

## THE CHANGING GEO-POLITICAL LANDSCAPE OF AFRICA: AN ARENA OF MAJOR POWER COMPETITION

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### **Abstract**

*This study examines the rising major power competition in Africa through the lens of a few select countries as reference points. For theoretical analysis, this study applies the realist perspective, emphasizing power politics as a key analytical concept” exploring the connections between major power competition and the changing geopolitical landscape in Africa. The analysis underscores the fact that while competitors may have changed over the centuries, the nature and behaviour of these competitors remain constant, especially when dissected through the prism of power politics. In contrast to the 18th and 19th centuries, which was primarily restricted to European powers, combined with the rising diplomatic, political and economic influence of China, the diversification of African foreign policies that transcend Euro-American direction, the call for a multipolar world by African states, and longing to be considered as equal players in global affairs, the current wave of major power competition is heterogeneous yet humongous, featuring countries that were either previously considered as developing nations or whose status of global power was considered diminished. The study concludes that the new scramble for Africa carries some semblance of the Cold War, geared at exploiting Africa. Nevertheless, Africans should not allow the repetition of the old scramble, where they were cast at the bottom of the ladder; instead, they should aim to be the winners themselves. The global power competition is a complex and challenging issue for African countries. The study aims to comprehensively analyse great power competition in Africa, focusing on key geopolitical and economic dynamics involving major powers such as China, the United States, France and Russia. It aims to assess the specific impact on countries such as Djibouti, Mali, and the Central African Republic, examining their political, economic, and security landscapes. The findings not only contributed to the academic discourse on global power dynamics but also offered practical recommendations for fostering sustainable development, facilitating*

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*peacebuilding efforts, and enhancing Africa's engagement with major global powers.*

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## **Introduction**

**M**ajor power competition over the continent is far from being a new phenomenon. History bears witness to the Vienna and Berlin conferences that led to the scramble and partition of Africa by European powers. The enduring consequences of this partition laid the foundation for a geo-strategic and geopolitical shift. Africa was not only divided by foreign actors, primarily European powers, but it was also forcibly integrated into the European-led international system. Fast forward to the continent of Africa, which endured decades of colonial rule until the era of decolonisation. While decolonisation began in the late 1950s and culminated in the 1990s, it does not entirely qualify Africa as liberated from colonialism or major power competition. Although many African countries have gained political independence, their continued dependence on the Euro-American-led world order highlights the concept of neo-colonialism.<sup>1</sup> Studies have demonstrated that the policies of big powers, and multinational-corporations in Africa not only tend to be self-serving but also bear the hallmarks of colonialism, exacerbating ethnic tensions in the continent.<sup>2</sup> In fact, the vested-interest of these powerful actors can alienate local populations and give rise to the perception that African governments are merely serving as puppets, promoting the interests of these external actors.

Furthermore, the African continent is at a pivotal juncture, driven by transformative forces that are reshaping its political landscape. Economic growth, demographic shifts, and technological advancements have catalysed a metamorphosis that ripples across the continent's geopolitical landscape. Major Powers are increasingly engaging with African countries, while African nations are asserting their potency on the global stage<sup>3</sup>. Africa's burgeoning population, raw materials and technological potentials position it as a central player in the global economy's production shift. This demographic weight, particularly with sub-Saharan Africa becoming the epicentre of global demographic growth, will undoubtedly reshape the global labour market and the very structure of the world economy. Amidst this dynamic interplay, the geopolitical landscape is characterised by intense competition for Africa's abundant natural resources, strategic location, and growing economic clout. This competition often pits major powers against each

other, with their interests frequently clashing. Africa's natural wealth, particularly its biodiversity and energy resources, has become increasingly politicised, attracting significant global attention and fueling geopolitical dynamics. As Africa navigates this transformative era, its trajectory will be shaped by its ability to harness its potential, confront external pressures, and foster internal unity. The continent stands at a crossroads, and its choices will have profound implications not only for itself but for the global order in the years to come.

Several key factors drive competition for influence in Africa. These factors include control over strategic resources, such as oil and other valuable commodities, which both China and the US are vying for<sup>4</sup>. Furthermore, the pursuit of political influence is a significant concern for major world powers as they seek to expand their reach and establish relationships with African governments. Additionally, the investment climate plays an important role, with poor property rights, macroeconomic instability, and burdensome regulations hindering private sector development in sub-Saharan Africa<sup>5</sup>. The lack of human capital and infrastructure also contributes to the challenges faced by African economies in terms of competitiveness.

Consequently, the weak internal factors in the region, such as internal conflicts, corruption, poverty, and the absence of a national identity, create opportunities for external interference and influence. Africa's growing population, projected to reach 2 billion by 2050, is attracting the relocation of production centres and making the continent strategically crucial in global geo-politics<sup>6</sup>. The global geopolitical competition in Africa, particularly between China and the United States, is destabilising African countries and causing increasing instability. However, Africa is gradually becoming an active "subject" in international relations and may change its position in the new model of world development. The continent's abundant and unique sources of raw materials, coupled with the growth of its labour potential and improved business climate, contribute to attracting external powers. This has resulted in Africa being a focus of global geopolitical competition, particularly between China, Russia, France and the United States. While China is Africa's largest commercial partner, it is also increasing its military presence and influence on the continent. On the other hand, the United States prioritises economic and military applications in Africa while France and Russia struggle to keep their post-colonial relevance. These opposing interests and policies between China and the United States are likely to cause increasing instability in the future. Additionally, the rise of China as a global economic power, the threat to

multilateralism and globalisation, and Russia's new international role further shape Africa's development in response to changes in the international system<sup>7</sup>.

These changes in Africa's geopolitical landscape have the potential to lead to increased instability in the future. It is against this backdrop that this paper seeks to discuss the intricate dynamics of great power competition in Africa, shedding light on the complex interplay of geopolitical, geo-economics, and security factors. By focusing on specific nations such as Djibouti, Mali, and the Central African Republic, the paper provided a nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities inherent in navigating major power rivalries on the continent.

## **Overview and Historical Geopolitical Alignment of African Countries**

Africa's geopolitical landscape has been shaped by its colonial past and the subsequent Cold War era. During the colonial period, European powers divided the continent among themselves, establishing colonies and exploiting its resources<sup>8</sup>. The Cold War brought ideological tensions to Africa, with the United States and the Soviet Union supporting their ideological allies in proxy conflicts. Initially, sub-Saharan Africa was a marginal region for Soviet strategists, but it became increasingly important as the Cold War progressed. The Soviet Union and its successor state, the Russian Federation, intervened in African countries to export their ideology and gain geopolitical clout<sup>9</sup>. Tanzania, under Julius Nyerere, became a "Cold War city" due to its engagement with the socialist world and close connections with China.

The prominent Cold War actors, the USA and the Soviet Union, shaped Africa's decolonisation process, often prioritising their own interests over those of Africans. Conflicts in Africa, such as in southern Africa, were influenced by the superpowers and had global ramifications. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Moscow's presence in Africa declined, leading to the closure of its embassies and trade missions. The rise of great power competition in Africa can be attributed to several factors. Firstly, the historical "scramble for Africa" in the 19th century led to a contest between European powers for colonial territories, establishing a precedent for power rivalry. Secondly, during the Cold War, Africa became a battleground for the global East-West confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union, further intensifying great power rivalry. Currently, the competition in Africa is between China and the US, with China's extensive

economic investments, military ties, and political interactions challenging US global hegemony.<sup>10</sup>

During the Cold War, sub-Saharan Africa became a hotbed of geopolitical contestation. The Soviet Union and its successor state, the Russian Federation, played a significant role in the region, driven by both geopolitical clout and the export of ideology. The USA and its European allies also had a significant impact on Africa's decolonisation process, with their actions shaping political and economic institutions in postcolonial Africa. Socialist countries in the Eastern Bloc, including the Soviet Union, forged alliances with newly independent African states, resulting in financial exchanges, political ties, and cultural solidarities. The Cold War rivalries between the USA and the USSR adversely affected Africa, with the domination of the world by the US and its allies through globalisation. For the US, the Cold War in Africa was about preventing the spread of communism and radical leftist ideas, while for Europeans, it was about preserving their own interests. Since the end of the Cold War, Africa's geopolitical landscape has undergone significant changes.

The end of the Cold War sparked profound changes in the constellation of alliances within African regimes, leading to the transformation of elite coalitions and the appointment of opposition party members to cabinet portfolios. Additionally, Africa has seen a greater focus from external powers due to its economic growth, demographic changes, and strategic importance in global politics<sup>11</sup>. The continent has become a battleground for global geopolitical competition, particularly between China, France and the United States, among others, with economic and military applications being at the forefront (Clement, 2022). Furthermore, Africa has faced challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the war between Russia and Ukraine, which have had socio-economic repercussions and posed threats to the global economy<sup>12</sup>. Despite these challenges, Africa has exercised its agency in the international system through institutionalised diplomacy, indicating its role as an agent in the evolving world order<sup>13</sup>.

## **Emerging Role of Africa in the Contemporary Geopolitical Environment**

Africa's vast resources, strategic location, and growing population hold immense potential for power. The continent is endowed with abundant natural resources, including oil, gas, minerals, and precious metals. Its strategic location at the crossroads of global trade routes and proximity to Europe, Asia, and the Middle East make it a critical player in international relations. Africa's youthful and

expanding population presents a demographic dividend, offering a potential workforce for future economic growth. Africa's vast natural resources can be used to improve the lives of its people by promoting industrialisation and development, creating equal economic opportunities, and generating social and cultural wealth<sup>14</sup>. By implementing the right growth promotion policies and ensuring strong institutions are in place, natural resource wealth can be harnessed to diversify the economy and transition from a low-value economy to a labour-intensive manufacturing base. Furthermore, interventions from developed countries can contribute to improving food security, healthcare, education, and environmental protection in Africa. Leveraging Africa's resources and implementing appropriate strategies can lead to economic growth, improved standards of living, and better access to essential services for its people.

Furthermore, Africa is often called the continent of the future due to its promising economic potential, lucrative investment opportunities, and abundant natural resources. The continent accounts for a population of 1.39 billion with a GDP of \$3.1 trillion according to the IMF. Accordingly, the continent holds 30 per cent of the world's natural resources, which include cobalt, coal, diamonds and uranium. However, Africa faces several challenges to its development. These challenges include the perception that Africa may fail to achieve sustainable development goals due to the opposing imperatives of growth and ecological sustainability. The process of gaining independence in Africa led to the formation of new state borders and the continuation of metropolises' intervention in the affairs of former colonies, resulting in economic and political dependence on global institutions<sup>15</sup>. Currently, Africa still struggles with poverty, unemployment, and inequality, and has made limited progress on structural transformation and self-reliance. Acute resource scarcity and the recent growth of Africa's high-net-worth givers have raised questions about the continent's development finance and the need for collaboration with multilateral agencies. Governance issues, such as corruption, weak political institutions, and undemocratic values, also hinder Africa's development, underscoring the need for institutional reform. Furthermore, the rise in globalisation and the surge in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in Africa have exposed many African countries to international trade competition, contributing to the dynamics of great power competition in the region<sup>16</sup>. These factors, along with the different strategies adopted by great powers to achieve their objectives, have shaped the rise of great power competition in Africa. In this regard, case studies of how Africa's great potential has attracted great power rivalry will be briefly discussed.

- **Djibouti.** Djibouti's geostrategic position in the Horn of Africa has attracted foreign military bases from countries like the US, France, Japan, China, and Italy, driven by economic and national interests. This has led to the country's economy being driven by premiums and rent from hosting these military bases. Additionally, Djibouti's strategic location has allowed it to maintain a monopoly over transit trade to and from Ethiopia, providing a comparative advantage in the region<sup>17</sup>. However, despite these advantages, Djibouti still faces challenges in achieving equitable and inclusive development, particularly from a gender perspective. Djibouti has been able to leverage its location to attract global powers and investments, such as China's Belt and Road Initiative, which has the potential to drive development in the country<sup>18</sup>. However, there are concerns about the negative implications of this strategic importance, including the militarisation of the region and potential political, social, and security consequences. Djibouti's location as a bridgehead between Africa and Arabia has enabled it to foster ties with a diverse range of states, transforming its weaknesses into economic and diplomatic capital<sup>19</sup>. Additionally, Djibouti's strategic location has made it a centrepiece of China's Maritime Silk Road Initiative in East Africa, as it facilitates connections into and from Ethiopia and provides a supportive environment for China's first overseas military base. Djibouti's strategic location has allowed it to balance intra-Arab regional competition, global rivalries, and diverse local logistical and political pressures within the Horn of Africa<sup>20</sup>.
- **Mali.** Mali has been plagued by instability and conflict since 2012, when Islamist militants took control of the northern part of the country. France intervened militarily to support the Malian government in regaining control of its territory. French involvement in Mali is driven by national interests, including securing economic resources, restoring influence in Africa, and preventing terrorism<sup>21</sup>. Elite bargains, corruption, illegal trafficking, and intercommunal conflicts have shaped the complex political economy of violence in Mali<sup>22</sup>. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has been involved in managing the Malian strife; however, France's influence has impacted ECOWAS' decision-making<sup>23</sup>. Mali's economy remains weak due to ongoing upheaval and the global pandemic. France has begun scaling back its military operations in the country, following recent agitation from the populace, as the military seized power to restore order. Consequently, France's intervention in Mali has had several long-term effects. Firstly, the French focus on military

strengthening post-2013 inadvertently created the conditions for the 2020 coup d'état. Also, the French military presence in Mali is considered a significant tool of French influence on the continent, acting as the most essential instrument of French structural power in Africa. Furthermore, the political upheaval and international isolation resulting from Mali's current situation have led to broken relations with key security partner France and the withdrawal of French forces from the country. These effects highlight the complex relationship between France and Mali, with implications for both countries' political and security dynamics in the region. The persistent degradation of governance, livelihoods, and security in Mali is also a challenge, despite ongoing international presence and intervention. The peacebuilding process in Mali has been more accountable to external donors and military partners than to local aspirations for peace and stability. Achieving an effective peace agreement in Mali is challenging due to issues such as corruption, politicisation, internal rivalries, and inadequate civilian oversight and control within the security sector. Additionally, the emergence and deepening of "unholy alliances" in the Sahel region, including Mali, pose threats to the state and complicate peacebuilding efforts<sup>24</sup>. In summary, Mali is contested by the French and now Russia due to its uranium and gold deposits, among other natural resources.

- **The Central African Republic (CAR).** CAR has been inundated by civil war since 2012, resulting in a humanitarian crisis and the displacement of millions of people. The conflict has attracted international involvement, with Russia deploying troops to support the CAR government and providing military training and equipment to government forces. The consequences of the civil war in the Central African Republic include the risk to security, stability, peace, and sustainable development in the country. The war has led to an upsurge in explosive ordnance incidents, causing harm to civilians, humanitarian delivery, peacekeepers, and the implementation of the United Nations mission in the country. The political system has become dysfunctional, leading to a gradual decomposition of the state and the inability to perform basic functions. The war has also resulted in social tensions, strikes, and a cost-of-living crisis, exacerbating the humanitarian situation in the country. The central government's authority is confined to major cities, while rebels control rural areas, dividing the nation into autonomous regions. The conflict has encouraged the enlistment of foreign mercenaries and has led to looting and

confrontations with religious overtones. Russia's involvement in the Central African Republic has had a significant impact on the conflict. Russia has expanded its presence in Africa, including the CAR, and has become a major actor alongside armed groups and the United Nations forces. Russian activities in the CAR have included military diplomacy, security issues, and training of government forces and rebel factions. This has allowed Russia to exert influence over both sides of the conflict and gain control over resource-rich areas. The presence of Russian Private Military Companies (PMCs) has also played a role in shaping a positive image of Russia's military presence in Africa. However, Russia's involvement has also escalated the geopolitical rift between France and Russia over the CAR. Overall, Russia's participation in the CAR has had both positive and negative consequences for the conflict, with implications for peace and prosperity in the region. The question remains, why is CAR attracting major power competition? It is simply because it holds the most significant mineral resources in the world, with approximately 470 high-value natural resources, including gold, diamonds, and the world's highest cobalt deposit.

### **The Role of the African Union, Progress and Stability**

The African Union (AU) is a continental organisation established in 2001 as a successor to the defunct Organisation of African Unity, with the primary objective of promoting unity, cooperation, and development among African countries. Some of its key objectives include Peace and Security, democracy and Governance, Economic Integration, and Social Development. The primary role of AU is to prevent conflicts, mediate disputes and promote stability across the continent. It advocates for democratic principles, good governance and human rights. The African Union (AU) has emerged as a regional organisation with growing influence, promoting peace, security, and economic development<sup>25</sup>. African countries are actively participating in international forums, such as the United Nations and the G20, advocating for their interests and priorities<sup>26</sup>. The AU and regional bodies, such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the East African Community (EAC), are working towards regional integration and cooperation, which has the potential to enhance sustainable peace, economic growth, and development in Africa<sup>27</sup>. A strong and united African Union (AU) is crucial for Africa's progress and stability<sup>28</sup>. The AU plays an active role in regional security matters, striving to prevent and manage crises through targeted interventions. However, the AU's mechanisms for dealing with human security

threats are inadequate. The AU's human security architecture is dependent on outside funding, which allows outsiders to shape Africa's agenda<sup>29</sup>. To enhance Africa's geopolitical positioning, the AU needs to operationalise its frameworks and fully subscribe to their guiding principles<sup>30</sup>. Africa should adopt a unified position and leverage its continental frameworks to unlock its economic potential, which is the foundation for its political influence in global affairs. A stable and peaceful Africa can attract investment, facilitate trade, and foster economic development. Africa faces significant challenges in terms of economic and social development. Poverty, corruption, and infrastructure deficiencies remain widespread. Conflicts and political instability hinder progress in many countries. Access to education, healthcare, and sanitation services remains limited in many parts of the world<sup>31</sup>. Under the Economic Integration, the AU also seeks to enhance economic cooperation, trade and infrastructure development. On the other hand, particularly in Social Development, it focuses on health, education and social welfare. The African Union currently has 56 member states. All these countries collaborate on various regional and global issues to advance Africa's interests and well-being.

### **Challenges of the African Union**

The AU faces several challenges as it strives to achieve its goals and enhance the well-being of the African continent. Some of these inevitable challenges include, but are not limited to, Conflict and Instability, Resource Constraints, Coordination and Implementation, Human Rights and Governance and Economic Development and Integration. Several African countries continue to grapple with armed conflicts, political instability and violence. The AU's efforts to promote peace and security face significant obstacles due to ongoing conflicts in regions such as the Sahel, Horn of Africa, and Central Africa. The aspect of resource constraints is yet another perpetual challenge faced by the AU. The AU relies entirely on member states' contributions for funding, which can be inconsistent. Limited financial resources hinder the organisation's ability to implement its programs effectively and efficiently as scheduled. The coordination and implementation of continental policies and actions among the 56 diverse member states is, without a doubt, very complex. Ensuring the consistent implementation of AU decisions and resolutions remains a challenge. Despite numerous and coordinated efforts to promote democracy and human rights, some member states struggle with issues like corruption, human rights abuses and weaker governance. Balancing sovereignty with collective responsibility is an ongoing challenge.

Consequently, achieving economic development and integration across the continent is yet another colossal challenge due to disparities in economic development, trade barriers and infrastructure gaps. The AU aims to address these issues through initiatives like the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). On the Health and Pandemics domain, the AU faces health challenges, including inadequate healthcare infrastructure, disease outbreaks and the impact of pandemics like HIV/AIDS, Ebola and, of late, the deadly COVID-19. The other huge challenge that the AU is currently facing is Climate Change and Environmental Degradation. Climate change poses risks to Africa's ecosystems, agriculture and livelihoods. The AU has been and continues to advocate for climate action and resilience-building. The African conflicts have resulted in significant migration and Refugees. The AU deals with migration issues, including irregular migration, displacement and refugees. Cooperation among member states is crucial to managing migration flows effectively. Ensuring gender equality and empowering youth are ongoing challenges. The AU strives to address gender disparities and engage young people in decision-making processes, including those of young parliamentarians. Strengthening AU institutions, enhancing their effectiveness, and ensuring accountability are essential for achieving the organisation's objectives. Despite these challenges, the AU remains committed to advancing the continent's interests, fostering unity and promoting sustainable development.

### **Achievements of the African Union in Peace and Security**

The AU has made significant strides in its mission to foster unity, development, and cooperation across the continent. The AU has played a crucial role in resolving conflicts and mitigating violence in hotspots such as Sudan, Côte d'Ivoire, and Mali. It has facilitated negotiations and encouraged peaceful transitions of power, thereby preventing further bloodshed. Despite challenges, the AU continues to address security threats. It focuses on regions like the Sahel, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Libya and Sudan, which are embroiled in armed conflicts and terrorism. Terrorism, violent extremism and unconstitutional changes of government remain challenges to democratic processes on the continent. The AU aims to enhance regional integration, economic cooperation and trade. However, cracks in regional integration need attention to ensure collective progress. The AU's Agenda 2063 serves as a blueprint for Africa's transformation. It focuses on inclusive and sustainable development, self-determination and collective prosperity. The AU monitors progress through quantitative data and strives to achieve its ambitious goals. The AU has made substantial progress in taking a stronger lead in integrating the continent on the

global stage. However, it continues to work toward effectiveness and influence. Progress has been made toward operationalising the African Standby Force, enhancing the continent's capacity for peacekeeping and crisis response. While challenges persist, the AU remains committed to advancing Africa's interests and building a prosperous future for all.

The African Standby Force (ASF), also known as, is a continental African peacekeeping force established under the direction of the AU. The ASF comprises multidisciplinary contingents, including military, police and civilian components. These contingents are on standby in their respective countries of origin, ready for rapid deployment when needed. The primary purpose of the ASF is to be deployed during crises within Africa. It acts as a peacekeeping force, intervening in situations such as armed conflicts, humanitarian emergencies and other security challenges. Before the establishment of the AU in 2001, its predecessor, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), lacked practical tools for collective action during violent crises. The 1994 Genocide in Rwanda highlighted the need for a change in Africa's security collaboration. The AU's Constitutive Act granted the right to intervene in member states in grave circumstances, such as war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity. The ASF is a constituent element of the APSA, which aims to enhance Africa's conflict management and resolution capacities. The APSA includes five pillars, which are:

- Peace and Security Council.
- Continental Early Warning System.
- Panel of the Wise.
- Peace Fund.
- ASF

The African Union AU has been actively engaged in addressing peace, security, and stability challenges across the continent. Although it faces obstacles, its efforts have had a notable impact. The AU plays a critical role in conflict resolution. It has facilitated negotiations, peace talks and mediation efforts in countries like Sudan, South Sudan, and Somalia. By promoting dialogue and encouraging peaceful transitions of power, the AU plays a crucial role in fostering stability. The AU's Peace and Security Council (PSC) anticipates conflicts and undertakes preventive diplomacy. Its early warning mechanisms help identify potential crises before they escalate. These efforts contribute to preventing violence and maintaining stability.

## **Peacekeeping Operations**

The AU deploys peacekeeping missions in conflict-affected regions. For instance, the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) has been instrumental in countering al-Shabaab and stabilising Somalia. These operations enhance security and stability on the ground. The AU advocates for democratic governance, human rights, and good governance. It monitors elections and encourages adherence to democratic norms. By supporting democratic transitions, the AU contributes to stability. The AU engages in regional peace-building efforts. For example, it has been involved in mediating the Anglophone crisis in Cameroon. By addressing localised conflicts, the AU aims to prevent broader instability.

## **Global Advocacy and Influence**

The AU represents African perspectives in global forums. It contributes to discussions on peace, security, and development. Its voice helps shape international responses to African challenges, such as the current International Court of Justice case where the Republic of South Africa dragged Israel to court for its genocidal crimes in Palestine. The AU should continue exploring new ways to address governance crises, maintain diplomatic channels, and support conflict-affected countries. In summary, while stability remains a complex goal, the AU's commitment to peace and security contributes significantly to Africa's well-being.

## **Challenges and Impediments to Economic and Social Development in Africa**

Great-power competition is a distinctive phenomenon that deserves scholarly investigation, as it is a permanent and comprehensive contest for supremacy among major players in the international system<sup>32</sup>. By understanding these dynamics and actively engaging in capacity planning, cooperation, and fair regulation, stakeholders can navigate major power competition to their advantage. African countries face the challenge of balancing the interests of different major powers in the context of major power competition<sup>33</sup>. China and the United States are two crucial actors in this competition, with their own priorities and policies in Africa<sup>34</sup>. While the key focus for both countries. China also seeks to increase its military presence and influence in the region. This competition between China and the United States creates instability in Africa<sup>35</sup>. Moreover, African countries are navigating complex international agreements and facing developmental, economic, social, and industrial transformation hurdles<sup>36</sup>. African countries have tried to balance the interests of different major powers through various strategies. They have engaged in negotiations with rising powers like Brazil, China, and India, as

well as established powers and international organisations, to secure more favourable terms of engagement<sup>37</sup>. However, the success of these balancing efforts is also influenced by the socio-political context in which they take place<sup>38</sup>.

Furthermore, there is a risk of becoming embroiled in conflicts between major powers. The emerging multi-polar world, with rising powers challenging established ones, increases the likelihood of clashes between major powers such as the U.S., China, and Russia<sup>39</sup>. These conflicts pose a significant danger, especially considering that these states possess nuclear weapons<sup>40</sup>. The power differentials between warring sides in asymmetric disputes can also lead to minor powers engaging in wars they are likely to lose<sup>41</sup>. Additionally, conflicts may arise due to the differences in population sizes among countries, leading to implosions of empires, conflicts over spheres of influence, and intermedial conflicts in transnational spaces. Critics argue that the United States should adopt retrenchment strategies to avoid provoking conflicts with significant powers<sup>42</sup>.

African countries face challenges in protecting their sovereignty and independence due to various factors. These challenges include weak governance, poor civil-military relations, economic underdevelopment, and ongoing conflict<sup>43</sup>. Globalisation has imposed structural challenges on the continent, making strategic multilateral collaboration necessary for addressing political and financial problems<sup>44</sup>. Socio-economic and political difficulties within African states have hindered the attainment of sustainable peace and have led to conflicts that spill over into neighbouring countries. The Positive Sovereignty deficit in Africa contributes to chronic insecurity and ethnic mobilisation, as weak states fail to provide necessary commodities and services, leading to competition for resources. The African independence movement aimed to disconnect from imperial control, but neocolonialist manoeuvres have hindered progress. The African Union has the potential to revitalise the movement and consolidate African independence through the United States of Africa, emphasising Pan-African interdependence<sup>45</sup>.

During the NDU ISSRA International Seminar held 23 September 2023 on Africa an emerging arena of major power competition which was also attended by Africa Ambassadors accredited to the Republic of Pakistan, on the keynote by the Chief Guest H.E Rashid Soobadar High Commissioner of Mauritius and Acting dean of the African Corp noted that Africa despite its size and population still struggle with issues such as poverty, disease, political instability, and limited access to education and healthcare. The Seminar also discussed that the ground reality in

Africa is somewhat bleak, given its embroilment in war, the concurrent coups, and corruption. At the same time, 60% of the population lives in extreme poverty, with the GDP of only 3 trillion dollars, and reported terrorism in parts of the continent further deteriorates the security. There is a realisation at the global level that Africa has been made poor by slavery, terrorism, internal armed conflict, re-colonialization and Western imperialism by the world powers. Many African Countries are being sucked into a debt trap, coups, unconstitutional changes and dictatorship, which invites selective involvement by the West—out of the 24 African countries that spent more than 15% of government revenue servicing debt in 2021, six countries - Angola, Cameroon, Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Ethiopia and Zambia sent over a third of debt payments to Chinese lenders. Other private creditors accounted for over a third of payments in 12 countries. Currently, the re-colonisation of Africa through economic means is hampered by the debt trap. Furthermore, African economic growth is hindered by a significant increase in youth unemployment, mainly due to a lack of opportunities in both the public and private sectors, as well as a decline in agricultural production, primarily caused by climate change and outdated farming practices. Similarly, the closure and lack of new development in the manufacturing and industrial sectors were caused by high investment costs resulting from corruption and other production inputs, such as high power costs. In the social sector, health facilities and services are underdeveloped, primarily due to the high population density, coupled with poor health infrastructure and inadequate sanitation, which contribute to a high disease rate.

Lastly, the media coverage of the information domain on African narrative is usually biased, depicting stereotypes, misunderstandings, and partial coverage of occurrences or disease outbreaks on the continent. These biased reports are aimed at painting a bad picture of Africa that is suffering from diseases and poverty, therefore attracting donors/sponsors to fund the operation of International and Local NGOs based in many African Countries. Such a prejudiced approach overlooks and downplays the continent's immense economic potential, political awakening, and diversity of culture and heritage with rich natural resources and Agriculture.

Arising from the above, the key takeaways on economic impediments and challenges to Africa's development are summarised as follows:

- **Poor Governance and Accountability.** A major impediment is the lack of policies to guide the management of public resources and the implementation of government programs. Corruption also contributes to slow economic growth due to exaggerated costs and, in some instances, incomplete public programs.
- **Lack of International and Local Investment.** To achieve sustainable economic growth, there is a need for the establishment of manufacturing and value addition; therefore, a reduction in imports and subsequently easing pressure on the dollar reserves is necessary. This sector is not thriving well due to political instability, insecurity, and a lack of policies mainly focused on attracting more direct foreign and local investment.
- **Lack of intra-African connectivity and Integration.** African countries currently lack adequate roads, rail, and air infrastructure for connectivity, as well as the right policies to facilitate the smooth movement of goods and services among the 55 countries, thereby hindering their economic transformation. The African Continental Free Trade Agreement (ACFTA) is one of the initiatives established to create a single market for goods and services in Africa.
- **Lack of Shared Common Resources.** Africa has rich natural resources that include oil and gas, mainly in the western and northern regions, which can be processed and traded amongst the African countries to reduce the importation of the product, which is usually costly due to transport costs, price due to market forces and other tariffs. The Eastern and Central African region is rich in agricultural resources and should ideally produce enough food to feed Africa and a surplus for export to increase foreign income.
- **African Debt Trap.** Most African countries use borrowed money from external and internal sources to implement public programmes. The external sources are primarily from the World Bank, the IMF, and bilateral creditors, with China being the largest lender for infrastructure development funds. Most African countries are currently struggling to service these loans while also managing import bills, which have been attributed to low tax revenue, high interest rates, and a lack of foreign income and remittances. Major powers have deliberately been unable to help African countries out of this distress, as it is part of their strategy to project their interests and continue controlling the resource-rich African continent.

- **Internal Conflict and Political Instability.** The continent continues to experience internal conflict and political instability, which has contributed to a lack of or slow economic growth and insecurity in the affected countries. These have mainly been attributed to poor governance and accountability, characterised by a lack of equality and equity in the management of the affected countries. The most affected countries are those that have rich mineral resources. One of the contributing factors identified is the interference from external global powers due to their own strategic interest. Africa should therefore be able to adopt good governance and resource sharing for the benefit of its citizens. Also, bring on board all the diverse communities' members of the respective nations, share the national cake equally and equitably.

Accordingly, the key takeaways on social impediments and challenges in Africa's development are summarised as follows:

- **Shortage of Health and Sanitation.** Many African countries lack well-established medical facilities and medical cover, which contributes to the population struggling to receive and access medical services. This has both economic and social implications, as they have to pay for the medical bills. At the same time, an unhealthy nation is not effective and efficient, therefore less productive. Sanitation also contributes to poor living conditions and the prevalence of diseases, straining the meagre existing medical facilities.
- **Lack Access to Education.** Most African countries are still developing their education sectors, primarily focusing on infrastructure and human resources, which has been slow due to a lack of adequate funding. This sector is key to economic growth and addressing the social concerns, including internal conflicts. African countries need to invest heavily in education by increasing and prioritising the education budget.
- **Lack of Food Security.** The most fertile parts of the continent are currently experiencing low food production due to climate change and poor agricultural practices, which have significantly impacted crop and livestock production. There is a need to implement climate mitigation measures and introduce modern farming and livestock keeping practices to include value addition and preservation/storage.

- **Youth Unemployment.** With the current high population growth on the African continent, the large number of educated youth who are unemployed has contributed to slow economic growth and a source of insecurity. Unemployed and idealistic youth can easily be exploited by greedy and self-centred leaders and individuals to commit crime and even mayhem, leading to frequent internal conflict.
- **Negative Media Reporting.** The international and local media house continues to report mainly on the negative aspects of the continent, despite numerous positive transformations currently taking place, including the development of modern cities, infrastructure development, a robust financial sector, and the widespread adoption of technology. Adverse reporting is likely to continue due to the narrative being propagated to achieve the strategic objectives of global powers. Africa needs to market itself by holding regular African continent/regional conferences and summits.

## **Way Forward for Africa in the Contemporary Geopolitical and Geo-Economic Environment**

To navigate the complex geopolitical landscape and great power competition in Africa, Africa must prioritise several key areas to achieve sustainable development. These include promoting integration, improving infrastructure, strengthening conflict resolution mechanisms, empowering youth, and harnessing technology. These will be discussed in the preceding paragraphs.

### **Promoting Regional Integration**

Promoting regional integration and cooperation is crucial for addressing shared challenges and pursuing common goals in Africa. Strengthening the African Union (AU) and enhancing collaboration among African countries can help overcome the constraints of small and fragmented economies, promote economic growth, and achieve equitable development. Additionally, regional integration initiatives, such as the establishment of the African Economic Community and the African Union, have sought to transform and accelerate the continent's economic integration, ultimately leading to collective, self-reliant development. However, efforts towards regional integration have recorded some achievements, including positive economic growth, and remain a key economic agenda for the continent. By strengthening regional integration and cooperation, African countries can improve their capacity for effective participation in the global economy and exert better

terms in their economic relations. Thus, promoting sustainable development by integrating environmental sustainability into strategies is essential for achieving long-term economic growth and resource conservation through regional integration and cooperation, thereby addressing shared challenges and pursuing common goals.

### **Improving Infrastructure**

Investing in infrastructure development, including improving transportation networks, communication systems, and energy infrastructure, is crucial for facilitating trade, investment, and economic growth. Infrastructure development has been found to have a positive impact on financial outcomes, such as real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and production output. Specifically, communication, electricity, education, and renewable energy have been identified as key determinants for sustainable development and economic growth. Moreover, transport infrastructure, including motorways, is significantly related to production outcomes. These findings underscore the importance of investing in infrastructure, particularly in areas such as renewable energy and green finance, to foster long-term economic growth and contribute to sustainable development.

### **Strengthening Conflict Resolution Mechanisms**

Conflict resolution mechanisms such as prevention, mediation, and peacebuilding are crucial for creating a stable and secure environment for development. Conflict and insecurity have been identified as the primary development challenges of our time, and addressing inequity and exclusion from basic social services can contribute to mitigating conflict factors. International intervention in internal wars has remained problematic, but there have been cases where development agencies have successfully ameliorated the root causes of conflict. The struggle for peace has been accompanied by systematic social science research that provides a theoretical basis for understanding peace and conflict, and social development scholars and practitioners can contribute to peacebuilding in practical ways. The United Nations emphasises the importance of prevention and strengthening institutions to promote peaceful, inclusive societies for sustainable development.

## **Youth Empowerment**

Empowering youth and investing in education is crucial for harnessing their potential and driving economic growth in Africa. The rapid growth of the African population presents both opportunities and challenges, and to benefit from the demographic dividend, the youth need to find productive work. However, labour market outcomes on the continent tend to be relatively poor, and there is a need to focus on specific products and capabilities to generate economic dynamism and job creation. Investment in education is paramount for the development of the youth in the region, as it addresses the needs and concerns of young Africans and provides them with the skills and knowledge necessary for economic advancement. Additionally, promoting information and communications technology can bridge the digital divide and empower the youth to harness the benefits of technology. By empowering the youth and investing in education, Africa can tap into its potential and drive sustainable economic growth.

## **Use of Technology**

Harnessing technology for development is crucial as it can improve access to essential services and drive progress. Technological innovation plays a vital role in addressing global challenges, including climate change, pollution, disease, and poverty. Developing and emerging countries can take advantage of technological leapfrogging in various domains, including health, energy, education, urban development, and agriculture. Moreover, technological innovation is increasingly being developed in the Global South and can serve as a source of inspiration for the Global North. However, standards are needed to ensure the quality, reliability, and safety of technologies, particularly in the Global South. Embracing technological advancements can lead to the transformation of learning experiences and support personalised learning activities. Embracing technology is crucial for driving progress and enhancing access to essential services.

## **Recommendations for the African Union**

To actualise the African dream in the midst of great power competition. The AU and African regional communities need to implement specific policies, which include the following:

- AU to engage in diplomatic solutions through the UN and other multi-national organisations for the decolonisation of economic resources by strengthening the AFCTA.

- African regional communities to establish a policy on youth empowerment through promotion of basic and secondary education through incentives backed by ADB.
- AU to establish a conflict resolution mechanism policy of non-interference from great power competition.
- AU to enact a debt management plan for distressed African countries through the African Development Bank in partnership with the IMF.
- Invest in a world infrastructural development plan leveraging on China's BRI and the Trans-Saharan trade route, as well as the Regional Infrastructure Program for Africa (RIPA) by the UK, among others, to promote connectivity.

## **Policy Recommendation**

### **Policy Statement (Ends)**

A Cohesive African continent with a common approach towards the achievement of social, economic, political, security and diplomatic objectives for the prosperity of the people.

## **Diplomatic Pillar**

### **Ways**

- Promote sub-regional and regional integration and co-operation.
- Promote international cooperation and multilateralism with global powers and other global nations.

### **Means**

- UN, EAC, ECOWAS, SADAC, GCC, EU, Global powers, other global nations and Development partners

## **Economic Pillar**

### **Ways**

Advance the economic prosperity of Africa and its people through:

- Enhance connectivity among the African nations.

- Self-sustenance to reduce imports.
- Direct foreign investment (DFI).
- Facilitate increased trade and commerce among the member states.
- Shared available resources to boost economic growth and reduce imports of available goods and raw materials.
- Develop processing and value addition within the continent.
- Debt management.
- Use of technology for economic growth.
- Development of energy to spur economic growth.
- Project Geo-Strategic Location of Africa in global trade and connectivity.
- Improved Agriculture, livestock, and fish productivity.
- Thriving Financial and Tourism sector.

### **Means**

- Roads, Rails & Sea/Airports, Industries and factories, Solar, Geothermal & wind energy, ICT infrastructure, Agricultural, livestock, fishing, tourist parks and sceneries.

### **Social Pillar**

#### **Ways**

Improve African social services to alleviate the living standards of the people.

- Provision of health and sanitation- Access to and affordable medical and health services, sanitation services. A common approach to address all disease pandemics within Africa.
- Access to education for all eligible persons, reforms, standardisation and competency-based to meet the current market within and outside the continent.
- Youth empowerment – Through the creation of jobs and business opportunities.

### **Means**

Medical, sanitation and education infrastructure, Budget to fund the sector.

## **Environment Pillar**

### **Ways**

- Common approach to mitigate climate change effects.
- Develop early warning systems.

### **Means**

Tree cover, Water, other resources and the use of fossil management.

## **Security Pillar**

### **Ways**

- Develop a human security- Conflict prevention, management, and resolution mechanism, and establish a standby force at the regional and sub-regional level.
- Food security- Utilise the fertile parts of Africa to produce sufficient organic food, livestock, and fish to feed the continent and even surplus for export.
- Use modern mechanisation processes, practices and knowledge to improve productivity.

### **Means**

- Regional and sub-regional conflict management bodies, and Regional and sub-regional standby forces.

## **Political/Leadership**

### **Ways**

- Develop accountable, progressive and patriotic leaders
- Develop governance structures

### **Means**

- Electoral bodies, Constitution, Leadership institutions.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, major power competition is a complex and challenging issue for African countries. However, by taking proactive steps to address the challenges of this competition, African countries can ensure that their own interests are well-served. Case studies of major power competition in certain countries were examined. Furthermore, despite the AU's efforts to reposition Africa for economic development and posterity, major world powers continue to explore some gaps to foster their interests. This precarious situation has impeded the continent's steady growth. In this regard, significant challenges in Africa remain the role of the African Union to tackle issues of poverty, unemployment, insecurity and debt burdens influenced by major world powers. Conversely, the need for AU to come up with economic policies centred on its integration and connectivity, as well as youth empowerment and infrastructural development, cannot be overemphasised. Thus, the future is bright if the realisation of the African dream can be actualised.

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