

## U.S.-CHINA RIVALRY IN AFRICA: A NEW EDGE OF GEOPOLITICAL CONTESTS

Otakhonov Komilkhon Saydolim ugli

**Annotatsiya:** *Ushbu tezis Xitoyning Afrika bilan ulkan siyosiy, iqtisodiy va ijtimoiy-madaniy aloqalarini qit'ada AQSh va Xitoy o'rtasidagi strategik raqobatning katalizatori sifatida ta'kidlaydi. Bu shuni ko'rsatadiki, ularning turli xil dunyoqarashlari ularning davom etayotgan qarama-qarshiliklariga sabab bo'ladi. Har bir global qudratli davlatning qit'aga ta'siri ikkinchisi qo'llayotgan taktika tufayli kamayadi. Yengildan mo'tadilgacha kuchligacha, ularning raqobati kuchayib bordi, chunki ikkala davlat ham qit'ada o'z mavjudligini oshirib, Afrikaning tarixiy marginallashuvini kamaytiradi.*

**Kalit so'zlar:** *AQSh, Xitoy, Afrika, Jo Bayden, Kamar va Yo'l tashabbusi, hukmronlik, "Buyuk Efiopiya Uyg'onish to'g'oni", Huawei, qarz tuzog'i, harbiy bazalarning mavjudligi, energiya, investitsiyalar, Prezidentning OITSga yordam berish bo'yicha Favqulodda Rejasi, rivojlanish yordami.*

**Abstract:** *This thesis highlights China's huge political, economic, and socio-cultural engagement with Africa as the catalyst for the strategic rivalry between the United States and China in the continent. It makes the case that their divergent worldviews are the cause of their ongoing antagonism. Each global superpower's influence on the continent is lessened by the tactics the other is employing. From mild to moderate to strong, their competition has grown as both nations increase their presence on the continent and lessen Africa's historical marginalization.*

**Keywords:** *USA, China, Africa, Joe Biden, Belt and Road Initiative, dominance, Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, Huawei, debt trap, military presence, energy, investments, President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, development aid.*

The US-China rivalry has entered a new phase, extending beyond the Pacific and into the African continent. As both superpowers vie for influence, Africa has emerged as a key battleground due to its vast resources, strategic trade routes, and growing markets. The 46<sup>th</sup> President of United States of America Joe Biden describes the African continent as follows:

*"We believe in the nations of Africa, in the continent-wide spirit of entrepreneurship and innovation. And through the challenges ahead, although they are great, there is no doubt that our nations, our people, the African Union — we're up to this task."*<sup>17</sup>

In contrast, China's policy in Africa is primarily characterized by a focus on economic investment, infrastructure development, and resource acquisition. Through initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China has invested heavily in projects such as roads, railways, and energy facilities, aiming to enhance connectivity and trade.

<sup>17</sup> **President Joe Biden.** *U.S. STRATEGY TOWARD SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA.* August 2022.

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/U.S.-Strategy-Toward-Sub-Saharan-Africa-FINAL.pdf>

China promotes a non-interference policy, fostering strong diplomatic relations while emphasizing mutual benefit. This approach appeals to many African leaders, as it often comes with fewer political conditions compared to Western investments. However, concerns about debt sustainability and the implications of Chinese loans have sparked debates about the long-term impact on African sovereignty and economic independence. Overall, China aims to strengthen its influence on the continent while supporting Africa's development goals.

### **Economic Investments and Infrastructure Development**

China has positioned itself as a major player in Africa through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which focuses on large-scale infrastructure projects. From railways in Ethiopia to ports in Kenya<sup>18</sup>, China's investments have been transformative for many African economies, providing critical infrastructure that has often been neglected by Western nations.

The African continent is increasingly becoming a focal point for global economic investment and infrastructure development, particularly by two superpowers: The United States and China. This competition reflects broader geopolitical interests, but it also holds significant implications for Africa's economic future.

### **China's Dominance in Infrastructure Development**

China has emerged as a formidable player in Africa through its aggressive investments in infrastructure, primarily driven by its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Launched in 2013, the BRI aims to enhance connectivity and trade across Asia, Europe, and Africa. In Africa, Chinese investments have led to the construction of critical infrastructure, including:

- **Transportation Networks:** China has financed and built numerous railways, roads, and ports. Notable projects include the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway, which enhances trade connectivity in the Horn of Africa, and the Mombasa-Nairobi Railway in Kenya, aimed at boosting regional commerce.

- **Energy Projects:** Chinese firms are heavily involved in developing energy infrastructure, including hydroelectric plants, solar farms, and oil refineries. The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam<sup>19</sup> is one of the largest projects, symbolizing China's commitment to energy investment. As one of the main financiers, Chinese companies have been instrumental in building this ambitious project, which aims to boost Ethiopia's energy production and promote economic growth. The dam has become a focal point of regional tensions, particularly with downstream countries like Egypt and Sudan, highlighting the complexities of China's involvement in Africa's infrastructure projects.

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<sup>18</sup> Li Xuanmin. *Addis Ababa–Djibouti Railway a road to prosperity, BRI boost 'speedy' transformation in Africa in past decade*. July 14, 2022.

<https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202207/1270556.shtml>

<sup>19</sup> Lisa Klaassen. *'Everywhere and Nowhere to be Seen': How China's role in the GERD dispute challenges Beijing's non-interference principle*. October 27th, 2021.

<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/cff/2021/10/27/everywhere-and-nowhere-to-be-seen-how-chinas-role-in-the-gerd-dispute-challenges-beijings-non-interference-principle/>

- **Telecommunications:** Companies like Huawei have played a key role in expanding Africa's digital infrastructure, providing technology that underpins mobile communications and internet access.

While these investments have significantly improved infrastructure, concerns about debt sustainability and transparency have been raised. Critics argue that some African nations may fall into a "debt trap," where they are unable to repay loans, leading to potential loss of sovereignty over critical assets.

In contrast, the United States has historically emphasized development aid and democratic governance. The Biden administration has renewed its commitment to Africa, highlighting partnerships in health, technology, and climate resilience. Initiatives like the Prosper Africa strategy aim to increase two-way trade and investment, countering China's influence through collaborative economic growth.

### **The US Approach: Partnership and Sustainable Development**

In contrast, the United States has historically taken a more cautious approach, focusing on partnerships rather than direct investment. The Biden administration has sought to reinvigorate American engagement in Africa through initiatives like Prosper Africa, which aims to double two-way trade and investment between the US and African nations.

Key components of the US approach include:

- **Development Aid:** The US continues to provide substantial foreign aid, emphasizing health, education, and governance. Programs such as the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) have made significant contributions to public health.

- **Investment in Innovation:** The US promotes technology transfer and innovation, particularly in sectors like agriculture, renewable energy, and health care. Initiatives that foster entrepreneurship and support local businesses are becoming more common.

- **Capacity Building:** Rather than simply funding infrastructure projects, the US focuses on strengthening local governance and institutions. This involves training programs aimed at enhancing skills in project management and sustainable practices.

### **Comparative Impact on Africa**

Both US and Chinese investments have the potential to drive economic growth in Africa, yet they come with different implications:

- **Economic Growth:** Chinese investments often lead to rapid infrastructure development, which can stimulate economic activity and create jobs. However, these projects are sometimes criticized for their lack of local involvement.

- **Sustainability and Governance:** The US approach, while slower in delivering tangible infrastructure, emphasizes sustainable development and governance. This can foster long-term resilience and empower local communities, but may lack the immediacy that large Chinese projects provide.

### **Diplomatic Engagement and Soft Power**

China's approach often involves strengthening ties through cultural diplomacy and non-interference in local politics. This has endeared China to many African leaders who

appreciate its respect for sovereignty. However, this strategy also raises concerns about potential debt traps and the sustainability of Chinese loans.

The US, on the other hand, leverages its diplomatic ties to advocate for democratic principles and human rights. American engagement often comes with strings attached, pushing for governance reforms that can create friction with authoritarian regimes. This ideological divide complicates relationships and underscores the differing approaches of the two superpowers.

### **Security and Military Presence**

The security landscape in Africa has become a significant arena for competition between China and the United States. Both countries aim to expand their influence on the continent through military presence and security partnerships, albeit with differing strategies and priorities.

#### *China's Security Strategy in Africa*

China has increasingly invested in Africa's security infrastructure, viewing stability as essential for its economic interests and resource access. Key elements of China's approach include:

- **Military Base in Djibouti:** In 2017, China established its first overseas military base in Djibouti<sup>20</sup>, strategically located near key shipping routes. This base serves logistical and support functions for Chinese naval operations and enhances China's ability to protect its interests in the region.

- **Peacekeeping Contributions:** China has become one of the largest contributors to UN peacekeeping missions in Africa, providing troops and financial support. This involvement not only showcases China's commitment to regional stability but also helps bolster its diplomatic relations with African nations.

- **Security Cooperation:** China has engaged in various security partnerships, including training programs for African military forces and the provision of arms and equipment. This fosters goodwill and strengthens bilateral ties, often with fewer political conditions than those imposed by Western nations.

#### *US Security Strategy in Africa*

The United States has a long-standing military presence in Africa, focusing on counterterrorism and promoting regional stability. Key aspects of the US approach include:

- **Counterterrorism Operations:** The US military conducts operations aimed at combating extremist groups such as Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab. This includes intelligence sharing, training, and direct military engagement when necessary.

- **Military Bases and Training:** The US operates several military bases across Africa, including Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti. Through initiatives like the Africa Command (AFRICOM), the US provides training and support to African military forces, enhancing their capacity to address security challenges.

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<sup>20</sup> **Michael Tanchum.** *China's new military base in Africa: What it means for Europe and America.* 14 December 2021

<https://ecfr.eu/article/chinas-new-military-base-in-africa-what-it-means-for-europe-and-america/>

- **Partnerships and Humanitarian Assistance:** The US emphasizes building partnerships with African nations through joint exercises, humanitarian assistance, and governance training. This approach aims to promote stability while fostering democratic values and human rights.

#### *Comparative Implications*

The differing strategies of China and the US in Africa reflect broader geopolitical interests. China's focus on non-interference and economic investment contrasts with the US emphasis on governance and democratic ideals.

- **Regional Reactions:** Many African leaders appreciate China's non-political approach, which often translates into quicker investments in infrastructure and development. However, concerns about debt and dependency on China persist.

- **US Influence:** The US maintains its influence through long-term partnerships and a focus on security threats, but its conditional aid can sometimes alienate local governments.

#### **The Path Forward**

As the US and China continue to deepen their involvement in Africa, the implications for the continent are profound. African nations stand at a crossroads, with opportunities for economic growth and development but also challenges related to dependency and sovereignty.

Ultimately, the rivalry may benefit Africa, providing countries with options and leverage in negotiations. However, the key will be ensuring that engagement from both powers leads to sustainable development rather than exploitation. As Africa continues to rise on the global stage, its leaders must navigate this complex geopolitical landscape with caution and strategic foresight.

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