

Critically examine China's geopolitical interests in Africa

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Introduction

Geopolitics is the study of how and for what purposes political power is reinforced using geographical arrangements such as spatial networks, coalitions, boundaries, and natural resources etc. This study also represents social and political decisions taken by the leaders with respect to geographical arrangements (Flint and Xiaotong, 2019). It is an important area of study as it is considered the most powerful agency in the world. It is also synonymous with political geography as it is called the geographical dimensions of power which concerns international relations particularly with geostrategic concerns of major powers. Geopolitics helps to provide a link between strategy and geography that how geographical space can be used as a source of power between two countries. It analyses that geography is only a part of the complete global phenomena (Kristof, 1960). It used geopolitical variables such as demography, natural resources, climate, area studies, applied science of the region that is being studied. It focuses on political power that is linked with the geographical space that is being studied. It also focuses on the political power linked with the geographical space (Harvey, 1985). Diplomatic history is studied in relation with land territory and territorial waters. Relations between the political actors are studied which then creates a geographical system.

History

Everyone in the world is taking notice of China's growing global role and increasing policies that are dominating the world. China has a huge influence in the world specially in the developing countries. China with its use of technology and new policies in influencing the world and gaining international attention. The world specially the western countries are taking notice of it (Agnew, 2010). China is coming out as a powerful geopolitical country with its expanding influence in the developing countries. Its growing investments in different countries linked to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), its connectivity and infrastructure program is increasingly debated and talked about in the world (Kuus, 2017). After the financial crisis of 2008, China came out to be a great geopolitical force. It has advanced its interests and values. In contemporary times, China has emerged out as second great economic divergence and China is expected to give more profound geopolitical consequences (Hepple, 1986). Even in 2020, when the world's economy is shrinking, and every country's economy is at stake there is one exception-that is China. Its economy is increasing in every quarter. The major reason of a rapid increase in China's economy is its geopolitical influence in the world. There are other reasons as well like construction of new

islands on existing reefs, investment in military and intelligence agencies, spread of Chinese technology throughout the world, its intelligence abilities and capabilities, economic capacity to affect other nation using imports, exports, grants, cheap loans and investments (Tuathail and Agnew, 1992).

Interest of China in Africa

In this essay, our main focus and goal would be to discuss how the China is influencing Africa with its geopolitical strategies. If we talk about how China has engaged with Africa in recent years, we see that it has caught a lot of world's attention. This is also referred as China's "Oil diplomacy". It has been highlighted by many commentators that in what way and using which strategies China has made a good use of technical cooperation, very low interest loans, and nationally condition aid to create bilateral deals over the oil supply (Alden, 2009). It has made trade agreements, engineering contracts. Beijing in considered to be the centre of foreign policy as it will make sure that the oppressed regimes are receiving aid and it will also defend them for their survival. (Tull,2006). It is also active in making foreign policy and it will have unlimited respect and will honor the sovereignty of the state and will make sure that its interests are taken care of. Some people suggest that China will make sure that it restores its ways which can satisfy its needs of oil and will take necessary steps to make sure its strategy works in the long-run. It will also make sure that it is also able to extract gas and oil resources. Thus, they destabilize global and regional order. China has made its ways of engagement in Africa; and BRICS has come out as a new way of securing neo-colonialism and dominating Africa. There are Chinese oil companies operating in Africa such as CNPC, CNOOC, Sinopec. There is a logical connection between the strategies set by Beijing and the Chinese companies set in Africa (Dent, 2010). It is also considerably overplayed sometimes. Some people say that China may get involved in wards for its increased involvement in the countries to make its strategies successful. The aim of China is to get access to the strategic resources all around the world. These strategic resources include gas, oil, and water all around the world. As we know that there is involvement of China in Africa due to its quest for oil. This quest for oil according to some authors might endanger international and regional security (Bajpaye, 2005). This is same way it has threatened Africa's regional security. The recent China's economic growth has brought it close to other countries binationally and multilaterally. A lot of people say that China's foreign policy has changed from an ideological perspective to a business perspective, thus China is using smart power to dominate all over the world.

Political Party Trainings

The CCP engagement is increasing with the African parties towards more expansive China's remarkable economic progress. It is changing from ideological perspective on communism in China towards its economic progress. CCP is in talk with the elites of the country as well as with the political parties and strong African leaders. (Mawdsley, 2007). The aim and the motive behind these meetings are to provide trainings and to create an environment of political training in China. These kind of meetings and party to party relations provide a deep and a good partnership in Africa and in between China and Africa as compared to other Western countries (Blanchard and Flint, 2017). Thus, these political training programs are providing a foundation to good relations and deep involvement between China and Africa.

Media and Digital Space

China and Africa have also developed a cooperation network between them. In this, China trains Africans journalists and officials and also exchanged visits and also has a joint production of media (MUEKALIA, 2004). There is a clear favor of Chinese views about the world on the media environment and the news broadcasted is also in the favor of China. The national agencies and the broadcasters that are working privately has done this with the help of Chinese backing. Thus, the African media companies have dealt with censorship cases that had a partial ownership by the Chinese companies. Thus, has a direct impact on the formation of norms on the continent and particularly by the Africa on the "Internet Sovereignty" (Power and Mohan, 2010). The hardware and practices applicable have also been exported to the surveillance states by the Chinese firms.

Diplomatic Engagement

China had a lot of geopolitical motives behind its visits in Africa. China's attention towards Africa has risen in recent times if we compare it to United States. This is done not only in terms of the embassies but how China pays visits to Africa. These visits have their geopolitical goals behind them. This includes advanced political engagement and advanced economic goals for Chinese government. This also provides a direct channel for the African leaders towards the Chinese officials to voice their interests (Shinn and Eisenman, 2012). China corps involved in Africa are playing a huge role in making public opinion of Africans using different mediums such as different communication strategies and diverse social media channels.

Considering all these, it is important to see how the Africa has responded to such policies. We see that African community and African government has lauded the Chinese aid and investment. It has also lauded its political engagement with the continent of Africa. From an economical perspective, the African government is in favour of Chinese aid and investment which competes for the limited yet sizeable funds. Moreover, from political perspective, Chinese provides a model to follow to the African government and China being a comember of the Global South helps Africa following China as a model to emulate (Tan-Mullins, Mohan and Power, 2010). However, there definitely exists a backlash which focuses or is heavily centred upon the economic influence done by China more than its political influence. There exists both type of cases such as wrong businesses and the harm those businesses are causing to the environment. Some are in favor of China's investment; some give a backlash and are not in favour of it.

There have been some recommendations made to the Congress and what should Africa do in order to tackle this situation.

Enhance U.S engagement

The main key considered of China gaining engagement in Africa is the lack of resources that the continent of Africa is receiving from Washington. If the United States enhances and makes an active engagement in political, economic, and diplomatic relations with Africa and offers Africa good alternatives which China has a great hold on to right now, then it will remove the ability of China to have dominance over Africa and its government (Wasserman, 2013).

Emphasize bidirectional communication

If good economic, political, and diplomatic relations gets developed between United States and Africa then historical legacies and reputational obstacles which accompany Africa with Western engagement can be mitigated (An and Zhu, 2018). If United States' visits ensures to highlight African perspectives on their diplomatic visits, African needs, their initiatives then this can offer these countries to increase and give them more chances to develop Africa economically and on a larger scale.

Increased Chinese investment in African society

In order to increase the investment in African Civil society, U.S should gain and increase support from the local and civil society. This will make the local safeguards strong against

bad intentions of the Chinese and it will increase the self-governance of African government (Burgos Cáceres and Ear, 2012). This is how they will be able to increase its investment in African civil society; thus, the United States should increase their support to the African society.

Align with harmonious partners

In order to increase the availability of resources and their credibility, United States needs to unite with the partners that are harmonious in nature. This will also diminish the perception that United States is in competition with the China in order to gain momentum in Africa. (Franks and Ribet, 2009). This will also enhance the support and input of the donors and the partners.

Limiting the impact of rivalry in the continent of Africa

The power rivalry between China and Africa should not hinder any sort of efforts whether unilateral or joint despite China trying to increase its effort in gaining political hold in Africa. It is because the challenges that continent is facing is so diverse and cast that it should not hinder any efforts (Carmody, 2013).

Resource expansionism as a central Chinese geo-economics interest

Resource sector has played an important role in this exchange of good relations of trade between the two countries. Rehabilitation as well as the infrastructure development also plays an important role in making this relationship strong. This resource expansionism was done in Africa to secure oil concessions since the country wanted to meet its increased need of petroleum that had surpassed Japan in 2003. It then became the world's second largest consumer of petroleum product after United States (BBC report, 2006). Where the resource sector has gained a lot of prominence in China, we see that China on the other hand has successfully created a lot of economic linkages, agriculture, technology, debt relief, investment and finance, and science etc. China's oil companies also face a stiff competition on the continent. China's activities make it possible for a speedy and decisive action as its activities and African policies are less complicated by private constituencies. China imports around 28% of its oil and gas supplies from Africa as compared to 15% of the U.S (Alexander Gas and Oil Connections, 2006). This is one of the comprehensive outreaches of China in making its way to build its relations, win contracts and concessions for its firms. An important facet of China's current investment strategy in Africa is its promotion of private firms to do business in Africa. In this "Going Global Strategy" Chinese multinationals play

a key role. To construct a powerful global company, China expressed its industrial policy competing on the global level. Due to this, strategic and diplomatic relations will be created in the political sphere (Mohan and Power, 2008). The African companies that are dealing with Chinese firms feel unencumbered due to the restrictions they face in dealing with other western companies. Moreover, the firms in China focus more on long term time frame when they want to make strategic interactions between countries, thus they keep in mind the time frame and make strategies according to that. This raises a conflict between African counterparts and Chinese enterprises' interests. China also does not bound itself by the principles set by 'Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI). It ensures a good and a safe use of natural resources, transparency, accountability, stewardship of revenue streams. It basically sets a global standard for companies to publish what they pay to the government and they disclose after they receive that what is the amount that they have received. It was observed that China's operations consisted of elements which necessitated the creation of EITI. It is also important that China remains on board with the EITI because then it can be encouraged by the African government, civil or private sector to support Chinese companies to connect with African countries (Moyo, 2016). This should be done in African countries in which they operate. There was a Bandung Conference held and after the espousal of BC, it is not clear that whether the arrangements made by China in commercial sector are benefiting its people or the regime in power. It is also a concern whether China will abide by the rules of fairness, equity, and transparency and will it also take care and address concerns of the environment degradation that is associated with the resource development. African states can use China's option for investment in the oil business to destroy efforts and to ensure beneficial efforts to reform the oil sector. For example, in the case of Angolan government, it failed to a clear reform of the oil sector to ensure transparency at the request of IFIs and also taking a \$2 billion loan from the government of China (Power, Mohan and Tan-Mullins, 2012). There are certain reports that thousands of Chinese engineers and laborers have been taken to Ethiopia to build the country's dam over there. The enlargement of China's geo-economics in the oil sector is in a competition with US interest in the Africa. It is a source for diversifying oil imports and to secure sources for its energy dependency.

China's economic engagement in Africa-Ideational affinity and geo-economics interests

With the measure of economic aid, China has backed up its ideological support of African states and has made the building of infrastructure its main focus. Moreover, China provided roughly 900 projects dealing with infrastructure, the most famous one is the (TAZARA

Railway). This was majorly centered upon the self-interest. But these types of projects such as Benguela Railway and TAZARA created China's economic dominance in Africa (Thrall, 2015). China also provided aid to Africa; it gave a diplomatic message to Africa of China's economic dominance in the African continent. China showed its interest in the continent by sending lavish infrastructure in the continent. This was done to prevent the bad influence of the cold war. This initiated a cooperation which was small however, it trained African workers, there were cultural agreements, scholarships for African students, and a provision of technical experts. By 2004, 15,000 Africans graduated from the Chinese institutions (2007). There is also a rapid increase of Chinese in the Africa approximately 750,000 (Mohan, 2008). China has provided development assistance such as low concessional loans, grants to Africa. This has been a continuing aspect of how China has increased its economic engagement in Africa. Using estimation done by some economists, it is estimated that the EXIM by China by mid-2007 has financed around 300 projects (Mohan and Power, 2009). It has done a strong emphasis on the infrastructure since infrastructure projects will play a key role in getting access to Africa's natural resources. "Coalition investment" is a term used to describe a link between infrastructure development and the acquisition of the energy and other natural resources. Africa accepted Chinese Aid because it had no tough conditions attached with it like with Western institutions. Thus, good relations were developed between China and Africa. As in 2008 earthquake, Africa offered a lot of moral and material support to China. The motive of China was also to get the strategic advantage from its other competitors like Japan and India who also showed a great interest in making its relations with Africa.

[The military interest in Africa](#)

To analyse the strategic and military interests of China we see that China's geo-economics interests are directly related with its strategic and military analysis of the view of the bipolar world. China has focused on the diplomacy on creating a partnership with Africa to increase its attractiveness. As Africa has grown rich in oil, countries like Japan, India, US, China has showed a deep interest in Africa's resource wealth. China has used all soft and hard efforts to secure political and economic advantages in Africa against its global competitors. China has worked to avoid the entanglements of the cold war and has tried to protect its strategic interests in countries to come out as a global power. Thus, the economic, military engagement, and diplomatic relations serve to secure energy, mineral resources, push China-Taiwan relations, expanding exports, and enhancing important national priorities.

Conclusion

China has made a refined and a long-term relationship with a third world country. This was done for the acquisition of natural resources and to emerge and a strongest power in the global economy. China has supported efforts by Africa and expressed its gratitude towards the ideational affinity to work towards South-South cooperation and towards more reformed international economic order. The new China and Africa policy is influenced by China's geo-economics interests by providing them with national security and aid, and by ensuring a ready supply of natural resources from Africa. China is enhancing its global strategic interests through use of soft power such as diplomatic engagement, concerted charm offensive, and proclamations of ideational principles, and through the use of hard power as well such as arm sales, exchange of military, and support for the countries that are rich in energy. China is seeking to emerge as a great economic power and is ensuring that its competitors do not try to threaten the interests that they have in Africa. China sees a great benefit in stretching its global reach by securing vital resources in a strategically important continent to make up its own deficiency in natural resources. This will result in China becoming a global power. Thus, Africa is seen as a great strategic partner which can help China achieve its goals and help her gain global power credentials and the economic might. However, one should not assume that the relationship is solely based on ideational principles because the relationship between them is complex and multidimensional as it is also important to see that these relations are helping Africans gaining material benefits that are also sustainable in the long term. China has engaged Africa on a broad range of economic endeavours but its main focus has been gaining and securing natural resources from the continent. There needs to be a consensus on how these two countries can provide and establish better relations and there is a need for more concerted efforts to establish stronger and better transnational linkages between the African and Chinese people. The process is already underway as a lot of Chinese migrant communities are increasing in Africa and China is opening doors for training programs for the African students. The convergence should be attained with a worldwide view in the Beijing Consensus for the basis of this new nuanced relationship. This is because Africa would otherwise never be able to adopt a global strategy and will always be a convenient actor that helps China in attaining its global strategy without receiving any clear and sustainable benefits from their relationship.



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