

China's Foreign Policy Toward Sub-Saharan Africa: The New Partner



Dr./ Chlelighem Abir ^{1,2}

¹ University of Algiers 03, (Algeria)

² Corresponding Author: abirabir99@yahoo.fr

Date of submission: 22/12/2023 Date of acceptance: 05/04/2024 Date of publication: 28/09/2025

Revision of the article: Dr./ BECHANI Fatima (Univ. of Algiers 2)

Abstract:

This study aims to shed light on the Chinese foreign policy towards sub-Saharan Africa, considering it a new partner in the region, similar to the partners, or rather, the former colonizers, led by France, by highlighting the various mechanisms that China adopted to achieve its goals in the region, as it embodied a new strategy known as "mutual benefit" or "win-win cooperation", as well as offering low-interest loans and financial incentives without requiring political demands such as the establishment of democratic institutions and respect for human rights in return for its development aid, unlike France or the United States, which pursue the so-called conditional aid policy.

Key words: foreign policy; China; Africa; sub-Saharan Africa; mutual benefit.

Introduction:

Many studies agree that China is the new main pole in Africa, which is competing with and threatening the old actors in the region, especially France and the European Union, in addition to the United States of America, which is increasingly connected strategically and diplomatically, and China's rapid economic growth increases the fear of these actors.

Through its presence on the African continent in general, China seeks to achieve four main interests. The first interest is the desire to secure and guarantee access to oil and minerals. The second interest is to make the continent a market for the sale of Chinese goods and products, while the third interest is to seek to end the presence of Taiwan's diplomatic mission to the African continent, and then its isolation and replacement with all African countries recognizing China. As for the fourth interest, it is China's desire to maintain good relations with all African countries, so that it can rely on its political and economic support in regional and international forums, with

the aim of consecrating the Chinese role at the global level as a great power with authority and influence.

This study aims to highlight the interests of China, the new actor in sub-Saharan Africa, where it has relied to achieve these interests in presenting itself to African countries as just one of the developing third world countries, and despite this, it is ready to provide a helping hand and assistance to the countries of the continent, and even support them on the global arena through many areas of economic and development. , military and security, political and diplomatic, and even the cultural and scientific field.

The problem of the study: In light of the above, and accordingly, the following problem was formulated: To what extent does the new Chinese policy affect its relations and interests in sub-Saharan Africa?

Study hypotheses: In order to cover the various aspects of the study, the following hypotheses were formulated as preliminary answers to the problem raised, which are:

- Whenever China reaps material gains in sub-Saharan Africa, the countries of the region also reap gains with it.
- If China supports the demands of sub-Saharan African countries in international forums, especially the United Nations, then the countries of the region support Chinese positions.

Study Methodology: In an effort to answer the problem raised and verify the validity of the previously mentioned hypothesis, as well as approaching the study in a scientific manner, several approaches can be used, including: the historical, descriptive, statistical, and case study approaches.

The study will attempt to answer the problem raised through the following plan:

First: The economic field:

Second: The military and security field

Third: The political and diplomatic field

Fourth: The cultural and scientific field

Conclusion

1. Economic field:

China has achieved tremendous economic growth, making it the second largest economy in the world after the United States, ahead of Japan. It has increased its development and progress in the military field, and its political presence in global events and forums. The Chinese trade surplus reached 120 billion US dollars and rose to reach 323.32 billion dollars in 2018 compared to 276 billion dollars in 2017, as the volume of exports reached 2480 billion dollars, compared to 2140 billion dollars for

imports, which achieves a large volume of a total of about 4620 billion dollars in trades. The volume of trade with China's three main trading partners: the European Union, the United States and the countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, continued to rise, achieving an increase of 7.9%, 5.7% and 11.2%, respectively.

China is exploiting its dual status in Africa, as a developing country and as a developing power on the rise capable of influencing the major strategic directions of the world. China has been able to transform in a short time into a major partner for Africa, as it has transformed in less than 15 years into a first-class "African power" by covering an important number of fields: economic, political, diplomatic and military. During this period, China became the second economic partner of the African continent.

The emergence of China provides African oil-producing countries with new favorable geopolitical and diplomatic opportunities. China offers its expertise and workforce, as well as low-interest loans and financial incentives to build infrastructure. It also does not require political demands, such as the establishment of democratic institutions and respect for human rights, in exchange for its development aid, unlike France or the United States, which adopts what is known as a conditional aid policy, and does not propose deploying armed forces on its territory, which allows African countries to maintain their sovereignty. (Niquet, 2011, p. 36) China has adopted a new strategy towards Africa known as "mutual benefit" or "win-win cooperation." It has been translated into a new relationship governed by bilateral Chinese investments - especially in infrastructure - in exchange for African natural resources. (Hellstrom, 2023)

1-1: China-Africa Cooperation Forum:

China has begun to adopt a new pattern of activating its economic relations with Africa through conferences and forums as a method of cooperation and conducting more deals between the two parties, which was demonstrated by the establishment of a forum to enhance Chinese-African cooperation called the Forum for China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) is a new platform for collective dialogue and an effective mechanism to advance South-South cooperation efforts. In general, the Forum serves as a platform to showcase the benefits of regional cooperation and partnership between Chinese officials and their African counterparts. (Sithara, 2023)

The founding conference of the forum (held in Beijing in October 2000) was attended by 44 countries, represented by 74 ministers of foreign affairs and international cooperation, in addition to representatives of international and regional organizations and non-governmental organizations, bringing their number to 51 member states in 2012. It is held at the level of experts and foreign ministers every two years. Once in Beijing and another time in an African country, the Chinese leadership announced during this forum that its relations with Africa are free of political conditions in a way that serves the interests of both Africa and China, such as canceling debts and increasing the volume of trade exchanges.

1-2: Chinese investments in Africa:

During the last two decades, the African continent has witnessed the entry of a new and powerful competitor to France. China is the first investor in Africa with a value of \$36 billion annually, and the total Chinese investments in Africa amount to more than \$400 billion. Trade exchange between China and Africa also amounts to \$190 billion, a volume exceeding The African continent's trade exchange with the United States of America, India, and France combined is according to statistics for the year 2017. While the average trade exchange between China and Africa for the year 2018 was approximately 204 billion dollars, Chinese exports to Africa amounted to about 104 billion dollars, while African exports to China amounted to 99.2 billion dollars. While the rate of trade exchange between Africa and the United States in 2017 amounted to about \$39 billion, of which \$14.1 billion were American exports to Africa and 24.9 African exports to the United States.

It is expected that China's oil consumption will increase by 10% annually, and expectations indicate that China's oil imports will rise from 4 million barrels per day to 7 million barrels per day in 2020 and to 8 million barrels per day in 2025, then to 11 million barrels per day in 2030. The International Energy Agency expects China to reach the position of the largest oil importer in the world after the United States of America, estimated at 13 million barrels in 2035. (Alessi, 2023)

In this way, China entered Africa through the gateway of South-South cooperation, and through the solidarity dimension of combating Western hegemony, especially with the succession of China's unprecedented achievements. The Chinese economy alone represents 10% of the global economy, which prompted it to achieve a significant presence in Africa, where it is distinguished. China's investment map in Africa includes infrastructure projects through the construction of roads, airports, hospitals and ports, as China has contributed to the construction of 3,300 km of roads in Africa, more than 100 schools, and 200 power generation stations.

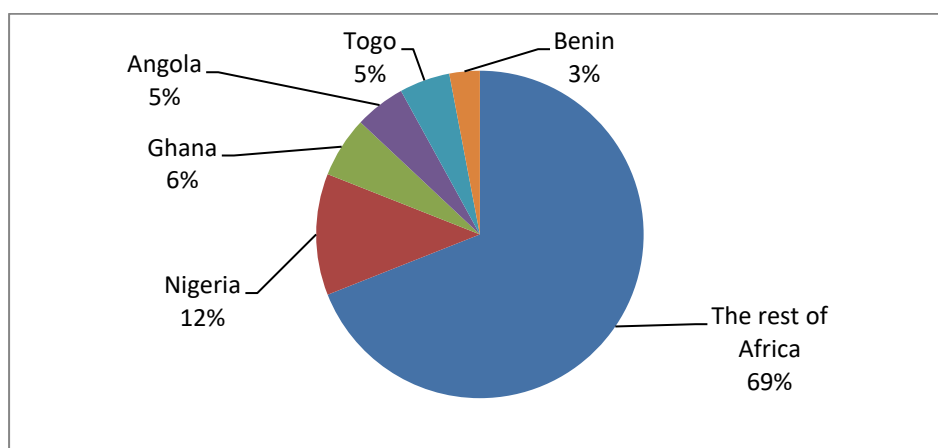
Chinese investments in Africa increased from 75 million in 2003 to 520 million in 2006 to 2 billion in 2008. This contributes to the country's foreign exchange reserve, which continued to rise until it reached 2 trillion in 2009. As for the year 2016, it was held at the Chinese Cooperation Forum - The African Union agreed to pump more than 2000 billion dollars in investments into Africa.

It is reported that there are more than 800 Chinese companies operating in 49 African countries. Among these companies, we find the China National Offshore Oil Company (CNOOC), which is located in Uganda, Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal, and Guinea Bissau. The company announced that its investments in the Nigerian oil sector amounted to 16 Billion dollars and is likely to increase, as the company stated that it aims to raise its oil production to 3 million barrels per day by 2023, as Mele Kyari, Managing Director of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation and Chairman of the China National Offshore Oil Company (CNOC), told me that it is necessary to have

Strategic partnerships and new investments in upstream operations to reach this target level of production

Furthermore; We find the Chinese petrochemical company Sinopec (Sinopec), which is concerned with oil refining, and the Chinese Chemical Import and Export Corporation (Sinochem), and their names were listed on foreign stock exchanges, which paved the way for the emergence of the first Chinese multinational companies in addition to infrastructure development companies, as these companies became an important feature in the African scene. For development and investment. for example; Chinese oil companies were interested in Nigeria, as the National Petroleum Company (PIN Petro China International) and the Nigerian National Petroleum Company (NNPC) signed an agreement with a total value of about \$800 million in 2005, under which Nigeria would supply China with 33,000 barrels of oil per day for a full year, with the possibility of renewal when Completion. In 2006, the Chinese energy company CNOOCLTD concluded a deal for \$2.3 billion to buy 45% of the oil extraction share. This hydro-oil field is located near the Niger Delta and covers an area of approximately 500 square miles. In 2016, the total bilateral goods trade between Nigeria and the world amounted to \$68.1 billion. The European Union was Nigeria's largest trading partner at 39.1%, followed by India 11.4%, China 7.4%, the United States 10%, and South Africa 3.4%. (Thrall, 2015, p. 27).

Figure N°. 01: A relative circle showing Chinese exports to sub-Saharan countries

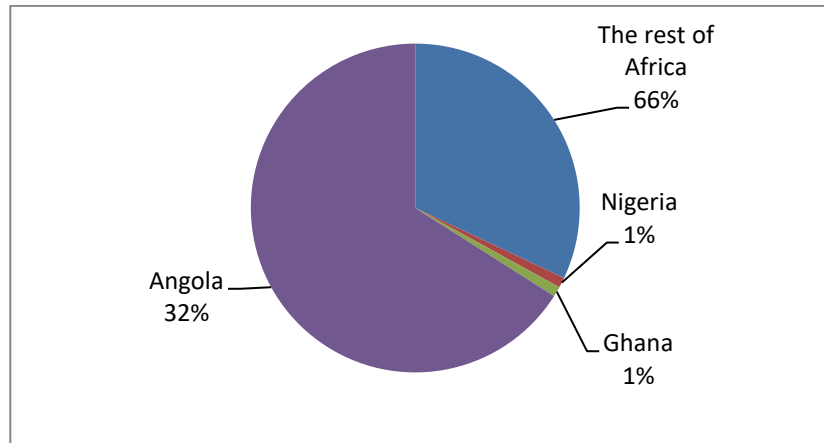


Source: Prepared by the researcher based on: Lloyd Thrall, "China's Expanding African Relations, Op. cit, P 51.

China's economic growth depends on resources other than oil, as China consumes 27% of the demand for iron and steel, 25% of lead, 23% of leather, and large quantities of nickel, tin, cotton and rubber. for example; Africa supplies China with 80% of its cobalt needs and 40% of magnesium. This situation makes China need to strengthen its relations with countries rich in these materials. It is noted that sub-Saharan African countries have important quantities of these materials, such as cotton in Mali and iron in Mauritania. And uranium in Niger, lead and magnesium, and it is

likely that the exploration sector for discovering gold in Niger will become an industry based on professional foundations in the near future. In January 2016, the Nigerian government issued the first official exploration permits to Chinese, Nigerian and Sudanese companies.

Figure N°. 02: A relative circle showing Chinese imports from sub-Saharan countries



Source: Prepared by the researcher based on: Lloyd Thrall, "China's Expanding African Relations, Op. cit, P 51.

Furthermore it; China provides development assistance to Africa through grants, interest-free loans and concessional loans. Aid can come in various forms such as building turnkey projects, providing goods and materials, technical cooperation and expertise, health assistance, debt relief, and participation in volunteer programs.

China has developed strategies to provide inducements in the form of cash loans or development projects. China's bilateral trade with Angola has increased by giving it billions of dollars to build roads, build airports and schools, construct railways, and build power plants, in exchange for marine areas for exploration and contracts to purchase oil. In this regard; China and Gabon signed a group of agreements to search for a refinery in Gabon, which was written off by the major countries as a deteriorating oil power. China took advantage of the situation to obtain 20 barrels of Gabonese oil. Thanks to China, Gabon will be able to extract its oil reserves, and thanks to Gabon, China has gained experience in African oil exploration.

Moreover; China has provided assistance to Africa in the field of disasters and famine that are plaguing it, and has canceled the debts of some poor African countries. For example, by 2009, China had canceled 312 debts to 35 African countries, worth \$29.3 million. It has also provided some financial grants to the African Union, and has contributed to operations in UN peacekeeping in Liberia, Congo, Ivory Coast, Rande, Ethiopia and Eritrea. To achieve its strategy in the region, China adopts the principle of respecting the sovereignty of states and not interfering in their internal affairs, and refusing to exert pressure on states in the name of democracy and human rights like Western countries. In the period from 2009 to 2011, (Niquet V. , 2011, p. 32) China

built 100 schools, 30 hospitals, and 30 anti-coronavirus centers. Malaria and 100 clean energy projects Chinese technical assistance was received between 2006 and 2009 in employee training, as in 2012 it trained 40,000 African employees in various fields.

Table N°. 01: Shows the sectors of trade exchange between China and Sub-Saharan Africa (exports and imports)

The most important sectors and commodities of trade	China's imports from sub-Saharan Africa	China's exports to sub-Saharan Africa
Petroleum materials	%82	/
Natural Resources	%70	/
Metals	%10	/
Agricultural and food commodities	%9	/
Processed goods	/	%43
Consumer goods	/	%38
Intermediate goods	/	%32

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on:
Valerie Niquet and Sylvain Touati, "China in Africa: Interests and practice", Op.Cit, P 14.

2. Military and security field:

China ranks third according to the Global Firepower Foundation's ranking of the world's most powerful armies for the year 2020, which specializes in military affairs, and which is based on evaluation comparisons of more than 50 categories ranging from military power in terms of ammunition, equipment and heavy weapons, to financial capabilities and logistical and geographic capabilities. For 138 countries, China has a strong army that includes 2 million and 183 thousand soldiers serving in military service and 510 thousand reserve soldiers, with a defense budget amounting to 237 billion dollars, making it the third most powerful army in the world. As for weapons and military equipment, the Chinese army possesses 371 attack aircraft, 1,232 fighters, more than 1,000 helicopters, 3,500 tanks, 33,000 armored vehicles, 52 frigates, 36 naval destroyers, 74 submarines, and two aircraft carriers. Shown in attached table No. (02). (Global Firepower Report To classify global armies, 2023)

Furthermore, China's arrival at the forefront of the international stage reveals unusual situations, according to the expectations of the US National Intelligence Council report, entitled "Global Trends for 2025 Transforming the World," that China will be the largest economic country in the world, and that it will be a leading military power in light of its pursuit and readiness for more. Influencing international politics over the next twenty years than any other country.

Table No. 02: Ranking of the most powerful armies in the world for the year 2022:

No	Country	Population (million people)	Number of planes	Number of soldiers	Number of tanks	Marine assets	Military budget (billion dollars)
1	America	329	13398	1 million and 280 thousand	6287	415	716
2	Russia	142	4078	1 million	21932	352	44
3	China	1billion and 384	3187	2 million and 183 thousand	13050	714	224
4	India	1billion and 296	2082	1 million and 362 thousand	4184	295	55.2
5	France	67million	1248	205thousand	406	118	40.5
6	Japan	126million	1572	247thousand	1004	131	47
7	South Korea	51million	1614	625thousand	2654	166	38.3
8	England	65million	811	150thousand	331	76	47.5
9	Türkiye	81million	1067	355thousand	3200	194	8.6
10	Germany	80million	613	179thousand	900	81	49.1

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on the following references:

Global Firepower Report To classify global armies, from the link: <http://www.globalfirepower.com>

Despite the above; China's interests are likely to be threatened by internal or inter-state conflicts, as these conflicts target foreign interests that exploit wealth belonging to indigenous groups that consider themselves not to benefit from the resources on their territories, and accuse these foreign interests of allying with national governments at the expense of local rights. In this context, it can be noted that kidnappings of Chinese nationals and citizens or attacks on Chinese interests, sites and facilities have been repeated in some hotspots of tension, as security sources announced the kidnapping of five Chinese in the oil state of Bayelsa in southern Nigeria in 2007. Another incident in which four Chinese sailors were kidnapped. End December 2019, off the coast of Libreville, the capital of Gabon, they were liberated and taken to Nigeria. Next; Five Chinese sailors were kidnapped by gunmen during an attack against a cargo ship in Nigerian waters on July 2, 2020. Some estimates indicate that there are about 800,000 Chinese living, working, and managing some companies in Africa. And the threats made by armed groups in the Niger Delta to China after it concluded an agreement with Nigeria in 2006.

In light of this situation, China has sought to strengthen high-level exchanges between its forces and the forces of African countries, by providing the most important aid and grants in order to support and develop the African military structure. For example: China granted Nigeria \$1 million to upgrade its army with the necessary means in 2001, and the Chinese Import and Export Bank signed a loan to the government of Ghana estimated at \$30 million in order to acquire military equipment

and infrastructure in 2007. (Dchris, 2011, p. 39) This was followed in 2010, when China donated \$1.5 million to Mauritania to purchase military engineering equipment.

It is worth to be mentioned; Assistance to the African army by the Chinese military leadership takes two forms: either military officers come to train armies in African countries, or African countries' army personnel are taken to China for training. China has also begun to intervene in UN peacekeeping missions, including in and from Sub-Saharan Africa, for example: China, like many Western countries, supported the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, known as MINUSMA - established on April 25, 2013 through Resolution 2100 by the United Nations Security Council. It sent 400 peacekeeping soldiers to Mali in 2013, and this is the first time that the Chinese armed forces participate in a peacekeeping mission.

3. The political and diplomatic field:

In the same escalating trend in the importance of sub-Saharan Africa in relation to Chinese interests, the German government can be considered a white book on Africa in January 2006, the first of its kind under the title "The Policy of China", the peak of China's relations with the continent represents a basic step that allows it to draw policies long term. The White Paper emphasizes China's common advantages with African countries and stresses that it is a reliable partner for developing countries. In a statement by the Chinese Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs, "Lui Guozeng," that the goal behind preparing this book is: "to inform the international group of the amount of attention that China attaches to the African continent and its desire to develop friendly relations with its countries." (Cheng, 2009, p. 93) The white book was also presented in a. It is clear that China is committed to participating in assuming the mission of maintaining peace and security on the continent, in addition to promoting high-level exchanges in the military field, including military technology and training of African armed forces. The Chinese government designated the year 2006 as the Year of Africa, and China strengthened its relations with African countries by intensifying official visits, to the point that it has become a diplomatic tradition in China for the president-elect to tour a number of African countries, on his first visit abroad after taking office. (Yi-Chong, 2008, p. 62)

Chinese diplomatic relations with Sub-Saharan Africa have witnessed great development, and accordingly, the two parties have exchanged official visits at various levels. China has also worked to support the demands of African countries in general in international forums, especially the United Nations. The same thing can be applied to African countries and their support for Chinese positions. It depends. China is keen to preserve its position and position in the United Nations because it is fully aware that its current capabilities will not qualify it to confront its strategic opponents, and therefore it seeks to strengthen its presence within this global body, especially since it has a permanent seat in it.

In this regard; African countries had a major role. China joined the United Nations Security Council in 1971 and occupied the seat for Taiwan. This represents a major achievement for Chinese diplomacy. The welcome and support of many African countries for this decision is evidence of the level of political relations between China and these countries. Which has not stopped developing over time the years. According to former Malian President Moussa Traoré: “The presence of the People’s Republic of China in the United Nations as a permanent member of the Security Council will contribute to strengthening the capacity of this organization and to maintaining international peace and security.

4. Cultural and scientific field:

China has developed a plan to spread the Chinese language and culture throughout the world in recent years by opening a large number of Confucian institutes to teach the Chinese language in the world. In 2005, China opened the Confucius Institute in Kenya, which is the first Chinese institute in Africa, funded by the Chinese government, dedicated to spread the Chinese language and culture, in the same year China concluded an agreement with Egypt to establish the Chinese-Egyptian University in Cairo as the first Chinese university in Africa, so that the number of foreign students studying the Chinese language reached about 200 million students.

In return; The Chinese government has established research centers and civil society organizations specialized in African affairs, including: the West Asian Institute of African Studies of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the Center for African Studies at Peking University, the Institute of African Studies at Natij University, the Institute of African Studies at Sangjatan University, the African and Asian Development Research Institute of the Center Research by the State Council, the Chinese Association for African Studies, and the Chinese Research Association for African History - all of this is a Chinese desire to strengthen Chinese-African cooperation in addition to reducing American control. It has also sent Chinese artistic teams and exhibitions to Africa, and China has also established an independent museum of African arts in Beijing.

Moreover; China was keen to secure many educational scholarships and cultural exchange for a large number of African students, as well as holding joint workshops and joint training. The Chinese policy paper towards Africa in 2006 included provisions on deepening cultural relations. In the same year, the Chinese government provided 40 scholarships and trained 300 Ghanaian professionals. China also announced the launch of a program to teach 15,000 African specialists, as well as raising educational scholarships for students. African students in China increased from two thousand to four thousand scholarships in 2009. For example, 35 Ghanaian students received a three-year Chinese scholarship, bringing the number of scholarships to 271 scholarships for Ghanaian students in 2013. The Chinese embassy decided to establish a cultural center in Ghana in order to provide Courses and lectures

in Chinese and African languages on Chinese culture. Therefore, China looks primarily at its economic future, as these students will become Chinese ambassadors at the level of Africa in the future and ambassadors for their country within China in a balanced equation between the two sides. As for the media level: In 2006, China opened an FM radio station in the Kenyan capital, Nairobi, which broadcasts programs for more than 19 hours in Chinese, English, and even Swahili.

Conclusion:

Chinese-African relations in general, and those with Sub-Saharan Africa in particular, have become a role model for fruitful relations in the field of exchange of interests between the African continent and China as a global power in our contemporary world. The current state of relations between the two parties represents a great interest in the region, especially its resources, as the continued growth of Chinese power in Africa. It will depend on the logic of supply and demand, as China is trying to fortify its position in Africa and the international system, in order to ensure confrontation with other major powers, as Chinese-African relations have become a major threat to the interests of Western countries, especially the United States and France, the old colonialists in the region, and at the same time it provides an alternative. To be freed from the political and economic restrictions and conditionalities imposed by Western countries on African countries by both the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. This has left the economies of these countries exhausted and subject to dependency as a result of high-interest loans in order to keep these countries in a weak state to facilitate the process of exploiting and plundering their wealth. This is due to the decline in the prices of Chinese goods, which is compatible with the purchasing power of the African people, most of whom belong to poor social classes. China also follows a soft economic policy based on comprehensive cooperation and permanent stability between China and Africa, as Chinese-African ties are centered on a set of principles represented in sincere friendship, equal treatment, solidarity, cooperation, common development and facing the future.

Moreover; What strengthens Chinese-African ties is the large spread of Chinese companies in Africa that have carried out their activities in all fields, starting from oil and mining to communications, energy and infrastructure companies. This has been helped by a number of factors such as: unconditional Chinese investments and easy procedures, in contrast to the political conditionality pursued by Western powers. At the forefront are France and America, which link the provision of development and economic aid to achieving democracy, good governance, and respect for human rights.

References:

1. Alessi, C. (2023, November 15). *Expanding China- Africa Oil*. . Retrieved from Retrieved from Council on Foreign Relation: <http://www.cfr.org>
2. Cheng, H. S. (2009, February). China's African Policy in the Post-Cold War Era. *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 39, p. 93.
3. Dchris, A. (2011, Janury). China' s growing role in African peace and security. *Safer wold*, p. 39.
4. *Global Firepower ReportTo classify global armies*. (2023, November 12). Retrieved from <http://www.globalfirepower.com>
5. Hellstrom, J. (2023, November 25). *China's emerging role in Africa A strategic overview*. . Retrieved from www.foi.se/africa
6. Niquet, V. (2011). *China in Africa: Interests and practice*. FRI.
7. Niquet, V. (2011). *La Chine en Afrique: Intérêts et pratique*. (P. A. Subsaharienne, Éd.) Paris: IFRI.
8. Sithara, F. (2023, November 16). *Chronology of China-Africa Relations*. Retrieved from China Report. the Balancing Act of China's Africa Policy. : <http://www.arsichina.org>
9. Thrall, L. (2015). *China's Expanding African Relations*. Santa Monica: RAND Corporation.
10. Yi-Chong, X. (2008, March). China and the United States in Africa: Coming conflict or commercial coexistence. *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 26.