



YENİ SOĞUK SAVAŞ SÖYLEMİNİN ÖTESİNDE AFRO-AVRASYA: ÇİN-ABD REKABETİNİN BÖLGESEL AKTÖRLER ÜZERİNDEKİ SİYASAL VE EKONOMİK YANSIMALARI

BEYOND THE NEW COLD WAR DISCOURSE AFRO-EURASIA: THE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF THE CHINA-US RIVALRY ON REGIONAL ACTORS

ÖZ Son yıllarda Çin ile Amerika Birleşik Devletleri arasındaki rekabet, uluslararası literatürde sıklıkla “Yeni Soğuk Savaş” söylemi üzerinden ele alınmaktadır. Ancak bu yaklaşım, günümüz küresel güç ilişkilerinin çok katmanlı yapısını ve özellikle Afro-Avrasya coğrafyasındaki bölgesel aktörlerin artan stratejik özerkliğini açıklamakta yetersiz kalmaktadır. Bu çalışma, Çin-ABD rekabetini ikili ve determinist bir güç mücadelesi olarak değil; Afro-Avrasya’daki siyasi ve ekonomik aktörlerin tercihleriyle şekillenen dinamik bir etkileşim alanı olarak ele almayı amaçlamaktadır. Makale, Afro-Avrasya’nın pasif bir jeopolitik arena olmaktan ziyade, büyük güç rekabetini yönlendiren ve dönüştüren aktif bir özne haline geldiğini savunmaktadır. Çalışmada nitel karşılaştırmalı analiz ve belge incelemesine dayalı bir yöntem izlenmiştir. Çin’in Kuşak ve Yol Girişimi kapsamındaki resmî belgeleri, ABD’nin Ulusal Güvenlik Stratejileri, OECD, Dünya Bankası ve Birleşmiş Milletler raporları ile Afrika ve Avrasya ülkelerinin dış politika metinleri analiz edilmiştir. Bulgular, bölgesel aktörlerin klasik dengeleme ya da taraf seçme stratejilerinden ziyade, çok yönlü angajman, stratejik belirsizlik ve hedging politikalarını benimsediğini göstermektedir. Ekonomik bağımlılık ile siyasi özerklik arasındaki ilişkinin yeniden tanımlandığı bu süreçte, Afro-Avrasya ülkeleri Çin ve ABD arasındaki rekabeti mutlak bir tehditten ziyade, pazarlık gücünü artıran bir fırsat alanı olarak değerlendirmektedir. Çalışma, “Yeni Soğuk Savaş” söyleminin analitik sınırlarını ortaya koyarak, büyük güç rekabetine dair daha kapsayıcı ve çok aktörlü bir çerçeve önermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Çin-ABD Rekabeti, Afro-Avrasya, Orta Güçler, Hedging Stratejileri, Stratejik Özerklik

ABSTRACT In recent years, the growing rivalry between China and the United States has frequently been conceptualized in the international literature through the discourse of a “New Cold War.” However, this approach remains insufficient to explain the multilayered nature of contemporary global power relations, particularly the increasing strategic autonomy of regional actors across the Afro-Eurasian geography. This study aims to analyze China-U.S. competition not as a binary and deterministic power struggle, but rather as a dynamic field of interaction shaped by the preferences and agency of political and economic actors in Afro-Eurasia. The article argues that Afro-Eurasia has evolved from a passive geopolitical arena into an active subject that both directs and transforms great-power competition. The study employs a qualitative comparative analysis and document-based research methodology. Official documents related to China’s Belt and Road Initiative, the United States’ National Security Strategies, as well as reports from the OECD, the World Bank, and the United Nations, together with foreign policy texts of African and Eurasian states, are examined. The findings indicate that regional actors adopt multidirectional engagement, strategic ambiguity, and hedging policies rather than classical balancing or alignment strategies. In this process, where the relationship between economic dependency and political autonomy is being redefined, Afro-Eurasian countries tend to perceive China-U.S. competition not as an absolute threat but as an opportunity space that enhances their bargaining power. By revealing the analytical limitations of the “New Cold War” discourse, the study proposes a more inclusive and multi-actor framework for understanding contemporary great-power competition.

Keywords: Sino-American Rivalry, Afro-Eurasia, Middle Powers, Hedging Strategies, Strategic Autonomy

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INTRODUCTION

The intensifying rivalry between the United States and the People’s Republic of China has emerged as one of the defining features of the contemporary international system. In both academic scholarship and policy discourse, this rivalry is increasingly framed through the notion of a “New Cold War,” a conceptual analogy that evokes the bipolar confrontation of the twentieth century. While this framing offers an accessible interpretive shortcut, it rests on a set of assumptions that are increasingly misaligned with the structural realities of global politics. In particular, it underestimates the degree to which power diffusion, economic interdependence, and regional agency have transformed the dynamics of great power competition in the twenty-first century.

The classical Cold War was characterized by rigid ideological blocs, relatively low levels of economic interaction between adversaries, and a hierarchical alliance system that sharply constrained the strategic autonomy of secondary states. By contrast, contemporary Sino–American competition unfolds within a highly interconnected global political economy, where trade, finance, technology, and development cooperation generate complex patterns of mutual dependence rather than systemic separation. As a result, the analytical utility of Cold War analogies is increasingly contested, particularly when applied to regions such as Afro-Eurasia, where political alignments are fluid, issue-specific, and often deliberately ambiguous (Ikenberry, 2018:15).

This article contends that the “New Cold War” discourse is analytically insufficient because it conceptualizes Afro-Eurasia primarily as a passive arena of great power rivalry rather than as an active constellation of strategic actors. Afro-Eurasia—stretching from Sub-Saharan Africa through the Middle East, Central Asia, and into East Asia—constitutes the geopolitical and geoeconomic core of the contemporary international system. The region hosts critical maritime chokepoints, energy corridors, emerging industrial hubs, and rapidly expanding consumer markets. It is also the principal site where competing visions of global order, development finance, and governance norms intersect and are selectively internalized by regional states (Acharya, 2014:72).

In this study, the concept of Afro-Eurasia is employed as an analytical rather than purely geographical category. The focus primarily encompasses Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia, and East Asia, where the intensity of Sino–American strategic interaction is most visible through infrastructure connectivity, energy corridors, and development finance initiatives. Eastern and Southeastern Europe—particularly the Balkans—are not included within the core analytical scope. This exclusion reflects a deliberate methodological choice rather than a geographical omission. Compared to other Afro-Eurasian subregions, the Balkans remain more structurally embedded within Euro-Atlantic institutional frameworks, including NATO and the European Union, which limits the degree of strategic autonomy and hedging behavior observable in other regions examined in this study. Therefore, the selected geographic scope aims to capture regions where regional agency and multi-vector engagement are most pronounced under conditions of intensified great-power competition.



The growing prominence of Afro-Eurasia is particularly evident in the context of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which seeks to reconfigure infrastructure connectivity, trade flows, and financial networks across the region. At the same time, the United States has recalibrated its strategic posture through initiatives emphasizing supply chain security, technological leadership, and partnerships with like-minded states. Rather than producing clear-cut spheres of influence, these competing initiatives have expanded the strategic options available to regional actors, enabling them to engage selectively with both powers while avoiding exclusive alignment (Farrell and Newman, 2019:47).

The central contribution of this study lies in its critical reassessment of the New Cold War narrative through an actor-centered analysis of Afro-Eurasian political behavior. Instead of treating regional states as objects of external pressure, the article foregrounds their capacity for strategic choice and adaptation. It argues that Afro-Eurasian actors increasingly pursue hedging strategies that combine elements of cooperation, diversification, and risk management in response to uncertainty generated by great power rivalry. Such strategies allow states to extract economic benefits from engagement with China while maintaining security ties, institutional access, and normative linkages with the United States and its allies (Kuik, 2016:503).

Existing literature on great power competition has traditionally emphasized balancing and bandwagoning as the primary strategic responses available to weaker states (Walt, 1987:23). However, these frameworks assume relatively clear threat perceptions and stable alliance structures-conditions that are increasingly absent in the contemporary international system. Under conditions of asymmetric interdependence and strategic uncertainty, hedging has emerged as a more flexible and politically sustainable alternative. Afro-Eurasian states exemplify this shift by pursuing multi-vector foreign policies that resist binary alignment while maximizing autonomy across economic, diplomatic, and security domains (Goh, 2007:118).

Economic interdependence constitutes a critical dimension of this strategic recalibration. China has become a leading source of trade, investment, and development finance for many African and Eurasian economies, particularly through large-scale infrastructure projects and concessional lending mechanisms. Simultaneously, the United States and its partners retain significant structural power through control over global financial institutions, reserve currencies, advanced technologies, and security networks (World Bank, 2023:91). This dual dependence complicates simplistic assumptions regarding economic coercion or dependency, suggesting instead a more nuanced relationship in which regional actors actively leverage competition between great powers to enhance bargaining capacity and policy space (OECD, 2022:36).

Against this analytical backdrop, the article addresses three interrelated research questions. First, how does Sino-American competition shape the foreign policy preferences and strategic calculations of regional actors across Afro-Eurasia? Second, do these actors engage primarily in classical balancing behavior, or do they develop multi-directional strategies aimed at strategic accommodation and hedging? Third, how is the relationship between economic dependence and political autonomy being redefined under conditions of intensified great power rivalry?

By engaging these questions, the study contributes to broader debates on middle powers, strategic autonomy, and the political economy of great power competition. It challenges the explanatory dominance of bipolar narratives and underscores the need for analytical frameworks that account for agency beyond the great powers. In doing so, the article positions Afro-Eurasia not at the margins but at the center of contemporary international politics, highlighting its decisive role in shaping the trajectory and outcomes of Sino–American rivalry.

POWER COMPETITION AND STRATEGIC AGENCY

Theories of Great Power Competition

Great power competition has long constituted a foundational concern within International Relations theory, particularly in approaches that privilege structural constraints and material capabilities. Realist and neo-realist traditions conceptualize competition not as a contingent outcome of policy choices, but as a systemic condition generated by anarchy and uncertainty. Within this perspective, the distribution of power determines the range of strategic options available to states, while shifts in relative capabilities generate periods of instability and rivalry (Waltz, 1979:97).

Offensive realism offers one of the most parsimonious explanations for great power behavior under anarchy. Mearsheimer argues that states, unable to ascertain the intentions of others with certainty, are structurally incentivized to maximize relative power and to seek regional hegemony wherever possible (Mearsheimer, 2001:21). From this vantage point, competition between China and the United States is not an anomaly produced by ideological divergence, but a predictable consequence of China’s rapid material ascent and the United States’ determination to prevent the emergence of a peer competitor. The analytical strength of offensive realism lies in its ability to explain why cooperation between great powers remains fragile even under conditions of economic interdependence.

However, the explanatory reach of realism is refined by balance-of-threat theory, which shifts attention from aggregate power to the perception of threat. Walt contends that states balance against those actors they perceive as most threatening, a perception shaped by proximity, offensive capability, and inferred intentions rather than power alone (Walt, 1987:26). This distinction is particularly relevant in the context of Afro-Eurasia, where regional actors do not uniformly perceive either China or the United States as an existential threat. Instead, threat perceptions are fragmented and issue-specific, allowing for strategic flexibility rather than uniform alignment.

Power transition theory offers a complementary but distinct interpretation of great power rivalry by linking systemic instability to moments of parity between a dominant hegemon and a rising challenger. According to Organski, the risk of conflict increases when a dissatisfied rising power approaches the capabilities of the system’s leading state (Organski, 1958:367). Contemporary applications of this framework frequently depict China as a revisionist power seeking to reshape global governance structures and the United States as a status quo actor defending an institutional order aligned with its preferences (Tammen et al., 2000:41).

Yet such readings often assume a linear relationship between power shifts and conflict, underestimating the role of institutional embeddedness, economic entanglement, and strategic restraint.

Hegemonic stability theory further enriches the debate by emphasizing the relationship between power concentration and systemic order. Kindleberger’s original formulation posits that international economic stability depends on the presence of a hegemon capable of supplying public goods such as open markets and financial liquidity (Kindleberger, 1973:28). In this view, debates surrounding U.S. decline and China’s rise are framed in terms of whether a single actor can continue-or is willing-to underwrite global order. More recent scholarship, however, challenges the assumption of indivisible hegemony, suggesting instead that authority and leadership are increasingly fragmented across issue areas and institutions (Ikenberry, 2011:63).

Despite their analytical value, these theoretical traditions share a common limitation: they privilege great powers as the primary agents of international politics. By focusing on systemic pressures and hegemonic trajectories, they often relegate middle and regional powers to secondary or reactive roles. This tendency is particularly problematic in the context of contemporary Sino–American competition, where regional actors exercise significant agency in interpreting, mediating, and exploiting great power rivalry. As such, while theories of great power competition provide an indispensable structural backdrop, they must be complemented by frameworks that account for strategic choice beyond the great powers themselves. The following sections build on this insight by shifting the analytical focus toward middle powers and the strategic repertoires they employ under conditions of intensified great power rivalry.

Middle Powers and Regional Agency

The concept of middle powers occupies an ambiguous yet increasingly central position in the study of international politics. Early attempts to define middle powers relied predominantly on material indicators such as population size, economic output, and military capability, situating these states between great powers and smaller states within a hierarchical international system (Keohane, 1969:296). While such classifications offered analytical clarity, they failed to account for the growing divergence in the strategic behavior of states with comparable material capabilities.

In response to these limitations, the literature has progressively shifted toward behavioral and relational definitions of middle power status. From this perspective, middle powers are not identified solely by what they possess, but by how they operate within the international system-particularly their propensity for diplomatic activism, coalition-building, and selective norm promotion (Cooper, Higgott and Nossal, 1993:21). This reconceptualization reflects a broader transformation in global politics, where influence is increasingly exercised through networks, institutions, and issue-specific leadership rather than through comprehensive material dominance.

Within this evolving framework, it is analytically useful to distinguish between “middle powers” and “regional actors.” While the two categories frequently overlap, they are not conceptually identical. Middle power status implies a degree of systemic relevance that extends beyond a single geographic region,

whereas regional actors may exert significant influence within their immediate environment without aspiring to broader global roles. Afro-Eurasia contains numerous states that occupy both categories simultaneously, functioning as middle powers in systemic terms while acting as pivotal regional brokers in their respective subregions (Acharya, 2018:46).

The Afro-Eurasian context is particularly significant because it amplifies the strategic agency of such actors. Unlike the relatively rigid alliance structures of the Cold War era, the contemporary international system offers multiple and overlapping platforms for engagement. Regional actors across Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia, and Asia-Pacific operate within a dense web of bilateral partnerships, multilateral institutions, and informal arrangements. This institutional pluralism enables states to diversify external relations and to avoid exclusive dependence on any single great power (Hurrell, 2006:9).

Strategic autonomy constitutes the conceptual core of middle power behavior under these conditions. Rather than denoting neutrality or disengagement, strategic autonomy refers to the capacity of states to preserve independent decision-making in the face of external pressures. It is best understood as a relative and context-dependent attribute, shaped by economic structure, security environment, and institutional embeddedness (Paul, 2018:11). For Afro-Eurasian actors, strategic autonomy is not an abstract aspiration but a practical necessity arising from exposure to competing external demands emanating from Sino-American rivalry.

Multi-directional foreign policy serves as the primary instrument through which this autonomy is operationalized. By compartmentalizing relations across different issue areas, middle powers engage simultaneously with rival great powers without committing to comprehensive alignment. Economic cooperation with China-particularly in infrastructure, trade, and development finance-often coexists with security cooperation, financial integration, and normative engagement with the United States and its allies. This deliberate separation of economic and security domains allows states to manage asymmetrical dependencies while expanding strategic room for maneuver (Acharya, 2014:89).

Importantly, this pattern of behavior should not be interpreted as opportunistic or incoherent. Rather, it reflects a systematic response to uncertainty in an international environment characterized by contested leadership and fragmented authority. By exercising agency through selective engagement, Afro-Eurasian middle powers actively shape the parameters of great power competition. Their choices influence the effectiveness of coercive strategies, the viability of exclusive blocs, and the overall structure of regional order. This dynamic underscores the need to conceptualize middle powers not as passive recipients of systemic pressures, but as actors whose strategic repertoires mediate-and at times constrain-the trajectories of great power rivalry. These insights provide the conceptual foundation for the subsequent analysis of balancing, hedging, and strategic ambiguity.

Balancing, Hedging, and Strategic Ambiguity

.Balancing and bandwagoning have long constituted the foundational concepts through which International Relations theory explains the strategic responses of states to external power concentrations.



Within realist frameworks, balancing refers to efforts by states to counter a perceived threat by internal capability enhancement or external alliance formation, whereas bandwagoning denotes alignment with a dominant or threatening power in order to avoid confrontation or extract secondary benefits (Walt, 1987:32). These strategies presuppose relatively clear threat perceptions and a high degree of structural polarization.

During the Cold War, such assumptions were largely consistent with empirical realities. Bipolarity, ideological polarization, and rigid alliance structures constrained the strategic choices available to secondary states. However, the applicability of these concepts has become increasingly contested in the contemporary international system. Under conditions of deep economic interdependence, institutional overlap, and fragmented authority, alignment choices are rarely binary or permanent. As a result, balancing and bandwagoning alone provide an incomplete account of state behavior in contexts such as Sino–American competition.

It is within this analytical gap that the concept of hedging has gained prominence. Hedging refers to a set of strategies aimed at managing uncertainty rather than directly countering or embracing a single dominant power. Unlike balancing, hedging does not seek to offset power asymmetries through opposition, nor does it entail the political subordination implied by bandwagoning. Instead, it involves the deliberate diversification of external relations in order to minimize risks while preserving flexibility across multiple contingencies (Goh, 2007:115).

Hedging strategies typically combine seemingly contradictory elements, including economic engagement, limited security cooperation, diplomatic reassurance, and institutional participation. This hybridity has led some scholars to criticize the concept as analytically vague. However, when properly specified, hedging constitutes a coherent response to strategic uncertainty under conditions where threat perceptions are ambiguous and the costs of exclusive alignment are prohibitively high (Kuik, 2016:504). Its core logic lies not in indecision but in risk management.

Strategic ambiguity constitutes a closely related but analytically distinct concept. While hedging refers to a pattern of behavior across policy domains, strategic ambiguity denotes the deliberate maintenance of uncertainty regarding a state’s ultimate alignment preferences. By avoiding explicit commitments, states preserve room for maneuver and reduce the likelihood of punitive responses from competing great powers (Paul, 2018:14). In this sense, strategic ambiguity functions as an enabling condition for hedging rather than as a substitute for it.

The relevance of these concepts is particularly evident in the context of Sino–American competition. Afro-Eurasian actors increasingly pursue what may be described as a model of “dual engagement,” characterized by simultaneous but differentiated interaction with both China and the United States. Economic cooperation with China—especially in infrastructure development, trade, and technology—often coexists with security cooperation, financial integration, and diplomatic coordination with the United States and its allies. Crucially, these engagements are compartmentalized rather than integrated, allowing states to extract benefits from both relationships without committing to comprehensive alignment (Acharya, 2014:92).



This dual engagement model challenges the assumption that great power competition necessarily produces zero-sum outcomes for regional actors. Instead, it demonstrates how middle powers and regional states actively shape the structure of rivalry by resisting pressures toward exclusivity. By doing so, they impose constraints on the strategies of great powers, limit the effectiveness of coercive instruments, and contribute to a more fluid and negotiated regional order (Ikenberry, 2018:19).

From a theoretical standpoint, the rise of hedging and strategic ambiguity underscores the need to move beyond rigid alignment models in the study of great power competition. These strategies reflect a broader transformation in international politics, where uncertainty, asymmetrical interdependence, and institutional pluralism redefine the calculus of state behavior. In Afro-Eurasia, hedging and dual engagement should therefore be understood not as transitional anomalies, but as durable features of regional order under conditions of prolonged Sino–American rivalry.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative comparative research design to analyze the strategic behavior of Afro-Eurasian states in the context of Sino–American competition. The methodological framework combines comparative case analysis with document-based content analysis, enabling a systematic examination of policy orientations, strategic preferences, and patterns of external engagement across selected regional actors. Qualitative comparison is particularly suitable for identifying recurring patterns across diverse geopolitical contexts while preserving sensitivity to regional institutional and historical variations (George and Bennett, 2005:67).

Document analysis constitutes the core methodological approach of the study. Official publications, including China’s foreign policy white papers and Belt and Road Initiative–related documents, provide insight into Beijing’s strategic priorities and economic engagement mechanisms (State Council Information Office, 2019; 2021). U.S. National Security Strategies (2017, 2022) serve a parallel function by clarifying Washington’s regional threat perceptions, foreign policy priorities, and instruments of influence. These primary sources are complemented by policy documents, development plans, and strategic statements produced by selected Afro-Eurasian states, allowing the analysis to capture how regional actors interpret and respond to great-power competition. The analytical focus is placed on policy content, strategic objectives, and observable patterns of cooperation rather than rhetorical framing.

Content analysis is applied to identify themes related to strategic autonomy, hedging behavior, diversification of partnerships, and sectoral engagement across economic, political, and security domains. Content analysis provides a systematic and replicable technique for examining policy documents and institutional materials by categorizing thematic patterns and strategic priorities (Krippendorff, 2018:24). Through this approach, the study evaluates how states operationalize multi-vector foreign policies and manage relationships with competing great powers under conditions of uncertainty. This method enables the identification of both similarities and variations across cases while maintaining analytical consistency.



The selection of Afro-Eurasian states follows a purposive sampling strategy. Cases were chosen based on criteria including regional influence, engagement with both China and the United States, and observable evidence of autonomous strategic decision-making. Such purposive case selection is widely used in qualitative international relations research to capture theoretically relevant variation rather than statistical representativeness (Gerring, 2017:52). The comparative design allows for the assessment of variation in strategic responses across Africa and Eurasia while accounting for local institutional and geopolitical conditions.

The research relies exclusively on open-source and publicly available data, including government publications, international organization reports (World Bank, OECD, UNCTAD), and verified policy documents. All analysis is conducted at the state and institutional level, focusing on policy outputs and documented strategic behavior. Consequently, this research does not involve human subjects, confidential data, or experimental procedures and therefore does not require ethical approval.

Methodologically, this approach offers several advantages. First, it integrates multiple levels of analysis by linking great-power strategies with regional responses and domestic policy frameworks. Second, document-based content analysis provides a systematic basis for evaluating strategic behavior without reliance on subjective interpretation. Third, the comparative design enhances analytical rigor by enabling the identification of generalizable patterns while accommodating contextual variation. Together, these features strengthen the empirical grounding and explanatory validity of the study's conclusions regarding hedging, strategic autonomy, and multi-vector engagement in Afro-Eurasia.

THE POLITICAL REPERCUSSIONS OF THE CHINA–US RIVALRY IN AFRO-EURASIA

Political Implications in Africa

The intensifying Sino–American competition has generated significant political reverberations across the African continent. Unlike classical Cold War frameworks, which assumed near-binary alignment of states along ideological lines, contemporary African states exhibit nuanced, selective engagement with great powers. This behavior reflects both the structural asymmetry between regional and global powers and the capacity of African governments to exercise strategic agency in response to external pressures. The political dynamics in Africa today are shaped by two competing narratives: China's emphasis on unconditional development and infrastructure cooperation, and the United States' promotion of democracy, governance, and institutional reform.

China's approach to Africa has been characterized by a discourse of "unconditional development," emphasizing pragmatism, economic partnership, and non-interference in domestic political affairs (Shinn & Eisenman, 2012:102). Through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China has mobilized significant infrastructure investments, concessional loans, and trade facilitation programs across the continent. Chinese political rhetoric stresses mutual benefit and shared development objectives, deliberately avoiding prescriptive governance norms. This strategy allows African states to leverage Chinese support for



domestic and regional development without incurring reputational or political costs associated with governance reform conditionalities, which were historically tied to Western aid (Alden, 2007:76).

By contrast, the United States frames its Africa policy around democracy promotion, institutional capacity-building, and human rights. Documents such as the U.S. National Security Strategy and policy statements from the U.S. Agency for International Development emphasize good governance as both a normative and strategic priority (United States Government, 2022:45). Washington's approach combines direct development assistance with multilateral engagement through institutions such as the African Union and regional economic communities, promoting policies that align with liberal norms. While these initiatives offer valuable institutional support and access to global governance networks, they also entail conditions that can constrain the policy flexibility of African governments.

African states, however, have increasingly demonstrated selective norm adoption, choosing to engage with external powers in ways that maximize domestic and regional autonomy. This process of normative selectivity reflects the ability of states to extract benefits from multiple sources while avoiding comprehensive alignment or coercion. For instance, countries such as Kenya, Nigeria, and Ethiopia participate in Chinese infrastructure projects, benefiting from rapid connectivity expansion, while simultaneously engaging in U.S.-backed initiatives in governance, education, and security reform. By compartmentalizing these relationships, African governments maintain policy space to maneuver between competing great powers (Taylor, 2019:61).

The strategic utility of such selective engagement is reinforced by Africa's structural significance. The continent possesses abundant natural resources, rapidly growing markets, and key logistical nodes, rendering it an attractive theatre for great power influence. African states leverage these endowments to negotiate favorable terms in bilateral and multilateral partnerships, thereby enhancing their bargaining position vis-à-vis both China and the United States. This dynamic underscores the inadequacy of "New Cold War" analogies that portray African states as passive recipients of great power competition; instead, African governments emerge as proactive actors capable of shaping the terms of engagement (Alden & Vieira, 2017:39).

Moreover, African strategic behavior is shaped by historical experience and domestic political imperatives. The memory of conditional aid programs, post-colonial intervention, and structural adjustment policies has heightened the salience of policy autonomy, leading to cautious engagement with external powers. In this context, China's emphasis on non-interference resonates with domestic priorities, while U.S. governance-focused initiatives are selectively adopted, often tied to specific sectors rather than wholesale alignment (Brautigam, 2020:112). This selective uptake demonstrates the capacity of African states to reconcile competing external pressures with domestic political objectives.

Normative selectivity also operates at the level of regional institutions. The African Union and subregional organizations serve as arenas for coordinating engagement with great powers, mediating conflicts, and asserting collective interests. Through these mechanisms, African states can amplify their strategic agency, negotiating with China and the United States from a position of relative collective strength. Multilateral



engagement allows for the articulation of shared norms, while maintaining the flexibility to engage bilaterally in issue-specific arrangements, further evidencing the compartmentalization central to contemporary hedging strategies.

The political implications of Sino–American competition in Africa are characterized by a tension between external normative pressures and domestic and regional agency. China’s unconditional development model and the United States’ governance-oriented approach offer alternative pathways for engagement, yet African states selectively adopt elements from both to enhance autonomy, development outcomes, and strategic flexibility. By doing so, they not only navigate the structural asymmetries inherent in great power competition but also actively shape the political landscape of the continent, demonstrating that Africa is not a passive arena but a decisive actor in global strategic recalibration.

Geopolitical Positioning in Eurasia

Eurasia constitutes one of the most strategically sensitive theatres of Sino–American competition, shaped by dense historical legacies, overlapping spheres of influence, and institutionalized security arrangements. Unlike Africa, where external engagement is largely mediated through development and governance discourses, Eurasian geopolitics is deeply embedded in questions of security, territorial integrity, energy transit, and regime stability. As a result, regional actors in Central Asia and the Caucasus confront a more constrained yet highly sophisticated strategic environment, in which autonomy is pursued through calibrated positioning rather than overt alignment.

Central Asia has emerged as a critical connective zone linking East Asia, Europe, and the Middle East. China’s Belt and Road Initiative has significantly intensified this role by prioritizing transport corridors, logistics hubs, and energy infrastructure across Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. These investments have enhanced regional connectivity while simultaneously deepening economic interdependence with China (Rolland, 2020:91). However, economic engagement does not translate into political subordination. Central Asian governments have actively sought to compartmentalize their relations with China, limiting Beijing’s influence primarily to economic domains while preserving autonomy in security and governance matters.

The Caucasus presents a parallel yet distinct configuration. Azerbaijan’s energy diplomacy, Armenia’s security dependence on Russia, and Georgia’s Euro-Atlantic orientation illustrate the diversity of strategic responses within a geographically compact region. These states exploit their positional value as transit corridors and geopolitical buffers to negotiate differentiated relationships with major powers. Importantly, none of these actors pursue exclusive alignment; instead, they employ selective engagement strategies that maximize leverage while minimizing vulnerability (Cornell & Nilsson, 2018:64).

Russia remains a pivotal actor in Eurasian geopolitics, not merely as a great power but as a structural condition shaping regional choices. Through institutions such as the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), Moscow has institutionalized its influence, particularly in security and labour migration regimes. This embeddedness limits the range of strategic options available to Eurasian states, especially in the security domain (Allison, 2018:109). The geopolitical landscape of



Eurasia has also been profoundly influenced by Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine since February 2022. The conflict has altered regional security perceptions, disrupted energy and transport corridors, and accelerated geopolitical fragmentation across the broader Eurasian space. For Central Asian and Caucasus states, the war has generated both risks and opportunities: while security uncertainties increased due to Russia’s shifting strategic capacity, new transit routes and energy diversification initiatives enhanced the strategic value of intermediary states. Moreover, the conflict has reinforced the importance of hedging strategies, as regional actors seek to avoid overdependence on any single external power while navigating sanctions regimes, shifting alliances, and evolving security dynamics. Consequently, the Russia–Ukraine war has not produced rigid bloc formation in Eurasia but has instead intensified the multi-vector positioning that characterizes regional responses to great-power competition.

At the same time, Russia’s relationship with China introduces an additional layer of complexity. While Moscow and Beijing cooperate tactically to counter Western influence, their interests in Central Asia are not fully congruent. China’s economic dominance increasingly challenges Russia’s traditional primacy, compelling regional states to navigate a triangular power structure rather than a binary one. This configuration creates opportunities for Eurasian actors to leverage inter-great-power competition, extracting concessions while avoiding direct confrontation with any single power (Trenin, 2021:41).

Multilateral institutions play a crucial role in mediating Eurasian geopolitics. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) serves not only as a security forum but also as a diplomatic platform through which regional actors can engage China and Russia simultaneously without committing to exclusive alignments. Membership in the SCO provides legitimacy, policy coordination mechanisms, and symbolic insulation against external pressure, particularly from Western actors (Lo, 2021:78).

Beyond the SCO, Eurasian states actively participate in overlapping institutional frameworks, including the EAEU, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), and various UN-affiliated bodies. This institutional diversification reflects a deliberate strategy to dilute dependence and enhance bargaining power. By embedding themselves in multiple governance structures, regional actors reduce the risks associated with great power rivalry while preserving room for maneuver (Kassenova, 2020:62).

Eurasian strategic behavior is best understood through the lens of advanced hedging rather than classical balancing. States in the region pursue differentiated alignments across issue areas: economic cooperation with China, security coordination with Russia, and selective engagement with Western institutions. This multidimensional approach allows governments to manage uncertainty and avoid being drawn into zero-sum competition (Goh, 2016:34).

Strategic ambiguity is not a byproduct of indecision but a deliberate policy instrument. By maintaining ambiguous positions on contentious issues—such as security alignments or normative commitments—Eurasian states preserve flexibility and signal autonomy. This practice challenges the analytical utility of “New Cold War” analogies, which assume clear blocs and ideological polarization. In reality, Eurasian geopolitics is characterized by layered alignments, transactional partnerships, and continuous recalibration.



The Eurasian case demonstrates that great power rivalry unfolds within a complex regional ecosystem shaped by historical legacies, institutional constraints, and active regional agency. China and the United States operate within an environment where Russia retains significant influence, and where regional actors possess both the incentive and capacity to resist binary alignment. As a result, Sino–American competition in Eurasia is filtered through regional strategies that prioritize autonomy, regime stability, and economic diversification over ideological commitment.

Eurasia should not be conceptualized as a passive arena of competition but as a strategic space co-produced by regional and global actors. The interaction between external power projection and internal strategic calculation underscores the limits of bipolar frameworks and highlights the necessity of region-sensitive analytical approaches.

ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS: TRADE, INVESTMENT, AND DEBT DIPLOMACY

Economic interactions in Afro-Eurasia have emerged as a critical site for the expression of Sino–American strategic competition. While the political and security dimensions of this rivalry are prominent, the economic sphere has arguably produced the most tangible impact on regional development trajectories, state autonomy, and systemic interdependencies. This section examines economic dynamics in Africa and Eurasia, focusing on China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), U.S. and allied alternative financing mechanisms, and the implications of debt and infrastructure investment. Comparative analysis draws on official data from the World Bank, UNCTAD, OECD, and IMF to assess the scale, distribution, and sustainability of these economic engagements.

The BRI has become the primary instrument through which China projects economic influence across Afro-Eurasia. Since its inception in 2013, the initiative has mobilized over USD 1 trillion in investment commitments across more than 70 countries, encompassing transport, energy, and digital infrastructure (Rolland, 2020:112). In Africa, BRI projects have concentrated on transport corridors, ports, and industrial parks, with countries such as Kenya, Ethiopia, and Nigeria receiving substantial funding for railway, energy, and manufacturing infrastructure (Brautigam, 2020:145). UNCTAD (2023) reports indicate that Chinese construction and investment contracts in Africa increased by 15% annually between 2018 and 2022, outpacing traditional Western financing sources.

In Eurasia, BRI investments are strategically concentrated in Central Asia and the Caucasus, reflecting both transit significance and energy corridor potential. Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan have received major financing for road, rail, and pipeline networks, while Azerbaijan has leveraged BRI-related port and logistics investments to enhance its role in East–West trade (Rolland, 2020:119). These projects demonstrate a dual objective: facilitating Chinese trade connectivity and integrating regional economies into a China-centered economic network.

BRI financing predominantly involves concessional loans, state-backed investment, and public–private partnerships. While this model accelerates infrastructure development, it also produces heightened dependency risks. African states, for instance, report external debt owed to China averaging 20–30% of



GDP, with Kenya's Standard Gauge Railway project exemplifying concerns regarding debt sustainability and repayment terms (World Bank, 2023). Similarly, in Central Asia, large-scale loans have increased fiscal exposure, prompting policy recalibration to balance development imperatives against long-term financial obligations.

In response to China's expanding influence, the United States and allied actors have initiated alternative financing mechanisms designed to promote transparent, standards-based development. The Blue Dot Network, the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII), and the U.S. Development Finance Corporation (DFC) collectively aim to provide capital for sustainable infrastructure while adhering to governance, labour and environmental standards (United States Government, 2022:64). OECD (2023) data indicate that U.S. and G7-backed projects in Africa have increased by 12% annually, although the total financing volume remains below Chinese commitments.

In Eurasia, alternative financing has focused on energy diversification, technological investment, and regional integration initiatives. For example, U.S. and EU support for transport and energy projects in Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Georgia emphasizes regulatory transparency and environmental compliance, creating a differentiated model from BRI. This dual-financing environment enables regional actors to hedge between competing great powers, extracting developmental benefits while mitigating exposure to creditor dominance.

The expansion of BRI and Western alternative financing has sparked extensive scholarly debate regarding debt dependency. While some analysts characterize Chinese lending as a form of "debt-trap diplomacy," empirical evidence suggests a more nuanced reality. According to World Bank (2023) and IMF (2022) analyses, the majority of African and Eurasian BRI loans remain within manageable thresholds when coupled with domestic revenue growth and multi-source financing strategies. Nevertheless, reliance on single-source credit can constrain policy autonomy, particularly for countries with limited fiscal flexibility or macroeconomic vulnerabilities.

Eurasian states exemplify proactive debt management. Kazakhstan, for instance, combines Chinese, Russian, and Western loans to diversify sources, mitigating potential coercion while maintaining infrastructure development momentum. Similarly, Ethiopia has strategically balanced BRI-financed railways with European development assistance, preserving both fiscal sustainability and operational autonomy (UNCTAD, 2023:32). In Africa, governments increasingly integrate Chinese, U.S., and multilateral funding to finance energy, digital, and transport infrastructure, reflecting sophisticated hedging behaviour at the economic level.

Comparative assessment highlights both commonalities and divergences. In both regions, BRI has accelerated infrastructure development and expanded trade networks. However, African economies exhibit higher sensitivity to debt-related risks due to lower domestic revenue bases and higher reliance on external financing (OECD, 2023). In Eurasia, historical integration with Russia, energy endowments, and higher per capita income levels provide a cushion against dependency, allowing states to pursue multi-source financing strategies more effectively.



Trade dynamics further illustrate regional variation. In Africa, Chinese exports are concentrated in manufactured goods and construction services, while African states primarily export raw materials and agricultural products, creating asymmetrical interdependence (UNCTAD, 2023:44). In Eurasia, BRI has facilitated both export diversification and energy corridor development, integrating regional economies into wider Eurasian and global supply chains. This dual impact underscores that economic engagement is not merely transactional but constitutes a strategic instrument for states to manage external pressures and enhance bargaining power.

The interplay of BRI, Western alternatives, and regional debt management illustrates a critical dimension of strategic autonomy in Afro-Eurasia. States that successfully navigate multi-source financing can extract developmental gains without compromising sovereignty. Conversely, overreliance on single creditors may produce vulnerabilities, constraining policy space in both domestic and foreign policy arenas (Brautigam, 2020:158). This dynamic reinforces the central argument of this study: economic interdependence in the Sino–American rivalry is neither zero-sum nor deterministic; rather, it is mediated by regional agency, institutional frameworks, and strategic hedging.

The economic dimension of Sino–American competition in Afro-Eurasia is characterized by both opportunity and constraint. BRI has accelerated infrastructure development and connectivity, while U.S. and allied financing initiatives provide alternative avenues aligned with governance standards. Regional actors employ multi-source financing, institutional engagement, and debt management strategies to maximize developmental returns while preserving strategic autonomy. Comparative analysis of Africa and Eurasia demonstrates that economic engagement is both a site of external influence and a tool for active agency, highlighting the interplay between infrastructure, debt, trade, and strategic positioning in shaping contemporary regional order.

STRATEGIC CHOICES OF REGIONAL ACTORS

Contemporary scholarship on great power competition increasingly recognizes that regional actors do not conform to binary alignments envisaged by classic bipolar or Cold War paradigms but instead pursue complex strategies aimed at managing risk, maximizing autonomy, and exploiting structural asymmetries. The concept of hedging has emerged as central in explaining these behaviours, particularly under conditions of high uncertainty and competing demands from rising and established powers (Kuik, 2021:300). Hedging is analytically distinct from balancing and bandwagoning: while balancing seeks to offset power disparities through opposition or coalition formation, and bandwagoning entails alignment with dominant powers for survival or benefit, hedging encompasses multivector engagement and risk diversification across economic, political, and security domains without full alignment. This section examines such strategic choices in Africa and Eurasia, identifying patterns of pragmatic non-alignment and the deliberate use of strategic ambiguity as a policy instrument.

In Africa, hedging manifests as a calibrated engagement with both China and the United States, internally rationalized through development imperatives, political stability considerations, and exposure to global

market dynamics. African states frequently supplement Chinese infrastructure financing with Western governance and security partnerships, thereby maintaining strategic flexibility. For example, Kenya's engagement with China's infrastructure investments - notably the Standard Gauge Railway - coexists with robust cooperation with the United States on security initiatives and democratic governance programs, reflecting a deliberate compartmentalization of economic and political engagements in pursuit of national development objectives. This multivector approach mitigates the risks associated with overdependence on a single partner and enhances bargaining leverage. Such differentiated engagement aligns with the broader conceptualization of hedging as a response to uncertainty rather than a passive or indecisive stance (Kuik, 2021:301).

Similarly, Nigeria's strategic calculus underscores hedging's dynamic character. While Chinese investment permeates energy and infrastructure sectors, Nigeria's security cooperation with the United States - especially in counterterrorism frameworks addressing Boko Haram - indicates a strategic blend of partnerships. This duality enables Nigeria to extract developmental gains from Chinese engagement while leveraging American security support to enhance internal stability. It also reflects the broader phenomenon of regional actors differentiating issue areas in hedging strategies rather than adopting monolithic alignments, a pattern widely documented in comparative studies of hedging behaviour (Springer et al., 2024).

The prevalence of hedging in Africa reflects not merely instrumental calculations but also normative and historical legacies. Decades of conditional aid and structural adjustment experiences have produced scepticism toward Western governance prescriptions, making Chinese economic engagement - often framed under principles of non interference - more attractive as part of a diversified foreign policy toolkit. In practice, however, African governments do not exhibit unconditional allegiance to China; instead, they engage Western partners on governance reform, institutional capacity building, and multilateral cooperation, exploiting competitive dynamics to secure concessional finance and policy space. Hence, African hedging reflects a strategic response to dual uncertainty - uncertainty emanating from external great power competition and internal developmental imperatives - rather than simple alignment with one power over another.

Eurasian states confront analogous pressures but within a markedly different structural context shaped by historical legacies, security dependencies, and institutional entanglements. Central Asian republics such as Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan exemplify multidimensional hedging: they engage China for trade and infrastructure connectivity while maintaining security commitments with Russia under the Collective Security Treaty Organization and selectively cooperating with Western actors on energy and governance initiatives. This multidimensionality cannot be reduced to balancing or bandwagoning; it entails a coherent, intentional distribution of foreign policy investments across competing axes of influence, consonant with contemporary hedging theory that defines hedging as "insurance seeking behaviour under situations of high uncertainty and high stakes" (Kuik, 2021:300).

The Caucasus further illustrates hedging's operational complexity. Azerbaijan's strategic posture involves economic engagement with China, particularly in logistics and connectivity projects, while simultaneously

preserving robust security and energy ties with the United States and Europe. Armenia, conversely, balances its security dependence on Russia with selective Chinese economic engagement, underscoring how geopolitical and historical constraints influence the hedging strategies of regional actors. Georgia's pursuit of deep engagement with Euro Atlantic institutions, alongside economic outreach to both China and Russia, similarly reflects differentiated external linkages calibrated to preserve autonomy in a contested geopolitical space.

The cases across Africa and Eurasia demonstrate that regional actors increasingly adopt multi aligned strategies that eschew binary alignment with either China or the United States. Rather than being coerced into "either/or" choices by great powers, these states exercise strategic agency by selectively engaging, prioritizing issue areas according to national interests, and preserving diplomatic flexibility. Hedging thus operates as a middle strategy situated between balancing and bandwagoning, offering an analytically distinct category in foreign policy behavior. This conceptualization is supported by broader comparative research which finds that smaller and medium powers often prefer to operate within an "accommodation zone" that allows engagement with both great powers without fully committing to either (Springer et al., 2024).

Critical to the logic of hedging is strategic ambiguity - the intentional maintenance of uncertainty regarding a state's ultimate alignment preferences. Unlike neutrality, which implies detachment, or non alignment, which suggests ideological distance, strategic ambiguity preserves policy optionality and enhances leverage in great power negotiations. This approach enables states to deliver contingent commitments in specific issue areas while evading punitive responses from competing powers. In both Africa and Eurasia, strategic ambiguity is operationalized through compartmentalized agreements, flexible institutional participation, and calibrated signaling that forestalls expectations of exclusive loyalty to any single great power.

This deliberate ambiguity serves several functions. First, it reduces the risk of strategic entrapment - wherein a state is compelled to adopt positions that constrain its autonomy in future contingencies. Second, it allows states to exploit informational asymmetries and generate bargaining advantages vis à vis external powers, fostering policy space to respond to shifting geopolitical dynamics. Finally, strategic ambiguity reinforces the agency of regional actors, positioning them as architects of their own foreign policy trajectories within great power competition rather than as passive arenas for external influence.

DISCUSSION: WHY THE "NEW COLD WAR" NARRATIVE IS INSUFFICIENT

The proliferation of analyses framing contemporary Sino–American competition as a "New Cold War" has gained traction in both media and academic circles. While this analogy captures elements of geopolitical rivalry, it is analytically insufficient to explain the complexity of interactions in Afro–Eurasia. Unlike the bipolar order of the original Cold War, contemporary global politics is characterized by multipolarity, interdependence, and strategic heterogeneity, which render a strictly dualistic lens inadequate. This discussion synthesizes findings from previous sections, highlighting three central limitations of the "New Cold War" framework: the collapse of binary alignment assumptions, the presence of multi-layered power

relations, and the active agency of Afro Eurasian actors. Recent shifts in United States foreign policy priorities also require consideration, particularly the strategic orientation associated with the second administration of Donald Trump after 2025. Emerging policy discourse suggests a greater emphasis on hemispheric consolidation and regional primacy within the Western Hemisphere, including intensified attention to migration control, economic nationalism, and security competition in the Americas. Such a reorientation has potential implications for Afro-Eurasia by creating perceptions of relative strategic retrenchment or selective engagement by the United States. For regional actors across Africa and Eurasia, this environment may further incentivize hedging strategies, as uncertainty regarding long-term U.S. commitments increases the attractiveness of diversified partnerships, including deeper economic engagement with China and other emerging powers. Rather than producing alignment shifts toward a single pole, evolving U.S. priorities may therefore reinforce the multi-vector foreign policy behavior that characterizes Afro-Eurasian strategic agency.

The “New Cold War” framework presumes a structural symmetry akin to the U.S.–Soviet rivalry of the 20th century, implying that regional states must choose between two hegemonic poles. Empirical evidence from Africa and Eurasia, however, demonstrates that most regional actors resist such binary categorizations. Hedging strategies, multi-aligned partnerships, and selective engagement across sectors reveal that states operate strategically in the interstices of power competition, rather than along a single axis of alignment (Kuik, 2021:305).

For instance, African states like Kenya and Ethiopia simultaneously pursue Chinese infrastructure investment while participating in U.S.-backed governance programs, thereby avoiding exclusive allegiance. Similarly, Eurasian states such as Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan engage both China and Russia for trade, investment, and security cooperation while maintaining discretionary partnerships with Western institutions (Kassenova, 2020:68). These findings contradict the notion that the contemporary international system can be reduced to a simple two-pole rivalry, demonstrating that binary alignment models underestimate the agency and strategic sophistication of regional actors.

Beyond the inadequacy of bipolar assumptions, the contemporary system exhibits multi-layered, overlapping power structures. Great power influence is mediated through economic, institutional, and normative channels, each creating distinct leverage points. For example, China’s Belt and Road Initiative provides economic connectivity and infrastructure financing, while the United States and European actors leverage governance, security, and multilateral frameworks (Brautigam, 2020:172; OECD, 2023:48). Regional states exploit these overlapping levers to maximize strategic autonomy, illustrating that power is not exercised unidimensionally but through sector-specific, context-sensitive instruments.

Institutional platforms, including the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the African Union (AU), and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), further complicate the competitive landscape by creating arenas for multilateral negotiation and flexible alignment. Through these structures, regional actors manage risk, coordinate engagement, and institutionalize hedging behaviour, thereby distributing power influence across multiple dimensions rather than concentrating it in binary poles (Lo, 2021:82).

Perhaps the most critical limitation of the “New Cold War” narrative is its treatment of Afro Eurasia as a passive stage upon which great powers project influence. Our analysis demonstrates that regional actors are strategic agents who actively shape the trajectory of great power competition. Hedging, multi-alignment, and the deliberate use of strategic ambiguity function as mechanisms of autonomy and leverage. By leveraging interdependencies and institutional opportunities, states such as Nigeria, Georgia, and Uzbekistan not only optimize their developmental and security outcomes but also modulate the competitive dynamics between China and the United States (Paul, 2018:25).

This agency challenges assumptions of deterministic influence, showing that regional strategies are not mere responses to external pressures but constitute proactive foreign policy choices. Afro Eurasian states, through careful orchestration of economic, political, and security portfolios, demonstrate that local and regional imperatives shape the structure of global competition, undermining the teleological logic inherent in “New Cold War” accounts.

The inadequacy of the “New Cold War” framework carries significant implications for both scholarship and policy. Analytically, it underscores the need for nuanced models of strategic interaction that incorporate hedging, multi-alignment, and institutional pluralism. Policies premised on binary competition risk misreading incentives, overestimating coercive leverage, and underappreciating the agency of regional actors. For policymakers, recognizing the layered and agentic nature of Afro Eurasian states enables more effective engagement strategies, aligning incentives with local priorities while mitigating unintended consequences of zero-sum framing (Markey, 2020:147).

The “New Cold War” narrative is insufficient to explain contemporary dynamics in Afro Eurasia. Its failure lies in three key areas: the collapse of binary alignment assumptions, the existence of multi-layered and sector-specific power relations, and the active, strategic agency of regional actors. Contemporary Sino–American competition operates within a complex, multi-dimensional international system where regional actors leverage economic, security, and institutional opportunities to preserve autonomy, optimize outcomes, and shape the competitive landscape. Recognizing this complexity is essential for developing accurate analytical frameworks and informed policy strategies that reflect the realities of Afro Eurasian geopolitics.

CONCLUSION

This study has critically examined the limitations of the “New Cold War” narrative in explaining the dynamics of Sino-American competition in Afro-Eurasia, emphasizing the active agency of regional actors and the multi-dimensional nature of contemporary power relations. Unlike the bipolar framework of the original Cold War, Afro-Eurasia demonstrates complex, overlapping influences where states pursue differentiated strategies across economic, security, and institutional domains. By integrating theoretical insights from realism, hedging, and strategic autonomy with empirical evidence from Africa and Eurasia, this research offers a nuanced framework for understanding the contemporary global order.



Theoretically, the study advances the literature by clarifying hedging and strategic ambiguity as deliberate policy tools that enable regional actors to navigate great power competition while preserving autonomy. Unlike traditional balancing or bandwagoning models, Afro-Eurasian states implement multi-vector strategies that optimize benefits, manage risks, and exploit sector-specific opportunities. These strategies illustrate that alignment decisions are neither uniform nor binary but instead context-dependent, issue-specific, and informed by domestic and regional imperatives. Conceptually, this work contributes to international relations scholarship by treating regional actors not as passive arenas for external power projection, but as active architects of their strategic environments, capable of shaping the trajectory of global competition.

For policymakers, the findings carry several implications. States should be engaged through flexible, sector-specific strategies that account for multi-vector hedging rather than assuming exclusive alignment based on economic or security cooperation. Supporting institutional capacity in fiscal management, cross-sectoral policy coordination, and risk assessment enhances the effectiveness of these strategies. Active participation in multilateral frameworks such as the African Union, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and the Eurasian Economic Union provides platforms for negotiation, coordination, and risk mitigation, allowing regional actors to maintain autonomy while engaging with multiple powers. Integrating environmental, social, and governance criteria into investment and infrastructure projects ensures that strategic engagement advances sustainable and inclusive development. Additionally, fostering strategic literacy through research centers and policy networks enables decision-makers to anticipate shifts in great power competition and to craft informed, adaptive policies.

From a scholarly perspective, these findings underscore the need for international relations research to move beyond simplistic dualistic frameworks. Future studies should adopt longitudinal approaches to track changes in hedging strategies, employ sector-specific analyses for energy, technology, and infrastructure, and explore the applicability of multi-vector frameworks in other regions facing great power competition, such as Southeast Asia or Latin America. Moreover, integrating normative, institutional, and domestic political dimensions with traditional analyses of security and economics will deepen understanding of how regional actors convert external pressures into opportunities for strategic autonomy.

In conclusion, Afro-Eurasian states exhibit proactive agency, leveraging hedging, multi-alignment, and strategic ambiguity to balance external pressures and optimize national outcomes. Recognizing this complexity challenges the explanatory adequacy of the “New Cold War” narrative, highlighting that regional actors are not passive but are strategically active participants in shaping the geopolitical and economic contours of the 21st century. The study provides both theoretical insights for scholars and practical guidance for policymakers, emphasizing that informed, flexible, and context-sensitive strategies are essential for sustaining autonomy, stability, and development in Afro-Eurasia.

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