

US-CHINA COMPETITION FOR AFRICAN RESOURCES: LOOMING PROXY WARS AMID POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVES

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Indeed, a depiction of angst is not only inutile indulgence, but ignores the historical role of the populace. Here, once again, we reiterate our sincere belief in the strength of an amalgamation of popular and intellectual forces in the [continent], as unity of action and purpose is sorely needed at this juncture of [African] history. – Ali Jimale Ahmed (1989)

ABSTRACT

Although the US and its Western allies had long relationship with Africa in various categories of aid and development, China's recent entry into the *Dark Continent* caused huge displeasure to the traditional donors. The Asian giant's economic investment in Africa was so huge that it engaged scholars to analyze the trend from various perspectives including politics, economics, commerce, governance, human rights as well as security. The move also became an awakening or a reawakening for the US and its think tank in that, with the magnitude of rich resources under its soil, Africa is to be redefined in a more appealing fashion very unlike the *Dark Continent* the West had misinterpreted it for calculated hidden interests. It is based on this background that this study problematises the nature of the competition between the two giants and the implications it may hold for Africa.

Keywords: African resources, aid, development, FDI, security, US-China competition.

INTRODUCTION

The recently invigorated Sino-African relationship has provoked a considerable wave of criticism, from Western think tank and diplomats to African elites, global leaders, academics as well as ordinary citizens. The split of opinion has taken two distinct schools: "Dragon-slayers" and "Panda-huggers" (Sun, 2013:6); in other words, a section that considers China as an important and necessary competitor and an opposing group that categorizes the Asian country as a non-traditional raider of African resources not very different from the traditional raiders, i.e. the West. The first group premises its argument on account of the variety of crucially needed development projects China has embarked on implementing. The latter camp hinges its case to the reality that China's lenient conditions in its aid to African countries in exchange of access to African resources will cause more damage to the continent than the average eye may see.

However, it is true that after ignoring the significance of Arica's underneath resources estimated at about 90% of the world's metals in the platinum group, 50% of cobalt deposits and 50% of chromium resources the world over, the US and its Western allies now seem to

have been caught off guard. The Asian giant's new initiatives and 'generosity' to Africa is verification that, after all, what the West described as the 'Dark Continent' was not so dark a continent! Whatever the Western disdain, we witness the emergence of another thesis that applauds Beijing's FDI as 'no strings attached' and sometimes 'without strings attached.' In any case, in order for scholarship to deal with the obfuscation related to the scenario, we would accommodate the perspective of Admore Kambudzi (quoted in ISS Report, 2012) delineating the conundrum as a dynamic turnaround in Africa's strategy as emerged by the necessity for diversification of its economic as well as trade relationships to the realm of non-traditional partners.

Thus, we would still deem some benefit of doubt (at least at this stage) to the notion of whether "China has embarked on an offensive to dethrone the USA," Makwerere and Chipaike (2012:312) – a loaded tone that informs the impression that China had crafted a premeditated plot to spoil for America. In juxtaposition, one may approach the problematic by contextualizing other variables and vagaries coined to the complex interplay between political economy, industrialization, socio-cultural change, globalization – trends that impact on socio-economic evolutions as well as other pressures that agitate and shape both the rise and decline of social needs as influenced by consumer demands. Yet, one might still argue the competition between China and the US/West from the perspective of a new Cold War, as others described it. As a result, a series of indicators were raised, including Western neglect of a systematic blueprint towards its African policy (Burgess, 2010), as well as China's search for opportunities to win supplies for its expanding industrial sector.

METHOD OF STUDY

By surveying through a variety of sources, this essay will discuss about the heated debate over the competition for African resources, particularly the competition between China and the USA, and the possible implications this may have to Africa. Accordingly, the study is set in five sections. The first part will provide an account of the early contact between Africa and China. The second portion will look into the competing views of the proponents of the two distinct camps. The third segment will engage in a discussion on the security implications related to the competition while the fourth tasks itself on the alternative as the way forward. The final portion will close the discussion with concluding remarks.

A SNAPSHOT TO EARLY CHINA-AFRICA CONTACT

Although Dr. Alfred Omenya (quoted in ISS Report, 2012) places Sino-Africa cooperation as commencing during Africa's struggle for liberation, the historical relationship between China and Africa traces its roots farther into the old past. A document in the archives of the Forum for China-Africa Cooperation (2012) reads that Africa experienced its contact with China as early as the 2nd century BC, a relationship traceable to the period of "China's Han Dynasty." And as Allen (1993:115) writes:

The *Sung Shih* or Annals of the Sung dynasty of China, compiled in c. 1345 but referring to the period 960-1279, describe the visit to China in 1071, and again in 1081-3, of an embassy from 'Zenjistan', whose ruler was described as the *Amir-i-Amiran* or 'Amir of Amirs'. Zenjistan is the Persian form of the Arabic *Zenjibar* for the East African coast...

Allen (1993) uses vast Chinese references as reliable sources that paid visits to places in East Africa in which they describe the inhabitants and aspects of their culture. Later, Chinese explorer Zheng He's visit to East Africa, particularly parts of what was known as the Benadir coast extending from Mogadishu, Merca, Barawa and Kismayo in modern Somalia to the Kenyan towns of Lamu, Pate Island, Malindi and Mombasa has been entered into Africa-China historical literature (Hadingham, 2001). Recently, astonishing revelations of descendents of shipwrecked Chinese sailors on coastal Kenya have captured a lot of attention. According to China state media, "the DNA tests have proven Chinese ancestry for some of the residents of Pate Island, but results have not been released," (Conway-Smith, 2011). Comparatively, Umar Weswala (2012) comments on the West's contact with Africa as follows:

The continent's significance dates back to the 16th century, during which millions of Africans were rounded up and shipped to Europe and the Americas to provide free and later cheap labour on the plantations and factories that allowed 'master nations' to prosper into economic powers.

From the same perspective, Eno et al. (2012:14) censure Western morality as they impart, "with no sanitary facilities in the lower deck, we do not know of any type of terrorism comparable to or worse than the one suffered by a human being shackled together with a dead body on his right leg and a diarrheal patient on his left!" In another aspect, although Arab slave traders have taken Africans to China (Wilensky, 2002), evidence is yet to be found that implicates China in active, economically motivated slave expedition across Africa or ventures in colonialism contrastable to the West's indulgence in the vice. To that effect, Mhandara et al. (2013:80) acknowledge, "The fact alone that imperial China never attempted to conquer Africa makes the current ties considered positively."

Notwithstanding the political motivation at the time, many observers claim that China is on record for assisting the African freedom fighters during their quest for independence from the imperial powers; from military training to arms supplies and ideological mentoring. At the UN, the communist nation supported, as it still does, the African cause. Likewise, at the level of international diplomacy, China acknowledges its appreciation of Africa's support in winning its position in the United Nations as well as relying on African support to achieve its global diplomatic goals at UN level.

However, from the early 1960s onwards, studies show that the Chinese have increased their interest in understanding Africa better. Among other studies which review this development, Large (2008) provides a well documented account of how this has gradually paved the way over the years for China's current intervention in the continent. Western studies on China also reveal that at some point, the foreign relations between Africa and China were not necessarily in focus beyond the political aspect. Referring Mark Mancall's *China at the Centre: Three Hundred Years of Foreign Policy*, Large (2008:47) states, "Current appreciation of China's historical involvement in the world, including Africa, contrasts with former notions about its supposedly isolated position at the centre of a hierarchical tributary system."

Several decades down the road, Beijing has mandated about 26 government bodies to take charge of matters related to policymaking for overseas investments, in order to achieve its global economic goals. The main policymaking agencies at the forefront of China's global trade endeavour include the Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM), State Administration of

Foreign Exchange (SAFE), National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), Ministry of Finance (MOF), People's Bank of China (PBC), China Securities Regulatory Commission (CSRC), and the State Asset Supervision and Administration Commission (SASAC), while the State Council functions as the topmost institution in the central government (Wenbin and Wilkes, 2011). These developments contributed to China's economic rise globally, and particularly in Africa, resulting in the current debate on resource hunting. With this in mind, the task of the next segment will be a review of the criticism and counter-criticism over the nature of "involvement" Large mentioned above, particularly China's investment and aid in Africa.

CRITICISM AND COUNTER-CRITICISM: THE COMPETING VIEWS

A review of the available literature provokes an interesting debate as a section of analysts attribute China's influx into Africa as a result of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) redirection caused by unwelcoming Western environment. "Several failures to acquire companies in the Western countries gave China the impression that there was no room for Chinese firms in Western countries." Discontented with these obstructions, "China turned its attention to Africa... to gain access to natural resources, increasing the investments and involvement since they realized Africa's potential as a business partner" (Caniglia, 2011). Unlike Caniglia's analysis, a study by Wenbin and Wilkes (2011) sounds convincing that China's entry approach in the continent has been strategic, and not merely an outcome of 'failures', while not denying that that could be one among several other factors. Although reference is often made in accordance with its recent surge of expansion overseas, "Nevertheless, the foundations of China's OFDI management system were laid in previous years."

Besides the entry strategy, some critics blemish China as a predator (colonizer) in search of vulnerable prey (Africa) -- symbolization ubiquitous in pro-Western literature. According to Smith (2012), "A leaked US diplomatic cable described China as a 'pernicious economic competitor with no morals.'" A similar view is exhibited in the speech of former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton informing Africa and other Chinese aid recipients to "[b]e wary of donors who are more interested in extracting your resources than in building your capacity," as Mark Tran (2011) reports.

A contention of not less magnitude is reflected also in the statement of Dr Rita Cooma that "African governments have to be careful of bilateral agreements which are only beneficial to a small number of people in the short term," (quoted in Stephanie Nieuwoudt, 2008). And as Friedberg (2006:7) accuses, "This ravenous appetite for resources is propelling China outward into the world further and faster than most Western (and many Chinese) observers appear to have anticipated." Similar comment by David Blair (2007) suggests how Beijing's strategic penetration into the *Dark Continent* "has happened so quickly," that it has taken many by surprise. But according to Glennie's (2012) observation, such arguments lack sufficient research and seem to be "tainted with a hardly disguised nationalistic slant in which China is seen as a competitor or usurper."

Other commentators acknowledge of limitations that do not avail much incentive to China in its quest for sources of energy, with the assumption that the US and its Western allies hold on their side Saudi Arabia and Iraq, "the world's largest oil reserves" which, between them, have approximately 45% of the oil in the world (Blair, 2007). This reality comes in the phase of the International Energy Agency's projection that China's energy "imports are expected to

increase to 13.1 million barrels per day by 2030,” a rise Makwerere and Chipaike (2012:315) describe as “a huge leap.”

Accusing China of greed, David Smith (2012) draws his contention by invoking “critics who warn of morally blind resource colonialism.” From a Chinese perspective, however, the focus is as diverse as much as it seems indefinite in terms of their intervention. With a note of clarification to Smith, Pan Hejun, the Chinese Ambassador to Malawi, affirms, “We want to have broader cooperation in other fields like health and education...Malawi has no minerals and no oil, but it is one of the African countries we want to establish a relation with,” (quoted in Smith, 2012).

Hejun (quoted in Smith *ibid.*) believes that the disparity between China’s and West’s policies is ensconced in the fact that “...according to Chinese experience, the people of a country are clever enough to know their own needs.” Therefore, flexibility and less involvement in a nation’s internal political affairs is what make the Chinese approach more “workable and sustainable.” Critical of Western political slapdash, Hejun informs Smith, “We think the UN Security Council is not a place to do regime change or make new king or president.” The reason for China’s refrain from such immoral traits underpins, according to Hejun and like-minded observers, the experiential learning that countries which have attempted to impose their own ideologies or decisions on others have failed along the journey.

Postulating Sino-African partnership, Makwerere and Chipaike (2012:311) write, “The new scramble that has taken root in the present era is no different from its predecessor except that countries with interest in African resources have increased significantly.” As the erudite scholars contend, “While the first scramble was premised on the strong arm tactics of the different colonizers, the new scramble...utilizes soft power tactics,” which, as Nye (2004: x) articulates, invokes “seduction” in preference to the use of “coercion.” Although the advocates of the (mis)perception about China would not disagree with Makwerere and Chipaike, a careful analysis on the characteristics of the old and new scenarios of the ‘scramble’ would easily reveal the incomparability of the latter to either the 1884 Scramble so notorious for its violence and conquest (Pakenman 2003; Rothkopf 2005), or its preceding parent, namely the Slave Trade institution. To some observers, the rubrics would still fall short of gauging China’s investment and aid environment to a return or renewal of either the 60s and 70s Cold War where the geopolitical focus lay more in strategic military presence and balance than investment, or the early ‘scramble’ in which Africa’s destiny was determined among several rapacious Western imperialists.

The debate also attracted top level Africans who gave their viewpoints. For example, Faida Mitifu, Democratic Republic of Congo’s ambassador to the US, explains to the cynics that Africans are not oblivious people “who can be easily manipulated.” In expression of the nature of his country’s relationship with China, the DRC diplomat states, “The good thing about this partnership is that it’s give and take” (quoted in Bayoumy, 2012). The China-Africa discourse has not escaped from the attention of President Jacob Zuma of South Africa who conceives the partnership as a dynamic cooperation quite distinct from a scramble. According to Zuma, Beijing intends “to help Africa stand on its own and work together with China.” Analyzing President Zuma’s statement, Singh (2010) concludes that China’s presence is affecting “the terms of engagement with the region as the countries in Africa have appreciated the Chinese methods of business and relations.”

Among other factors, the West's accusation of China emanates from an inherent anxiety triggered by the magnitude of Beijing's OFDI to Africa which, as a study by experts reveals, stands at "1346 investment records of intent to invest in Africa." This figure stands for "less than 8.5%" of the entirety of Chinese companies approved for overseas investment. The top rated investment focus is on mining, which Beijing considers as vital segment of venture for Chinese enterprises. It also accounts "for 15% of the total number of investment records." Among the target countries, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Zambia, Algeria, Nigeria and South Africa are highlighted as "the important mining destinations, accounting for nearly half of all investment approval records" (Wenbin and Wilkes, 2011:9).

The pro-Western camp is further upset by China's motivation and commitment as its trade with Africa increased a record "tenfold in less than a decade" with intent to expand it further, "regardless of the toughening conditions in many parts of the world" (Xiaotian, 2012). China's FDI in Africa indicates to have reached "\$160 billion in 2011, up by 28 percent from the previous year, according to the most recent data released by the Ministry of Commerce" (ibid). Xiaotian sums up that in the past decade alone, "bilateral trade has been growing at an average pace of 33.6 percent per year." Recently, Robert I. Rotberg (2013) discusses how China's recent pledge of \$1 trillion investment over the next decade or so, announced in November 2013 in an African Development Summit in Hong Kong, will help Africa cope with its surging population and dire need for infrastructure, agriculture, energy, and other technology necessary for developing the continent out of its chronic underdevelopment impasse (www.chinausfocus.com).

Disturbed somehow by the acceleration of this growth, it sounds natural that the US and allies feel haunted by realities like the China-DRC concessions which involved approximately \$9 billion before the West sought the intervention of its financial watchdog, the International Monetary Fund, which slashed the deal to the estimate of \$6 billion (Burgess, 2010). This milestone dispensation, like others in diverse parts of the continent, allows Chinese enterprises the exploitation of over "10 million metric tons of copper and more than 600,000 metric tons of cobalt" (Nieuwoudt, 2008). Besides China's gain, the mineral rich but developmentally impoverished African country is geared to benefit from much needed infrastructure whose development the West had neglected ever since their domination of the country before and after its independence (McGreal, 2012).

Within the context of the gains parameter, Nieuwoudt (2008) elaborates that in the DRC alone, China is engaged in the construction of "a road network stretching for 4,000 km and a railway system spanning 3,200 kilometres." In assessment of the scale of neglect and dilapidation the country has been entangled with over the years, Nieuwoudt (ibid) sympathetically comments, "This is a much needed development in a country the size of Western Europe and the second largest in Africa but with only 200 km of tarred road." According to Engdahl (2007), tangible interventions of this type are what makes many Africans to consider the Chinese investment as a long awaited remedy to "the painful medicine of the IMF," particularly the fact that "China gives easy terms." In fact, Angola's shunning of IMF loans, as Weintstein (2008) reports, could be a precursor to more African independence from Western aid which is often criticized of being attached to high interest rates and rigid conditions unfavourable to one struggling to have one meal a day on the table. Other than FDI, available literature supports China's involvement in peacekeeping operations in Africa with "more than 3,000 peacekeepers to 12 operations," (www.focac.org). However, Hang (2013:32) demonstrates the Dragon as "the 7th financial provider" to UN Peacekeeping Operation, while earlier on Zhang (quoted in Hang, 2013:36) censured the West for paying

less attention to areas of extreme conflict where they do not see meaningful strategic interest to Western benefit.

With recourse from its academic arsenal, the Asian giant waged a defensive counter-criticism from multiple domains. In a recent symposium frequently referred to in this essay, Prof. Zhou Haijin of the Institute of African Studies at Zhejiang Normal University condemns the Western countries for failing to deem the African identity, culture and values the recognition they deserve. In comparison, the scholar decrees Beijing's role as an alternative endeavour of sharing with Africa "the key indicators" of his country's magic leap forward (ISS Report, 2012). Another academic, Dr. Zhang Chun of the Centre for West Asian and African Studies at Shanghai Institute of International Studies, blames the West for disinclination of effective engagement towards Africa (Ibid), as admitted in the works of a section of the US think tank like Burgess (2010) and Rogers (2007), both quoted in this essay.

The sharp ideological divergence between China and the West, regarding African development, can be juxtaposed to the bipolar opinions of the traditional partners as opposed to the recent alternative. Throwing a barb at the West, Prof. He Wenping contends, "Africa's security had been neglected by Western powers, as had the tragedies in Somalia in 1993 and Rwanda in 1994" (quoted in ISS Report, 2012). To put more gunpowder to the Chinese arsenal, Jean Ping, Chairman of the African Union Commission at the time, proudly asserted how Africans will always remember China's endeavour towards "promoting peace, stability and development of Africa" (Xinhua, 2012). China's presence in this initiative pays more incentive to its rising influence in the continent while incurring further perplexity to the West's repugnance of the Asian country's expansion into this vital role, particularly at a time when many Africans have developed persistent suspicion over the Western security policy in the continent (Eno et al., 2011).

Therefore, contrary to the West's unremitting crucifixion of China as hungry exploiter, the proponents of China's fast jump into Africa believe that, considering Africa's undesirable experience with the West, "one wouldn't be much surprised by China's warm welcome to the continent," comments Osman Abalu, a British citizen of African origin. That notion seems to be shared also by a section of African intellectuals like Dr. Mehari M. Taddele (ISS Report, 2012) who believes that "China is one of the key players in the African peace and security and socio-economic development." The architects of this hypothesis position China within the framework of an investor "in competition with other actors" (i.e. the West); an ideal situation "which has an impact on the behaviour of China itself and other actors" (Ibid).

Unlike Taddele's refined tone, reviewers like Lafargue (2005) attribute the West's antipathy toward China from the opportunistic perspective in that "Sino-African relations come into conflict with the interests of the United States, itself concerned about diversifying the sources of its oil imports." As Lafargue denotes, "Africa has become a tempting territory because, following US intervention in Iraq, that country has consolidated its control over all the countries of the Middle East, with the exception of Iran." The picture by Lafargue reveals individual interests as the basis of the confrontation, with each competitor having his version to defend, but without an attempt to safeguard Africa from the foreign claws of exploitation. However, looking at the issue from the perspective of any other country which ventured to prosper from Africa's resources, China has joined in the adventure, but with a different and far more idyllic approach. Understanding that it has become "the biggest consumer of iron-ore, China has a relentless hunger for African minerals and energy," (Bayoumy, 2012). Supporters of China's Africa involvement argue that the Asian country is capitalizing on the

fact that poor and underdeveloped infrastructure has drastically hampered the African potential for economic growth. Accordingly, the Asian investor has set tangible development targets neglected by the traditional partners to revamp the tremendous development sector with projects involving vital sectors including construction of roads, railroads, bridges, textile factories, and power plants as well as the implementation of other badly needed local infrastructure in the sectors of health and industry. As some observers suggest, China's current investment is seen as a demonstration of an emerging power which threatens the US's free hand in the continent, thus changing the scene from pure economic influence to political warfare with possible resort to military might. Through that 'military' lens, they see the possibility for confrontation over African resources as likelihood as that one said to be looming in East Asia. The following section will provide a discussion on the security implication related to US-China competition.

SECURITY IMPLICATIONS: POSSIBLE PROXY WARS?

Certain analysts interpret the recent US and Western involvement in the wars in some parts of Africa not as a strategic endeavour designed for the confrontation of Al-Qaeda per se but as a "Hidden Agenda" to challenge China's aggressive diplomatic and economic influence in the continent (Schreiner, 2013). For instance, Stephen Walt (2013) questions whether the rationale for deploying Western military personnel, particularly in Mali, is based on "real evidence that extremists...are plotting to attack France, the United States or anyone else." He describes the intervention as a "grand strategy of containment against China." The experts, not unconscious of the vagaries unfolding in the political climate, also summarize the trend as "political warfare" (Chau, 2007) and a Western "case for legalization of a new interventionism in Africa" (He Wenping quoted in Schreiner, 2013).

Opposing the US policy towards military interventionism, Draitser (2014) reveals how, "recent years have seen an unprecedented military expansion which has gone almost entirely unnoticed by the US public." With this calculated shift of interest, the aim of the US is "to check the growing influence of China" regardless of whether this could involve "a widespread proxy war." Draitser continues to highlight that the scale of US build-up for confrontation is not surprising since not only AFRICOM but also the CIA effectively participates, as in the example of Somalia, by "funneling money and weapons to Washington's favorite warlords." To a section of analysts, military deployment is contrary to the principles of building peace and stability, despite the USA's history of obsession for removing peaceful regimes because they "refused to submit to the dictates of Washington, London and Paris" (Ibid.)

This trend towards military action, as some experts have indicated, is conceivable from the calculated manner in which the US and its allies capitalized on the Libyan uprising in which they deliberately spoilt for Chinese companies which had a huge investment of about US\$20 billion in projects. It was an explosive geopolitical conspiracy in which the activities of about 36,000 Chinese workers of various professional backgrounds were frozen, thereby frustrating oil and other infrastructure projects (Neumann, 2012). Many of the elite also believe that the US's current shift to reassess and enhance its engagement with Africa represents one among a host of strategies reformulated "to counter-balance the rising influence of China" (Brown, 2013) and therefore weaken the crucial impetus "propelling China into a geopolitical contest against the United States" (Mahadevan, 2013:38).

In a multi-tonal study urging the US to utilize diverse strategies – from multilateral politics to military might, Stephen Burgess (2010:3) forewarns, “In the long run, Chinese demand-driven activities will seek to dominate the South African mining industry and minerals and metals market.” This and similar perceptions by the US think tank predict that more catastrophic situations could be in the horizon; that a Sino-American conflict over African resources may be in the making while Africa’s concentration is focused merely on the debate of ‘strings attached’, ‘no strings attached’, and the empty tones of ‘shared values’ with the West.

In the event that Africa sidelines the US in the exploitation of its mineral resources in favour of China, and political and diplomatic avenues fail, a war scenario will be irrevocable. To that possibility, Makwerere and Chipaike (2012:316) astutely highlight, “AFRICOM has the potential to form the basis of future USA military engagement in Africa and the new cold war might actually be turned into real direct combat engagement between the USA and China for strategic African resources.”

The US and its Western affiliates have been dealing with the continent from the slave trade period to date; as *development* partners and traditional donors since the advent of colonialism, but Burgess’ worrisome discussion on certain African countries’ obstruction of “US access” to their mineral wealth denotes the intense lack of significant win-win policy in Western partnership. At this juncture, the advice for war leaves a lot to be admired as a solution to the problem or a promising development partnership with the Dark Continent, although that seems not to worry Burgess (2010:19) who writes “Southern Africa is a potential battleground” thus suggesting to the US authorities to:

...prepare for conflict in attempting to compel China to not monopolize strategic minerals and Southern African regimes not to nationalize them and not divert resources away from the United States. One way to stop Chinese monopolistic behaviour and biases, excessive Southern African off-take agreements would be to use the US Navy to block the shipment of mineral. While China is gaining greater access in Africa, the United States has the upper hand because the resources have to be transported from Southern Africa through the Indian Ocean and Strait of Malacca to Chinese ports.

Anticipating China’s retaliation, Burgess (2008:19-20) predicts, “The Chinese response could involve their navy attempting to defeat the US Navy; the ‘sting of pearls’ that China is developing could eventually help to offset US supremacy.”

When the situation ultimately brews into the height of the broil, one wonders what role the AU will be able to play to protect the Africans who may be pitted against each other through the payroll of the rich powers. This may pave the way for a durable animosity between the African Union (AU) and African countries on the one hand, and AU-China and AU-West relationship on the other. Such developments may put the AU in an indefinite position of whether to be favourable to its Western partners of the “shared values” project or whether to betray the loyalty to Beijing’s partnership. We cannot undermine problematising this issue from this perspective, considering the AU’s feebleness, especially when absent from her profile is a tangible achievement in the diplomatic corridors to save her sitting Heads of State from ICC indictment. The disgrace laden to this kind of diplomacy, among many others, exhibits the West’s control over many things African, much less a regard for African leaders;

although at another level they seek African support through dubious “shared values” project aimed at utilizing Africans as a means to Western end.

Among the writers fanning the fire of the warfare discourse, Rogers (2007:22) sounds more concerned about the worrisome situation of “diminishing U.S. influence” in Africa against China’s ample investments, bilateral aids and economic endeavours tremendously rising (Brautigam, 2013). In comparison, the US is charged for not having charted out a tangible and effective development oriented blueprint in an “overarching strategy that coordinates its diplomatic, military, and economic instruments of power” to counterbalance the Chinese pressure in the continent (Rogers, 2007:22). It is by closely analysing such sentiments and the frequent use of the term *military* that one wonders about Africa’s destiny when caught up in the quagmire of proxy wars generating not just from the access to its resources but the rapacity for the control of those resources (at will, if you may like it) by the competing giants. There is another perception in the war literature, though, that the anticipated confrontation will not emerge as a result of Beijing’s pursuit for international supremacy, considering its careful approach and concentration on investment opportunities rather than military adventurism (Lieven, 2012). But this is only one of the various views circulating around the issue, although we cannot rule out the possibility of China’s want to demonstrate military superiority in Asia, particularly East Asia and around the waters of the Pacific Sea, given that it assumes the position of the world’s leading economic superpower. In the event that the unavoidable becomes a reality, the likelihood of the extension of the Asia war into African precincts will be a major concern for the Dark Continent, once the articulation of warfare takes the shape of destabilisation of the enemy over and across geopolitical interests.

With regards to the current escalation of deployment of Western soldiers, and the empowerment of AFRICOM with multiple military tasks across the continent, the speculation of a spill-over of a remote Asian war into Africa deserves due attention. However, although at the East Asia front China has an assortment of territorial disputes with several of its neighbors (call them ‘US interests’ if you may), a purely resources-based duel could be ignited in Africa relative to the Asia warfare. In the context, Africa could be affected either directly or indirectly in the event of military showdown between the two elephants, regardless of cause or geographical location.

Therefore, a Chinese attack on any of the ‘American interests’ in its neighborhood, i.e. Japan or South Korea, is anticipated to lead to US involvement; not only in defending the ‘interest’ but possibly also a retaliation on China’s interests, including Africa as a potential candidate for proxy wars uglier than currently blazing in some spots on the continent. At least, a war instigated in Asia will provide a good motivation for the US and allies to either capture or damage/destroy targets under the pretext of enemy destabilisation. However, the propagation of ‘war’ notwithstanding, some analysts contribute a note of relief. Their notion embraces collaboration between the nuclear giants as a possible and probably more rewarding alternative to the concept of military confrontation. From the aspect of that alternative, the following part will focus on the way forward without the sacrifice of human blood.

THE WAY FORWARD: EXPLORING AVENUES FOR COOPERATION

...our future might be defined by our shared sense of values – more than by the frustrating differences that currently threaten the interests of both the United States and China. – David Rothkopf (2005)

Unlike the alarmists, Evans and Downs (2006) are of the opinion that “China’s participation in the upstream oil market, in fact, can help increase supplies and lower prices, benefiting all consumers,” and consequently minimizing the tensions that may inform a conflict. Greed and spoiler-game aside, we (authors) believe that there is sufficient room for every genuine competitor to benefit from African mineral resources yet untapped, and thus available to both rivals, China and the US, and even other interested investors like Japan, Korea, India, Brazil and many more. Therefore, the ideal lies in the avoidance of unnecessary altercation, and rapacity for a big chunk the mouth cannot accommodate. This is supported by the reality that competition for commercial interests fosters in a stable, peaceful environment which is conducive to the conduct of business.

In any case, engaging in geopolitics that undermine stability encourages cut-throat antagonism which leaves a lot to usher in any gains to the strong parties in divergence; nor will it develop the host countries whose citizens will fall victims to proxy wars due to the exploitation of their resources. Secondly, although China has become an enviable model for its recent economic growth and unprecedented investments in different parts of the world, especially Africa, it is still a rising star whose interest and economic vision could also be affected in a conflict environment, regardless of the geographical location. Moreover, economic growth is appreciable when its sustainability remains also unaffected in the establishment of a stable environment whose infrastructure in the political economy at all levels attracts more investment in the constituents of its diversity. Threats, speculations, and political warfare represent tools of destruction. Instead, genuine competition, influence, persuasion, and transparency are more likely to create a peaceful business ambience when compared to a precarious situation where uncertainty and disruption reigns in the everyday conduct of business.

The optimistic, or rather idealistic, tone here seeks its solution on the basis that, while China has already won concessions for extraction and other investment channels, these represent only a fraction of the resources that lie in belly of Africa’s earth. Thus, by hinging on its long established multifaceted partnership as diplomatic leverage, the US can gain equal access to tap into areas of investment in nations or resources not much dominated and less affected by China’s engulfing entry into Africa. A shift in strategy, as has been mentioned by a section of the American think tank, becomes necessary in order to reassess the negative image the average African has criticized the US of. One way to ameliorate that image would be the implementation of tangible development schemes by the US, and not hypocrisy and hefty amounts of funds allocated to self-serving local and international NGOs, corrupt leaders, or excessive and expensive Western expatriates whose salaries, hardship allowances, and other expenditures constitute more than half of the entire project budget. The US and the West should realize that to the common African a single meal a day is more valuable for daily survival than NGO’s training of a few elite and advocating for implementation of good governance in Africa in its purely Western design.

Likewise, China should exercise the limitation of the over-pouring of Chinese workers who hinder job opportunity for the African experts, professionals, and unskilled laborers. In order to maintain a stable and durable environment for its investment, the over-emphasized ‘soft power’ issue which has now become synonymous with ‘appreciation of malfeasance’, as criticized by many observers, needs to be addressed with China respecting issues related to human rights and good governance enriched with effective African ingredients so as to avoid another Libya or Sudan.

Most importantly, if the African leadership does not take the foremost initiative of prioritizing the well-being of their citizens with the introduction of transparency and laws that govern malfeasance and abuse of human rights and other vice detrimental to national development, handouts in aid and investment solicited from overseas may not build a nation whose citizens are susceptible to uprising that will consequently hamper all what has been previously achieved during the years of peace. It is due to this concern that dictatorship should end in the continent and instead, a system of peaceful democracy, with African input, and good governance be implemented. Through that endeavour, and together with its traditional and non-traditional partners, Africa will be able to design a durable solution in its pursuit to eradicate poverty and enjoy sustainable development.

Factors central to that development should include not only the social, economic, and technological development of the people in the continent but also to a greater extent the protection of the environment from being misused by the community of investors. This necessitates the formation of a body that oversees transparency and fairness in the conduct of business by either introducing laws aimed at protecting the biodiversity and the environment or enforces compliance where these laws and other national regulatory agencies exist that govern labor as well as environmental issues.

Without doubt, a coordination of this kind and adherence to the laws of the land will reverse the philosophy of antagonistic and destructive competition based on individual existentialism of the players to a more rewarding policy of co-existentialism. By maintaining a friendly rivalry, the investors and all the other stakeholders, directly or indirectly, will not need to embark on the costly journey of legitimising the use of military might for the participation and sharing of resources that are sufficient for all parties. As for the US, we believe that it is too early to listen to an alarmist think tank that embraces war on the classification of issues regarded as being “of great strategic importance to the United States,” and therefore providing inadequate justification in their assumptions of matters they categorise as having “compelling moral reasons for U.S. involvement” without first exhausting other peaceful alternatives. Goals are better not pursued “by making sure” that Washington puts “the right person [] in charge” regardless of the deadly consequences in lives and property (Mearsheimer, 2014; see also Zachary Keck (2014).

In this case, Africa needs an effective and balanced counter-penetration in its trade with the partners and also other destinations, so as to deliver the continent out of the acute dependency circuit. As Jeremy Stevens informs Xiaotian (2012), “Africa needs to look at how partnerships with China can further link its economies to global supply chains, and to take a practical approach focusing on carefully chosen sub-sectors, which can leverage the global value chain.” Our assumption is that, it is very unlikely to achieve tangible development with China or any other partner if the African focus is on individual accumulation rather than social well-being, knowledge transfer based on technological advancement and industrial capacity. The latter should also not target only the production and exportation of raw materials but the production and exportation of finished goods so that Africa does not import them at exorbitant prices after their finishing overseas.

CONCLUSION

The study has provided a discussion of the differing views about the competition for gaining African resources and the political, economic and security implications embedded to the competition. Although from a certain perspective this looks like a quest for investment

opportunities, at another level, political and security implications are evident with some analysts not just anticipating a US-China military confrontation but indeed encouraging it to occur. The study also revealed that since the vast majority of African resources are not yet tapped into, the opportunities are wide and, therefore, unnecessary for the rival competitors to fast engage in warfare in the midst of sufficient resources for all. The study further indicated that all stakeholders are likely to succeed in fair competition as long as there are legal and other structures as well as infrastructure for fair play and transparency, in the part of the competitors as well as in that of the leaders of the hosting African nations. Such an appealing environment can be realized if it is true, as Rothkopf, (2005) insightfully puts it, that “[o]f course, in the end, we all value survival above everything else.”

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