



RISING POWER ACTIVISM VS GREAT POWER STATUSQUOISM: QUEST FOR A PLACE IN AFRICAN POWER POLITICS

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Abstract

This paper seeks to elucidate the policies the United States (US), Russia, China and Türkiye applied to have a place in African power politics. The US, as a great power, and through its strategic engagement with international organisations, addresses issues such as terrorism, the promotion of democracy, and the advocacy of human rights to exert influence over African countries. In contrast, Russia (once a great power; currently a rising power) employs a soft diplomacy strategy, capitalising on its historical context and regional relationships. While China's contemporary commercial investments and economic support for African nations dominate the continent, a delicate balancing act between soft and hard power is the foundation of Türkiye's foreign policy towards Africa. In this sense, the comparative methodology is employed to analyse these policies through a Neo-realist approach, focusing on examining specific agreements and contracts between the nations in Africa and the rising and great powers. The research findings indicate that there are evident signs of the exploitation of African countries by great powers facilitated through international organisations, investments, and soft diplomacy in order to keep the status quo intact. At the same time, the rising powers mostly built "heart-to-heart" connections with the African nations by adopting activist foreign policy understanding.

Keywords: Rising Powers, Great Powers, Africa, Türkiye, the US, Russia, China

JEL Classification: F51, F52, F59

YÜKSELEN GÜÇ AKTİVİZMİ VE BÜYÜK GÜÇ STATÜKOCULUĞU: AFRİKA GÜÇ MÜCADELESİNDE BİR YER ARAYIŞI

Öz

Bu makale, Amerika Birleşik Devletleri (ABD), Rusya, Çin ve Türkiye'nin Afrika güç mücadelesinde yer edinmek için uyguladığı politikaları açıklamayı amaçlamaktadır. Büyük bir güç olarak ABD, uluslararası örgütlerle stratejik angajmanı yoluyla ve Afrika ülkeleri üzerinde etki kurmak için terörizm, demokrasinin teşviki, insan haklarının savunulması gibi konuları ele almaktadır. Buna karşılık, Rusya (bir zamanlar büyük bir güç; şu anda yükselen bir güç olarak) tarihsel bağlamından ve bölgesel ilişkilerinden yararlanarak yumuşak güç diplomasisi kullanmaktadır. Çin, ticari yatırımları ve Afrika ülkelerine ekonomik desteği ile kıtaya hakim olmaya çalışırken, Türkiye'nin Afrika'ya yönelik dış politikasının temelini yumuşak ve sert güç arasında kurduğu hassas denge oluşturmaktadır. Bu anlamda, bu makale karşılaştırmalı metodoloji üzerinden bahsi geçen politikaları Neo-realist bir yaklaşımla analiz ederek Afrika'daki uluslar ile yükselen ve büyük güçler arasındaki belirli anlaşmaları ve sözleşmeleri incelemeye odaklanmaktadır. Araştırma bulguları, Afrika ülkelerinin uluslararası örgütler, yatırımlar ve yumuşak diplomasi aracılığıyla büyük güçler tarafından statükoyu korumak adına sömürüldüğüne dair açık işaretler olduğunu göstermektedir. Diğer taraftan yükselen güçlerin aktif bir dış politika anlayışı ile çoğunlukla Afrika ülkeleriyle işbirliğine dayalı bağlar kurduğu ortaya konulmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yükselen Güçler, Büyük Güçler, Afrika, Türkiye, ABD, Rusya, Çin

JEL Sınıflandırması: F51, F52, F59

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1. Introduction

The power centre has been shifting over centuries. Even though this is an irrefutable reality based on the observations and experiences of human beings, the solutions to the questions of how this power centre shifts continue to be a centre for debate and controversy. According to neo-realism, power politics and strategic competition are fundamental aspects of this framework, as states seek to maximise their security and relative power in an unpredictable world. At the same time, it is based on the fundamental notion that these never-ending power conflicts to provide safety contribute to an anarchic social and international environment (Thompson, 2006: 6–8). “The character of these respective changes contradicts power transition theory, which claims that the dominant power, as a status quo power, will seek to maintain the status quo actively, and the rising power, as a revisionist power, will challenge the existing system” (Zhou, 2019: 3). In this sense, rising powers mostly encounters great powers. However, since they lack the material power, if no alignment with other rising powers, to financially substantiate their foreign policy courses, rising powers employ soft-power instruments such as cultural, educational, and partly commercial relations (Volgy and Imwalle, 1995; Schweller and Pu, 2011). That is the main trigger leading rising powers to follow their agenda.

Africa bears a profound historical legacy of colonial domination and economic hardship on this account. Nevertheless, the continent possesses vast expanses of land abundant in natural resources and holds significant potential for development and growth. Ultimately, it was the African people who liberated themselves from the oppression and dominance of foreign powers, achieving independence and dismantling apartheid in the process of their emancipation. All of these factors are regarded as essential contributions to the elements and advancement of development.

Distinguished by its pivotal geographic position and expansive area exceeding 30 million square kilometres, Africa possesses the most substantial wealth and strategic mineral reserves. Africa hosts substantial critical minerals resources, and the continent is currently being positioned as a major global player in the critical minerals supply chain (Boafo et. al, 2024: 1). In addition to oil and gas, experts estimate that the volume of African oil constitutes between 8 and 9 per cent of the total global supply. Roughly 8 million barrels of oil per day are produced from African content, representing approximately 10 % of the world's total production (Ali et. al. 2024: 1). They are notable for their efficiency, rapid extraction, and seamless oil transfer from the wells to the vessels. With these striking features and the relatively low power status of the states, the African continent has attracted the attention of great or rising powers. Having experienced power challenges in the past, states in the African continent do not seem to play easy with the intervention of great powers.

In this context, the US, Russia, China, and Türkiye are selected as cases since they show different but significant involvement in the diplomatic activities of African nations as great and rising powers with different strategic approaches. The US has kept its ranking as the great power in the world since it developed Africa's political framework using direct democracy support and work with international agencies, thereby combating terrorism and providing relief. Reaching its position on the African continent by counting on historical ties, military cooperation, and political influence, Russia has re-merged into African diplomatic activities. Since both countries strive to keep power using the defence of established political and economic systems that advance their geopolitical objectives, both policies might be defined as having great power statusquoism.

China and Türkiye, as rising powers, seek significance in Africa through various means. China uses its enormous economic resources to accomplish its activities through commerce, investments, and infrastructure development, therefore weakening traditional Western leadership in Africa. Through economic alliances, humanitarian foreign policy, and cultural interactions, Türkiye conducts an African policy to produce a unique model combining soft and hard power components in its diplomatic approach. Through mutually beneficial economic alliances that do not call for political or ideological convictions, China's and Türkiye's increasing power establish

their political ties. In this sense, this essay shows contrasting power strategies between established and rising global powers pursuing dominance in Africa, highlighting universal tendencies in international rivalry.

In recent years, China has demonstrated remarkable engagement in Africa, characterised by a series of high-level visits, substantial commitments of loan capital, extensive investments, and a concerted effort to cultivate favourable relations with African nations. The responses from the US have been diverse. Some perceive China as a strategic challenge aiming to secure access to essential natural resources like oil, minerals, and timber while simultaneously seeking to diminish conventional Western influence (Alden, 2017). Some dismiss the notion of a strategic threat yet recognise China as a significant competitor in terms of political influence and commercial gain.

Russia, as a Great Power until the end of the Cold War, not only aided African countries in their struggle against British colonialism and the pursuit of political independence but also played a significant role in the United Nations' recognition of independence for colonial nations and peoples.² This seminal document asserts the inherent right of all individuals to self-determination and unequivocally calls for the prompt and unconditional cessation of colonialism. When it comes to Türkiye, the designation of 2005 as Africa Year signified a crucial juncture for Turkish-African ties, heralding a new era of heightened interest in the continent. In 2008, the African Union designated Türkiye as a "strategic partner." The Justice and Development Party (AK Party) administration enhanced Turkish diplomatic engagement in Africa by establishing additional embassies, TİKA offices, Yunus Emre Institutes, and Turkish Maarif schools. The humanitarian and development budget of Türkiye allocated bigger sections to Africa as governmental agencies and civil society organisations initiated programs that included the whole continent. During this period, social interactions with Africa became a pivotal factor in the formulation of Türkiye's Africa policy. The government scholarship programs have facilitated substantial development in the number of African students studying in Türkiye, fostering a personal link between these areas (Tüfekçi and Dağ, 2022).

According to Neorealism, which was developed theoretically by Kenneth Waltz (1979), the international system remains anarchic, forcing states to concentrate on power growth to achieve security. In this sense, Ayoob (1995) and Clapham (1996) have examined how external powers use African power politics to enhance their geopolitical influence. The creation of the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) serves as evidence that supports neorealist theories about balance of power. The exploitation of African platforms by external powers becomes the focus of research written by Lake (2013) and Krapohl et al. (2014), who demonstrate how these powers establish strategic alliances and fight opposing influences while securing military and economic presence in Africa. Mearsheimer (2001), along with Taylor (2014a; 2014b), explain how external powers enhance their spheres of influence by implementing military assistance with trade agreements and political interventions as part of their strategies. Despite these studies, the lack of comparative analysis is more evident in the discussion about how external powers, including the new rising power, Türkiye, get into African power politics.

In this sense, this paper will explore the rivalry between the external powers (the US, China, Russia and Türkiye); some of them embrace activism, and some go for statusquoism.

2. Theoretical Framework: Neo-Realistic Positioning and Great Power Statusquoism

Neo-Realism explains how states interact in an anarchic international system. Rooted in classical Realism, Neo-Realism was developed primarily by Kenneth Waltz, who argued that the

² In 1960, the General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples (General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV)), known also as the Declaration on Decolonization. By this resolution, the General Assembly, considering the important role of the United Nations in assisting the movement for independence in Trust and Non-Self-Governing Territories, solemnly proclaimed the necessity of bringing colonialism in all its forms and manifestations to a speedy and unconditional end, and in this context, declared, *inter alia*, that all people had a right to self-determination.

international system's structure, rather than human nature, dictates state behaviour. Power politics and strategic competition are fundamental aspects of this framework, as states seek to maximise their security and relative power in an unpredictable world.

According to Neo-Realism, the international system is anarchical because no central authority can establish rules or manage conflicts (Glenn, 2009). Unlike domestic political systems, where governments regulate behaviour, international relations operate in a self-help environment where states must rely on their own capabilities for survival. This lack of central authority forces states to prioritise their security and act in ways that enhance their power. Since no state can fully trust another, competition for influence and resources becomes inevitable. Even when states pursue cooperation, their underlying motivation remains the maximisation of relative gains over rivals, which introduces power politics, which is the practice of using economic, military, and diplomatic means to maintain or expand a state's influence. Under Neo-Realism, power is the primary currency of international politics, and states continually seek to strengthen their position relative to others. In neo-realism, power politics is the main trigger of the security dilemma (Waltz, 2000). It occurs when a state's attempts to enhance its security inadvertently threaten others, leading to an arms race or heightened tensions. Since states cannot know the true intentions of others, they assume the worst and react accordingly. In this sense, strategic competition is the natural outcome of power politics. In a neo-Realist framework, great and rising powers constantly seek to expand their influence while preventing rivals from gaining an advantage. The ongoing global competition between China and the US, along with NATO expansion pushing Russia to aggression, demonstrate this pattern.

Characteristics of Neo-Realism explain power contests and strategic rivalries between states. Anarchy within the international system compels states to focus on defence initiatives, resulting in weapons development, military partnerships, and economic rivalry among countries (Firoozabadi and Ashkezari, 2016). Security dilemmas and power balance dynamics generate worldwide conflicts affecting relations between great powers and rising powers such as the US, China, Russia and Türkiye. In this sense, Neo-Realism creates useful knowledge to elucidate nation-state actions in their relentless fight for survival. Strategic competition shapes future international relations because global norms are evolving; thus, Neo-Realism maintains its fundamental role in studying trends in international relations.

The great power statusquoism bases its roots on international relations realist and neo-realist schools that focus on power systems combined with security challenges and stable system maintenance practices. According to neo-realists, the main goal of great powers is to defend their position of dominance by preventing any new powers from challenging them. In international relations, Kenneth Waltz's structural realism states that anarchy between these powers drives powerful nations to defend their status through economic systems, which create more opportunities for global dominance (1979).

Hegemonic stability theory demonstrates that great powers maintain world order by developing and managing institutional systems dedicated to their advantages. According to Robert Gilpin (1981, 1988, 2016), great powers seek to uphold the systems that serve their interests through international financial institutions paired with security alliances and diplomatic influence to stop changes in power distribution. These mechanisms deployed by the US and Russia in Africa focus on maintaining their influence and restraining rising powers like China and Türkiye.

Power transition theory contributes to greater comprehension of how statusquoism develops in great powers. Organski (2014) believes great powers attempt to block the emergence of rivals that aim to challenge their position of power. In this sense, it is obvious that the economic growth of China and the diplomatic expansion of Türkiye in Africa generated responses from the US as the hegemonic power in the continent. Great power competition manifests through status quo versus revisionist state tensions that require using economic containment strategies, military alliances, and institutional barriers for dominant state preservation. Implementing these theoretical

frameworks shows how the US and Russian foreign policies function in African great power status quo activities. The great powers demonstrate the continued pursuit of control over African state political and economic directions as they implement their strategies from security intervention to economic coercion and institutional partnership to uphold their long-term global strategic goals for the sake of statusquoism.

3. The US's Quest for Africa: Strategic Engagement and Hegemony

The US has maintained decades-long ties with Africa by establishing economic relations and diplomatic alliances and providing foreign aid with additional military support to achieve its goals of influence amplification while resolving issues across terrorism governance and economic progress. The US began its relationship with Africa through its establishment of Liberia as an experiment to resettle African American freedmen in 1822. The start of substantial US involvement in African affairs emerged during the Cold War because African countries became vital territories in the ideological contest between America and the Soviet Union. Washington prioritised aiding pro-Western governments and anti-communist activists through support that undermined democratic systems and human rights protection. After the Cold War era, a new US policy toward Africa was started, which emphasised democratic development and economic progress with human aid included. The African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), together with the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), demonstrated Washington's evolving attitude through its focus on economic development and public health support (Blair et al. 2022).

The US focuses its African efforts on combating terrorism, maintaining peace, and providing assistance programs. Historically, the US has endeavoured to promote democracy, governance, and human rights while also engaging in peacekeeping through stability maintenance and safeguarding commerce prior to supporting African development. The US engages in less commerce in Africa than in other significant global regions. The proportion of US commerce with Africa in the world market has ranged from 1.5 to 2 per cent from 2007 to the present (Kepe et al. 2023: 2). The volume of US energy imports from Africa is minimal relative to other areas and has exhibited a falling trend from 2006. Acquisitions of crude oil and its derivatives dropped by one-third due to a general decline in US worldwide crude oil imports. Only 10 per cent of US mineral imports in 2022 came from Africa (Usman and Csanadi, 2023). Despite US corporations demonstrating interest in African resources, the government allocates few resources to expand African enterprises, resulting in static corporate interests on the continent. The US possesses an inadequate strategic comprehension of Africa. Rather than acknowledging their significant strategic importance, the US addresses African matters as undesirable challenges or solvable initiatives. Experts often observe that the US has formulated numerous primary policies for the area; nonetheless, they recognise a lack of a fundamental strategic framework for US-Africa relations (Harris, 2017).

American engagement with the African continent has evolved significantly into "Great Power statusquoism" since the Cold War era. The American state did not prioritise Africa until the aftermath of the Cold War when the containment of communism emerged as the central focus of its foreign policy from 1947 to 1989. Following the collapse of Berlin and the ascension of George Bush to the presidency, a discernible absence of a coherent policy regarding Africa emerged, a continent that began to diminish in significance with the decline of communism. The Bush administration brought forth the notion of encircling communism, accompanied by the concept of "the comprehensive vision". It engaged in formulating the idea of the New World Order. In which American hegemony manifests itself devoid of constraints or boundaries. Following 1998, the Clinton administration endeavoured to clarify the American perspective on Africa, aiming to foster a relationship between the US and the continent.

In an era where Africa endeavours to assert its autonomy from dominant global powers and establish equilibrium within the realm of international relations and emerging dynamics, novel equations have surfaced from the competitive landscape on the continent, particularly involving

the US, China, and Russia. The American engagement with the continent arose from the competition for influence among the great and rising powers, which regarded Africa as a fertile ground for investment and a significant market for primary resources.

The US aims to manage and limit the extent of Chinese influence in Africa to maintain the status quo. China is amplifying its engagement with Africa, advocating for a shift towards the East to alleviate the constraints related to political, economic, transparency standards, and good governance that Europe and America impose in their interactions with the continent. The presence of Chinese influence is increasingly apparent in the oil sector and various infrastructure initiatives, which are fundamental in numerous regions of Africa.

American organisational leadership depends on Washington's substantial financial contributions to the continent. The US provides this financial support but combines it with an organisation's level of policy alignment even when their policies contradict international law and American-claimed ethical standards (Blair et al. 2022). The increasing relevance of Africa in global politics and economics necessitates the US' strategic changes to stay active and beneficial in African partnerships. China's deepening economic and political presence in Africa through infrastructure development has become urgent for US policymakers. To maximise its influence in Africa, the US focuses on creating more responsible trade strategies combined with robust diplomatic relationships and extra reinvestment in African infrastructure and technology sectors. Educational exchange programs and cultural and diplomatic initiatives help America create long-lasting relationships with African nations. Since its beginning, the US has built its relationship with Africa across three key dimensions: history, economics, and security needs. Africa's development and security receive active support from the US, but the ongoing difficulties pertain to economic expansion, geopolitical dominance, and security protection needs. Washington aims to balance strategic needs and African ambitions regarding development and independence.

4. China's Strategic Expansion in Africa: Economic Influence and Political Engagement

China established its relations with Africa within an extended historical context, rapidly expanding over the last few decades. China's expansion through trade, investment, resource acquisition, and geopolitical influence has enabled Beijing to create strong connections with African states by building countries through infrastructure development and establishing security alliances. Beijing initiated support for struggling independence movements and delivered ideological concepts and material aid to socialist-backed African nations. In the 1970s, China designed and built the TAZARA Railway, which connected Tanzania with Zambia as part of its extensive development support for Africa. China changed its diplomatic approach during the early twenty-first century to implement economic diplomacies combining significant investments, trade growth, and infrastructure expansion. The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) was founded in 2000 to create structured China-Africa relationships, which enabled extended cooperation between nations. The diplomatic landscape of Africa receives support from China through its investment strategies. China uses the One-China policy to achieve foreign strategy goals as part of its diplomatic approach, while African states abandon their relations with Taiwan to establish connections with Beijing. China achieved an enhanced position in the African continent by receiving diplomatic backing from its local partnerships, which led to receiving economic and infrastructure investments (Gilpin, 2023).

The combination of strong economic growth and an astute leadership rise gave China a boost in scholarly African dialogue and a confident population to acknowledge their international role, prompting Beijing to take a more forceful foreign policy direction. The rapid growth of Chinese industries requires secure fresh energy sources, new export markets, and diplomatic support in global organisations. Meanwhile, propaganda networks work to build alliances that help these Chinese efforts and counter American influence. These approaches have placed Africa at the forefront of their activities. China collaborates with Africa because it requires essential resources

for its domestic operations. China's economic growth and reduced natural resource reservoirs required Beijing to search for resources in foreign territories (Jenkins, 2022).

China has established itself as an exceptional model that respects traditional African approaches while prioritising people's work alongside African business partnerships to promote development by building a foundation and improving social institutions. China advances its African engagements through a gradual process that combines strategic engagement within world powers' narratives and its non-occupation historical stance on the continent. China avoids meddling in African national politics, which allows African political figures and elites to respect the Chinese authority. The initiative operates alongside its African ally program, which delivers services with loans, industrial development projects, and construction initiatives. Undoubtedly, this policy propels China towards attaining global economic and military influence. China has become a major economic power that strengthened its political presence through direct participation in military peacekeeping operations in problem areas throughout Africa. China leads the world as the largest contributor of troops to peacekeeping operations through its 2,500 personnel involvement, which surpasses all other UN Security Council permanent members. The percentage of Chinese arms exports as African imports from 2017-2021 amounts to 17%, making China Africa's second-biggest weapons supplier (Wezeman et al., 2024). China developed its first overseas military base in Djibouti in 2017, which indicated its strategic security interests in Africa, while its naval forces executed anti-piracy missions near Somalia since 2008. Beijing seemed to oppose entirely the use of international forces until it changed its stance on such interventions.

China holds the position of the second-largest economic power in the global sphere. Under Deng Xiaoping's economic system reforms in 1978, China started implementing market liberalisation policies, which brought significant economic growth to the nation. There has been a substantial rise in Chinese interest in Africa after the Cold War ended in 1991. The main goal of China was to become Africa's most prominent development organisation through enhanced trade and investment activities throughout multiple regional countries on the continent. Nearly 3,400 Chinese enterprises have started investment activities in various sectors of African business since 1991, especially in oil wells, agriculture and manufacturing and retail operations (Niu, 2019: 3).

China has declared its commitment to launch different development support programs in multiple African regions. China embraces mutual partnership combined with cooperation and shared benefits in its foreign policy framework for the African region. The unique diplomatic approach indicates joint advantages, which produce noteworthy benefits for both China and the host country during their enhanced interaction. Oil consumption in China has grown steadily twice during the previous ten years. Chinese economic growth requires the country to secure undiscovered oil fields through direct control to maintain access to vital energy resources. The Chinese government benefits from capitalist economic structures when initiating tangible projects in African markets by employing governmental and quasi-governmental entities, including the China National Petroleum Corporation. This organisation maintains control of major industrial sectors, including energy, mining, petrochemicals, construction, transportation, and financial services, and this visible power triggers concern within many countries. The annual growth of China-Africa trade from \$10 billion in 2000 to \$282 billion in 2022 supported investment of about \$155 billion into African infrastructure such as railways, roads, ports and energy facilities, as well as Chinese direct foreign investment reaching \$47 billion. In addition, twenty-five economic and trade cooperation zones have been created with China in sixteen African countries (Freitas, 2023: 4).

The infrastructure improvements provided by Chinese investments to African nations remain controversial because the recipient nations remain in debt and face additional problems regarding labour conditions and environmental deterioration. Some analysts believe that Chinese economic methods support rapid development in Africa, but others oppose this method because they see signs of Beijing's potential future dominance (Brautigam, 2020). Greater Chinese involvement in

African business operations has substantially transformed how nations act globally by undermining Western control throughout the continent (Singh, 2020). The US and European countries have introduced the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII) to create alternative development projects that fight against Chinese economic influence worldwide. The expanding Chinese military activity across Africa triggers worry among Western nations mainly because of critical maritime areas such as the Red Sea. Maximising regional stability depends on China's responsible management of its counterterrorism and security infrastructure program (Tüfekçi, 2024; Dağ and Tüfekçi, 2023).

5. Russia's Return to Africa: Strategic Revival and Power Projection

The Russian relationship with Africa underwent substantial development, starting from Soviet ideological principles and progressing toward contemporary economic and military alliances. The Russian government has stepped up its activities throughout the African continent through political partnerships, mineral resource extraction activities, weapon sales operations, and military collaboration programs. Russia started establishing its relations with Africa during the Cold War through Soviet Union support toward African liberation movements alongside socialist government leadership across the continent. During the Cold War era, Moscow supplied armed forces training, money, and ideological support to anti-colonial forces across Angola, Mozambique, and Ethiopia. The USSR sought to challenge Western interests and promote its global ideological movements. The fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 brought a significant decline in Russian diplomatic efforts towards Africa due to economic instability within Russia. Vladimir Putin brought Russia back into global influence following his leadership takeover during the 2000s through historical partnerships alongside economic and security concerns (Tüfekçi and Birinci, 2020). Russia made a pivotal change during the 2019 first Russia-Africa Summit when it declared intentions to expand its cross-sector partnerships. Moscow now focuses its strategy on military weapons sales alongside power deals and political backing of African national governments. Western sanctions against Russia have led to an increase in its diplomatic and economic support toward African states. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov continues his regular appearances at African nations, where he seeks to establish agreements for Southeast African countries to obtain Russian arms. At the same time, Russia holds its position as the main arms provider on the continent. On this matter, Russia was the leading supplier to Africa in 2019–23, accounting for 24 per cent of African imports of major arms, making it the continent's largest weapons supplier (Wezeman et al., 2024). Russia is endeavouring to secure political advantages by deploying military experts to regions characterised by protracted colonial disputes, such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, which remains under the influence of France.

Moscow's engagement in Africa is perceived expansively, drawing upon connections established during the Soviet era. President Vladimir Putin has articulated that Africa is a significant focus of Russia's foreign policy framework. The inquiry arises as to whether Russia engages in economic diplomacy in Africa to bolster its energy sector or if it is acting opportunistically, perceiving Africa merely as a market ripe for exploitation. The dynamics of Russian energy diplomacy are contingent upon the unique contexts of individual companies; nonetheless, energy contracts possess the potential to facilitate avenues for political leverage. The Russian state energy enterprises, namely "Gazprom", "Lukoil", and "Rosneft", position Moscow as a preeminent producer and exporter of hydrocarbons on a global scale. The company "Lukoil" oversees gas and oil initiatives, engaging in operations across Cameroon, Egypt, Ghana, the Republic of Congo, the Gulf of Guinea, and Nigeria. Meanwhile, Gazprom is active in Algeria, Libya and South Africa (Gupte, 2022).

Russia's engagement in Africa is driven by distinct economic interests, particularly its deficiency in essential minerals like manganese, bauxite, and chromium, which are crucial for industrial applications. It possesses considerable expertise in the energy sector that it can extend to resource-abundant states. Russian state-owned enterprises have extracted bauxite in Guinea,

negotiated agreements for diamond mining in Angola, and secured concessions for offshore gas production in Mozambique (Droin & Dolbaia, 2023). Russia is extending its nuclear power technology to various African nations, notably facilitating the establishment of Egypt's inaugural nuclear plant at El Dabaa, supported by a substantial loan of \$25 billion (Lorenzini, 2023).

Russia is a significant defence ally for Africa and the primary provider of armaments to the region. However, Africa does not represent the largest defence market. From 2018 to 2022, Russia was the continent's major arms supplier by providing 40% of the weapons to the African continent. A significant proportion of the arms exports to Africa, specifically 72,63%, were directed towards Algeria (Karabektas, 2024). In the context of volume, the defence exports to sub-Saharan nations are relatively modest. Nonetheless, the evolution of defence relationships is noteworthy, as military cooperation agreements have been established with more than 20 African nations since 2015. Russia's military and security connections encompass more than mere arms exports, occasionally involving the engagement of private mercenary entities. For instance, Russia has engaged in activities within the Central African Republic (CAR), ostensibly assisting to bolster the beleaguered UN-supported government in its struggle against various rebel factions. However, private military entities from Russia have been operating in that region, offering security services to the government and assisting in protecting vital economic resources.

Like China, Russia's mining rights could be supplanted by alternatives beyond financial considerations. In the Central African Republic, Libya, and Sudan, mineral rights are conferred to Russia at a mere fraction of their actual worth in return for security provisions and military training. In a strategic manoeuvre, Russia dispatched nearly 1,500 to 2,000 military trainers to the conflict-stricken Central African Republic, securing diamond and gold mining rights in return. The Russian military supplied light weaponry, rocket launchers, and artillery while also offering training to the Central African Republic Army and the Presidential Guard (Karabektas, 2024).

In examining Russia's diplomatic, military, and security dimensions, it is evident that Africa is home to various regional organisations. These include the African Union, various economic groups beyond the African continent, ECOWAS, the East African Community, the Arab Maghreb Union, and the West African Economic and Monetary Union. This landscape positions Russia to assert itself as a credible entity within these organisations, potentially seeking internal observer status (Droin & Dolbaia, 2023). BRICS plays a crucial role in facilitating access to Africa; nonetheless, Russia must contend with other member nations for its share of the opportunities present on the continent. Ultimately, each member nation of BRICS possesses distinct interests in Africa. Conversely, Africa presents a landscape fraught with both challenges and opportunities for Russia, which is currently navigating numerous conflicts across various fronts (Global Initiative, 2025).

The most concerning instances are those where exploitation rights are compensated through bonuses or concessions within the infrastructure and energy sectors. These accords among nations typically pertain to technical-military collaboration, encompassing endeavours such as the sale of armaments and the provision of training. Noteworthy instances of Russian engagement in Africa encompass the Central African Republic, Angola, South Africa, and Sudan, where military accords are intricately linked to economic pursuits.

In the Central African Republic, Russia, via its private military entity Wagner, has emerged as a crucial participant whose involvement is essential for the successful negotiation of agreements. In return for assurances of safety, concessions for various diamond and gold mines have been allocated to enterprises associated with the Russian entity Concord. In Angola, the Russian oil enterprise Gazprom Neft exerts influence over a segment of the nation's crude oil extraction via its collaborative venture with Sonangol (ENI, 2024). It is prominently evident in the diamond sector, controlling a significant portion of the mining market. In South Africa, its presence is notably significant in the oil extraction and refining sector, as well as in the steel industry, exemplified by Severstal, and in the gold sector, represented by the Norilsk Nickel company (Devitt and Ferreira-Marques, 2012).

Russian influence in Sudan is on the rise, particularly within the energy sector, where both nations have formalised an agreement to construct a nuclear facility in Khartoum. Additionally, Gazprom is actively engaged in oil exploration throughout the country. Furthermore, since 2017, Russia has emerged as the principal importer of grain within the nation. Conversely, Sudan has procured a considerable quantity of military apparatus from Russia, encompassing combat and transport helicopters as well as infantry vehicles (Kollakowski, 2022).

6. Türkiye's Rising Influence in Africa: Balancing Soft Power and Strategic Engagement

Türkiye's connection with Africa dates back to the Ottoman Empire, which controlled parts of North Africa, including Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, and Algeria. Ottoman influence in Sub-Saharan Africa was limited, but it included trade relations with the Swahili coast and support for Muslim communities in the region.

Modern diplomatic engagement began in earnest in the early 2000s, with Türkiye adopting an Africa Action Plan in 1998 and declaring 2005 the "Year of Africa". Since then, Ankara has expanded its embassies across the continent, increasing from 12 in 2009 to 44 in 2023. As a significant step toward institutionalisation, the Türkiye-Africa Partnership Summit began operations in 2008. The economic relationships between Türkiye and Africa have expanded tremendously since the turn of the century because trade volumes grew ten times larger. The trade volume between Türkiye and Africa grew to \$40.7 billion in 2022 after starting at \$5.4 billion in 2003 (Özyakışır et al. 2024). Turkish foreign direct investment crossing into Africa reached \$10 billion in 2023, while the primary sectors involved were building construction, energy infrastructure, and manufacturing. The government of Türkiye maintains an essential role in building African infrastructure. Turkish constructors hold the second position after China among international builders who have invested in African construction projects worth approximately \$85 billion through over 1,700 ventures. The Blaise Diagne International Airport (Senegal), along with Djibouti Multipurpose Port and Ethiopia's railway modernisation projects, and the construction of roads, bridges, and hospitals in Somalia are part of the major projects (Anadolu Agency, 2024).

Türkiye uses its military forces to enhance African nation capabilities through weapons buying arrangements while delivering anti-terrorism operational capabilities and armed force expertise. Defensive partnerships between Türkiye and more than thirty African nations have been established. The Bayraktar TB2 drones supplied by Türkiye have become significant military equipment for Ethiopian and Moroccan forces as well as the Nigerien military forces (International Crisis Group, 2023). Besides UN peacekeeping missions, Türkiye conducts counterterrorism training programs in Western African territories. Despite growing trade and investment growth in Africa, Türkiye faces several barriers to expansion, including economic competition between China and the US, as well as debt management concerns of African business partners and political uncertainties in key partnerships with Libya and Sudan. The foreign policy initiative of strategic autonomy drives Türkiye to act as an independent diplomatic force against Western alliances in Africa. The strengthened security alliances between Ankara and African countries produce better governmental capabilities, yet critics debate the ethical consequences of drone deployments alongside rising military conflict dynamics in the region. The relationship between Türkiye and Africa continues to develop actively and change. African countries need to develop strategic approaches when collaborating with Türkiye to maximise mutual prosperity from their relationships. The sustained impact that Türkiye achieves in Africa depends on its ability to create a harmonious equilibrium between its economic goals and its political influence through its security cooperation initiatives across African nations.

7. Conclusion

Great powers and rising powers such as the US, Russia, China and Türkiye have turned Africa into their main geopolitical arena for influence acquisition. Each power uses different tactics to reach its goals through its relations with Africa alongside economic and security variables, which

count on exploiting African assets and seeking African votes for international matters. The differences between traditional and contemporary competition patterns represent the extensive number of states seeking African resources and the essential systems used to create enduring relationships ensuring asset access. The current power dispute in Africa functions under joint administration between the US and China alongside Russia and Türkiye due to their Cold War legacy and present-day economic tensions between America and China. The contest between China, Russia and Türkiye shows unique cooperation with African nations. At the same time, the US, with great power statusquoism, maintains its mainland status without moving its position from the continent.

The extent of American-African relations shifts between engagement and disengagement because the US uses democracy promotion and economic reform implementation through development agencies and international financial institutions to justify these changes. China persistently broadens its sphere of influence across the strategically significant and economically robust nations of Sub-Saharan Africa. It fortifies its presence throughout the continent through loans purportedly supporting African nations' development.

Russia has emerged as a crucial nation on which to depend for strategic decision-making in Africa. While Russia recognises its inability to achieve the same degree of influence as the former Soviet Union, it has progressively asserted its presence in sub-Saharan African nations' economic, military, and political arenas since 2014. From 2018 to 2022, Russia was the continent's major arms supplier by providing 40% of the weapons to the African continent, with the US and China trailing behind. One rationale for Russia's emphasis on enhancing its relations with the African continent stems from the sanctions imposed by Western nations following the annexation of Crimea in 2014. While it is a significant entity within the realm of private military companies in Africa, its influence extends far beyond mere security, encompassing well-defined economic, energy, and diplomatic aims. The relationship between Russia and Africa is rooted in a rich history of camaraderie and mutual support, originating from the Soviet Union's backing of African nations in their fight against colonialism, racism, and apartheid. This partnership was instrumental in safeguarding their independence and sovereignty, as well as in fostering statehood and the development of national economies, as evidenced by historical records.

China has established a significant presence in Africa through investments in various sectors such as industry, modern agriculture, transportation, communications, energy, education, health, and poverty alleviation. Its recent diplomatic event has even eclipsed the United Nations activities related to China-Africa cooperation, contrasting sharply with the US interests in the region, which appear to be predominantly focused on counterterrorism and oil. Nevertheless, the US endeavoured to mitigate the expanding Chinese influence in East African nations like Ethiopia and Sudan, which typically exhibit receptiveness to Washington's policies owing to their geographical closeness to the Middle East through diplomatic and political responses.

Türkiye's historical ties with Africa stem from the Ottoman Empire's control over parts of North Africa. Throughout the past twenty years, Türkiye has significantly strengthened its relationship with Africa to create a time of enhanced activity and growth. The Turkish Foreign Ministry launched the Africa Action Plan through its former Foreign Minister, İsmail Cem, in 1998. The Justice and Development Party (AK Party) implemented this plan after taking control of the government in November 2002. When the AK Party took command, they completely redesigned Türkiye's diplomatic mission and economic relations throughout the African continent. From 2002 to 2024, Türkiye developed robust alliances with many African nations through comprehensive development projects that advanced beyond economic interests into charitable assistance. Frequent highest-level interactions between Türkiye and Africa have shaped the analysis period, resulting in the 2022 Istanbul Türkiye-Africa summit. As Türkiye progresses in its defence sector, it also becomes a pivotal security player in Africa through dual agreements concerning security and weaponry exports.

Although multiple studies investigate present-day colonial mechanisms of major powers across Africa alongside their multi-dimensional exploitation activities, the US manifests its African colonial approach through fake democratic campaigns, human rights advocacy, and counterterrorism objectives to gain entry into regional circumstances. External organisations control the internal operations of African states through manipulative methods despite UN Charter provisions that protect states from outside interference in their domestic matters.

This stands in stark contrast to Russia, which has opted for a strategy of soft diplomacy while acknowledging the rights of African nations to pursue their autonomy. This is rooted in their historical stances favouring colonial powers in their quest for self-determination. However, from a military and security perspective, Africa has emerged as a primary market for Russian arms and military technology, facilitating Russia's presence within these nations. China chose economic methods to ensure its presence in Africa and to enjoy its natural resources of raw oil and gas. This made it the first investor in the field of energy in Africa, and it provides services to African countries in the fields of energy, research, and scholarships.

Neorealism helps researchers study how external powers work with African regional organisations while balancing powers and addressing their strategic priorities. These external powers, including the US and China, together with Russia and Türkiye, have achieved strategic options by constructing military bases alongside economic investments and diplomatic partnerships. Academics of the neorealist school explain that these diplomatic activities originate from pressures stemming from systems while states seek to expand their worldwide influence. The neorealist approach to the balance of power politics supports the creation of platforms such as the African Union and ECOWAS in West Africa. US-China economic relations, along with their military alliances, proceed as both countries develop their cooperation and Russia and Türkiye execute their arms trade and infrastructure investment strategies. From the perspective of neorealists, external actors actively contribute to the dynamics of African geopolitics. African states receive economic and security advantages through these regional partnerships, yet these benefits develop dependencies that control the formation of international decisions and alliances in global affairs.

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