

The Political and Economic Dimensions of US-China Rivalry in Africa: A Comparative Analysis

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Abstract: The US-China competition in Africa is propelled by China's pursuit for natural resources to feed its industrial needs along with its aspiration to develop political and economic dominance in the continent, challenging the prevailing US hegemony. Alternatively, the major objective of US involvement in Africa is to counter China's headway and maintain its dominance. African countries are caught in the middle of a tug of war, as great powers strive for supremacy. These circumstances have substantial consequences for global politics, with possible hazards of heralding a new cold war and limited direct conflicts. The study maintains that nurturing collaboration between China and the US will be more advantageous, developing a win-win situation for all stakeholders through strategic diplomacy and effective dialogues. China's non-interference policy, contrary to USA's insistence on democratic reforms, has given China a competitive advantage. Nevertheless, Chinese engagement in Africa has posed the risks of debt dependency, environmental deterioration and resource exhaustion. This study exhibits the double-edged nature of US-China rivalry, bringing numerous benefits and posing several threats to African countries. On one hand, US-China competition has brought several benefits to African nations in form of economic growth, infrastructure development, education promotion and technology transfer, on the other hand, challenges like diminution of sovereignty, debt trap and economic dependency on external states are crucial concerns.

Introduction

Africa is positioned at the crossroads of the crucial international trade routes, impacting a major portion of global trade. Connecting Mediterranean Sea to the Indian Ocean, North Africa serves as a vital trade link between Asia and Europe. The Atlantic and Indian Oceans are connected through South Africa, Eastern Africa facilitates supervision over the trade passing through the Gulf of Aden, and Western Africa serves as the Atlantic Ocean's trade basin. Moreover, Africa possesses enormous deposits of natural resources such as critical minerals, rare earth elements, oil and precious metals. Throughout the ages, Africa has been the target of several colonial powers due to its abundant natural resources (Reid, 2020). Initially, the great power competition in Africa started in 1500s when the Portuguese pursued to contest Ottoman authority in Abyssinia. The continent was aggressively colonized and divided by the European powers in the late 1800s. This fierce competition between the European countries was termed as the "scramble for Africa" (Chamberlain, 2014). The Cold War era once again turned the region into an arena of ideological

contest between the USA and the Soviet Union. In the beginning of 2000s, the region became battleground for new scramble for Africa between China and the US. Chinese engagement in Africa, following its exponential economic advancement and increasing requirement for Africa's natural reserves, has intensified during the past two decades (Aldene, 2017).

Currently, China has turned up as Africa's sizeable trade and investment ally. Its engagement extends beyond mere economic domain, encompassing political, diplomatic, and strategic spheres as well (Paterson, 2018). Its rapidly growing influence in the region poses a potential threat to the US hegemony, raising significant concerns for the USA's interests. China's engagement in Africa can be categorized into three major areas: its pursuit for Africa's resources, its non-interference policy and the impacts of Chinese engagement in Africa on the US global hegemony. These elements exacerbate the changing balance of power, potentially eroding the US dominance in African continent. US-China competition in Africa is going to have substantial impacts on international relations in the 21st century (Thrall, 2015). Although the nature of US-China engagement in Africa is competitive, it still possesses prospects for cooperation in domains like infrastructure development, economic growth, education and coping with issues such as climate change, terrorism and extremism (Kerboub, 2023). This study investigates the current and historical engagement of the USA and China in the continent, concentrating on economic and political domains. It then proceeds to examine to what extent China's growing influence has influenced USA's interests in the region. The study aims at pinpointing the potential areas of cooperation between two great powers, suggesting recommendations to alleviate the detrimental impacts of their strategic engagement.

By offering an in-depth examination of US-China competition in Africa, this study adds to discussions on super power rivalry and its impacts on the region. It is very crucial to understand the intricacies of this competition to devise policies that can optimize the advantages of the USA and China's engagement at the same time encouraging viable growth and stability in the region. This study explores the ongoing great power rivalry in African continent, encompassing a time period of around ten years i.e. 2013 – 2024.

Theoretical Framework: Neorealism

The theory of Neorealism is applied to draw theoretical framework for this study. Neorealism, also recognized as structural realism was developed as a variant of classical realism. In 1979, Kenneth Waltz established this theory in his book "Theory of International Politics." Other eminent proponents of the theory of Neorealism include John Mearsheimer and his colleague Stephen Walt. Neorealism puts emphasis on the self-help operations and anarchic order of the international system (Schörnig, 2014). This theoretical framework offers a valuable lens for comprehending and examining the dynamics of US-China rivalry in Africa. The theoretical framework postulates that the absence of a principal command in the international structure, together with the ensuing inherent fright and doubt among states, principally world powers like the USA and China, is what directs their competitive operations in Africa. Owing to the anarchic character of the global structure, both powers, driven by self-help actions, pursue to enhance their power in regard to each other, Africa becomes a battleground for this scramble for domination (Uzodike, 2018). Mearsheimer asserts that the great powers' quest for dominance comes to an end only when they attain global hegemony. This is considered to be the most effective means to eradicate any likelihood of opposition from other world powers. The term "global hegemon" denotes a country

that holds enormous power and the capability to vanquish all others, possessing a leading position to set up and maintain international order.

Mearsheimer asserts that the presence of insurmountable oceans and the nuclear equilibrium make it hard to achieve global hegemony in the contemporary world. Therefore, world powers can strive for regional hegemony, dominating only a specific geographical region. (Mearsheimer, 2014). The US considers China's rise in Africa as a potential threat to its supremacy, as it is the single regional hegemon presently controlling the Western Hemisphere (Balogun et al., 2020). On the contrary, China pursues to attain regional hegemony in African continent and enhance its comparative strength in order to neutralize the USA's impact in the global system. The study explores how the anarchic global structure and the self-help behavior of the USA and China add to this dependence, and how their quest for regional hegemony is expected to influence political stability and economic atmosphere in African continent. Additionally, the framework will also direct the study in exploring the future course of this competition in African continent. It will examine China's aims to increase its engagement in Africa and play a substantial role in global politics, as well as the USA's resoluteness to restrain China's growth, both internationally and in Africa, as it poses a potential threat to US hegemony.

Hence, the Neorealist theoretical framework provides a strong foundation for comprehending the dynamics of the US-China rivalry in Africa and its repercussions for the region. It provides valuable understanding of the motives and conducts of the USA and China, the implications of this scramble on African states, and the likely future progress in this geopolitical race.

Methodology

This study employs qualitative research design amalgamating descriptive and exploratory approaches to make an in-depth examination of the intricate dynamics of US-China competition in Africa. The descriptive feature of this study aims at gathering data that describes historical background, important events and current interplay in USA, China and African states. Together with descriptive form of research, this study also employs exploratory approach to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the US-China competition in Africa. Exploratory form of research aims at discovering hidden aspects, evolving tendencies and possible future situations connected with US-China competition in Africa. In their article "China-Africa relations: What lies beneath?" Mlambo et al., (2016) also used descriptive-cum-exploratory approach to have an in-depth analysis of the relations between China and Africa. As far as data collection is concerned, the study makes use of secondary data. A detailed review of the current literature, comprising research papers, scholarly articles, books, theses, and policy documents constitute the main data sources. To have an in-dept analysis of the data, this study employs thematic analysis and comparative analysis. Thematic analysis comprises categorizing, evaluating, and reporting themes in the data. A wide-ranging and exact examination of the data is possible through this method.

Comparative analysis compares and contrasts various tactics, interests and implications of Chinese and US involvement in Africa. This approach explores various parallels and contrasts in different domains such as political impacts, economic endeavours, and development initiatives enabling a comprehensive evaluation of the impacts of this competition on the region.

CAUSES OF US-CHINA RIVALRY

Economic Causes

The ongoing rivalry between China and the US in Africa has gained enormous significance for both world powers. Economic interests of both powers serve as a key driver of this competition. US-China competition comprises different factors such as mineral extraction, infrastructure development, trade and financing (Kerboub, 2023). Africa's importance for China saw an exponential growth after the discovery of oil and other critical minerals in the continent. In 2017, the oil reserves in the continent were at 7.2 percent of the world's total reserves (Listing, A., & Content, S. 2023). In 1998, Africa's estimated oil reserves were 77.2 thousand million barrels, which surged to 125.3 thousand million barrels in 2017. During 1990s, importance of Africa in energy markets increased considerably, which further enhanced China's interest in the region (Jenkins, 2022). Thus, China's government owned oil firms started their operations in Africa in 1990s. Unlike the Middle-East and other oil rich regions, the US and European companies had not yet entered Africa. Therefore, it was very easy for China to establish its foothold in the region. On the other hand, the USA has been conducting its operations in Africa through private companies. Currently, China is taking the lead in the continent, while the US is lagging far behind (Jenkins, 2022).

Another reason for Chinese engagement in Africa is that this region possesses enormous deposits of critical minerals like lithium, copper, cobalt, and rare earth elements (Boafo et al., 2024). These minerals play a significant role in industrial growth, technological advancement and economic development. Chinese high-tech industries heavily depend on African minerals. Another important reason for US-China competition in Africa is the potential for trade with the region. There are 54 countries in Africa, constituting an enormous market for both world powers. Africa is valuable for both world powers in two ways. Firstly, because of its rich mineral deposits, and secondly, due to the prospects of trade with African countries. China is taking the lead as far as trade operations are concerned. China's trade volume with Africa surpassed that of the USA in 2008. Infrastructure development projects and resource security also play a vital role in driving the US-China competition in Africa. Critical minerals like cobalt, lithium, copper and rare earth elements are essential for the development of modern industries, manufacturing electrical vehicles, batteries, and other portable devices. A major portion of the economy of both world powers depends on high-tech industries and any disruptions in the supply of critical minerals may have negative impacts on their industries. Hence, both China and the USA are engaged in an intense competition to secure their supply chain of critical minerals (Gulley et al., 2018). Both powers are engaged in infrastructure development initiatives like BRI and Lobito Corridor, constructing roads, railways, renewable and hydro energy projects.

Political Causes

US-China competition in Africa is an intricate interplay of political and economic interests of both world powers. Both countries are endeavoring to strengthen their political footprints to achieve their goals in the region. They are engaged with African countries through alliances and diplomatic engagements. China is reinforcing its economic and political ties with African states through FOCAC, whereas the US has a long history of its ties with African countries, particularly in the domains of development assistance, trade and security. Soft power tactics also play a significant role in US-China competition (Kulungu, 2023). Apart from their contribution in the development of Africa, both powers leverage their investments for political repression, forcing the regional

states to take decisions against their desires. The USA and China have great influence on the foreign policy of African countries. For example, in 2011, China pressurized South Africa to delay a visitor's visa to the Dalai Lama (Mlambo et al., 2016). Similarly, China has adopted very strict policy towards the countries establishing relations with Taiwan. China does not develop relations with the countries having ties with Taiwan, asserting that no country can develop ties with China and Taiwan simultaneously. The US, on the other hand offers conditional aid, loans and infrastructure development initiatives. The US assistance schemes for African countries are conditioned with good governance, democratic reforms, policy changes and rule of law. The US does not pay proper attention to those countries which ignore its demands. However, China's non-interference policy is more appealing to the African states (Aidoo, 2015). Hence, most of the regional countries prefer China over the US. It is obvious that the USA is endeavoring to diminish China's dominance by enhancing its engagement in the region, since the US deems China as a potential threat to its global supremacy and unipolarity.

Both great powers are vying for hegemony in Africa. China, a newly emerging power is endeavoring to establish its hegemony in the region, whereas the USA, a status quo hegemon sees China as a potential threat to its dominance. Chinese engagement and obtaining advantageous position may upset the current distribution of power, which favours the USA. China is striving for enhancing its relative dominance for attaining hegemony to counterbalance the US dominance in the international system. Thus, the USA pursues to obstruct China's further advancement, as it poses a potential hazard to the US hegemony in Africa (Kim, 2019).

CHINA'S INFLUENCE IN AFRICA

China's Policy on Africa

Following the end of Chinese Civil war in 1949, China's policy towards Africa has been a crucial facet of its international strategy. China's foreign policy towards Africa has experienced significant transformations over the years, establishing multifaceted relations that comprise economic, technological, strategic and political domains. From the early days of backing liberation movements to the current period of enormous funding and diplomatic initiatives, China's approach to Africa has become a notable characteristic of its international strategy. Zhou Enlai laid the foundation for Chinese foreign policy towards developing states, chiefly African countries, at the Bandung Conference in 1955, establishing China's preliminary engagement with Africa (Aidoo & Hess, 2015). China-Africa ties were mainly ignored during the 1970s and 1980s, as China focused on interior economic improvements. Nevertheless, in 2000, the creation of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) marked a turning point in relations between China and Africa. (Aiping & Zhan, 2018). FOCAC became the basis for China's activities in Africa, stressing principles of cooperation, friendship, solidarity, equality, and mutual growth.

During Xi Jinping's regime, Chinese policy towards Africa has become more nationalist, focusing on increasing Chinese tactical competence. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has played a noteworthy role to promote connectivity, economic growth and infrastructure development, spanning across the continents, including Africa (Chan, 2018). An essential feature of China's approach has been its non-interference policy, which emphasizes on collaboration with multinational companies, abstaining from interfering in Africa's internal matters. China's Soft power strategy in Africa is not only restricted to diplomacy and politics but also comprises

economic interactions. China has become a significant trading partner with African nations with its heavy investments in various sectors. Despite China's positive engagements, its policy towards the continent has faced several challenges and criticism. Maintaining a balance between economic objectives, and social and environmental responsibilities is still a big challenge for China.

China's Key Initiatives in Africa

China's involvement in African countries has increased considerably during the last two decades. Chinese engagement in the region has played a substantial role in influencing the power dynamics in the region and affecting the development of African nations in multiple ways. China's foreign policy goals and strategies revolve around five prime objectives regarding Africa i.e. Access to Resources, Market Expansion, Diplomatic Influence, Development Cooperation and Security Cooperation.

Economic Initiatives

China has become a substantial investor in Africa, using a multi-layered procedure that comprises loans, aid, debt relaxation, and founding economic collaboration zones. In 2013, Chinese embassy in South Africa stated that it signed assistance treaties with 48 countries, with loan contracts outspreading to twenty-two countries, exhibiting a considerable promise to Africa's progress. Since 2000, China's aid to African states has gradually augmented, offering significant monetary funding that supports in socio-economic progress. Loans and aid programs have become life and blood for African countries, without which Africa cannot manage its day-to-day affairs. Infrastructure is pivotal for sustainable economic growth, productivity enhancement, and overall development (Bhattacharya et al., 2015). In Africa, scarce infrastructure hampers growth, with many nations struggling to survive with insufficient systems. China's engagement in Africa's infrastructure development is noteworthy, which has become Africa's chief infrastructure ally, excelling traditional donors such as the World Bank. Chinese infrastructure initiatives comprise the construction of railways, roads, bridges, ports, and energy facilities, intended for enhancing links, promoting trade, and facilitating economic development (Siddiqui, 2019). China has also made heavy investments in renewable energy and hydroelectric projects.

Chinese state-owned companies are busy in Africa extracting minerals. The speedy progress of technology has created an increased requirement for critical minerals, which serve as vital components in several technological manufacturing industries. Minerals like lithium, copper, cobalt, and rare earth elements are crucial for manufacturing electric vehicles, smart phones, renewable energy systems, and other high-tech devices. As the international economy increasingly depends on advanced technologies, the requirement for critical minerals is constantly surging. Therefore, China, through its state-owned corporations is busy in extracting critical minerals from Africa to fulfill its industrial demands (Jepson, 2012). China has appeared as Africa's chief trading partner, with trade magnitude increasing from 2 billion dollars in 1999 to 160 billion dollars in 2012. In 2018, China-Africa annual trade volume surpassed 160 billion dollars, reaching 282 billion dollars in 2023 (Mamo, A. 2024). This exponential growth in trade highlights the significance of trade for sustainable growth. China's imports from Africa mainly involve mineral resources, whereas its exports to Africa comprise manufactured goods, consumer products and machinery. While some see China's heavy investments in Africa as beneficial for development, others raise concerns about its impact. Chinese investments have eased technology transfer and regional trade. Nevertheless, problems like trade imbalances, resource exploitation, and

competition with African producers because of low-priced Chinese products have caused economic challenges.

As trade and investments between China and Africa possess challenges as well as opportunities, vigilant supervision is required to guarantee shared benefits and handle negative impacts on local businesses. China has also established economic zones in various African countries (Brautigam & Xiaoyang, 2011). These economic zones act as important centers for mutual business enterprises, knowledge sharing and business cooperation, contributing to Africa's economic progress, industrial growth and export promotion.

Political Initiatives

In Africa, China's political and economic activities go side by side. Political initiatives undertaken by China are intended for enhancing its dominance over the continent, developing good relations with African countries in order to obtain political support from them in regional as well as international forums, guaranteeing an uninterrupted supply of resources. China's aim is to create a multipolar world contrary to the bipolar world preferred by the USA. Further, challenging US hegemony in the region is also one of the chief objectives of Chinese engagement in Africa (Qobo & Pere, 2019). China executes its political initiatives through Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). This is an effective platform for developing cooperation and undertaking various political and economic initiatives. FOCAC is intended for promoting mutual understanding, reinforcing bilateral relations and providing assistance to run Africa's development programs (Ibonye, 2022). China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), though an infrastructure development project, also aims at fulfilling its political objectives in Africa. Through infrastructure development programs, China improves connectivity between different areas of the continent, strengthening its political ties with African states. Further, China leverages its investments in Africa to influence political decisions and foreign policy of African countries in its favour (Mlambo et al., 2016).

In this regard, China's impact on South Africa to delay a visitor's visa to the Dalai Lama in 2011 is an obvious example of China's influence on the decision-making process of the African countries. During the past several years, China has been endeavoring to obstruct the Dalai Lama's visits to other countries, issuing warnings that Dalai Lama's visit to any country would harm its relations with China. Moreover, China has adopted very strict policy towards Taiwan. China is determined to eliminate Taiwan's presence in African continent, forcing African countries to break their ties with it. China's policy that no country can develop ties with China and Taiwan at the same time, compels African countries to make a choice between China and Taiwan (Mlambo et al., 2016). Resultantly, most of the African countries have terminated their relations with Taiwan, considering the geopolitical and economic significance of China. Actually China employs a carrot and stick strategy while dealing with African states i.e. the African countries are rewarded if they follow China's directions and punished if they act against them (Lee, 2021). China's non-interference policy in the internal matters of African states has been criticized by the USA and other western countries. They argue that this policy promotes human rights violations and poor governance in many African countries. It is proclaimed that China's non-interference strategy is attractive to dictatorial governments, which are engaged in political suppression and human rights abuse in African countries. US thinks that China's noninterference policy allows it to reinforce its influence without paying attention to democracy and transparency, leading to potential debt trap, weakening the governance system (Ginsburg, 2021).

China's Strategies in Africa

US-China competition in Africa has prompted China to adopt various strategies to strengthen its footprints in the region. The major objectives behind Chinese presence in Africa are safeguarding its economic, political and strategic interests. China usually adopts following strategies in this regard:

Soft Power and Public Diplomacy

China's emergence as an international power led to the creation of the "China threat theory" which played a major role in damaging China's image on the global arena. In order to compensate the damage caused by "China threat theory", China adopted the strategy of soft power diplomacy, pursuing 'peaceful rise' strategy, making the world realize that its aim is to create a harmonious world which possesses equal opportunities for every country (Li & Worm, 2011). Through peaceful growth policy, China is trying to persuade the world to acknowledge its mounting power. For this purpose, China is concentrating on soft power and public diplomacy. Thus, China is promoting its political values, culture, language and diplomacy in the world, with a particular focus on Africa. Although China has been accused of violating the basic rules of international health organizations, it has succeeded to provide numerous health facilities to African public.

Cultural Diplomacy

China's use of cultural diplomacy has proved very effective in developing close ties with African countries. China has succeeded in creating its positive image in Africa through its media, education, culture and people-to-people interactions. China is offering several educational scholarships to African students, providing trainings to African professionals. In 2012, more than 20,000 African students obtained scholarships from Chinese universities, more than 30,000 African professionals got trainings from Chinese experts and more than 350,000 Chinese experts went to Africa to perform their duties. A significant role has been played by the Confucius Institutions to elevate Chinese culture and language. In this regard, 38 Confucius Institutes, operating in 27 African countries have played a significant role (Li, 2021).

Media Power

In the context of China-Africa relations, media has been used as a powerful tool to popularize Chinese culture in African countries. From 2009 onwards, China launched many media channels for its soft power projection in different African countries (Repnikova, M. 2022). China reserved 6.6 billion dollars to spread its media in the region. Chinese media agency Xinhua launched its channel "CNC World" in 2011 and in 2012, "CCTV Africa" was launched by Chinese Central Television. "China Daily" also started its operations in 2012. These media channels have played a significant role in mitigating the impact of western media, at the same time building a positive image of China.

Health Diplomacy

China's health diplomacy has played a noteworthy role in establishing Sino-Africa relations and bringing both nations closer. Sino-Africa medical relations started in 1963 when China sent a team of medical professionals to provide support to Algeria. Chinese medical cooperation with Africa

comprises sending medical teams, launching anti-malaria initiatives, providing medical trainings and funds to establish hospitals and clinics. China launched container Hospitals in 2013 in order to provide medical facilities in the remote areas of Africa (Killeen et al., 2018).

US POLICY AND COUNTERMEASURES

US Policy on Africa Post World War II

US policy on Africa has been passing through different phases and transformations since the World War II. During the cold war epoch (1947-1991), the major focus of USA's policy on Africa was to counter the growing influence of USSR and develop ideological ties with African states (Schmidt, 2013). During the cold war era, the US pursued to develop democratic values and adherence to human rights, at the same time taking effective measures to contain communist expansion in Africa. The US extended unconditional support to anti-communist African countries and movements without considering whether they adhered to human rights and democratic values or not. Overall, priority was given to strategic interests of the US over regional development and stability. A significant change in the US foreign policy towards Africa was observed during the second phase of Clinton government (1997-2001). During this period, Africa gained significant importance for the US, but it was not included in US's long-term policy. The major focus was to establish economic ties with Africa, integrating it into international economy. In 2000, Clinton government passed a bill i.e. African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) to promote trade and investment between the US and Africa (Rapanyane, 2022). Strategies were made to promote democracy in African countries. In spite of all its efforts, Clinton government could not make a long-term policy towards Africa.

Bush Administration (2001-2009) paid a lot of attention to provide aid and reduce poverty in Africa. The US engagement in Africa took a new turn after 9/11 attacks. Counter terrorism activities enhanced US engagement in Africa, leading to enormous US aid and military presence in the region (Kalu & Kieh, 2013). Nonetheless, Bush administration's foreign policy towards Africa lacked collaboration and long-standing goals. It was near the end of the second term of Bush administration that the US realized the strategic importance of Africa. Barak Obama's administration (2009-2017) was signaled by high expectations regarding US policy towards Africa. Obama administration's policy towards Africa was more engaging and it seemed to be a continuation of Bush administration's policies. But there were certain areas where Obama Administration's policy towards Africa differed from that of Bush Administration. The Obama government, with small changes, continued several initiatives which had been initiated during the Bush Administration, such as AFRICOM and PEPFAR. The Obama Administration also launched new initiatives such as Young African Leaders Initiative (Adenle, 2017). Donald Trump's government (2017-2021) was characterized by a significant shift in the USA's existing policy. The major focus of the Trump administration was to counter the growing influence of China, foster economic growth and counter terrorism in Africa. The prosper Africa Initiative aimed at increasing the trade volume and investments between the US and African countries. Instead of traditional aid and development programs, private companies were encouraged to initiate development programs.

Joe Biden assumed power in 2021, adopting a cooperative policy towards Africa. The main focus of Biden's policy towards Africa was nurturing collaboration, developing infrastructure, promoting peace and security, and addressing global challenges. Biden government launched Build Back Better World (B3W) in collaboration with G7 countries (Savoy, 2022). B3W offers

finance to developing countries including African states, offering a substitute to China's BRI. Countering China's mounting influence in African states was one of the priorities of Biden administration.

US Countermeasures against China

During the cold war, the purpose of US engagement in Africa was to obstruct the advancement of Soviet Union in the region. But after the cold war, Africa lost importance for the US. Africa regained importance for the US in 2000 when China started to spread its influence in the region. It will be no exaggeration to say that most of the initiatives taken by the US in Africa were to obstruct the advancement of China, as China was becoming a potential threat to the US hegemony. Therefore, we can assert that China dragged the US in the current scramble for Africa. The US-China competition in Africa can be seen as an action-reaction sequence (Zhang, 2024). In this section, we will discuss the US strategies to counter the growing influence of China in the continent. The analysis will comprise three major domains: economic, political and strategic.

Economic Domain

Chinese successful advancement in Africa ignited several counter responses from the USA. Soon after the enactment of FOCAC in 2000, the US launched the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), a wide-ranging financing and trade initiative for African countries. Since its ratification, AGOA has played a substantial role to reinforce US-Africa trade relations (Odularu, 2020). The major objective of this initiative was to enhance economic development in the region, helping the Sub-Saharan countries to incorporate themselves into the international economy. Furthermore, this initiative allowed all marketable commodities in all the member countries to enter USA's duty-free market, facilitating mutual trade between the USA and African states. AGOA has been a successful strategy to counterbalance the economic impact of China in the continent. The USA has also leveraged this act to acquire access to oil and other critical mineral resources. During the first term of Bush administration, the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) was launched. This initiative aimed at reducing poverty and enhancing economic growth (Lohalo et al., 2022). Obama's government also pursued the policies of his precursors G. W. Bush and Bill Clinton regarding the USA's strategies to hinder China's advancement in the region. During his official visit to the region in 2009, Barak Obama emphasized helping the African states attain financial stability, considering them long-term strategic partners.

Hillary Clinton's visit to Africa in 2011 was a restatement of Obama's visit. During her visit, Hillary Clinton emphasized ensuring sustainable investments in Africa, asserting that the USA wanted a relationship of partnership, not patronage with African countries. The official visits of the US leaders to Africa aimed at strengthening US-Africa relations on one hand, and counterbalancing China's influence in the region, on the other hand. In 2018, the US International Development Finance Corporation (DFC) was launched under the Build Act, ratified by the congress (Landers et al., 2020). This agency helps African states grow their economies while countering the state-owned Chinese corporations in the region. This agency makes heavy investments in Connect Africa Initiative, which is engaged in developing communication and information systems, as well as constructing transportation infrastructure. But, in spite of several visits of US leaders to the region and various initiatives launched by the USA, China has constantly made progress in every sphere of African life.

Political Domain

The political domain of US-China rivalry in Africa possesses substantial significance and falls in the category of hard-core interests of the US and China. Both world powers are engaged in a relentless competition to safeguard their interests in the region. China, as a rising power, is trying to break the hegemony of the US, whereas the US, being a status quo power, is endeavoring to hinder China's advancement in the region by employing various tactics (Zhao, 2015). USA's strategies to counter China's growing influence in Africa comprise diplomatic initiatives, economic programs, security alliances and capacity building measures. The US is employing several political strategies to counter China's engagement in Africa, while ensuring an uninterrupted supply of resources that are crucial for its economic growth and industrial advancement. During the past few years, several US leaders visited Africa, criticizing China's engagement in the region. In 2011, Hillary Clinton embarked on a visit to African countries, criticizing China as a new imperialistic power (Pan, 2022). She said that Africa should be cautious about the "new colonialism" being imposed by China in African countries. She also accused China of robbing Africa's natural resources. The USA accuses China of supporting the dictatorial rulers of Africa, which is a big obstacle in the way of promoting democracy in the region. China's non-interference policy is also considered by the US as a big impediment in the way of fostering adherence to human rights, democratic values and effective governance.

In order to counter China's advancement in Africa, the US has focused on reinforcing its diplomatic relations with African states, stressing the implementation of democratic governance and respect for human rights. Currently, around 50 US embassies and diplomatic missions are operating in Africa, millions of Africans residing in the US, generating possibilities for collaboration between the US and African states. The US launched the Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI) to provide training to the young African leaders, engaging in several capacity building exercises to promote democracy, effective governance, transparency and obedience to human rights. Such initiatives aim at fostering political sense and democratic values in African people and counterbalancing China's mounting impact in the continent. The US is engaged with African countries through different diplomatic initiatives, official visits of US leaders and alliances with African states to achieve its goals (Pham, J. P. 2014). Through diplomatic channels, the US is busy in making the African countries aware of the consequences of Chinese investments in Africa such as debt trap, erosion of democratic values, negligence of labour standards and environmental impacts caused by mineral extraction by Chinese companies. Statistics exhibit that China will excel the US in terms of GDP within the next 10 years. The US deems China's exponential growth as a potential threat to the US hegemony. Therefore, the US has taken various measures to obstruct China's advancement and influence in the international arena. The major battle is being fought in Africa and its outcome will decide which power will play a major role in the world in future (Cooper, F. 2019).

Considering China as a potential threat, the US president Donald Trump launched a technological, political, and economic war against China in 2018, prohibiting US corporations to indulge in business deals with Chinese company Huawei, putting restrictions on visa to Chinese scholars and students (Lohalo et al., 2022). Such initiatives on the part of the USA gave the US-China competition a global significance, putting an end to the post-Cold War unipolarity and initiating the quasi-bipolarity facet of the present global system. In June 2021, the US president Joe Biden launched the Build Back Better World (B3W) initiative in collaboration with G7 countries. Several

development programs, financial assistance schemes and capacity building initiatives were launched under B3W, but its major focus was to counterbalance China's advancement, particularly in Africa. From the above discussions, it is quite obvious that both powers are using their soft power in Africa to obtain their personal goals.

IMPLICATIONS FOR AFRICA

Positive Impacts

Africa has benefited from several infrastructure development programs initiated by China and the US. China's BRI has proved very beneficial for the African countries. The construction of roads, railways, ports, dams and power projects has brought enormous benefits for the regional countries, generating numerous job opportunities and bringing prosperity in the region. BRI has played a noteworthy role in the progress of the continent. The USA has also launched various infrastructure development programs in Africa, such as Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), Power Africa and Prosper Africa (Is, 2024). Through such initiatives, the USA has invested billions of dollars in the region, paving the way for economic growth, enhancing opportunities for the Africans, developing power sector and increasing the trade volume within the continent as well as the outer world. Heavy US investments have proved instrumental in heralding prosperity in African states (Qobo & Pere, 2019). Rivalry between the US and China has brought notable technological advancements in Africa. Under BRI, several Chinese companies are engaged in building ICT projects, enhancing connectivity and bridging digital divide among African states. Chinese companies such as ZTE and Huawei have played a substantial role in constructing telecommunication networks, thereby ensuring technological growth, and providing affordable technological solutions and expertise to the African countries (Agbebi, 2022).

Several US companies make heavy investments in technology sector, playing a significant role in digital innovation of the region. US tech-giants such as Microsoft and Google are engaged in capacity building and skill development in technology sector, making enormous investments. These companies also help African firms to start their own projects in digital domain. China and the US have made substantial investments to promote education and develop human resources in African countries. In this domain, China's focus is constructing educational institutions, providing technical and vocational trainings, offering scholarships to African students in Chinese universities and providing trainings to African professionals. The USA also plays a significant role in promoting education and human resource development through scholarship funds and endeavours like the Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI), providing academic education, entrepreneurial and leadership trainings to African youth (Yeboah, 2019). Both China and the US have played a substantial role to uplift Africa's health sector. China's major focus is to construct hospitals, provide trainings to the people related to the medical profession, provide medical equipment and send medical teams to different African states. The USA is also engaged in several health care initiatives to combat diseases, like AIDS and malaria.

The President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) has proved very instrumental in improving health care sector in Africa by providing financial assistance and professional trainings (Vogus & Graff, 2015). Both world powers have played a substantial role in enhancing trade opportunities for African countries. China has initiated several infrastructure development programs under BRI, constructing roads, railways seaports and airports. These projects have increased connectivity within the region and with the outside world. Mineral extraction is another

domain where US-China competition has brought significant benefits for the African countries. China is engaged in mineral extraction operations through several state-owned companies, extracting oil, critical minerals and rare earth elements (Seaman, 2019). The USA conducts its mineral extraction activities in Africa through private companies. The export of these minerals generates revenues for Africa, thereby boosting their economy, bringing stability and prosperity in the region.

Negative Impacts

In spite of having enormous benefits, US-China competition also possesses some negative impacts for African countries. China is engaged in several infrastructure development programs under BRI, offering enormous loans to African countries. This trend may cause a debt trap for African countries if they are unable to repay these loans, thereby posing risks to their sovereignty and losing control over strategic assets. Most of the African countries depend heavily on the US and Chinese investments which may lead to their long-term dependency on external powers, undermining their own potential to formulate independent policies and take autonomous decisions. Most of the African countries are heavily relying on external support in economic and political domains, hindering their sustainable growth and self-sufficiency. US-China competition in Africa holds the risks of resource depletion and environmental degradation (Jamali et al., 2024). Several Chinese and US companies are engaged in extracting African resources in large quantities. If this trend continues, Africa's natural resources will be exhausted within the next few decades, destabilizing the economies of African countries. Further, too much reliance on the export of mineral resources may hinder economic diversification, thereby causing economic instability in the region.

To fulfill external demand, the extensive extraction of minerals and large-scale construction projects can damage the environment, causing deforestation, environmental pollution, and loss of biodiversity. This ecological damage leads to unemployment and displacement of local communities, causing regional instability. Moreover, race for resource acquisition often causes corruption in resource-rich regions. US-China competition has created market and trade imbalances in Africa, impacting African economies and trade patterns. The incursion of Chinese low-priced products has harmed African industries considerably (Toye, 2021). African states export raw materials to China and import finished products. This trade pattern goes in favour of China, as African industries cannot compete with Chinese inexpensive products, resulting in factory closures and increasing unemployment. The range of Chinese products entering African markets is very wide, comprising textile garments, household appliances, machinery, vehicles, electronics, military equipment etc. African countries, instead of promoting their local products, are increasing dependence on Chinese goods. Resultantly, trade imbalances exacerbate in Africa, undermining local industries and mitigating the prospects of self-reliance. This trend is going to hinder the sustainable growth of African nations.

In the ongoing US-China competition, the USA and China directly interfere in the internal affairs of African states, undermining their sovereignty and self-determination. Both world powers are engaged in making enormous investments in various domains such as financial aid, infrastructure development, technology transfer, education, capacity building and maintaining security in African countries. The US and China's activities in Africa are driven by their respective strategic objectives. The US is striving to obstruct China's growth, mitigating its influence in the region

(Thrall, 2015). On the other hand, China is determined to break US hegemony. Therefore, Africa's decisions regarding engagement strategies in the region are taken by the USA and China, motivated by their strategic interests. This external influence in the decision-making process mitigates the role of African countries in the initiatives that directly impact regional progress and sovereignty. Under these circumstances, African countries cannot take autonomous decisions. Their policies are formulated under the influence of either China or the US, undermining the autonomy of African states. This will have far-reaching impacts on the sustainable development of African countries (Roy, 2014).

The competition between China and the USA possesses serious labour and human rights apprehensions. As both powers are engaged in an intense competition to secure personal interests, they may overlook ethical norms. Chinese companies are often criticized for ecological degradation, substandard labour conditions, inadequate labour protections and insufficient payment (Shinn, 2016). The US companies operating in Africa have also faced same criticism. It is possible that both countries are ignoring the basic human rights standards and ethical norms in their pursuit to gain competitive advantage over the other, giving rise to exploitative practices and human rights abuses.

Findings

China's investments in Africa are intended for safeguarding the supply of mineral resources by establishing cordial ties with African countries, so that Chinese may feed their high-tech industries to boost their economy (Hogenboom et al., 2022). Most of the US infrastructure development initiatives are intended for obstructing China's advancement in order to preserve its hegemony in Africa. But in spite of all its efforts, the US is unable to hinder China's advancement in the region. Both the US and China have launched various initiatives to upgrade the health sector in Africa. Before this competition, the health system in the region was very poor. African countries lacked resources to develop their health system. Thanks to the US-China competition, both world powers have been prompted to uplift the standard of Africa's health domain. Health sector in Africa is one of the rare areas where USA and China can engage in cooperation with each other, turning this rivalry into a win-win situation for all the stake holders.

Both China and the US leverage their investments for political repression, forcing the regional states to take decisions against their will, influencing the foreign policy of African countries. China's carrot and stick strategy with African countries exerts great political influence on regional countries, impacting their decision-making process. Similarly, USA's conditional investments are also a big source of influencing the political decisions of African countries. USA's influence in international forums like the World Bank and IMF is also used as a tool to influence political decisions and foreign policy of African states in its favour. China's exponential growth in Africa can be attributed to its non-interference policy, consideration for immediate economic requirements in Africa and common colonial history, nurturing unanimity with African states. In contrast, USA's conditional assistance schemes, emphasizing good governance, democratic reforms, policy changes and rule of law, are not attractive to African countries (Li, 2017). China has far surpassed the US in Africa due to its proactive policy, making it necessary for the US to reevaluate its policy towards Africa to maintain its presence in the region.

China, a newly emerging power, is endeavoring to establish its hegemony in Africa, whereas the USA, a status quo hegemon, sees China as a potential threat to its dominance. Chinese engagement and obtaining advantageous position in the region may upset the current distribution of power which favours the USA. China is striving to enhance its relative dominance in order to attain hegemony and counterbalance the US dominance in the international system. Africa's geographical location, abundant natural resources, thriving purchaser markets, and ample opportunities to influence the international trade, make it a point of convergence for China and the USA (Rotberg, 2013). Africa is located at the crossroads of world's critical waterways and chokepoints, controlling a major portion of international trade and maritime security. Whoever dominates these critical trade-routes, controls the bulk of global trade. Further, Africa is world's least developed continent, having no capacity to utilize its opulent resources by itself. This situation has created a gap for the world powers and presently this gap is being filled by the USA and China.

Despite bringing considerable benefits, US-China rivalry also possesses several hazards for African countries. Risks, such as debt trap, erosion of sovereignty and long-lasting dependency of African countries on external powers, undermining their own potential to formulate independent policies and take autonomous decisions, may erode their self-sufficiency. Moreover, perils of resource depletion and environmental degradation may cause further problems for African nations (Sarkodie, 2018).

Conclusion

The ongoing US-China competition in Africa incorporates a substantial significance in international geopolitics, emphasized by the interaction of economic, political and strategic goals. This competition is characterized by both powers' aspirations to proclaim their supremacy in Africa, comprising ramifications that outspread regional borders. A detailed analysis of this rivalry exhibits that the implications of this competition will decide the future course of international relations, having far-reaching impacts not only on Africa but also the international order as a whole.

In order to safeguard their particular interests, the USA and China are engaged in Africa through varied schemes. Africa appears to be a treasure-house of resources for China which are crucial for their speedy industrial advancement and economic progress. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is intended for bolstering its trade and securing strategic interests through a network of roads, railways and ports. This strategy harmonizes with China's "no strings attached policy", a tactic that has obtained a lot of support from African countries which prefer economic growth to political restructuring.

On the contrary, USA's engagement in Africa is prompted by a blend of tactical benefits and an urge to counter China's growing power in the region. Though fostering democracy and human rights is USA's proclaimed goal, the hidden objective is to preserve its dominance, hindering China from attaining regional hegemony. Nevertheless, African countries do not like USA's political preconditioning because they consider it an encroachment in their sovereignty. The rivalry between the USA and China has turned into a tug of war which has created a very critical situation for Africa, offering challenges and opportunities simultaneously. The inflow of funds from both

powers has propelled technological expansion, economic advancement and infrastructure development in the region.

Nonetheless, the competition has also posed several challenges to Africa. African countries owe enormous debts to China which may create a debt trap for them if they are unable to repay these loans, thereby posing risks to their sovereignty and losing control over strategic assets. These circumstances may cause long-term dependency of African countries on external powers, undermining their own potential to formulate independent policies and take autonomous decisions. This competition also has far-reaching impacts on the environment. Extensive exploitation of Africa's resources may lead to resource depletion and environmental degradation, causing deforestation, environmental pollution, and loss of biodiversity.

Although this rivalry is inevitable, there are certain areas where the USA and China can engage in collaborative activities. The potential cooperation between these powers can bring three-fold benefits for all the stakeholders. Their collaboration in domains like ecological conservation, technological advancement and counter-terrorism can foster more affluent and secure world order. By resorting to diplomatic channels and engaging in negotiations, both China and the US can evade the hazards of zero-sum game and foster a win-win scenario that feeds their mutual interests, at the same time nurturing African development.

African nations should exploit this intricate situation tactically to negotiate more advantageous terms, guaranteeing that external funds nurture their longstanding development objectives. In order to mitigate harmful effects of peripheral interventions and nurture sustainable development, it will be necessary to develop strong regional collaboration and set up strong institutions. To avoid debt traps, viable debt management policies should be implemented, ascertaining that funds are used for sustainable development. In this way African countries can change US-China competition into an opportunity for development and prosperity, determining their own fate in the modern world.

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