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*To the person that encouraged me to pursue my passion, International Relations, and
to my parents that have stood by me.*

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Abstract

In the contemporary international system Africa emerges as an integral paragon of the world politics chessboard, even more so since China, the United States and France became so involved in the region. Consequently, this paper inquires three issues: (a) whether the presence of all great powers in Africa is tantamount to a zero-sum competition, (b) whether China's greater involvement in Africa is the independent variable of the United States' and France's foreign policy, and (c) how important is Africa for these great powers. The current literature regarding United States, China's and France's foreign policy in Africa is bountiful and illustrates in detail the interests and activities of all great powers in the region. It is important to know the exact kind of coexistence of all three countries in the region and make an assessment of the implications for the African states. The method that is used is the comparative method of foreign policy of all three countries in the region since 1990. The findings of this comparative analysis are crucial both for the pertinent perception of the international politics in Africa and conducive for the policymaking.

Keywords: Africa, China, United States, France.

Introduction

Presently, the international context has changed significantly since the 2000s and early 2010s, and has showcased Africa as ever integral part of the international politics and the global political economy. After the end of the Cold War and with the onset of the 21st century, Africa's position in global politics has changed and the power politics between the great powers has been focused on this specific region. The reasons that account for this change of Africa's position in world politics are three (Huliaras & Petropoulos, 2015: 93): (a) the abundance of oil reserves, (b) the terrorist groups that operated in Africa, and (c) the active involvement of China and other emerging economies in the region.

Nevertheless, scholars disagree as to how this power politics work in the case of Africa. In particular, the concomitant engagement of the United States, China and France is nothing close to a West-China rivalry, inasmuch as both the United States' and China's engagement in Africa, and especially in the FrancAfrique undercuts Paris' interests in the francophone region. The primary question of this research is whether the relations of the United States, China and France in Africa is commensurate to zero-sum competition or it is a more complex situation. However, in order to answer this question, another one has to be addressed before: What is the importance of Africa to these Great Powers' interests? Given that the United States and China compete on a global scale, their mixed relations, strewn with convergence and competition, in Africa, cannot be isolated by the overall international context. Another subsequent research question is about whether the United States has engaged in Africa after China's immense presence in the region. In other words, the objective of this question is to shed light as to whether China's involvement in Africa is the independent variable of the United States' foreign policy in Africa. At last, this research will determine the way that Africa's identity in the international system has changed ever since the great powers have intensified their engagement in the continent.

To address these questions, this research will examine the engagement in Africa of three great powers: The United States, China and France. The reason that these specific nations are examined pertains to their manifold and enormous involvement

in Africa. Although other countries (e.g., India, Russia, United Kingdom, European Union, Japan, Brazil, etc.) are engaged in Africa, their presence in the region is not examined for the following reasons:

- The United States, China and France are the largest investors in Africa and their involvement in the region goes beyond FDI and loans, and includes military presence and the use of soft-power in their relations with the African states.
- The international context is characterized by an acute competition between the West and China. The deliberate investigation of their interaction in the African continent will answer to the question of whether Africa is the trophy of a zero-sum game or rather the field of more complex relations.
- Russia's engagement in Africa is not financially enormous, but it rather influences Africa's international politics with the deployment of mercenary groups.
- European Union is not a state-actor but rather a sui generis political and economic entity and cannot be put on the same yoke with other nation-states. A case study for the European Union's involvement in Africa would be more suitable.

Despite their preclusion from this thesis, these countries' involvement in Africa has turned the latter into an integral part of the international system and global politics.

Apart from the United States and China, France's inclusion in this research is important, inasmuch as France has been the most engaged of these powers in Africa, even after the end of the colonial era. However, China's and United States' intensifying engagement in Africa and the dubbed 'Francafrique' has impugned France's erstwhile quasi-monopoly in the region. Also, France's and United States' contradicting interests in the region belies the assumption that Africa is the field of the fierce competition between China and its west rivals. Conversely, all of the three powers have perplexed relations and multiples points of convergence and divergence.

However, it is essential to make a clarification about the nature of the competition in each case. More specifically, this research is based upon the premise that the definition of the competition between the United States and China is not identical to the competition between the United States and France. The antagonism between the United States and China reflects the ongoing competition between the two Great Powers in world politics generally. Conversely, the case about the United States and France in Africa is not commensurate to sheer competition, but rather regional frictions. In particular, France's participation in western institutions and the western strategic and military alliances denote the overall convergence of the French and US national interests and their adherence to the liberal international order's preservation. Therefore, Africa is not the venue of a US-France competition equivalent to the US-China competition, but rather a case of regional frictions in some issues of foreign policy. Thus, the US-France relations in Africa are regionally contending, whereas US-China relations in Africa reflect a systemic competition of global reach.

The chronological springboard of this thesis is the end of the Cold War and the 1990s. That is because after the end of the Cold War four processes happened:

- a) The West neglected the region owing to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the elimination of the communist threat.
- b) The African states were mired in an endless vicious cycle of violence and collapse. The need for international cooperation was instructed by political elites and the Western societies.
- c) The Chinese Communist Party implemented reforms that transfigured the Chinese political economy and elevated China to the stage of the global economic powers. All these prompted Beijing to seek for natural resources and diplomatic ties in Africa.
- d) The 9/11 terrorist attack and the burgeoning terrorism in Africa made the Western powers to strive against terrorism, illicit trade, regional violence and extreme poverty in the region.

These four processes transpired concomitantly to lead Africa from a brief period of total neglect in its gradual ascent in global politics. Thus, after a short period of isolation, China's growing engagement in Africa has signaled the inception of a new era for

Africa's international politics, since other major powers (the United States, France, etc.) have entered the race for the new 'Scramble of Africa'.

China's foreign policy in Africa

During the Cold War, the relationship between China and Africa was dominantly based upon ideological premises (Rich & Recker, 2013: 64), and hence Chinese engagement in Africa was restricted in its scope. More specifically, Mao Zedong's foreign policy towards African states encompassed anti-imperialistic notions (Rich & Recker, 2013: 64) aiming to align them with Beijing.

The critical juncture in Chinese foreign policy towards Africa occurred under Deng Xiaoping's leadership, who fostered a multitude of reforms (Zezeza, 2014: 148) that reshaped both domestic politics and foreign affairs (Hanauer & Morris, 2014: 19). The reforms that Deng Xiaoping featured made the soliciting of access in foreign markets and trade indispensable, steering China in intensifying foreign investments and global trade (Ajakaiye, 2006: 2).

China's increasing engagement in Africa, along with other factors, induced a structural change in the international system: Africa obtained an overhauled significance in global politics (Huliaras & Petropoulos, 2015: 93).

Since the reforms implemented by Deng Xiaoping and his successors, China shifted from a rural to a capitalistic economy, that entailed precipitous economic growth which required ample raw materials and energy resources to breed and sustain the Chinese economic apparatus (Executive Research Associates Ltd, 2009: 5). In that respect, Africa is of cardinal geopolitical and strategic importance to China (Klare & Volman, 2006: 297), especially as its vertiginous industrial and economic growth will require greater imports of fuels and energy resources from Africa (Shinn, 2013: 86).

The breadth of Chinese engagement in Africa is wide, but the prominent sectors that characterize Chinese engagement in Africa are four: Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs), Foreign Aid, trade and infrastructure (An & Feng, 2022: 765).

Before anything else, it should be clarified that when literature investigates China – Africa relations, the notion is that Africa is the hodgepodge of 54 different states, that each one of them is patently weaker than China, entailing in a multitude of bilateral relations between China and every single African state (Shoeman, 2008:

403). Given that China is a global superpower interacting bilaterally with 54 states, the relations fostered between them are featured of asymmetry in terms of power (Zezeza, 2014: 146). This fact is absolutely important in order to discern the way that economic engagement can be converted in political influence that China exerts on African states (Jones et al., 2022: 13). For that reason, there are some assertions accusing China of replicating the patterns of the erstwhile European imperialism (Tull, 2006: 459).

Another important question that is posed is that regarding the national interests that prompt China to forge closer and stronger ties with the African states. After the Deng Xiaoping's and his successors' implementation of China's economic and industrial reform, the country has become an immense economic and commercial player in the international system, with insatiable needs of raw materials and energy resources to sustain its industrial and commercial capacity (Rich & Recker, 2013; Tiboris, 2019). Thus, China's internal environment instructed its foreign policy to seek closer ties with Africa. In particular, China's rising economic robustness and middle class's enlargement imperils national resources and have made Chinese people able to demand products and services of higher-quality (Tiboris, 2019: 2). According to Boston Consulting Group (2023: 1) China's middle class will receive 80 million new members, by 2030, and in the overall, Chinese middle class will account for 40% of the country's population.

Apart from these, there are two other drivers that galvanize China to deepen its relations with Africa (Tiboris, 2019: 3):

- The growing middle class in China leads to more needs for agricultural areas and activities, that subsequently lead to more water consumption and thus increasing water shortages. In that respect, Africa's agricultural capacity seems luring.
- BRI's passage through Africa could decrease the cost of importing agricultural products in China, that given the population's growth in China, will push the cost of shipments even higher.

In a nutshell, China's growing presence and engagement in Africa relates to long-term goals, and as a result China follows a long-term strategy in Africa. China's growing population and the enlargement of its middle class is integral for the country's economic progress and commercial weight in the international system. Unequivocally, Africa constitutes a strategic priority for Beijing and the CCP, especially when the latter's legitimacy hinges upon its economic growth and social-class improvement. However, this is not commensurate to any presumption that China attempts to monopolize the African continent, precluding any other power establishing ties with African states.

Trade

The bulk of trade between China and the African states has dramatically increased to such extent that over the years, China has become Africa's biggest trade partner, overtaking the United States and France as well, that both once dominated trade with Africa (Wang & Elliot, 2014: 1014).

The trade between China and the African states follows, more or less, a certain pattern: African states export raw materials to China, and they import processed products from China (Melber, 2008: 394).

The extent to which trade relations with China are beneficial for African countries varies, since nations have ranging levels of raw materials and energy resources and thus they exhibit different balance of trade with China (Zafar, 2007: 112). According to Zafar (2007: 112), there are three categories of African states, assorted in accordance with both their natural resources abundance and their balance of trade with China, which are the following:

- a) Benefited states: those who possess profuse natural resources which are exported to China. Hence, countries like South Africa (platinum), Zambia (copper), Mozambique (aluminum) and Mauritania (iron ore) tap into their trade with China.

b) Mildly benefited states: those who might possess natural resources, but lack oil-reefs, they rely on China for their energy sufficiency. Countries like Mozambique and CAF pertain to this category.

c) States that are harmed by their trade relations with China, due to their entire reliance on Chinese exports of energy fuels and processed textiles.

Foreign Direct Investments (FDI)

In recent years, African countries have exhibited remarkable economic development, so that some African countries are assorted among the most developing countries worldwide (Miao et al., 2020: 53). This expedient development is empowered by external factors, like the increase of the prices of some merchandises, the increasing input of foreign capital and the foreign direct investments (FDIs) (Ibid: 53). China wields the dominancy of FDIs in Africa, which, for most of them, are allocated to almost all African countries, and thus the economic relations between the two sides are reinforced (Ibid: 53).

Chinese FDIs have remarkably increased over the last years, and this is confirmed by the fact that whereas Chinese FDIs in 2003 amounted to \$75 million, in 2020 they reached \$4.2 billion (Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, 2022). China's financial and exporting engagement in Africa is bolstered by state owned financial institutions, like Exim Bank (China Export – Import Bank), while most of the FDIs are allotted to the infrastructure (Renard, 2011: 12).

In the meantime, Beijing has established Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in numerous countries throughout Africa (Wang & Elliot, 2014: 1021). Special Economic Zones are geographical regions with special tax regulations and the main notion is the replication of those SEZs established in China in the decades of 1980s and 1990s (Kim et al., 2018: 1).

Loans

There is a vivid repartee hovering around loans granted from Beijing to the African States, while the former had lent from 2000 to 2014 loans to the amount of \$86 billion to varying African states, thus aiming to reimburse around 3,000 infrastructure projects in these countries (Were, 2018: 2 – 3).

In the present, many loans are granted to African states in respect to the BRI (Belt & Road Initiative), that was launched in 2013 by China's present leader, Xi Jinping (Ibid: 3 – 4). The BRI project is primarily subsidized by three creditors: the state owned Silk Road Fund, China Development Bank and Exim Bank (Ibid: 3 – 4).

Notwithstanding, both African societies and international community are reticent towards the financial aid granted by China to Africa, owing to the murky procedures and clauses that accompany these loans, diverging from the preconditions set by the OECD (Samy, 2010: 85). The actual level of the Chinese loans to Africa is unknown and the clauses and commitments that bind the African borrowers are undisclosed, as well (Ibid: 85). Concomitantly, China's adherence to no-intervention policy undermines African states' process to democratization and economic reforms, since the lent money can be mustered to tighten the strongmen's iron grip on their countries (Ibid: 85).

In 2020, the World Bank designated seven African countries as debt-ridden or unable to repay their loans (Vines et al., 2022: 7). Especially, countries with natural resources abundance and in urgent need for money, they tend to set their future natural resources revenues as a guarantee for the loans they are granted (Estevão et al., 2022). However, that type of borrowing entails a high level of obscurity related to the terms agreed between the African states and China, whereas those agreements are hardly ever published (Ibid).

One of the most prominent paradigms of China's debt policy in Africa is Kenya, that until June 2022 it had borrowed money from China to the amount of \$6.83 billion, primarily for bankrolling the Standard Gauge Railway, that is prospected to link Nairobi with Mombasa (Vines et al., 2022: 11). Furthermore, the conundrum was exacerbated by Kenya's denial to address to the world financial institutions for help, in fear

of the expensive borrowing that would follow suit (Ibid: 11). The African countries' debt burden was deteriorated due to the COVID-19 pandemic coupled with their poor governance (Acker et al., 2020: 31).

The term "Chinese Debt Trap Diplomacy" was first used in 2017, after Sri Lanka's transferring of 70% of the dividends of its commercial port to a private Chinese company (Brautigam & Kidane, 2020: 1 – 3). In a nutshell, Debt Trap Diplomacy is identified as China's purposeful lending to African countries, with the prospect of seizing their strategically important infrastructure, when those countries will be unable to repay their debts (Ibid: 1 – 3). Although, Moody's has warned African counties of the stakes lurking due to the debt trap, some bilateral indentures between China and African countries, attest to the fact that China opts for debt release facilitation via arbitration (Ibid: 1 – 3). After all, in world politics it is hard for the creditor to find means in order to seize a country's state property (Ibid: 1 – 3).

Nevertheless, since 2016 China's lending to Africa has dwindled and during COVID-19 pandemic this decrease was even deeper (Hwang et al., 2022: 1 – 2). This decrease might be ascribed either to African countries' poor financial solvency or to China's waned alacrity to lend more money (Ibid: 1 – 2). Notwithstanding, African countries are deeply indebted to China, while their debt amounts to \$160 billion from loans that had been allocated from 2000 to 2020 (Ibid: 1 – 2).

On the other hand, some scholars profess that China does not prefer the debt trap diplomacy, since it undermines its national interests based upon the "non-interference" premises. According to their reasoning, China uses the natural resources in African states not in order to seize them, but instead to set a reasonable interest rate to countries that otherwise would be burdened with a higher interest rate (Singh, 2021: 246). Moreover, China attracts its borrowers mainly because the debts it grants come with no premises and requirements (Ibid: 248). These scholars postulate that if China obliged African countries to forfeit their natural resources, then its attraction emanating from the "non-interference" policy would vanish (Ibid: 248). Either way, China wields excessive political leverage on the African countries, a phenomenon witnessed in many different fields of interaction between the two sides.

As addressed by the aforementioned, China's economic engagement and presence in Africa is sizeable and ever growing. However, the economic engagement and thick trade relations between China and Africa do not account for the international competition between China and the West over Africa. Instead, competition stems from the political fallout of China's economic engagement in Africa. More specifically, there is a causal mechanism linking the economic and trade relations between China and Africa with the former's growing political influence over the latter.

Particularly, when two countries with inordinate disparities in terms of national power establish economic relations, then the lesser part will be exposed to greater risk if disturbances in their economic relations occur (Jones et al., 2022; Hirschman, 1945). Hence, intense trade between the two countries and the subsequent trade dependence lead to an alignment on policy issues (Jones et al., 2022: 11). Therefore, by retracing Hirschman's (1945) theory of national power and foreign trade, it is obvious how China acquires political leverage over the African states, that can be observed in miscellaneous aspects of China – Africa relations.

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), launched by Xi Jinping in 2013, originates from the "Going Out" policy that has been Beijing's foreign policy flagship since the 2000s (Carmody & Murphy, 2022: 22). The BRI constitutes the most ambitious development and infrastructure project in history (Jaivin, 2021: 14) and it aspires to involve as many countries as possible that will comprise a global production network, while China will spearhead the overall endeavor.

China's goal is to tap into countries with inexpensive labor and high quality raw materials (Carmody & Murphy, 2022: 22). Of all African countries, 39 have signed indentures with China for the projects pertaining to the BRI (Risberg, 2019). Simultaneously, countries that have not yet partaken in the BRI (e.g., Burkina Faso, Eritrea, Malawi, CAR, Mauritius), they still brim with Chinese investments and retain their trade relations with China (Coetzee, 2021: 5).

Notably, all BRI bankrolling is assigned to state-owned Chinese financial institutions, and the money is received by African countries or their public institutions (Carmody & Murphy, 2022: 22 – 23). More specifically, the money provided by China and its state-owned banks is not given to any private entities (Ibid: 22 – 23). That is a pattern very prominent in China's way of allotting foreign investments, but not very customary in the West. Given that, anybody can infer how China is able to exert direct political influence on the African governments, by instrumentalizing economic and financial inducements. In detail, since the interaction between the provider and the recipient is an interaction of two entities that wield political power, subsequently their economic interactions will be overlapped by political exchanges. In the West's case, while the recipient is probably a political entity, however the provider could be a private entity with a restricted political interests scope, but with extensive economic stakes. Therefore, in that case the overlapping of economics and politics is diminutive. In other words, a private firm with no or negligible political objectives, will not require political and diplomatic convergence, which is mostly observed between interacting political entities. Contrarily, the private entity will require a safe environment and conducive legislation for its activities, which have a slim political scope. Succinctly, this contrast reveals another pattern whereby China can convert trade and economic power into political influence.

The BRI's flare-up in Africa elicits judicious concerns, due to China's augmenting military presence in the continent, Chinese soft power campaigns, the tolerance or even support to illiberal strongmen and the exploitation of telecommunications for surveillance of foreign governments (Risberg, 2019). The growing influence of China over African states and its respective repercussions for the West are highlighted by two startling incidents. Firstly, Benin's president requested that the oil extracting company Petrolin and the French corporation would recede in favor of China, so that the latter would construct the railway linking Benin and Niger (Venkateswaran, 2020: 3). Secondly, in 2016 Sao Tome severed its diplomatic ties with Taiwan, reducing that way the overall number of states that recognize Taiwan as a state, aligning that way with China's demands for "One China" diplomatic recognition (Ives, 2016; Venkateswaran, 2020).

Military Presence in Africa

As aforementioned, China – Africa relations have been grounded on the premise of “non-intervention”. Although, Beijing reassures of its adherence to this premise, geopolitical circumstances and structural changes have prompted China of redirecting its policy of “non-intervention” in Africa (Albert, 2017). China’s involvement in the UN’s peacekeeping missions in Africa, the erection of Chinese military establishments in the Djibouti, along with the raging instability in Sudan, which is a major gas exporter to China, denote a latent rerouting in China’s direction of its military and political interference in Africa (Ibid). Aside from these, China holds maritime presence in the Horn of Africa in order to smite piracy (Wang & Elliot, 2014: 1014). Its naval base in Djibouti, on the entrance in the Red Sea is of cardinal strategic importance for its global aspirations (Tanchum, 2021).

The starting point of this pivot occurred in 2004, when Chinese president Hu Jintao announced the “New Historic Mission”, that would pave the way for PLA’s global presence (Miller, 2022). Later, Libya’s miring in civil war and Beijing’s resolve for expanding the BRI, both contributed to China’s global military presence ambitions (Ibid).

For the moment, China possesses only one military base in Africa: in Djibouti. However, Beijing has confirmed its desire to erect another military base in West Africa (Nantulya, 2022). If that occurs, then China will extend its military and naval presence beyond the Indo-Pacific, and will station forces on the Atlantic shores of Africa (Ibid).

Investigating the greater picture, China plans to create a comprehensive security network in Africa thus undercutting United States’ hegemonic foothold in the region and obliterating Europe’s international role (Tanchum, 2021).

Nevertheless, China’s military engagement in Africa contains vital motives of national interest. More specifically, the free passage of Chinese merchantmen through the Indian ocean and the unencumbered shipment of merchandise to the rest of the world are of preeminent importance to China in its rivalry with the United States (Miller, 2022) and emerging India.

In general, if Chinese military presence in Africa surges, subsequently its political leverage on African countries, that host China's military units, will grow. Especially, countries that are devastated by civil war, terrorist groups, local warlords and regional upheavals will become acutely more reliant on China's military engagement. Notwithstanding, a question that swirls is whether China will forsake the "non-intervention" policy in Africa, as its military engagement will grow.

The answer to this question is very premature, since China has already stationed military and naval units in only one of the fifty-four African countries, and for the moment it plans to establish a new base in another county on the Atlantic Coast of Western Africa. Djibouti is not a representative specimen owing to the military presence of many Great Powers, and thus China cannot boast for its military mission monopoly in the country.

In spite of this, if China expands exponentially its military engagement in Africa and United States' and France's military foothold wanes in the region and if African states, especially those in the Sahel region, continue to be devastated by civil wars, terrorism and local upheavals, China's military presence will oblige frail governments and notorious strongmen to conform with Beijing's will, in order to garner its military protection. In other words, their need will aggrandize China's political leverage in those specific African states and those who plan to host Chinese troops on their territory.

Nonetheless, China's military capacity in Africa is dwarfed by United States' military preeminence, and thus the former relies mostly on financial and economic tools to magnify its political leverage. Therefore, China's military presence will not, for the foreseeable future, substitute Chinese investments and loans in Africa as drivers of political influence, but rather they are complementary and sometimes derivatives of these economic facilitations.

China's soft power in Africa

The Chinese engagement in Africa elicits strong disquietude (Liang, 2012: 668), since the West sees China's resolution to ground its soft power in Africa as a two-fold strategy: on the one hand, China tries to entrench the "One China" alignment of African countries, while on the other hand, Beijing aspires to rally the African states and secure their support in any UN voting regarding China's violations on human rights (Suzuki, 2009: 779 – 780). Factually, China's soft-power endeavor in Africa is multifaceted, and in no way can anybody contend that it is anti-western beforehand (Ibid: 779 – 780).

Nevertheless, China's soft power is innately different from that of the United States. For it is in China's self-posture to perceive itself as superior to any other state in the international system, without, however, trying to impart its experiences to them (Hill, 2017: 47). China holds the longstanding perception that it is a sui generis case in the span of history, to such extent that it preferred to keep its image intact of any external elements (Kissinger, 2014: 321). Therefore, China follows a different path from the United States that perceives itself as the missionary of the nations, deriving from a perception of a sui generis entity, as well (Ibid: 321).

Notwithstanding, China's economic boom inspired many underdeveloped countries that viewed Chinese economic model as a subtle substitution to the Washington Consensus, that received poor reception in those states (Liang, 2012: 669).

As of now, China's presence in Africa is miscellaneous, spanning from infrastructure projects and transcultural affiliation to the struggle against piracy and epidemic diseases. Thus, China features itself both as solvent counterpart and a prudent agent in the international system (Benabdallah, 2016: 139). Aside from this, Nairobi hosts a sizeable Chinese broadcasting compound, that is conducive for China's benign promotion to Africa populace (An & Feng, 2022; Wang & Elliot, 2014).

The inception of China's soft power strategy is spotted in Xi Jinping's first term, who pronounced an initiative for the transcultural approach between the two sides (Wang & Elliot, 2014: 1019). The very initiative entailed the exchange of public sector employees, the education and the intellectual cultivation of young Africans and future

leaders, who will secure the strong bonds between China and the African countries (Ibid: 1019). Presently, the CCP has stationed tens of Confucius Institutes in multiple African countries and has established relations with multiple African political parties (Zezeza, 2014: 164) and offers scholarships to African students who wish to pursue their studies in Chinese universities (Wang & Elliot, 2014: 1019). Despite the bulk of Chinese charm offensive, Beijing's soft power in Africa encounters many hindrances, whilst Chinese people residing in Africa are segregated and alienated from the African societies (Zezeza, 2014: 164).

China's approach toward Africa, premised on the "non-interference" principle, most times ignores the encroachment on human rights by authoritarian regimes in Africa and the pervasive corruption (Rich & Recker, 2013: 65). Thus, African states along with China conjure a new post-western identity and dynamical relations between them (Ibid: 65). Nevertheless, Chinese culture and political tradition is hardly possible to become ecumenical (Liang, 2012: 687), whereas western liberal ideals have spread and have been embedded in many different societies, beyond the West.

United States' foreign policy in Africa

The competition between the United States and China has become ever apparent in the region, owing to the latter's growing engagement and immense financial support and cultural exchange in Africa (Conteh – Morgan, 2018: 39). The relations between Washington DC and Beijing contain multiple points of convergence and divergence, as well, and thus zero-game assumptions fail to grasp the cumbersome reality (Thrall, 2015: 80). Subsequently, tensions between the United States and China cannot be considered commensurate to the Cold War, especially because the Cold War was a rivalry emanating from ideological and political differences and military competition. Instead, the United States and China are the two richest countries with the strongest military. Notwithstanding, because of China's inability to project military power worldwide, Beijing musters economic, financial and trade tools to maximize its power.

The United States' interest in Africa has been renewed ever since the end of the Cold War, during the Bush Jr. administration, and the economic aid toward African nations grew steeply (Huliaras, 2014: 106). The principal drivers stemmed from both the international politics and the national developments and they were the following (Ibid: 106 – 107).

1. The 9/11 terrorist attack prompted the United States to quell poverty and the subsequent violence that both foster the emergence of terrorist groups in parts of Africa,
2. HIV – AIDS's spreading in Africa spurred fears in the United States for a potential pandemic.
3. The need for energy security and the access in consequential raw materials in a region ridden by tumult and unrest was of utmost importance.

Although, China has become Africa's greatest trade partner, outpacing the United States, it is wiser to look the different type of engagement in Africa of both sides.

In contrast to Chinese flimsy military presence in the region, the United States has stationed a bounty of military bases throughout Africa (Lei, 2020: 123). More specifically, China's military presence in Africa is dainty and, by and large, it is encompassed in the UN's peace-keeping military mission (Ibid: 123). However, China is a major arms supplier of African states, brokering bilateral arm deals (Ibid: 123). Hence, the United States, having commissioned large military units in Africa, can play the role of the regional security guarantor, while China lacks that capacity. In particular, recent upheaval observed in several African states, specifically in the Sahel region, features the United States as the potential stabilizer in the region, since China's slight military engagement and France's waning influence create a strategic and security vacuum that only the United States can fill efficiently.

Nonetheless, the competition between the United States and China in other aspects of foreign policy, beyond military engagement, is acute and is growing gloomier. Paradoxically, this tug-of-war benefits the African states, since they acquire increased autonomy in the international system. Anders Wivel (2023, 90) professes that small states outside any sphere of influence and endowed with bountiful natural resources and rare earths exhibit autonomy in foreign relations and avert commitment to any sphere of influence. That is the case of most African states that are courted by the United States, China and other great powers, and have the agility to cooperate with many of them concomitantly.

As stated above, the competition between Washington DC and Beijing is not predominantly military, however it resonates the global scale competition between them, which embeds miscellaneous aspects of foreign policy, like trade, foreign direct investments, infrastructure and financial aid. Therefore, the United States – China relations in Africa should be viewed through the prism of International Political Economy, among all other theoretical paradigms. Particularly, the United States economic dominance in Africa had been reduced significantly ever after the 2008 depression (Lei, 2020: 127). Consequently, China's emergence as a global economic power rendered Beijing's FDIs and loans in Africa as drivers of political and foreign relations leverage (Jones et. al, 2022: 4). Despite the strains due to the economic crisis, the United

States maintained its preeminence in the energy resources and energy investments in Africa (Lei, 2020: 127).

The Barack Obama's administration founded the US foreign policy in Africa on the following pillars (Adekeye, 2018: 34):

- Democratic governance
- Conflicts resolution
- Economic development
- State-building and healthcare and education governance.

Barack Obama's administration changed the way the United States viewed African states, by setting the platform for a dialogue among equal partners (Lei, 2020: 127).

In 2014, the first US – Africa summit had been held in Washington DC, where forty African states leaders were present (Ibid, 127). Notwithstanding, that summit was held belatedly, considering that other great powers (China, Japan, France, EU) had already been holding similar summits with African leaders for years (Adekeye, 2018: 43).

US foreign policy's drivers in Africa

Although, the United States' foreign policy in Africa might include FDIs, financial aid and infrastructure projects, nevertheless, this had not been the case ere China's emergence in the region. In fact, after the 9/11 attack the United States centered to the military presence in the region to fight against terrorist groups that constituted an imminent threat to world peace (Huliaras, 2014: 106). The inflection point that galvanized the United States to redirect its foreign policy in Africa was Chinese engagement in large parts of the continent via economic and financial provisions. Even more pivotal for the United States' foreign policy recalibration was Xi Jinping's proclamation of the 'One Belt, one Road' initiative. Ever since Xi Jinping, in 2013, assumed power of the CCP, the Chinese foreign policy has been mutated. In fact, China's foreign

policy has become ever more aspiring to redefining the global economic and political order by promoting an alternative model for the international economy system (Morales & Aguiar, 2020: 133-134). The Belt Road Initiative (BRI) is one of those means that serve the comprehensive Beijing's global ends (Ibid: 133-134). Hence, the redirection of United States' foreign policy in Africa should not surprise anyone.

The augmenting Chinese engagement in Africa unnerved the United States administrations, both the Bush administration and the Obama administration, and the latter made a great shift over United States' foreign policy toward China. In 2013, the Obama administration signaled a structural change in the United States foreign policy (Παπασωτηρίου, 2018: 625-630) and signaled the onset of an era of climaxing tensions between the two states that is still ongoing. The rise of China and its mitigation was the prevalent conundrum of Obama's second term and spanned both Asia and Africa.

Regarding its disquiet, the United States was concerned of the potential exertion of Africa's natural resources by China's extractions and the rampant economic and political influence of Beijing on the African states (Conteh-Morgan, 2018: 39 & 46).

Although China engages in Africa with financial provisions and diplomatic interactions, the United States has a great interest in maintaining a sizeable military presence in Africa. The United States, in order to strengthen its trade relations with the African states, it has to secure the regional stability, the safe and unhampered access in resources and raw materials and the defeat of terrorist and criminal groups that disturb the African states' internal order (Thrall, 2015: 75). Actually, the stability in Africa is aligned with the interests of both the United States and China, since Africa's economic prosperity and diplomatic solvency require the tackling of any counteracting factors (Ibid: 85). This need for stability denotes both great powers' will to have a long-term engagement in Africa. The recent turmoil in Sudan and the putsches in Niger and other adjacent countries denote France's waning influence in Western Africa and the hazards that emanate from war-torn countries in the region and could destabilize other neighboring states. Thus, the United States is the only actor that can guarantee the security in the region against transnational and extremist groups.

The Political Economy of United State – Africa relations

Regarding United States' economic engagement in Africa there are some structural constrictions stemming from the liberal capitalism of the West. Whereas Chinese version of capitalism, or as McNally (2013: 744), dubs it "Sino-Capitalism", entails the interference of the Chinese state in economic activities to a great extent, the Western liberal capitalism is of disparate essence. The cardinal trait of Western capitalism is the greatest possible emancipation of market economies of state control (Ibid: 744). As a consequence, private companies' investments do not extend political influence of Western governments overseas, something whereby China outpaces its adversaries (Shinn, 2011: 6). This is demonstrably illustrated by the bountiful amount of money that China's state-owned banks and enterprises can invest in Africa, because of their access in capitals provided directly by the state, in contrast to their independently operating Western counterparts (Ibid: 6).

As a result, the real problem is not the bulk of the Chinese FDIs and loans in Africa, but rather China's ability to convert them into political leverage that will prompt African governments to align with Beijing's will. Contrarily, western investors are not necessarily – and most times are not – aligned with their countries' governments' interests. In other words, African leaders' alacrity to receive Chinese investments entails their supportive stance toward China, whereas reception of western companies' investments is not equivalent to diplomatic convergence with Western governments. Therefore, the United States has to consume more resources in diplomacy in Africa, while China is able to serve, in a great degree, its foreign policy interests in Africa with the investment packages it dispatches to the region.

Another point is that regarding raw materials and natural resources in Africa which are exploited by China to a great extent. In particular, the real conundrum for the United States and the rest of the world is that China's increasing demand for Africa's raw materials and natural resources engenders a surge in these commodities' prices in global markets (Shinn, 2011: 6).

Why Africa matters to the United States

Before moving on, it is crucial to know why Africa is strategically substantial to the United States. Africa's population is expeditiously increasing and the large part of it consists of youngsters. In the meanwhile, the national GDP of some African countries is growing, and Goldman Sachs predicts that in 2075 Nigeria's economy will be assorted among the five largest economies of the world (Daly & Gedminas, 2018). Accordingly, Africa's expenditure for goods and services will hike up to \$2.5 trillion by 2030, rendering the continent an attractive venue for investments and economic and business endeavors (Tiboris, 2019: 2).

Another point about Africa's potential transformation in a colossal resource and food supplier that should concern the United States is of strategic importance. Whichever of the great powers engages in Africa and create an extensive trade and commercial trade, it will secure significant supply of food and natural resources for itself (Tiboris, 2019: 2). According to Nick Burns, US ambassador to Beijing, China is on the process of rearranging its supply chains in order to make itself immune to any sanctions (Kurtz-Phelan, 2022). This providence could be part of a larger plan in case that China's assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific or toward Taiwan grows even more, that foreign governments impose sanctions to China, as it has happened in the case of Russia since 2014 and hitherto. If that is the case, then Africa's bounty of natural resources coupled with the BRI could be China's armor against any sanctions that try to deter Beijing's assertiveness in East Asia. Thus, if Africa is embedded in China's grand strategy, any western deterrence would be blunt, as Beijing will face insignificant loses in prospect of greater gains.

As observed hitherto, Africa is of integral importance to the United States in their competition with China, not only in the very region, but in others as well. United States' both strategic and economic interests dictate greater engagement in Africa. Notwithstanding, greater engagement in Africa does not entail greater competition with China, since their coexistence in the region is not similar to a zero-sum game, but instead a complex interaction with intertwining interests and multiple points of convergence and divergence.

France's foreign policy in Africa

Since the 1960s, already, France has been dubbed “Africa’s gendarme” (Vallin, 2015: 79 – 81). Nevertheless, all European colonies in Africa had attained their independence, however, France is the only former European colonizer that has retained so close ties with its erstwhile colonies (Ibid: 79 – 81). Notwithstanding, France’s overt presence in its past colonies has been characterized as a covert attempt of neocolonialism, and many call this status quo in Africa as “Pax Gallica” (Ibid, 79 – 81). This “Pax Gallica” in Africa is founded upon three fundamental premises (Ibid, 79 – 81):

- First, all France’s fourteen former colonies – except for Guinea (Renou, 2002: 9) – participate in a financial union, the CFA (Communauté Financière Africaine). The currency circulating in these fourteen African countries is pegged on Euro (EUR), however in the past, it was pegged on Franc (FRC).
- Second, France dispatches special counselors to assist policy-makers in African states for policies regarding statecraft, economic, fiscal and educational governance.
- Third, France retains military bases in multiple regions in Africa and French expert military officers provide African states with consultancy on military and security issues.

The 1990s had been an inflection for the French foreign policy in Africa. The upheavals in African states against the heads of state that Paris supported culminated in the deposition of Rwanda’s regime in 1994 and in 1997 in Mobutu Sese Seko’s overthrow in Zaire (Renou, 2002: 5). The tumult that transpired in Sub-Saharan Africa proved French foreign policy in the region to be futile and stirred up resentment against the French foreign policy both in Africa and domestically (Ibid: 5). In order for France to overtake the quagmire in which its foreign policy had been lately, a new approach has been proposed to be followed (Ibid: 5).

The first pivot in the French foreign policy in Africa occurred during François Mitterrand’s presidency in the 1990s, who blatantly supported the democratization of

the African states (Huliaras & Petropoulos, 2015: 65). This pivot was, actually, facilitated by three factors:

(a) The end of the Cold War signaled the termination of the Soviet threat to African states' safety and the West's interests (Huliaras & Petropoulos, 2015: 65). Thus, the promises and support for liberalization and democratization in Africa were pronounced in an international system different from the bipolar one of the Cold War era. As long as the democratization process would not be sabotaged by the Soviet Union and any pro-Soviet groups in Africa, president Mitterrand voiced his promises easily.

(b) After the Rwanda genocide in 1994 and the collapse of the pro-France regimes, the civil war in Sudan and the ensuing instability in Africa, France was perceived by African states as the generator of instability in Africa (Renou, 2002: 12 – 15). Therefore, in order for France to amend its foreign policy and expand its diplomatic ties with more states in Africa, it should first distance itself from its blameworthy past.

(c) As the instability increased in Africa and the end of the Cold War gave rise to claims for worldwide democratization, Africa came to the fore. More specifically, in the 1990s the United States started to involve increasingly itself in Africa aiming to help Africa overcome the instability in which it had been protractedly mired and to dissipate democracy and rule of law in the region. However, Paris perceived this as an engagement perilous to French interests in the region (Renou, 2002: 14). The United States threatened to overthrow the strongmen that ruled Africa with France's backing (Ibid: 14 – 15).

(d) Since the clamors for democracy were widespread, France wanted to patronize the democratization movement in its favor.

Although, both France and the United States aimed in establishing democratic institutions in the African states, each one's incentives were different. For the United States, the democratization of Africa was more an ideological purpose deriving from the Wilsonian tradition of foreign policy (Mead, 2001; Παπασωτηρίου, 2007). On the other hand, France's promises for the democratization of Africa was viewed through the French national interests. Hence, the United States viewed democratization as the

culminating process in a nation's evolutionary journey, whereas France perceived democratization, or just the appearance of it, as the sole solution for saving its national interests and soft power in Africa.

The 1990s was the decade during which the United States became more engaged in Africa, making France feeling unnerved. Consequently, it is not only China's growing presence in Africa that unnerves Paris, but the United States' presence as well.

Africa is highly important to France for many reasons, and one of them is the fact that Western African states, especially Niger, are exporters of huge quantities of uranium to France (Taylor, 2019: 1065). Considering that France's reliance on nuclear energy accounts for 80% of all energy mixture, it is quite obvious why Africa matters to France so much (Ibid: 1065). Additionally, African states export in France materials (e.g., magnesium, chromium, phosphoric ores, etc.) greatly vital for the French arms and aeronautic industry (Ibid: 1065).

Presently, France has the largest military presence in Africa among all member states of the European Union (Signé, 2019). However, France's ubiquitous presence in Africa has exhibited signs of retreat in the last decades (Benazeraf, 2014: 1 – 2). The emergence of new agents in Africa, like China, India and Russia has changed the context of Africa's international politics, giving African states more free space to interact with many different partners (Ibid: 1 – 2). Africa's recent coups signal the waning of France's leverage upon African states, while the putschists refuse to collaborate with France. The real quandary for Paris is not the coups themselves, considering that West Africa's nation-states have experienced hundreds of coups since their independence. The conundrum has more to do with the putschists' support for France's rival states, like Russia. For instance, the recent coup in Niger in August 2023, was marked by the mob's support for Russia and the many slogans in favor of Russia (Euronews, 2023). Despite this, there is no evidence of Russia's involvement in the Niger coup and the mob's inclination toward Russia cannot be attributed to Russian backing (Euronews, 2023). However, what is certain is that France's soft power in the Sahel region has dwindled precipitously over the last years, giving free space to other actors to gain influence over the region against France. Particularly, Abdourahamane Tiani's (the

current Niger's putschist) assertion that Nigerien people will redefine their country's relations with France (Jeune Afrique, 2023), denotes a trend of authoritarian regimes that want to drive their countries away from France's sphere of influence. The many recent coups in the Sahel region do not signify that several major powers are in the backstage of these developments. This cannot be inferred, but it reveals the capabilities that minor nation-states possess in the emerging multipolar international system.

Notably, African states can be without France, but France cannot afford losing influence over the African states (Benazeraf, 2014: 1 – 2). Even French government officers and bureaucrats aver that if Africa is driven away from France, then the latter's future will face vital challenges (Kouakou, 2022). As China augments its diplomatic and economic involvement in Africa, France's presence in Africa wanes dramatically (Benazeraf, 2014: 1 – 2). Africa is the bedrock of France's welfare, but the latter's behavior towards African states is perceived as patronizing and shortsighted (Kouakou, 2022). Conversely, China is not perceived as a colonial power in Africa (Benazeraf, 2014: 1 – 2). A major difference between the French and the Chinese foreign policy in Africa is that China interacts and has forged strong ties with almost all African states (Ibid, 1 – 2). Instead, France's foreign policy and influence seem to be more efficient in West and Central Africa (Ibid, 1 -2), just a portion of all African states. Notwithstanding, this does not mean that France never tried to extend its diplomatic ties and influence beyond West Africa. Actually, France since 1960 and especially during the 1990s has struggled to be more involved in the whole of Africa (Renou, 2002: 10). However, enduring ties and great influence over all other African states proved to be quixotic aims, probably because of the French patronizing traditions of diplomacy and foreign policy.

China's greater engagement in Africa has dethroned France from its diplomatic primacy. As French companies have been accused of corruption and persistence in monopoly, African states have signed agreements with Chinese companies making it easier for Chinese firms to make deals with African governments and harder for French firms (Signé, 2019). In the meanwhile, China has become the most famous educational destination among African students, overtaking France (Cohen, 2022: 11). For instance, in 2018 China hosted 82,000 African students, while in 2015 France hosted

42,000 African students (Ibid, 11). Perhaps, as China becomes an attractive destination for African students, African elites could be imparted Chinese values, serving that way Beijing's long-term geopolitical aims (Ibid, 11).

The present president of France, Manuel Macron, has set Chinese involvement's curtailing as his primary goal of the French foreign policy in Africa (Che, 2019). Virtually, Paris has two major pillars whereby it can amplify French influence in Africa: (a) the French language, and (b) the CFA (Communauté Financière Africaine) (Ibid). Considering, that the CFA guarantees the financial and economic stability and prosperity of the African nations, that second pillar might prove to be the spearhead of the French diplomacy in Africa (Ibid). In order to understand how integral is the CFA to France's foreign policy in Africa, it should be clarified how does the CFA work.

CFA (Communauté Financière Africaine):

First and foremost, the CFA comprises of two distinct monetary unions: (a) the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU), and (b) the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC) (Hallet, M., 2008: 3). The WAEMU consists of eight countries and the CEMAC of six countries (Ibid: 3), making the CFA a regional economic and monetary union of fourteen states.

Although, the two unions use different currencies, their parities are equal to each other, owing to euro currency on which they are pegged (Ibid: 3). The CFA franc zone was established back in 1947, before the African states gained their independence (Renou, 2002: 11). According to Xavier Renou (2002: 11), the reasons France founded the CFA franc zone are the following:

- France would guarantee the financial, monetary and fiscal stability of the African states' economy within the CFA.
- Paris could have control over the African states' central banks.
- The high convertibility of the CFA's currencies into franc would facilitate the monopoly of French companies and traders in the CFA region,

and the concealing of corruption and illicit transactions of French nationals or firms in Africa.

The rise of the United States and China in Africa, challenges France's control over its former colonies through the CFA zone (Che, 2019). Particularly, the ever growing bilateral partnerships of both Great Powers with the states in the region eliminates the objectives of the CFA zone: France's monopoly in the CFA and France's economic preponderance in the region (Ibid).

In many ways, the French foreign policy in Africa is considered to be immutable, regardless of the promises that François Mitterrand and Manuel Macron have voiced for a new era in the Franco-African relations. The main problem is that the international system has shifted from the bipolar system of the Cold War to the monopolar system of the post-Cold War period, which now recedes, and a multipolar system is emerging. As aforementioned, according to Anders Wivel's (2023: 90) theory of small states, those states which are courted by the Great Powers can be more autonomous in international politics, because they do not belong to any sphere of influence. Considering that the African states are bountiful in natural resources, their autonomy is increased even more so, as the Great Powers intensify their rivalry for these resources. This makes the African states so autonomous in international politics, that any attempt for creating a sphere of influence in Africa would resent the other Great Powers. But even if a sphere of influence could be established, this endeavor would require a cost that would eliminate any kind of benefits for that major power from this sphere of influence.

As France persists in its strategy to preserve its influence in the region, the cost of doing so will be increasingly overwhelming for France, considering that other Great Powers are precipitously increasing their presence in the region. The coups in the Sahel region denote the opportunities of putschists and authoritarian regimes of resorting to non-Western powers for their survival. Howbeit the CFA is a fundamental foundation for France's influence in West Africa, that could keep the African states bound to Paris for years. Those countries' transition from the CFA to autonomy is decidedly unwise, unless they become reliant on other Great Powers for their economic and monetary stability, which is not the case for the foreseeable future. However, as the

United States and China increase their presence in Western and Central Africa, the states of the region might optimize their bargaining power against France, claiming for better and more equitable terms of operation within the CFA. In that case, these countries will become more agile, signaling the dwindling of France's sphere of influence in Western and Central Africa.

The reasons why a French sphere of influence in Western and Central Africa is not viable due to the sphere of influence analytical definition given by Van Jackson (2019: 255):

"Spheres of influence are generally understood as a hierarchical structure, the construction and maintenance of which results from a practice involving two specific features: some amount of control over a given territory or polity by a foreign/outside actor, especially as regards third-party relations, and exclusion of other external actors from exercising that same kind of control over the same space."

Taking into consideration that a sphere of influence preconditions the preclusion of any other external actor's involvement in it and as long as France is unable to inhibit the United States and China to strengthen their bilateral ties with each of the Western and Central Africa states, France's will to wield a sphere of influence in the region is untenable. Therefore, the multipolar international system does not favor the creation or the preservation of spheres of influence in Africa. As long as France does not redefine its foreign policy, then the latter will tumble on many restrictions inflicted by the international system. As the United States and China increase their presence in Africa, France has to reconsider its foreign policy and the *modus vivendi* with its former colonies.

France's military presence in Africa

France's largest military presence in Africa is in Djibouti, dating back in 1991 (Durosomo, 2016), which was a former French colony that gained its independence in

1977 (Gregory, 2000: 444). Despite its miniscule size in territory, Djibouti wields a special strategic importance to France, since it offers control over the Horn of Africa, the Indian Ocean, the Middle East and the Red Sea (Ibid, 444).

France's military interventions in Africa have been fostered after the end of the Cold War, while Paris tried to balance between excessive international aspirations and limited military might (Ibid, 444). Apart from this, France's main strategic aim is to be involved militarily in Africa in the least possible way (Ibid, 444). In order to achieve this, France has to orchestrate preemptive interventions, rather than reactive, in order to eliminate any potential threat to Paris' interests in the future (Ibid, 444).

However, by the 1990s instability spread all over Africa putting strains on limited French military capabilities (Renou, 2002: 14). Even though, France solicited multilateral military cooperation for tackling the challenges in Africa, but its western partners did not offer any help, as they wanted to let France-backed African autocrats be overthrown (Ibid, 14).

France launched another large military operation – Operation Barkhane (Paquette, 2021) in Mali in 2013, when it dispatched troops to the country to fight against the jihadi groups that sapped Mali (Powell, 2022). However, France's greatest misjudgment was the nature of the instability in Mali. Policymakers in Paris considered that the civil war in Mali and other adjacent countries accounted for religiously fundamentalist groups affiliated with the ISIS and Al-Qaeda (Ibid, 2022). French policymakers fell short in understanding that rebellions in the region pertained to resurrection against state control and legitimacy, and not so much to religious or ideological propensities (Ibid, 2022). Thus, the French focused on decapitating these groups' leadership, in an attempt to incapacitate their will to fight, as it had happened in other Islamic groups in Africa and in the Middle East (Ibid, 2022). Nevertheless, this strategic fashion did not produce anything more than marginal gains, and these groups remained vivid and with robust will to fight (Ibid, 2022).

In 2021, the French President, Manuel Macron, announced Operation Barkhane would be discontinued (Paquette, 2021). This change in France's security policy in Africa set persisting questions about the United States' alacrity to bear the burden

of Africa's security questions (Ibid). In the meantime, France's withdrawal from the Sahel region created a vacuum that many considered that it would be filled by Russia and China, if the United States did not want to (Ibid).

Beside this, the coup in Niger that placed Abdourahamane Tiani in power, pushes the French military operation out of the country, adding another blow in Paris' security policy in the Sahel region, after previous ones in Mali and Burkina Faso (Bensimon et al., 2023). France's ultimate exodus from Niger is a realization that anti-French sentiments in the region are pervasive, and thus French military presence falls short in attaining its strategic and security objectives, while other anti-western powers, like Russia, gain influence in the region (Kayali & Caulcutt, 2023).

In a nutshell, recent withdrawals of French military forces from the Sahel region denotes a structural change in France's security policy in the region. Since the 1960s, when African states started becoming independent, France's military engagement in Africa was conspicuous. In the 21st century, Jihadism and religious extremism prompted France to partake in multilateral cooperative military interventions in countries that had been raided by extremist groups. Nevertheless, a flurry of reasons leads France to be ousted from the region:

(a) the ongoing political instability in the region and the stillborn governments that are overthrown by putchists.

(b) France's dubious past presence in Africa, and Paris' patronizing of African states via the CFA zone. The growing resentment towards Paris could also be ascribed to anti-western third parties that foment African peoples' aversion against France.

(c) the mutation of the international system in the 21st century, that fosters the engagement of more Great Powers in the region, competing France's longstanding presence. Subsequently, those who wish to grasp the power in African states, by orchestrating coups, they are facilitated by the multipolarity of the competition in the region.

Although, it is too reckless to foretell France's eternal preclusion from Africa, it is very much certain that France's foreign and security policy in Africa is undergoing

structural changes that produce new variables in Africa's international politics. Whether and how France will try to save its remaining influence in Africa is still unknown, but the current fashion whereby international politics is conducted in Africa warrant a viable reshaping in France's foreign policy. Through a realist perspective, France will at some extent remain engaged in Africa, because its own and European Union's security will be threatened if the tumult in Africa releases massive immigration flows that both will be unable to deal with. France must not forsake its security policy in Africa, but it must recalibrate it in an efficient way.

Conclusion

By comparing United States' and China's foreign policy in Africa multiple inferences are drawn about:

1. Africa's importance to the two superpowers and,
2. the nature of the two superpowers' coexistence and interaction in Africa.

Both points are important to US policy makers, since lucid assessment of Africa's importance to US national interests and the way United States interact with China in Africa will yield the most appropriate strategy prescribed for the region. Although, this paper does not prescribe any strategic advice, however prior to any policy making, it is decidedly important to understand the gains and stakes (actual and potential) of the United States' engagement in Africa and its interaction with Beijing's foreign policy in the region.

The table below demonstrates the results distilled from the above comparative analysis, assorting United States' and China's foreign policy in Africa in four major fields (military presence, economic relations, diplomacy, Africa's importance to both great powers):

	Military Presence	Economic relations	Diplomacy	Africa's overall importance
United States of America	Sizeable (AFRICOM)	Growing	State-building, human rights, foreign aid and peacemaking, Stability.	Strategic
China	Minimal (but new military base in Western Africa is expected)	Growing	Non-intervention, One China policy and BRI acceptance, natural resources foreclosure, Stability.	Strategic and vital

In the overall, Africa is emerging as an overarching strategic partner and a fundamental possessor of natural resources and, potentially, food supplies. Nevertheless, the way that the United States perceive Africa has changed since 1990, and even more so in the 2010s. Initially, the United States engaged in Africa, mainly with military missions. The mutation of US foreign policy to a more investments and infrastructure directed policy occurred after China's patent presence in the region. In other words, the independent variable that accounts for the change in United States' foreign policy in

the 2010s is Beijing's trade, loan and FDI oriented foreign policy toward the African states.

Presently, Africa is a growing market with an immense youth population, and its needs and production could make Africa a preeminent trade partner for both the United States and China. Besides, Africa is becoming a strategic aim for both super-powers and is encompassed in the broader strategic competition between Washington DC and Beijing.

Howbeit the competition between the two sides does not entail a zero-sum game. Instead, both countries have multiple points of convergence and divergence of interests in Africa, that subsequently constitute misperceptions inordinately costly for both great powers. As aforementioned, the United States has a great interest of stability in Africa as much as China does, and China needs the United States for that purpose, since the United States is the only actor capable of dealing with security issues due to its sizeable military presence in the region.

On the other hand, China garners its influence that FDIs and loans have on African states and manages to redirect the votes in the UN sessions that convene to condemn CCP's abuse of human rights. Furthermore, China's foreign policy in Africa is fraught with opaque terms and conditions regarding the loans backed by African states' natural resources. Besides the ethical implications that stem from China's foreclosure of Africa's resources, there are pragmatically unnerving implications that should concern the West. China takes African states' governments as "hostages", and tampers with their foreign policies when the latter try to establish efficient ties with the West.

Hence, the United States and China are not the actors in a zero-sum game in Africa, but rather their relations in the region seem to be perplexed, making policy-making a neuralgic task demanding scrupulous study. Moreover, since China has minimal military presence in Africa, the interaction of the United States and China in the region brings to the fore International Political Economy as a useful tool for understanding both great powers' political influence in Africa, when financial tools overtake military power.

Another important observation is African states' agility in the contemporary international system. As they are courted by multiple great powers (the United States, China, Russia, France, etc.), and they have profuse natural resources, they manage to establish versatile relations with many different actors simultaneously. That showcases a great shift in the international politics of Africa and a differentiated paradigm for policymakers.

Succinctly, the United States and China are, more or less, engaged in different aspects in Africa, and their coexistence in the region is neither purely contentious nor insouciant. On the contrary, Africa is a region where both countries have to contrive ways to overtake one another and to find ways to collaborate with each other, inducing, thus, the fragmentation of foreign policy in the region regarding each aspect of interests.

Having articulated these about the United States' and China's foreign policy in Africa, France's engagement in Africa is, by and large, different. France's presence in Africa predates that of both the United States and China. Actually, France is the only former colonial power that has preserved its close ties and inordinate influence in its former colonies. France's present cooperation with the United States in security operations in Africa is completely dissimilar to the former's dissatisfaction owing to Washington DC's increasing engagement in Africa during the 1990s and 2000s.

However, as the threats against France's interests in Africa increased, Paris realized that neither security nor stability could have been achieved if no multilateral military cooperation was formed. Even though multilateral military cooperation has been put into effect, the Sahel region is swamped with conflicts, civil wars, coups, extremist groups and insurgence. France's inability to impose order in the region has stirred up resentment and disapproval towards French presence in Africa, letting the window for the United States and China to augment their involvement in the region.

According to the literature, France's interests in Africa are not aligned with those of the United States. Beyond security issues, the Franco-American relations stumbles on contending interests. As mentioned above, both the United States' and China's increasing bilateral ties with the CFA member states has dwindled some of the

benefits emanating from the CFA zone for France. In particular, the neo-colonialist style of monopoly and economic prevalence in West and Central Africa, that France established after the decolonization, is crucially challenged by the growing economic, trade and diplomatic ties between these states and the United States, and China.

Though, France's influence in the region is challenged, the competition between China and France cannot be classified as a zero-sum game. Conversely, in regard to security issues, Beijing is a proponent of the preservation of stability in the region. Furthermore, China is, still, unswerving in its "non-intervention" policy in other countries, leading no credence to the assumptions that Beijing is a stealthy supporter of the latest coups in the Sahel region. Beijing has managed to challenge France's influence in the region without going overtly against the CFA zone edifice. Therefore, China's presence in the region does not raise questions about the region's security and stability, both are principles respected and pursued by Beijing and Paris. The common security challenges that the United States and France face do not stem from China's activities in the region. Contrarily, they are ascribed to affiliations with terrorist groups in the Middle East and anti-statist movements within the African states.

On the other hand, China's augmenting economic and diplomatic involvement in France's backyard makes the region the focal point of a competition between France and China. Additionally, notwithstanding China fails to compete efficiently the United States in soft power terms, it fares better than France does. Garnering the resentment of France's post-colonial patronization of Africa, China becomes an attractive option for these states that are raged towards French influence.

As in the case of the United States, China is not the sole independent variable for France's mutation of its foreign policy in Africa. Although, China has forged diplomatic, economic and trade ties with almost all African states, France has remained mainly engrossed with its former colonies in Western and Central Africa. France is attempting to expand its economic and trade ties with other African states beyond Western and Central Africa, but it is still behind China and the United States. Yet, France is struggling to keep its former colonies close to it and away from Beijing's influence. In that perspective, China's containment in Western and Central Africa is one of the objectives that France has set in the region. But as aforementioned, China is a

great competitor to France, but the former is not the cause of Africa's security ordeals that France has to tackle in the region. Thus, China is one of the multiple drivers of France's foreign policy in Africa, and not the only one.

In no way, France's economy and international status could be equalized to China's and the United States' inordinate economic and political size. Hence, the only way France can be an agent in Africa that can be reckoned with, is that Paris counterpoises China in terms of quality and not quantity, as the latter is untenable for France's limited capabilities compared to those of the United States and China.

In the meanwhile, as the unipolar international system recedes to a multipolar system, France cannot expect the preservation or the reinvigoration of its sphere of influence in its former colonies. Unequivocally, France's influence, through the Francophonie and the CFA zone monetary stability pledges, will remain, but in general they will be adapted in the growing competition in the region among the United States, France and China. The more France's former colonies are being courted by other major powers, the more they will feel autonomous, driving them away from France's influence. Reasonably, France has to recalibrate its foreign policy according to the international system's constrictions and reconsider its *modus vivendi* with its former colonies, in a manner that benefits Paris.

From the preceding discussion, it seems that Africa's place and importance in world politics have been upgraded, even though there is still a long way to drag it out of its neglect. As mentioned above, Africa is important to the United States', France's and China's interests, as the competition between them intensifies, Africa, as a region, and African states individually will be even more so agile in the international system and relevant to Great Powers' competition.

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