitments of loan capital, extensive investment, and general currying of African favour. Reactions in the U.S. have varied. Some see China as a strategic threat, seeking to “lock-up” access to vital natural resources such as oil, minerals and timber, and to undermine traditional Western influence. Others reject the idea of a strategic threat but acknowledge China as a formidable competitor for both political influence and commercial advantage. At the other end of the spectrum, the Bush Administration considered China’s activity in Africa as largely benign, providing a mixture of benefits and costs for Africa; the one most troubling issue was China’s support of rogue regimes in Sudan and Zimbabwe. What is perhaps most striking is that while China has a fairly clear and comprehensive strategy for Africa, with significant implications for U.S. interests, the U.S. does not have a similarly comprehensive response (Joshua, 2005).

The explosive growth in Sino-African relations over the past decade has heightened U.S. trepidation over China’s role in Africa. Across economic, political, and security domains, the growth of China’s presence has been swift and staggering. For example, Sino-African trade increased almost twentyfold since 2000, supplanting the United States as the continent’s largest trading partner (Lloyd, 2015).

#### *Theoretical Explanation*

The theory is general principle that scholars used after evidence base research to explain a particular phenomenon. Theory, therefore, is a guiding tool of analysis. This work is anchored in the Hegemonic Stability Theory (HST) to explain the aggressive foreign policy of China towards Africa and perceived hostilities the policy posed to the United States in the pursuit of her economic interest in Africa. The greatest apologist of this theory is Kindleberger (1973). Other prominent scholars that contributed to the development of this theory are Gilpin (1981), Joanne (1989), Keohane (1984), Krasner (1989) and Modelski (1978). In his work titled *The World in Depression: 1929-1939*, written in 1973, Kindleberger argued that the economic chaos between World War I and World War II that led to the Great Depression was partly attributable to the lack of a world leader with a dominant economy. Kindleberger's reasoning touched upon more than economics, however: the central idea behind HST is that the stability of the global system, in terms of politics, international law, and so on, relies on the hegemon to develop and enforce the rules of the system (Michael & Stephen, 1989).

HST indicates that the international system is more likely to remain stable when a single nation-state is the dominant world power, or hegemon (Barry, 1996). According to Robert



Keohane, to be considered hegemonic in the world political economy...a country must have access to crucial raw materials, control major sources of capital, maintain a large market for imports, and hold comparative advantages in goods with high value-added, yielding relatively high wages and profits. It must be stronger on these dimensions taken as a whole than any other country (Keohane, 1984). Keohane further emphasizes the economic factors most. His criterion of hegemonic power only emphasizes factors that are related to economy and trade. In his own perspective of hegemonic theory, Suzan Strange suggests four elements of structural power that can be called hegemony's global position;

The ability to threaten or protect other countries' physical security by resorting to arms (security element); the ability to control the global system of production of goods and services (production element); the ability to shape the international capital market of finance and credit (financial element); and the ability to direct the development, accumulation and transfer of knowledge (knowledge element). (Susan, 1987).

Relating this theory to this study, it is obvious that the United States has been the global political and economic hegemon since 1945 after the Second World War (WWII) and their hegemonic status became more pronounced in the 1990s after Cold War when USSR was defeated. As the former Soviet Union's efforts to displace the United States was faced with a lot of cold hostilities, there were renewed efforts by China to challenge the United States' global political and economic hegemony. The aggressive Chinese economic policy towards Africa is a clear manifestation of Chinese interest to displace the United States as the major player in the continent.

Judging from Suzan's thesis on hegemonic theory, China has created a huge economic den in Africa by providing loan facilities to African countries, enriching the continent's security architecture, being involved in serious production in both industrial and social services and most importantly transfer of technology and knowledge to the continent. China's government and commercial actors have three primary economic interests in Africa: a source for natural resource imports, a growing and relatively underutilized market for exports and investment, and an opportunity for Chinese firms to increase employment and gain global experience (Lloyd, 2015).

More so, the arguments by Keohane that for a country or global player to be a hegemon, economic control is the most sacrosanct. This has justified Chinese behaviour towards Africa and the possible displacement of the United States in African economic spheres.

### **3. China's Diplomatic Clash with the US: Policy Implication for Africa**

What is perhaps most striking is that while China has a fairly clear and comprehensive strategy for Africa, with significant implications for U.S. interests, the U.S. does not have a similarly comprehensive response (Princeton, 2000). Tensions surrounding commercial competition in Africa can be heightened by U.S. perceptions of alleged Chinese cheating in economic interactions. In evaluating Chinese economic activity, it should be remembered that both states use policy banks to assist exporting businesses, China does not have a



private-sector alternative to heavy state involvement, and the difference between the United States and China in politicizing economic ties is a matter of degree rather than a pure dichotomy (Lloyd, 2013).

In historic terms, Chinese strategic interest in Africa has been albatross for the United States. For instance, China's support for Robert Mugabe's ZANU liberation army in Zimbabwe's fight for independence, in the 1970s, in contrast to the Soviet Union's support for ZANU's rival, ZAPU, helps explain the close ties that continue today between Mugabe's regime and China. But that history only partly explains China's current ties. Today China's involvement in Africa has taken on a new character, marked by China's emergence as a relatively wealthy partner, and China's current need for significant raw materials to support its rapid growth. To put it bluntly, China now arrives on the scene with lots of money and a clear strategy that incorporates both political and economic objectives (Princeton, 2000).

African continent, therefore, is at receiving hand with the hegemonic powers' economic clash and dominant system. African economy may likely experience stagnation and double subjugation in the midst of double economic interest. For instance, countries like Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Nigeria etc are the major economic Interest of China in the midst of the United States' domineering policies in these countries. The resistance by any African government to these conflicting and striking players in the pursuit of their economic interest might create hostile economic zones for the continent.

#### **4. Conclusion and Recommendations**

This work interrogates the aggressive stance of Chinese foreign policy towards Africa which remained hostile to America's economic interest in the continent. It is the conclusion of the work that continue economic blueprints by the two economic giants in Africa is a signal to perpetual impoverishment of the African economy amid conflicts between China and the United States.

Generally, the nation-states display their economic and political adequacy to promote their national economic interest. Chinese strategic position in Africa in the pursuit of her economic interest remained robust and posed a gigantic challenge to the United States thereby constituting a potential economic threat to Africa. It is on this note that this work recommends the followings; Africa countries must strike a balance between the two conflicting global economic players and set their own economic blueprints to suits either player in her developmental stride. Countries of Africa must look inward in their domestic economic interest and not necessarily relied on both players in all their economic spheres. Massive industrialization of the African economy is strongly recommended as both players see Africa as a potential market where they exposed their industrial goods. Private investment must be encouraged in Africa, this will give room for wider competition among investors. The competitiveness of the investors shall give Africa a wise choice of partner among the global economic players. Lastly, which is more germane, indigenous investors





must be encouraged by creating an enabling environment for domestic investors. The more domestic investors are encouraged to produce, the more the continent strike a balance between these players in a competitive manner.

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