

AFRICA: A Constant Battlefield of Great Power Rivalry

Buğra SARI*

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Abstract

This study examines the objectives and motivations of three different episodes of great power rivalry in Africa. The first was the colonial rivalry among European powers in the second half of the 19th century, called the “scramble for Africa”. The second was the rivalry between the USA and the Soviet Union during the Cold War era as an extension to the global East-West ideological confrontation. The third is taking place today between the USA and China as a result of China’s extensive economic, political and cultural involvement in Africa that threatens the US global hegemony. Analyzing these three eras of great power rivalry in Africa, the study reveals the different underlying dynamics and features of each era, including the different strategies that great powers adopted to achieve their objectives within each era.

Keywords: *Africa, China, European Powers, the US, the USSR*

JEL Classification: F50, F59, N47

* Assist. Prof. Dr., Turkish National Police Academy, Institute of Security Sciences, Department of International Security, bugrasari1988@gmail.com

Büyük Güçlerin Sürekli Bir Mücadele Alanı: AFRİKA

Öz

Eldeki bu çalışma Afrika kıtası üzerindeki farklı dönemlerde medyana gelen büyük güçler arasındaki mücadelelerinin amaçları ve motivasyonlarını ele almaktadır. Birinci mücadele Avrupalı güçler arasında 19. yüzyılın ikinci yarısındaki vuku bulmuş olan “Afrika Talanı”dır. İkincisi, Soğuk Savaş döneminde Amerika Birleşik Devletleri ve Sovyetler Birliği arasındaki küresel Doğu-Batı mücadelesinin kıtaya yansması olmuştur. Kıta üzerinde hali hazırdaki büyük güç mücadelesi Çin ve ABD arasında yaşanmaktadır. Nitekim 2000’li yılların başından itibaren Çin’in Afrika ile büyüyen ekonomik, siyasi ve kültürel ilişkileri ABD’nin küresel hegemonyasına meydan okuyacak boyutlara ulaşmıştır. Çalışma Afrika kıtası üzerinde geçmişten günümüze bahsi geçen bu üç farklı büyük güç mücadelesi dönemine odaklanarak, her dönemin kendine has özelliklerini ve bu dönemleri şekillendiren büyük güçlerin amaç ve stratejilerini ortaya koymaktadır.

***Anahtar Kelimeler:** Afrika, Çin, Avrupalı Güçler, ABD, Sovyetler Birliği*

***JEL Sınıflandırması:** F50, F59, N47*

Introduction

Africa, covering about one-fifth of the world's land surface, is the second largest continent after Asia. It is bounded on the north by the Mediterranean Sea, on the south by the intersection of the Atlantic and Indian oceans, on the east by the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean, and on the west by the Atlantic Ocean, making it a key hub of world trade throughout history. In addition to its strategic location, the continent has had abundant and valuable natural resources, including large global shares of gold, silver, iron ore, diamonds, sugar and salt since antiquity. In the modern era, its resources have diversified for use in military products and key industries, such as oil, natural gas, uranium, thorium, chromium, cobalt, copper, zinc, titanium, platinum, zirconium, manganese, lithium and phosphates. Because of these reserves, Africa has always drawn attention of outside powers. Hence, Africa has been subjected to the imperialist designs of great powers throughout history.

The earliest great power rivalry in Africa happened between the Portuguese and Ottomans in the 16th century, when the former's activities challenged the latter's sovereignty in Abyssinia. The subsequent was the rivalry among European powers in the second half of the 19th century for the brutal partition of Africa, known as the "scramble for Africa". During the Cold War, the continent became an extension to the global East-West confrontation between the United States (the US) and the Soviet Union (USSR). While the sudden collapse of the USSR in the 1990s left the US without any rival in the continent, its dominant position was soon challenged by the rise of China. Since the 2000s, China has increasingly engaged with Africa in parallel with its economic boom and the increasing proven energy reserves of the continent. China's extensive involvement threatens US global hegemony. As a result, a new great power rivalry in the continent has emerged in the 21st century between the US and China.

Focusing on the great power rivalry in Africa, this study examines historically the objectives and motivations of great powers in the continent. It first discusses the colonial rivalry that began with Portuguese imperial designs and intensified at the end of the 1800s with the arrival of other European powers. It then considers East-West rivalry during the Cold War era. Finally, it focuses in great detail on the latest great power rivalry between the US and China. Analysis of these three eras of great power rivalry in Africa reveals the different underlying dynamics and features of each one, including the different strategies that great powers adopted to achieve their objectives within each era.

1. Colonial Rivalry in the Continent

Although it is geographically connected to Europe and Asia, vast areas of the African continent other than its shores were unknown to outsiders until the beginning of the 19th century. For many centuries, Africa's wealth, such as gold and other valuable materials, had been brought to great civilizations outside the continent by Islamic empires along caravan routes from its interior to its coasts, making the discovery of deep Africa not a great concern (MacKenzie, 1983, p.11).

Once, however, the Portuguese had appeared five centuries ago as the first European colonists in Africa, the continent gradually became a zone of rivalry between Eastern and Western civilizations. The story of the scramble for Africa thus naturally begins with Prince Henry the Navigator of Portugal, who sent fleets around the continent and claimed territories along the coasts (Nutting, 1971, p. 22). As part of Prince Henry's expeditions, Portuguese sailors, merchants and Christian missionaries intensified their activities in the continent. As a result, Portuguese coastal trading stations were established to transfer raw materials to the homeland. However, since the profit from these raw materials failed to satisfy Portuguese appetites, Portuguese merchants also engaged in the slave trade to cover the costs of their expeditions to the continent (da Veiga Pinto, 1979, p. 119).

Portuguese expeditions in the 15th and 16th centuries to Abyssinia, in north east Africa, were prompted mainly by economic motives, although religious ideals, such as converting heathens to Christianity while seizing their lands, also played a part (Abramova, 1979, p. 17). Portuguese economic and religious activities thus caused an early, albeit geographically limited great power rivalry by challenging the Islamic Ottoman Empire's sovereignty over Abyssinia. Portugal had two main economic objectives (Nutting, 1971, p. 24; da Veiga Pinto, 1979, p. 119; MacKenzie, 1983, p. 11). The first was to divert the trade route for exporting Sudanese gold to Europe via North Africa. The second was to find a sea route to India's silk and spice markets. Both objectives upset Ottoman hegemony over East-West trade relations. The Ottomans therefore attempted to curb Portuguese advances in East Africa but failed because their ocean-fighting warship technology lagged far behind that of Portugal (Orhonlu, 1996, p. 32). Consequently, Portuguese fleets took control of the entrances to the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea, and East Africa's coasts, from Socotra to Mozambique (Nutting, 1971, p. 25).

As Portuguese supremacy declined, Dutch, British and French colonial activities began in the late 16th century. Although these were limited to trading in raw materials and slaves in

fortified coastline stations (Keltie, 1966, p. 5; Vandervort, 1998, p. 35),¹ these Europeans became interested in Africa's interior in the first half of the 19th century once they realized there were more opportunities for increasing their wealth. During this period, Africa became an important producer of commercially valuable commodities for Europe, such as palm oil, groundnuts, ivory, spices, gold and diamonds (MacKenzie, 1983, p. 13). The mid-19th century also saw intensified efforts by Europeans to explore the interior. While initially these explorers mainly aimed to make geographical and natural observations, by the 1870s they had become more connected with efforts to occupy, divide and colonize Africa. Accordingly, their activities gained nationalistic sentiments such as outdoing the activities of explorers from rival European powers in the colonialist scramble for the continent (MacKenzie, 1983, pp. 13-14).

Unsurprisingly, this new momentum in the exploration of Africa also coincided with the emergence of new powers in European politics, most notably Germany, Italy and Belgium. After their unifications, their demands for a share of Africa's wealth caused new colonial rivalries over African territories (see Keltie, 1966, pp. 5-11; Pakenham, 1991, pp. 141-256). It soon became clear that this rivalry could cause conflict among the great powers when France and King Leopold II of Belgium clashed over their interests in the Congo basin. As a skilful diplomat, who knew the costs of international tensions with the traditional colonial powers to acquire overseas colonies in Africa, Otto von Bismarck of Germany therefore called an international conference in Berlin to agree rules and procedures to peacefully occupy, divide and colonize Africa. The conference successfully prevented war between the European powers as they agreed on the rules and borders of partition through effective occupation. Thus began the great powers' remarkable "scramble for Africa", which was the most rapid period of imperial expansion in world history (Brooke-Smith, 1987, p. 1). At the time, only 10 percent of the continent was under formal European rule, but this had increased to almost 90 percent by 1914, with only two independent African states left after the scramble: Liberia and Ethiopia (Lucas, 1966, pp. 15-16; MacKenzie, 1983, pp. 13-14).

Regarding the nature of the great power rivalry of the time, historians have presented numerous accounts of the scramble. Their explanations focus on a mixture of economic, strategic, political and cultural factors. However, because they fail to capture the full story due to highlighting one factor over the others, it is better to discuss them eclectically rather than emphasizing one. Robinson and Gallagher (1962, pp. 593-640), for example, mainly emphasize

¹ Before the 1870s, European holdings in interior Africa were quite limited. Portugal had an entity in today's Angola, Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique. Britain owned commercial ventures in the so-called Oil Rivers region in today's Nigeria. France expanded up the Senegal River towards Western Sudan.

Britain's geopolitical strategic concerns. They suggest that Britain was forced to saddle itself with new territorial responsibilities in Africa in response to a French strategic challenge to the security of the Upper Nile and Egypt, which safeguarded the Suez route to India. In contrast, Fieldhouse (1961, p. 205) highlights diplomatic relations, with territorial negotiations over the scramble viewed as "an extension into the periphery of the political struggle in Europe". Sanderson (1974, p. 9) and Barnhart (2016, pp. 385-419) considers national self-esteem as the key motive for annexations in Africa, related to the imperialism of prestige or "status competition", such as French and Italian rivalry over Tunisia in 1881. The crucial factor behind France's annexation of Tunisia, accordingly, was not material interests but the belief that failure to act would be viewed as a humiliation for France at the hands of the Italians. Similarly, Langer (1951, p. 281) argues that the dominant factor in the minds of Italian decision-makers was a conviction that the country would look more like a great power if it imitated others by acquiring colonies in Africa. Finally, both Wehler (1970, pp. 119-155) and Stengers (1972, pp. 248-275) claim that economic factors caused the scramble in that European leaders were concerned about the stagnation of Europe's economy. Africa thus offered potentially rich markets to ease the economic pressure.

2. East and West Rivalry during the Cold War Era

Nearly all former colonies in Africa gained independence from Europe's colonial powers in a 20-year period after World War II. However, this was also a new era of great power rivalry in the continent as the major victors of World War II, the US and the USSR, emerged as the world's most powerful states. World politics became dominated by the rivalry between these superpowers, known as the Cold War.

At first glance, the African continent seemed peripheral to US-USSR rivalry. However, it soon became clear during the Cold War that East-West competition had global effects, including rivalry in Africa. As Maxwell (1980, p. 515) rightly notes, "any separation of Africa from the complex web of East-West relations [is] impossible". However, this does not mean that Africa topped the Cold War rivals' agenda on its own as it was too poor and peripheral. Instead, it only gained importance in parallel to its role in the new superpower rivalry. As Kitchen (1983, p. 14) puts it,

the only sure way of keeping an African item from sliding off the agenda of the US secretary of state's morning staff meeting is to package it with East-West wrappings. Attaining presidential level of attention for an African policy initiative is more complicated and protracted but establishing a connection between the proposed action and US global concern - that is, the Soviet Union - is again mandatory.

Superpower interest in Africa was therefore mainly shaped by the general US-USSR relationship, based on the Cold War East-West cleavage (Akindele, 1985, p. 128; Orwa, 1985, p. 96; Thomson, 2004, p. 152).

More specifically, both the US and the USSR portrayed themselves as natural allies of newly independent African countries because they had not participated in the scramble for Africa in the previous century. In addition, the USSR actually had an advantage due to its socialist worldview, which shared African nationalists' anti-imperialist sentiments, rooted in the continent's colonial past. Unsurprisingly, many newly independent African states proclaimed themselves to be socialist (Thomson, 2004, p. 152). Regarding the Soviet leadership's view of the ideological links between the USSR and Africa, Brayton (1979, p. 253) suggests that "Africa offer[ed] maximum gains for winning world influence with minimum risks to the Soviet Union". As part of this, the USSR forged fraternal links with the radical governments of Ghana, Guinea and Mali, and three Marxist-Leninist states, Angola, Mozambique and Ethiopia (Thomson, 2004, p. 152). The main concern for US policymakers, in this respect, was that any African state that followed socialism could tilt the overall global balance towards the USSR. Hence, the US designed its continental policies to prevent countries with nationalist and anti-imperialist sentiments from becoming Soviet satellites (Thomson, 2004, p. 155).

Supplementing the ideological dynamics of the superpower rivalry in Africa, both the US and the USSR had economic and strategic reasons to engage with the continent. For example, the USSR was interested in Africa's strategic mineral resources, traditionally controlled by the US and Europe. Hence, by improving relations with African states, especially Zaire and South Africa, the USSR could secure the strategic resources needed to maintain the pace of its military projects and space programme. More importantly, by dominating African resources, the USSR could also prevent the West accessing them (Thomson, 1980, p. 217). Soviet plans for African resources seriously concerned the US since it depended on them to feed its industry. For instance, 99 percent of the US's cobalt requirements were met by imports from Zaire, 98 percent of manganese requirements by Gabon and South Africa, about 45 percent of platinum requirements by South Africa, 91 percent of chromium requirements by South Africa and Zimbabwe, and 40 percent of petroleum requirements by Algeria, Angola, Congo, Libya and Nigeria (Adelman, 1980, pp. 17-19; Oude and Clough, 1980, pp. 82-84; Shafer, 1982, pp. 154-157; Orwa, 1985, pp. 102-103).

In addition to strategic resources, Africa's location also made it an important sphere of superpower rivalry during the Cold War. For example, West Africa was a critical asset in military calculations because it lay on the North Atlantic coastline. South Africa overlooked Cape Hope, which was a strategic supply route between the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. Finally, East Africa was adjacent to the oil-rich Middle East and supply routes passing through the Gulf of Aden and the Persian Gulf.

Until the 1970s, the USSR's initial failures to establish African bases enabled the US to hold key strategic locations in and around the continent. The US first gained a foothold after World War II when it started a military relationship with Liberia. The two sides signed a military agreement in which the US pledged to defend Liberia from external attack. In 1949, the US extended its relations to South Africa through military cooperation. By the 1950s, the US had acquired bases in Libya and Morocco, and built communication facilities in Ethiopia (Orwa, 1985, pp. 96-97).

While the US was gradually strengthening its position, the USSR's only attempt to gain a foothold before the 1960s occurred immediately after World War II when it demanded sovereignty of Libya and Massawa in Eritrea, which are strategically important for operations in the Mediterranean and Red Sea, respectively. However, these efforts proved futile (Orwa, 1985, p. 96). Despite forging a close alliance with Egypt, the USSR was unable to establish any naval or air bases. Egyptian President Anwar Sadat eventually expelled Soviet military advisors in 1972 upon Soviet refusal to provide Egypt with offensive weapons, which Egypt was considering important to alter balance of power with Israel (The New York Times, 1972). Similarly, Soviet attempts during the 1960s to acquire bases in Ghana and Guinea also failed (Orwa, 1985, p. 104). This did not, however, discourage the USSR, which finally gained an airfield in Guinean Conakry. This was a strategic asset as the USSR could monitor US movements in the Atlantic (Thomson, 2004, p. 155). In 1974, the USSR established shore-based facilities in Somalian Berbera in return for military aid, worth up to \$450 million (Adelman, 1980, p. 11). The USSR evacuated Berbera base in 1977 when Somalia attempted to invade Ethiopia, which had a socialist government. In return for assisting Ethiopian government, the Soviets acquired a military base in the port of Massawa on the Red Sea. The importance of this base increased after the USSR acquired another coastal base in Aden in South Yemen. The two bases lie at each end of the Gulf of Aden, where the Red Sea and Indian Ocean meet. Thus, the Soviets achieved an invaluable strategic asset for harassing the West's oil supply route from the Middle East (Kitchen, 1983, p. 17).

The US responded to these East African assets by taking over the ex-Soviet Berbera base in Somalia. The US also acquired military facilities in Mombasa, Kenya and improved military ties with Egypt and Sudan, which neighbour Ethiopia (Coker, 1982, pp. 125-126). These countries were made available for the US Rapid Deployment Force to react quickly against any development threatening Western interests in East Africa, the Middle East, the Gulf of Aden or the Persian Gulf (Orwa, 1985, pp. 104-105).

To achieve their objectives, the US and USSR both employed economic and military aid programs as means of influence, which they used highly selectively. Only those governments with pro-Western sentiments were eligible for the US aid programme. However, this contradicted overall US foreign policy since strategic interests were put ahead of liberal values, such as democracy and human rights. Consequently, the US did not hesitate to provide economic and military assistance to brutal regimes in Zaire and South Africa (Thomson, 1996; Sari, 2012, pp. 98-99). Conversely, the USSR's aid programme was available only to countries opting for the non-capitalist road with a commitment to Marxism-Leninism (Lawson, 1988, p. 502; Akindele, 1985, pp. 134-135).

3. A New Era of Great Power Rivalry in Africa²

Following the dissolution of the USSR, the worldwide Cold War ideological confrontation ended, leaving the US as victor and apparently the single great power in world politics. Since US interest in Africa during the Cold War had been mainly a response to USSR involvement, Africa inevitably lost its place in US strategic projections for the post-Cold era, and thus global power rivalry. This is evident in an August 1995 US Department of Defense (DOD) report, "U.S. Security Strategy for Sub-Saharan Africa". According to the report,

America's security interests in Africa are very limited. At present we have no permanent or significant military presence anywhere in Africa: We have no bases; we station no combat forces; and we homeport no ships. We do desire access to facilities and material, which have been and might be especially important in the event of contingencies or evacuations. But ultimately we see very little traditional strategic interest in Africa (DOD, 1995).

However, US disinterest soon disappeared once China emerged as a rival to US global hegemony and became extensively involved in Africa following new oil discoveries. China's economy has been remarkably successful since it implemented free-market reforms in 1979 (Yueh, 2007, p. 35), with GDP growing over 9 percent per annum. Driven by this momentum,

² For the theoretical explanation of the current Sino-US rivalry in Africa in great detail through neorealist lenses, see Sari (2019).

China has become the world's second largest economy after the US, and has the highest GDP on a purchasing power parity basis (World Bank, 2018).³ Having risen to such a status, China constantly needs to expand its markets and secure reliable resource supplies to sustain its rapid economic growth. Africa is thus probably the most important area of operations for China. Since the 1990s China's involvement has dramatically diversified and deepened, with extensive economic investments, intense educational, cultural and political interactions, and growing military ties. These developments threaten US global hegemony.

3.1. China's Rise in Africa

China's active engagement is closely related with Africa's proven energy reserves. Whereas it was of only minor economic interest for diamonds and strategic mineral reserves in the 1970s and 80s, Africa's importance in energy markets has increased following the latest oil discoveries. Africa's proven oil reserves was estimated at 7.2 percent of world reserves in 2017 (British Petroleum, 2019). While this still lags far behind the Middle East, discoveries of proven reserves accelerated from 77.2 thousand million barrels in 1998 to 125.3 thousand million barrels in 2017. Moreover, the US Department of Energy (DOE) predicts that the combined oil output of African producers will rise by 91 percent between 2002 and 2025 (DOE, 2005; *see also* Klare and Volman, 2006/b, p.611).

Given its rising need for reliable supplies as it is no longer self-sufficient in oil, China's interest in Africa has intensified enormously. It had become self-sufficient in energy after production started in the Daqing oil field in 1963. However, its oil consumption has exceeded production since 1993, when it produced 2.8 million barrels of oil per day (mbpd) while consumption was 3 mbpd. Since then, the gap between production and consumption has accelerated. Chinese demand for oil doubled within a decade between 1995 and 2005, from 3.3 to 6.6 mbpd, while oil production only rose from 2.9 mbpd to 3.6 mbpd. By 2018, China consumed 13.5 mbpd while oil production reached only 3.7 mbpd (British Petroleum, 2019). Consequently, China is now the world's largest importer of crude oil.

The widening gap between China's oil production and consumption raised concerns in Chinese decision-making circles. The increasing dependence on imported oil meant that China had to participate in the global oil market. Chinese leaders therefore adopted a "going out" strategy to secure and diversify oil supplies. Implementation of this strategy made Africa soon become the most important part of China's efforts to diversify external oil sources. Since the

³ While Chinese GDP (ppp) was \$25,361,740.19, US GDP (ppp) was \$20,494,099.85.

end of the 1990s, China has extensively engaged with African countries, diplomatically, economically, militarily and culturally.

China's rising interest in Africa was symbolized by the introduction of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), initiated at the Ministerial Conference in Beijing in 2000. FOCAC has cemented China's relations with African countries through a robust economic agenda, which combines three main elements: aid, investment and trade. Regarding aid, Beijing has provided many African nations with debt relief worth billions of US dollars (Gill, Huang and Morrison, 2007, p. 8; Broadman, 2007, p. 275; Hofstedt, 2009, p. 80). China has also granted loans, which have gradually increased since 2005 from \$4.5 billion in 2006 to \$30.4 billion in 2016 (SAIS China Africa Research Initiative, 2019). However, these loans are mainly distributed to resource rich countries, such as Angola, Mozambique, Nigeria, Sudan, Zimbabwe and South Africa.

China's foreign direct investment (FDI) has grown rapidly, from \$491 million in 2003 to \$9.3 billion in 2009, \$34.6 billion in 2015 and \$43.2 billion in 2017 (SAIS China Africa Research Initiative, 2019), although this is also mainly allocated to resource rich countries. The most powerful indicator of China's emerging interest in Africa is trade. In the 1990s, prior to implementing the "going out" strategy, China-Africa annual trade volume was below \$10 billion. Since then, however, it has grown dramatically, from \$10 billion in 2001 to \$71.2 billion in 2007, when China overtook Britain and France to become Africa's second largest trading partner after the US (Hofstedt, 2009, p. 80; SAIS China Africa Research Initiative, 2019). By 2010, it had reached \$120 billion, surpassing US trade at \$113.3 billion (SAIS China Africa Research Initiative, 2019; The US Census Bureau, 2019). It has since increased further, to over \$200 billion in 2015 (SAIS China Africa Research Initiative, 2019; The US Census Bureau, 2019) and \$204 billion in 2018 (Ministry of Commerce, Peoples Republic of China, 2019).

As Wang and Bio-Tchané (2008) point out, it is particularly noteworthy that Africa's exports to and imports from China have risen by more than 40 percent and 35 percent, respectively, which is significantly higher than growth in world trade at 14 percent and commodity prices at 18 percent. More interesting, the composition of China's trade with Africa is not exploitative. On the contrary, unlike the US approach, it reflects the comparative advantages of each partner rather than serving any unilateral Chinese interest in exploiting natural resources. Evidence of this is the fairly even import-export balance (see Figure 1). While China mainly imports oil, other energy sources (about 60 percent), and strategic minerals and

metals (about 15 percent), Africa mainly imports manufactured products, machinery and transport equipment (about 75 percent).

The striking feature of China's aid to Africa is its "no strings attached" approach. That is, aid is based on the principle of non-interference in the domestic affairs of recipient countries. As China's then deputy foreign minister, Zhou Wenzhong, put it in 2004 regarding aid to Sudanese government accused of massive and systematic human rights violations, "Business is business ... We try to separate politics from business ... Secondly, I think the internal situation in the Sudan is an internal affair, and we are not in a position to impose upon them" (French, 2004). This principle of non-interference gives China an advantage over the US, whose aid is tied to structural reforms as conditions imposed by Western values, such as democracy, human rights and liberal economy. This has made African countries see Chinese aid a valuable alternative to the US (Alden, 2005, p. 156; Taylor, 2006, pp. 939-94; Pant, 2008, pp. 36-37).

To further strengthen its presence, China supplemented its extensive economic engagement with activities in media, education and culture. These are skilfully and harmoniously used by China to present itself a friendly power. In 2010, for example, China's state news agency, *Xinhua*, broadcasting in English and French, expanded to 33 offices across the continent (Shinn and Eisenman, 2012, p. 198). Confucius Institutes are critical to cultural dissemination strategy of China. There are around 38 Confucius Institutes and Confucius classrooms across 27 African countries. These are designed to orient Africans increasingly towards China by raising awareness of Chinese language and culture (Ongodia, 2017, p. 41).

China also has an increasing military presence in Africa. In the 2000s China's military and security goals in the continent were quite limited to United Nations peacekeeping missions and anti-piracy activities. Since then, its military presence has progressed to acquiring its first overseas military base in Djibouti in 2017. According to a report by the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission (2017, pp. 171-172), the Djibouti base will serve as an important strategic asset as it is located on "a key chokepoint for sea lines of communications between the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean, through which travels a large portion of hundreds of billions dollars in trade between China and the Middle East and Europe." The base's location is also particularly sensitive for the US because it is close to Camp Lemonnier, one of the largest and most critical overseas US military installations, and the centre of US African Command (AFRICOM) facilities. US officials therefore fear that the Chinese military could spy on US military activities.

3.2. Implications of China's Rise for the US Interests in Africa

China's strengthening ties with African countries through aid, investment, trade and the vigorous introduction of the Chinese way of life challenge US foreign policy goals and its vision for the continent in several ways. The first challenge is that China's quest for African oil is a deliberate attempt to block oil supplies to other importing countries and keep the US out of Africa's energy market (Brookes and Shin, 2006, pp. 2-4; Klare and Volman, 2006/a, pp. 303-306; Conteh-Morgan, 2018, pp. 40-41). Some western analysts even predict that China could be able to threaten both US and global energy security by locking up Africa's oil supply (Hanauer and Morris, 2014, p. 105). As the 2006 Report to Congress of the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission (2006: 95) emphasized, "China's strategy of securing ownership and control of oil and natural gas assets abroad could substantially affect U.S. energy security-reducing the ability of the global petroleum market to ameliorate temporary and limited petroleum supply disruptions in the United States and elsewhere".

The second challenge is China's "no strings attached" engagement policy. This is claimed to encourage misrule, corruption and human rights violations by supporting oppressive and destitute African regimes, thereby undermining the US vision of Africa governed by democratic regimes that respect human rights and embrace liberal free market principles embodied in the IMF and World Bank (Hilsum, 2005, p. 421; Brookes and Shin, 2006, pp. 1-5; Pham, 2006, pp. 249-250; Carmody and Owusu, 2007, pp. 512-515; Sun, 2014, pp. 6-7; Conteh-Morgan, 2018, pp.40, 43). As a hearing report in the US House of Representatives (2018: 1) notes, "While a number of African nations have welcomed Chinese engagement and investment, it often comes at a very high cost, with tendency to adopt the worst practices that prop up kleptocrats and autocrats".

The third challenge is the implications of China's extensive engagement for US global hegemony (Gill et al., 2007: p. 5; U.S. Congressional Research Service, 2008, p. 4; Conteh-Morgan, 2018, p. 44). That is, Chinese expansion in Africa is part of an overall strategy to confront the US globally. The assumption is that as the US rebalances the Asia-Pacific region to contain Chinese influence there, China has responded by shifting its attention westward to Africa to escape US containment (Rotberg, 2008, p. 2; Sun, 2014, p. 7).

3.3. The US Response to China's Rise in Africa

Faced with these challenges, the US has realized that it needs to engage with the continent more seriously. While there the rivalry was mild or moderate at most during the Clinton and Bush Administrations, it intensified during the Obama Administration (Conteh-

Morgan, 2018, pp. 39). For instance, Obama's secretary of state, Hillary Clinton, publicly criticized China's presence in Africa during an 11-day trip to the continent, when she warned African countries about cooperating with powers that are exploiting the continent's resources. Clinton also praised the US stance: "America will stand up for democracy and universal human rights even when it might be easier or more profitable to look the other way, to keep the resources flowing" (Smith, 2012; Ghosh, 2012). Describing Clinton's remarks as a "U.S. plot to sow discord between China [and] Africa, China's state-owned *Xinhua* news agency replied that "Whether Clinton was ignorant of the facts on the ground or chose to disregard them, her implication that China has been extracting Africa's wealth for itself is utterly wide of the truth" (Embassy of the PRC in the Republic of Kenya, 2012).

Sino-US rivalry in Africa has become even more evident in the Trump administration's new Africa strategy, announced on December 13, 2018 by national security advisor John Bolton. Ironically, according to Tremann (2018), "the new US Africa strategy is not about Africa. It's about China". Indeed, Bolton's remarks underlined China's (and Russia's to a lesser extent) activities in Africa as a national security issue for the US (The White House, 2018). He claimed that China is deliberately and aggressively increasing its influence in the continent against US national security interests. Moreover, according to Bolton, China's predatory actions are components of its ultimate goal of advancing Chinese global dominance.

US interest in Africa during the post-Cold War era first reappeared after the bombing of the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998 and the September 11 terrorist attacks on American soil. These events raised US concerns that the spread of terrorism into Africa might threaten the free flow of oil, thereby threatening US national security. Hence, China's accelerating pursuit of oil assets in Africa since the 2000s intensified existing US concerns (Klare and Volman, 2006/a, p. 303). In response, the US has increased its military, humanitarian and economic activities.

Military activities constitute the backbone of the US presence in Africa. It has established military bases throughout the continent and provided a variety of security assistance programmes to African countries, overseen by AFRICOM. The creation of AFRICOM as a stand-alone command in 2008 demonstrated how Africa's position in US strategic projections had changed from peripheral to central in parallel with rising US security interests in the continent. According to the AFRICOM Posture Statement (2019, p. 6), it has approximately 7,000 personnel conducting tasks while the total number of US personnel in Africa, including contractors, is 75,000 (Conteh-Morgan, 2019, p. 81). As already mentioned, AFRICOM's

major base is Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti, with about 4,000 military and civilian personnel, and fighter jets, cargo aircraft and drones.

AFRICOM is not designed as a typical military command only serving security and defence purposes. Instead, it has a multi-functional focus. On February 6, 2007, when AFRICOM was announced, US President George W. Bush stated that “Africa Command will enhance our efforts to bring peace and security to the people of Africa and promote our common goals of development, health, education, democracy and economic growth in Africa.” Although unmentioned in the statement, many experts suggest that it was also closely related to securing natural resources in response to growing Chinese influence in Africa (McFate, 2008, p. 113). Conteh-Morgan (2018: 48) even asserted that the US had launched a new continental containment policy against China through AFRICOM.

In parallel with its multi-functional framework, AFRICOM has various functions, including military activities, development programmes and humanitarian assistance. Its military activities mainly concentrate on promoting regional security and stability to create a secure environment for US companies operating in the continent and ensuring oil flows to the US. The main tools are the Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA), the Africa Deployment Assistance Partnership Team (ADAPT), the Africa Partnership Station (APS) and the Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI). CJTF-HOA actively conducts operations to counter violent extremist groups in East Africa. It includes Djibouti, Burundi, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Seychelles, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda. CJTF-HOA Headquarters states that its “operations prevent violent extremist organizations from threatening America, ensuring the protection of the homeland, American citizens, and American interests” (Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa, 2019). ADAPT, funded by the US Department of State (DOS), is basically a Theater Logistics Engagement activity to enhance the projection capabilities of African partner nations to support requirements in missions, such as peacekeeping, counterterrorism and humanitarian relief operations. APS, to improve maritime capabilities of African partner naval forces to ensure maritime security. GPOI is another DOS security assistance programme focused on enhancing partner nations’ self-sufficiency to conduct peace operations under UN and regional organizational mandates.

Regarding AFRICOM’s humanitarian missions, the US assists in preventing HIV/AIDS, combating pandemics, improving disaster preparedness and strengthening medical and veterinary capabilities. The main tools are the DOD HIV/AIDS Prevention Program

(DHAPP), Foreign Humanitarian Assistance, the Pandemic Response Program, the Medical Civil Action Program (MEDCAP) and the Veterinary Civil Action Program (VETCAP).

Economically, the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), adopted by the Clinton administration in 2000, the same year that China established the FOCAC, is the main economic instrument to deepen US trade and investment ties with Africa. AGOA is a trade preference programme for lifting tariff barriers with sub-Saharan African (SSA) countries. The striking feature of AGOA is that SSA countries must meet specific economic and political conditions to become eligible. There are currently 49 candidate SSA countries, of which 39 are eligible as of June 2019 (AGOA, 2019/a). AGOA demands full liberalization of the economy, requiring structural reforms like cutting government spending, and removing price controls and subsidies, even in key sectors selected for industrial development. The political conditions specifically call for respect for internationally recognized human rights and workers' rights. SSA countries must also refrain from activities that would undermine US national security and foreign policy interests. However, this last condition has created damaged the sovereignty of several African countries. For instance, the US applied intense pressure through AGOA conditions on Angola, Guinea and Cameroon in the United Nations Security Council to make them support the US invasion of Iraq (Thompson, 2004, p. 465).

AGOA increased the momentum of US-SSA trade from \$28 billion in 2000 to \$100 billion in 2008 (AGOA, 2019/b). US-all Africa trade also peaked in 2008 at \$141.8 billion (The US Census Bureau, 2019). However, growth in US-AGOA beneficiary countries trade has weakened since 2008 to \$39.2 billion in 2018 (AGOA, 2019/b). Similarly, US-all Africa trade was only \$51.8 billion in 2018, just a quarter of China's trade volume with Africa (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). There is also an import-export imbalance in US-AGOA beneficiary countries trade that favours US imports from Africa. While US exports to AGOA countries were worth \$18 billion in 2008, imports were worth \$82 billion (AGOA, 2019/b). Likewise, for US-all Africa trade, US exports were \$28.3 billion while imports were \$113.4 billion in 2008 (The US Census Bureau, 2019). Demonstrating how the US exploits African energy resources, 90 percent of US imports were energy related products (Ongodia, 2017, p. 33).

Increasing US interest is also evident in its aid policy to Africa. While total US disbursements to Africa by the US Agency for International Development (USAID), the DOD, the DOS and other agencies were \$3.4 billion in 2001, they rose to about \$8.1 billion in 2009 and \$11 billion in 2017. According to the USAID (2019), the main beneficiaries of the US disbursements to Africa in 2017 were resource-rich countries: Ethiopia (\$943 million), South

Sudan (\$922 million), Kenya (\$899 million), Nigeria (\$644 million), Uganda (\$608 million), South Africa (\$598 million), Tanzania (\$575 million), Mozambique (\$481 million), Zambia (\$474 million), Somalia (\$451 million), Malawi (\$449 million) and Democratic Republic of Congo (\$411 million).

China thus retains the upper hand despite US containment efforts due to its massive trade with the continent that far outstrips that of the US. In parallel, Chinese aid and investment activities have eclipsed those of the US and cemented its ties with African states. This is acknowledged by Tibor Nagy, the US assistant secretary of state for African Affairs: “For too long when investors have knocked on the door, and the Africans opened the door, the only person standing there was the Chinese” (BBC, 2019).

As well as economically, China is also now challenging the US in Africa militarily by acquiring a strategic military base in Djibouti. There have already been reports of rising tensions between the Chinese and US militaries in the continent. For example, according to US officials, China used military-grade lasers from its base in Djibouti to distract US pilots on ten different occasions, causing eye injuries to two pilots (Dahir, 2018).

Hence, Sino-US rivalry in Africa is likely to intensify. On the one hand, it is obvious that China is going to deepen its engagement to maintain its economic growth. More importantly, it seems that China has been preparing to play a more assertive role in world politics, as evident in President Xi Jinping’s speech to the Chinese Communist Party Congress on October 16, 2017. Identifying the rise of China as a “new era”, Jinping stated that “It is time for us [China] to take centre stage in the world” (BBC, 2017). On the other hand, the US is determined to curb China’s rise, both globally and specifically in Africa.

Conclusion

This study discussed three different eras of great power rivalry in Africa. In this way, it was able to reveal the distinct underlying dynamics and features of each, which the particular objectives, motivations and strategies of the great powers regarding Africa in each period.

Great power rivalry in Africa began with the Portuguese expeditions to Abyssinia, which challenged Ottoman sovereignty in Abyssinia. However, this was not a continental rivalry but limited to north east Africa. Later, other European powers became interested in colonial activities as Portuguese supremacy declined. Soon, they found themselves in a colonial rivalry for territory throughout the continent, known as the “scramble for Africa”. As a result, 90 percent of Africa had been colonised by 1914. The underlying causes were rooted in a mixture of geopolitical, diplomatic, economic, strategic and cultural factors.

The second era was the extension of the ideological confrontation between East and West during the Cold War. Although Africa was too poor and peripheral to be at the top of the agenda of the Cold War rivals on its own, it gained importance in parallel to its role in the competition between them. Both the US and the USSR presented themselves as natural allies of African states since they had never participated in the earlier “scramble for Africa”. To gain the upper hand, each employed economic and military aid programmes. While the US provided aid to pro-Western governments, opposition movements and paramilitary groups, the USSR supported those opting for the non-capitalist road with a commitment to Marxist-Leninist practices.

The current era of great power rivalry in Africa, between China and the US, started in the 2000s. As a result of its enormous economic growth in the last three decades, China’s demand for oil has increased about five times, making it no longer self-sufficient in energy. Consequently, China has participated in prospecting for and producing African oil and constructing infrastructure, such as pipelines and ports, to facilitate oil flows to China. To strengthen its presence, China’s has also extensively engaged with African countries, diplomatically, economically, militarily and culturally. China’s strengthening ties with African countries challenges US interests in the continent in several ways. First, it threatens US energy security. Second, China’s non-interference policy, according to US officials, undermines their efforts to promote democracy and liberal economic principles in Africa. Thirdly, China’s engagement is claimed to be part of its overall strategy to undermine US global hegemony.

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