

Africa: A New Scramble for World Powers or the 'Biggest Frontier of the 21st Century?'

أفريقيا: تدافع جديد للقوى العالمية أم "أكبر حدود في القرن 21"؟

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Abstract

For a long time, Africa was the target of colonial domination, the source of plunder of its riches, the arena for conflicts, and economic backwardness. Yet, this continent has huge natural wealth, valuable geostrategic assets, vibrant cultures, and a dynamic youth potential.

The current world geostrategic mutations, exacerbated by the COVID-19 and the Ukraine-Russia war, have generated a new international scramble over Africa. They have also accentuated thorny challenges for this continent in terms of the spiral rise of food and energy prices, the spread of terrorism, and the consolidation of authoritarianism. However, these international changes have paved the way to greater resilience and better opportunities to make Africa an autonomous, responsible, and competitive world power, providing the inception of new development strategies.

Key words : Africa, power scramble, Ukraine-Russian war, resilience.

ملخص:

لفترة طويلة ، كانت إفريقيا هدفا للهيمنة الاستعمارية ، ومصدر نهب ثرواتها ، وساحة للصراعات ، والتخلف الاقتصادي . ومع ذلك ، تتمتع هذه القارة بثروة طبيعية ضخمة ، وأصول جيوسراتيجية قيمة ، وثقافات نابضة بالحياة ، وإمكانات شبابية ديناميكية . أدت التحولات الجيوسراتيجية العالمية الحالية ، التي تفاقمت بسبب COVID-19 والحرب الأوكرانية الروسية ، إلى تدافع دولي جديد على إفريقيا . كما أنها أبرزت التحديات الشائكة لهذه القارة من حيث الارتفاع المتصاعد في أسعار الغذاء والطاقة ، وانتشار الإرهاب ، وترسيخ الاستبداد .

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ومع ذلك ، فقد مهدت هذه التغييرات الدولية الطريق لمزيد من المرونة وفرص أفضل لجعل إفريقيا قوة عالمية مستقلة ومسؤولة وتنافسية ، مما يوفر بداية استراتيجيات إنمائية جديدة.

كلمات مفتاحية: أفريقيا ، تدافع السلطة ، الحرب الأوكرانية الروسية ، المرونة.

Introduction:

The old but promising continent, to dare a kind of a soft oxymoron, suits adequately Africa because of its atavisms, contrasts, and hidden potentials.

Africa's long history has proved violent, and disruptive for the socioeconomic structures of this continent. The historic sequence revealed also features of political instability, and a distorted path of development, well after the independence of African countries.

Many political scientists have delved into the analysis of the post-colonial State in Africa by focusing on the lack of efficient institutions (Kumssa, Mbeche, 2004), the deficit of democracy (Fomunyoh, 2005), bad governance (Mukum Mbaku, 2020), and the ill management of the national economies (Amin, 2013; Hashim et al., 2012). However, a few writings have brought under sunlight the link existing between the crisis of the African post-colonial States and foreign interventions (Bereketeab, 2011).

Ideological considerations have strongly marked East/West competition over Africa during the bipolar world divide, while the post-cold period witnessed sharp rivalries over the economic assets of this this continent. However, the aftermath of the COVID-19 and the ongoing impact of the war in Ukraine revealed that this competition has raised new geostrategic and security concerns, not only for major rival powers but also for several African countries (Iratni, 2023a).

The impact of the looming new cold war may have generated the division of the world on informal alliances opposing two poles: North America and Europe, on the one hand, and Russia, and China, on the other. Satellite countries, orbit around these two rival configurations for geostrategic reasons and economic interests. In addition to this loose bipolar configuration, a great number of countries from the non-Western rim tries to keep a neutral stance, according to their national interests.

If only a few African countries have already chosen their side, the great bulk of African political entities remains the target of foreign powers'

influence for geostrategic designs. These major powers inherited a great space in Africa and it is not surprising to notice, however, that foreign competition over Africa's resources and geostrategic assets has extended, recently, to newcomers; such as Turkey and the Gulf States (Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates).

Major powers have witnessed diverse fortunes in their dealings with Africa in the last decades. The United States has started a progressive withdrawal from this continent following its failed military intervention in Somalia in 1993, and the reorientation of its vital interests towards the Asia-Pacific region (Iratni 2018). France is losing ground in its traditional West-African sphere of influence, and Russia has struggled to return to Africa after a long eclipse, due to the disruptive impact left by the crumbling of the Soviet Union (Iratni, Marok, 2023).

In contrast, India and Japan have been involved in a steady cooperation with many African countries for over fifty years, while China has not only maintained its presence in Africa, but has also strengthened its presence in this continent, and greatly benefited from its partnerships with Africa countries (Iratni 2023b).

What reasons can explain the scramble over Africa? Geostrategic and military considerations seem to constitute the main driving force behind the increasing foreign competition over this continent, especially after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, in addition to the need of the world's major powers for Africa's minerals, energy resources.

Never since the end of World War II has the international system been so fragile, and never the world's stability and prosperity have been so shaken up. It may be a mistake, however, to believe that the war in Ukraine is confined to a violent clash between Kyiv and Moscow only, but it became clearer that this war opposes, broadly, Russia to the Western world, and implies evolving and shifting alliances that touch other major powers such as China, India, and a few emerging countries.

The target of these confrontations and geostrategic alignments may consist of the determination of many countries from the southern hemisphere to challenge the US-led Western hegemony over world affairs. The empowerment of the BRICS group, for instance, and its extension to other emerging powers in August 2023, stand as solid ingredients for attempting

to undermine US economic supremacy, if not reduce the domination of the US currency over the world's foreign exchange reserves and over the international mechanisms of payments and settlements.

These vital economic and geostrategic considerations have started to split the world into opposed coalitions and threaten peace and security in the world. They became more acute, in a context marked by the menaces proffered by Russia to use nuclear arms in case of attacks from Western countries, the possible enlargement of the Atlantic Alliance (NATO), and the risks of a generalized conflict in the Middle East after the war launched by 'Israel' in Gaza in October 2023.

The establishment of foreign power bases in Africa, the growing military might of China, the increasing interference of Russia and the Gulf States in civil war-torn African countries, and the expansion of terrorism in the Sahel-Sahara region and the Horn of Africa, have further exacerbated international instability and fragility.

Amid these geostrategic, economic, and security designs, Africa is becoming the focus of growing competition between the world's major powers because the influence of one of these powers over this continent will not fail to raise suspicions, and concerns from other contending rivals. It was not surprising, that the United States has expressed its determination to challenge the perceived rising presence of China and Russia in Africa. Therefore, the Biden administration started to deploy a strategy to catch up the ground lost in this continent, which resulted from President Donald Trump's 'absentee diplomacy,' to use the metaphor of a former US Assistant State Secretary for African Affairs (Cohen, 2020).

Africa is drawing expectations and attention from the international community as the 'biggest frontier of the 21st century,' according to Japanese diplomatic discourse (Japan/ Gov.).

France has held annual conferences with its African partners ever since 1973, a sign of its staunch influence over this continent, until the protests raised by civil societies and military rulers in French-speaking West Africa in 2021-2. Japan has organized seven sessions of the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) since 1993, focusing mainly on economic matters. India held three summits with Africa over the period 2008-2015.

The United States hosted the second summit with Africa in 2022, eight years after the first meeting, in a decisive attempt to resume ties with Africa and counter the increasing presence of its rivals in this continent. The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) occurred every three years from 2000 to 2021, a sign of the regularity China has accorded to its partnership with Africa, in contrast to the summits convened by other powers with this region. Russia, the 'late to the party' (Stronski, 2019) has convened a second summit with Africa in July 2023.

Except for France, no other major or emerging power had colonial ties and turbulent relationships with Africa, but unlike the United States, all of Russia China, and India had firmly supported the fight to achieve decolonization, a matter that has enhanced their credibility in Africa. Japan «boosts the unique advantages in Africa, as it is neither a former colonial empire nor a power with hegemonic views "(Wade, Tyrell, 2022).

However, major world powers did not miss the occasions to depict, blithely, their links with Africa. According to the public statements of their leaders, these powers declared to pursue noble objectives consisting of contributing to the economic welfare and security in Africa. Furthermore, they denied, quite candidly, any temptation to participate in a new scramble over this region.

Addressing the first Russian-African summit held in Sochi in October 2019, Russian President Vladimir Putin emphatically stated that the objectives of Russia's return to Africa "did not aim to participate in a new 'partition of Africa,' but engage in a competition for cooperation with this continent, providing that this cooperation is civilized and develops in compliance with the law. We have a lot to offer our African friends" (Cayley, 2021).

During his second visit to Africa in August 2022, the American State Secretary, Antony Blinken said the United States is an "equal partner of African countries"(Boussion, 2022). He went on to affirm that his country "firmly believes that it is time to stop treating Africa as a subject of geopolitics and start treating it as the major geopolitical player it has become" (US Department of State, 2021).

The Chinese leader Xi Jinping tried to translate China's dream based on "national rejuvenation and prosperity" into an African context, as he said,

"people in China and Africa should strengthen unity, cooperation, and help each other to make their respective dreams come true" (MFA, 2021). In a key address to the Ugandan Parliament in July 2018, Indian Premier, Narendra Modi promised, "Africa will be at the top of our priorities" (Majumdar, 2022).

Japanese leaders affirmed that their country pursues two major approaches to guide its relations with African countries, namely quality growth (inclusiveness, sustainability, and resilience) and human security (capacity building focusing on each individual in Africa),"according to a Japanese official statement (Japan/ Gov.). During his four-African Nation tour in March 2023, French President Emmanuel Macron said the era of French interference in Africa was "well over," implying the end of the age of 'Françafrique' which refers to France's post-colonization strategy of supporting authoritarian leaders to defend its interests" (Aljazeera, 2023).

All these statements pompously praised the cooperation of great powers with Africa, and all expressed respect and deference to this continent. However, none has stated what it really expected to obtain from Africa, and what tangible geostrategic designs and economic benefits it pursues in this region.

Concomitant to these pertinent remarks, there is an assumption that Africa would become a new international scramble, especially in light of the war in Ukraine. However, it remains to see if this continent could display resilience and play off the world's powers against each other in order to nurture dividends and shape its future.

The study encompasses four parts:

- The first part underlines the nature of the interests of major powers in Africa, mainly the need of raw materials and energy sources,
- The second part assesses the attempts of major powers to implement their global geostrategic designs, thanks to the contribution provided by African assets and geostrategic utilities.
- The third part reviews the instruments used by major powers to exert their influence over the African continent,
- Finally, the fourth part delves into explaining the dynamics of the new world power game in a context marked by the complex but unpredictable

implications of the Ukraine Russia war. It also questions the ability of Africa to become a world powerhouse, if major powers change their postures towards this continent, and if some African countries dare to play a stellar role in the looming international geostrategic configuration.

I-Foreign Powers' Economic and Strategic Competition in Africa

Africa served as the provider of raw materials for major world powers, whether during the colonial scramble or after its political emancipation that started in the late 1950s. These energy and mineral resources, in addition to land assets, have become acute with the increase in the prices of agrarian and energy products due to the war in Ukraine.

-The importance of African raw materials

Major powers, particularly China, Japan, and India, need the resources that are abundant in Africa: minerals, energy, and land to maximize their economic capabilities and enhance their international status.

The logic of the international economic system has confined Africa into the mere role of providing raw materials, and limited its access to the processes of industrialization and manufacturing. Thus, 83% of African countries rely on a single commodity as the main source of foreign currency earnings. African countries account for 45% of the commodity-dependent countries worldwide (UNCTAD, 2022).

Unlike other major powers, Russia has abundant mineral resources, such as platinum, gold, and iron ore, but most of the mining potential remains quite difficult and costly to extract, because of its remote location. In addition, the quality of some of Russia's minerals such as platinum, for instance, is lower than that minerals extracted in Africa. Therefore, Russia preferred to import some of the raw materials it needs, with lower costs and encouraged its extractive companies, such as RT Global Resources and the Renova Group, to are exploit mining deposits throughout Africa, such as manganese (South Africa), Zimbabwe (platinum), Angola (diamonds), bauxite (Guinea) and uranium (Namibia).

Energy supplies:

Russian state-owned companies such as Gazprom, Rustec, and Rosatom are active in Africa with investing substantial amounts in the hydrocarbons

sector in Algeria, Egypt, Uganda, and Angola, and in offshore exploration of gas near the Mozambique coastline (Cayley, 2021). Cooperation in the energy sector conducted through Rosatom helped some African countries develop nuclear capabilities for peaceful purposes. Therefore, nuclear projects mushroomed in Ethiopia, Rwanda, Sudan, and Zambia. However, more impressive is the huge nuclear plant under construction at El Dabaa in Egypt, which necessitated a \$13 billion investment (Forum, 2021).

To phase out Russian oil imports, Japan moved to turn old LNG tankers into floating offshore LNG production bases near the coast of Mozambique, a promising gas-producing country (RFI, 2023). Qatar has invested in renewable energy projects in Kenya, such as the development of a wind farm in Marsabit County, and targeted the exploitation of Mozambique's energy resources (Namata, 2023).

As decarbonization becomes urgent, the demand for critical minerals will spur Western powers' investments in the African mining sector. For instance, the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation (DFC) is considering investing money in Namibia's lithium mining industries. In addition, Africa's extensive fossil fuel reserves, and proximity to Europe could allow it to help EU wean themselves off Russian energy (Yade, Tyrell, 2022).

However, Beijing did not refrain from heavily investing in the hydrocarbon sector of Africa because this region constituted its largest supplier of oil and gas after the Middle East; with a share amounting to 25% of China's total energy imports. China expected to invest \$15 billion in Africa's upstream sector over 2019-2023 (Burkhardt, 2019).

Around two-thirds of Chinese spending in African energy went to Nigeria, Angola, Uganda, and Mozambique, and Chinese State Oil Company (CNOOC) has taken a majority stake in a project to drill for oil off West Africa's Guinea Bissau, and some shares in Rovuma LNG project in Mozambique. Chinese oil company CNCP is building a 1.980km pipeline from the Agadem oil field in Niger to the port of Seme in Benin (Africa oil week), and Sinopec Overseas oil and gas company Limited has struck a \$490 million deal with the Algerian national oil company, Sonatrach in May 2022 to explore in the Saharan Zarzaitine region (FOCAC).

China is helping Algeria to develop a \$7 billion integrated phosphate and fertilizers project in the region of Tebessa, and the expected production capacity of this project will reach 5.4 million tons per year. Tanzania will set up, with Chinese participation, a \$ 657 million mineral sands project due to begin by September 2024 (Iratni, 2023b).

Qatar bought 2014 Chevron's shares in the consortium that exploits Chadian oil for \$1.4bn, as a compensation for the inability of Ndjamen to repay the debt it owed Doha (Gillon, 2019).

-Land assets

An African Union statement released in January 2023 asserted that the African continent has 60% of the world's available arable land, and agriculture is the source of livelihood for 70% of the population. Yet, the continent generates only 10% of global agricultural output (AU food security, 2023). Therefore, useful or fertile land is not scarce in Africa, but some factors have plagued the development of the agrarian sector, such as low agrarian productivity, droughts, severe soil degradation, and global warming.

Therefore, some African countries resorted to leasing their land for agricultural purposes and reserving part of the crop to meet the needs of the local population, while some major powers looked for land concessions to increase their capacity to process agrarian products to make profits and meet food self-sufficiency. These powers exercised a kind of grabbing at the expense of economically poor African States.

Foreign investors have bought approximately 35 million hectares of African land in the past 20 years (Kayembe, 2023). Many Chinese, Emirati, Lebanese, American, and European investors have acquired several tens of millions of hectares of arable land in Africa, covering a surface area slightly larger than Côte d'Ivoire (Toulemonde, 2021). Arabia bought 500.000 hectares of land in Tanzania in 2009 to make it the kingdom's "basket" (Al-Faisal, 2019), and Qatar announced in 2018, plans to invest \$500.000 million in the agricultural and food sectors in Sudan.

China invested \$1.11 billion in the agrarian sector of 35 African countries by the end of 2020, and 7.556 Africans have received agricultural training in China since 2012 (MFA, 2021).

II- Transposing the balance of power game to the African context

The competition involving major powers in Africa lies on strategic motivations to maintain hegemonic domination over the international system (USA) or to alter the world configuration by enhancing their power status (China, Japan, and India). The hard instruments used by these powers consist in searching for military bases and naval facilities as well as through the policy of arms sales to acquire dependent clients and influence over Africa.

-Power strategic motivations

Major powers coined Africa with the search for strategic designs to enhance their posture in the world balance of power. They were more worried about containing threats to their security believed to come from Africa than extirpating the seeds of instability from this continent. Therefore, the security concerns of these powerful nations appear to pertain more to preventing terrorist groups from carrying out attacks against their interests and curbing illegal migrant flows. These big powers have been relatively successful in greatly reducing terrorist threats against their territories, and limiting the incursions of illegal migrants, but they have not succeeded in eradicating terrorism and civil wars in Africa.

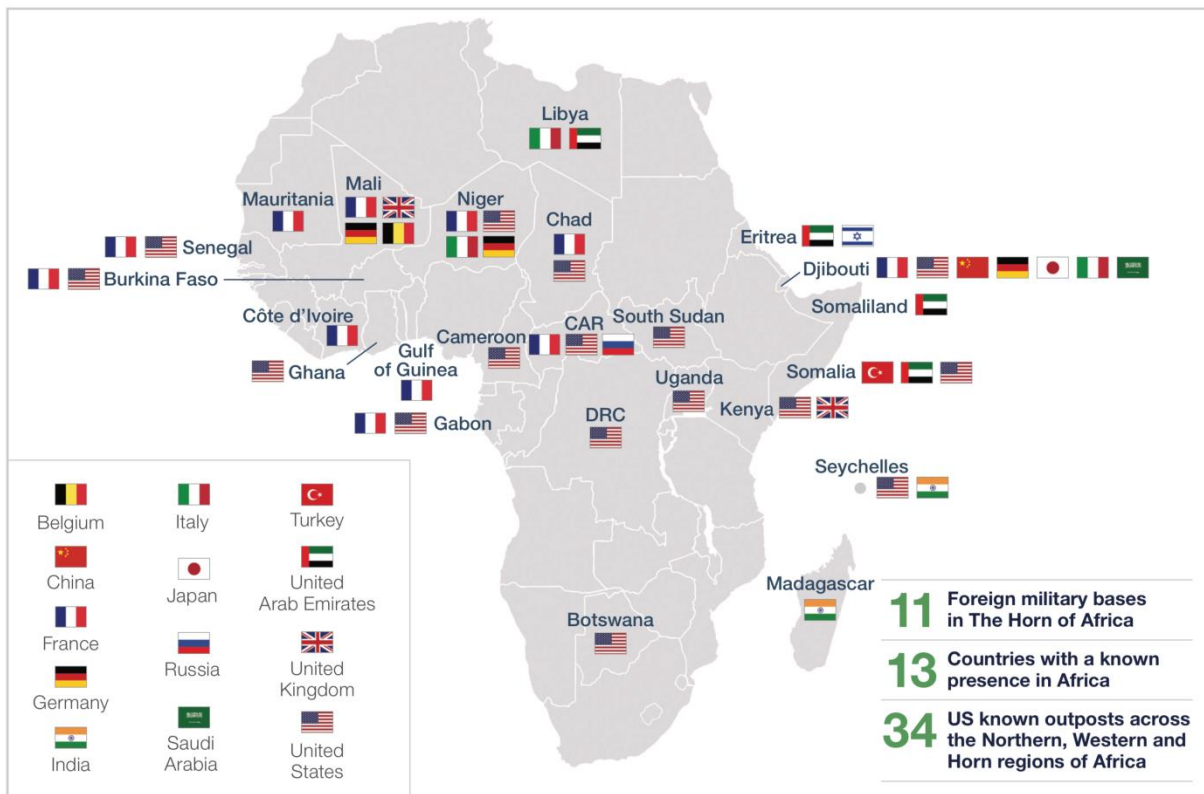
France claimed to help the Sahel countries fight terrorism through its military Serval and Barkane operations. However, it aimed to preserve its military presence in this region and protect its economic interests, mainly market shares and uranium. The Gulf States seem more worried about cutting the junction between Al-Shabab terrorist groups operating in the Horn of Africa and the rebel movements activating in the Arab Peninsula and the Gulf of Aden. China seems to focus on combating piracy in the Indian Ocean and protecting naval routes.

China aims to be a major military power in the world, not only to protect its national sovereignty and territorial integrity but also to participate in ensuring a safe and stable international environment, according to the Chinese doctrine. In this optic, security issues in Africa became part of China's worries because the Chinese leaders view development and security as structurally linked. Therefore, China continued to expand trade exchanges and hold dialogues with African countries in the field of peace and security. At the FOCAC Beijing summit in September 2018, President

Xi Jinping launched the China-Africa Peace and Security Initiative and decided to set up a China-Africa Peace and Security Fund to increase African capacity building. Beijing provided financial aid to the African Union's military operations, and to the G5 to fight terrorism in the Sahel-Sahara region (MFA, 2021). It also firmly supported the 'Silence the Guns in Africa' adopted by AU. China sent over 30.000 Chinese peacekeepers to Africa in the past to perform tasks in 17 peacekeeping mission areas (MFA/PRC, 2021).

-The search for bases and naval facilities

As many as 15 foreign countries are militarily present in the African continent, as shown by the following map:



Source: Africa: A Rough Guide to Foreign Military Bases in Africa, July 20, 2023, <https://archive.assenna.com/africa-a-rough-guide-to-foreign-military-bases-in-africa>.

(Remarks: this map does not mention the administrative borders of the disputed territory of *Al Halaib* between Egypt and Sudan and refers to Somaliland).

USA, Russia, China, Japan, and India, former colonial empires: France, UK, Belgium, and Germany, as well as emerging powers such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Iran, the UAE, and 'Israel' have military bases or posts in Africa.

Nothing better illustrates the spread of foreign bases in Africa than the case of Djibouti. This tiny country, which lies on the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, constitutes a gateway to the Suez Canal, one of the world's busiest shipping lanes. It is also a waypoint between Africa, India, and the Middle East. This country alone hosts bases and military facilities in favor of seven countries at the same time and is the only place in the world to shelter Chinese and US bases at the same time.

The US is confining its military presence in Africa to well-targeted objectives. It runs an expeditionary base with more than 3.000 troops in Djibouti, a base for naval personnel, and Green Berets in Kenya. It operates a drone base in the Victoria Island of the Seychelles and a drone base to fight Boko Haram in northeastern Nigeria. It has installed Predator' and 'Reaper' drone bases in Chad and Niger, covering the Sahel region and the Lake Chad Basin, as well as drones for operations in Somalia and Yemen (Homeland Security News Wire).

The US has a 'cooperative security location' in Burkina Faso charged with surveillance and intelligence over the Sahel region. It has also compounds for US commandos in Somalia as well as PC-12 surveillance aircraft fly at Entebbe airport, as part of the US Special Forces mission helping the Ugandan army combat the Lord's Resistance Army (Segell, 2019).

President Biden announced the 21st Partnership for African Security (21PAS) to bolster African efforts to implement and sustain security sector capacity and reforms. The amount earmarked for this three-year pilot reached \$100 million. The United States launched also the new Prevention and Stabilization Fund to sustain partnerships with some African countries, in addition to the assistance provided by Africom to the Sahel-Saharan armies (White House, 2022).

China is reinforcing its military presence in Africa by planning to build another naval base in Djibouti, in addition to the Doraleh Multipurpose Port it set up in 2016. Beijing is also courting Mozambique to install naval

facilities and intending to construct bases in Kenya, Tanzania to reinforce its military presence in the Indian Ocean. Furthermore, it planned to install naval bases in Africa's Atlantic, especially in Equatorial Guinea, where it has upgraded port facilities (Phillips, 2021) and in Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Namibia, Nigeria, and South Africa, to protect its oil and commercial commodities supplies from African countries located on the Atlantic coast.

Another reason explaining China's search for bases consisted of finding facilities to evacuate its citizens in case of emergency and avoid the bitter experience it faced following the collapse of the Gadhafi regime in 2011.

Russia's military engagement in Africa aimed to search for naval bases and maritime facilities to have access to the warm waters of the Mediterranean Sea through Libya, considered as a strategic anchor in this sea. Russia also tries to get control over maritime routes along the Indian Ocean. Particular attention focused on the ports of Berbera (Somaliland), Massawa and Assab (Eritrea), and Port Sudan (Sudan). According to an American expert in African affairs, Russia's naval strategy suggests "an interest in projecting force along the strategic maritime chokeholds of the Bab-el-Mandeb strait (Djibouti-Yemen), the Suez Canal, and the eastern Mediterranean. Russia has also explored port access in southern Africa with Mozambique and has conducted joint naval exercises with South Africa"(Siegle, 2021).

France has bases in Chad and Gabon from which anti-terrorist operations operate in the Sahel region and Central African Republic, facilities at Port Bouët near Abidjan, and a contingent of 1.500 soldiers in Djibouti.

Japan maintains a contingent next to Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti, while Turkey has a military base in Somalia and a training facility for Somali troops in the framework of Camp Turksom, which serves as the main hub of the task force dubbed 'African Eagle' (Kenenz, 2022).

The United Arab Emirates has developed a deep-water port at Assab in Eritrea, serving as a hub for all operations in Yemen, including the naval blockade of the Red Sea ports of Mokha and Hodeida. It trains and equips Somalia's counterterrorism unit and the National Intelligence and Security Agency. The UAE has a 30-year lease on a naval and airbase at the port of

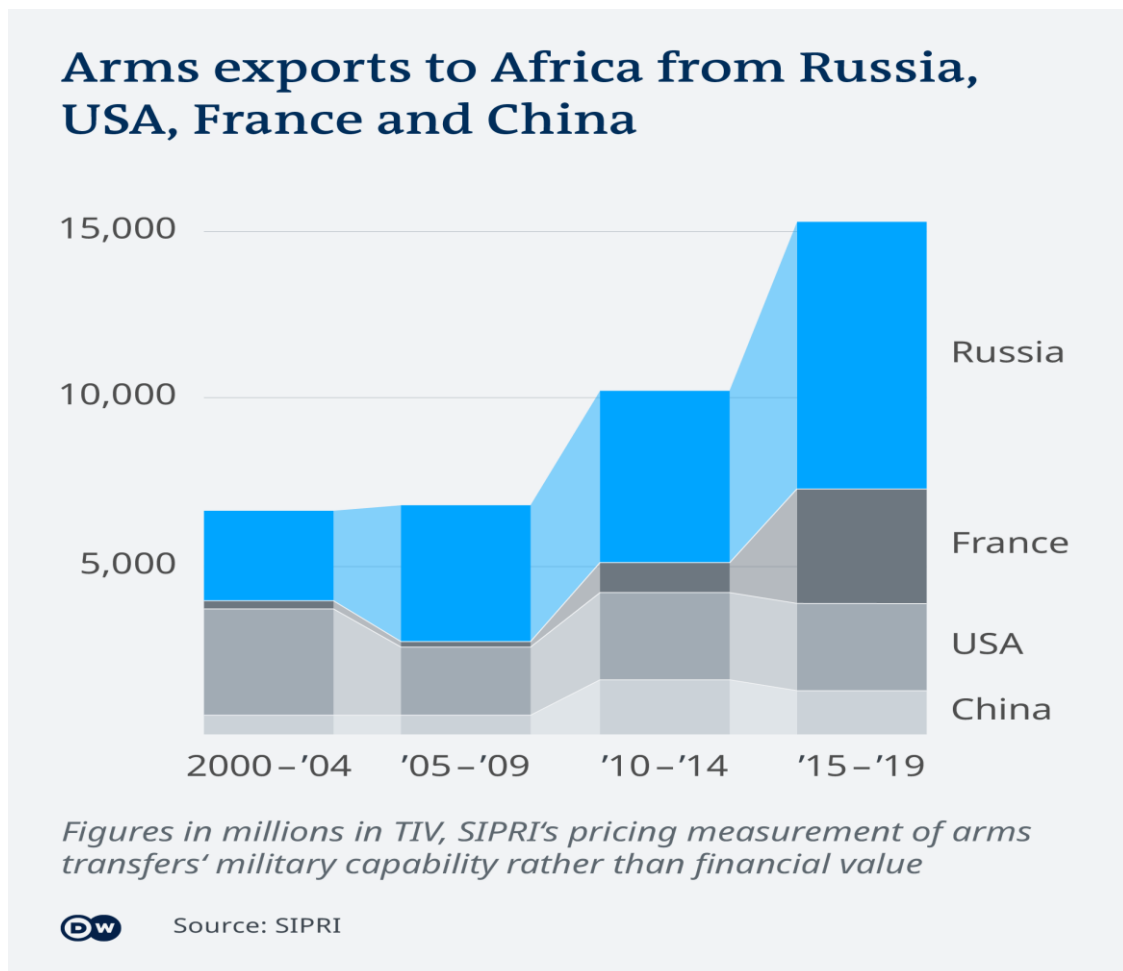
Berbera in Somaliland and reportedly provides military training and a security guarantee to this self-declared independent territory (Telci, Horoz, 2018).

Qataris and Emiratis are competing for influence in Somalia. The UAE has been looking for bases to support its operations in the war in Yemen, and Abu Dhabi signed a deal with the secessionist government of Somaliland in February 2017 to build a naval base at the port of Berbera (Gillon, 2019).

-Arms sales competition

Major Powers consider Africa a huge market for their military exporting industries on the pretext that this continent faces insecurity and threats emanating from terrorism, civil wars, and tribal conflicts. Seldom, foreign military interventions and meddling in Africa were the subject of Western media or their criticisms.

Russia represents, by far, the largest exporter of arms to Africa from 2000-2019 as shown by the following table:



Despite its entanglement in the grueling war against Ukraine, Russia overtook China as the top weapons supplier to Sub-Saharan Africa between 2018 and 2022 by grabbing 26% of the region's market share, up from 21% over the previous five years. In contrast, China's shares in the region fell from 29% to 18% between 2013 and 2022 (AFDB, 2023).

The Washington Atlantic Council think tank report revealed that between 2010 and 2021, China accounted for 22% of the \$ 9.32 billion in total arms exports to countries south of the Sahara. With \$2.04 billion, Chinese sales were second only to Russia and almost three times the amount exported by the US to this region (*South China Morning Post*, 2023).

Not only do arms sales represent a valuable business for major powers, but they also constitute a subtle means to fulfill their strategic interests through winning close allies for security reasons, especially in Africa.

III- Competition over Africa's promising markets and economic assets

The economic aspects of the competition of major powers over Africa consist of providing direct investments, and financial assistance. However, these powers seem quite reluctant to permit this continent to get the access to technological innovations. Conversely, Africa needs to move from an economy based on the exports of commodities that do not bring much benefit, to digital and innovative processes.

- Investments and trade policies

Major powers have privileged direct investments or financial assistance in favor of the African countries to secure imports of raw material imports from Africa, increase their market shares, and enhance their economic assets in this region.

The United States and China have been the largest providers of investment stocks and financial aid to African countries. Washington announced, at the 2022 American-African Summit, its intention to invest \$55 billion in Africa over the next three years and \$15 billion to be deployed in two-way trade and investment commitments, deals, and partnerships that advance key 'priorities, including sustainable energy,

health systems, agri-business, digital connectivity, infrastructure, and finance (Virusha, 2023).

China's direct investments in Africa rocketed to \$43.4 billion in 2020 from \$490 million recorded in 2003 (Investment Monitor, 2023). By contrast, India had an accumulated stock of \$74 billion between 1996 and 2021 (Gregson, 2023). This figure sets the annual average of Indian investments in Africa for 25 years estimated at \$3 billion, to a level far below the stock recorded by China in 2020, for instance.

Japan's foreign direct investment in Africa declined from \$10 billion in 2016 to just \$ 4.7 billion in 2020 during COVID-19 but recovered to \$6 billion in 2021. Still, Africa accounts for only 0.003% of Japan's \$2 trillion global foreign direct investments (ADB 2023), and Russia invests little in Africa, contributing less than 1% of the foreign direct investment (FDI) going to the African continent (Siegle, 2023).

In terms of trade exchange with Africa, China's global value was by far the largest compared to other major powers. Chinese trade with Africa reached \$260 billion in 2022, followed far behind by India, whose trade grew from \$56 billion in 2021 to \$89.5 billion in the same year the United States with \$64 billion (accounting for only 1.1%US global commerce), and Japan with \$24 billion (Usman, 2023). In a weaker position, comes Russia whose trade exchanges with Africa declined from \$20 billion in 2018 to \$17.7 billion in 2021 (Gregson, 2023).

Without a doubt, China has been the most important partner of African countries in terms of participation in building large infrastructures in the domains of energy, transportation, health, and ports. In a press meeting held in Addis Ababa in January 2023, China's Foreign Minister Qin Gang stated, "since the beginning of the new century, China has built in Africa more than 6,000 km of railways, 6.000 km of roads, nearly 20 ports, and over 80 large-scale power facilities. It has also funded over 130 hospitals and clinics, over 170 schools, 45 sports venues, and over 500 agricultural projects"(China Embassy 2021).To add a symbolic value to these achievements, it may not be farfetched to mention that Chinese companies have, graciously, built the African Union's headquarters in Addis Ababa.

Foreign powers have different approaches to dealing with Africa in terms of investments and trade exchanges. Both Japan and India rely on

their private sector, though in smaller quantum in contrast to China, which operates through its state-owned big companies.

In addition to the differences in the use of instruments related to investments and trade, Japan and India have another approach compared to China concerning the sectors of activity. Japan spurred \$4 billion in green initiatives that focused on sustainable economic growth and the integration of African economies into the global economy and in 'high-quality infrastructure' in contrast to what it depicted as 'substandard' Chinese infrastructure (Morreale, Jain, 2022). Russia remains the largest supplier of grain to this continent, with 30% of Africa's needs. Wheat constitutes 95% of these grain supplies with 11.9 million tons worth \$3.3 billion, while 80% of these wheat exports went to North Africa (Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia), as well as Nigeria, Ethiopia, Sudan, and South Africa (Siegle, 2023).

- Financial aid and assistance

Major powers provided financial assistance through loans, facilities, and donations to implement their investments and trade exchanges in Africa. The objective remains the same: securing markets through financial inducements, although this financial assistance differed from one major power to another.

China privileges cooperating with African official authorities, while Japan prefers dealing with civil societies and NGOs and focusing on governance and human rights. Japan sought an alternative lending policy to the Chinese approach by pledging, at TICAD 8 held in Tunis in August 2022, \$30 billion to spend on training African professionals, and promoting food production, and green growth. Still, Japanese engagement was below that accorded by China (\$40 billion) at the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation held in Dakar in 2021. Furthermore, China has extended debt relief worth over \$2bn to develop projects under a G20 framework known as the Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI). Some of the beneficiary countries include Angola, Ethiopia, Zambia, and Djibouti. Beijing has also waived some debts for Congo (Africans on China, 2021).

Despite the negative connotations linked with the assistance major powers provided to Africa, it remains that many African countries still rely on this aid, perhaps forced to meet urgent domestic needs. As a direct

consequence of the Ukraine-Russia war, African countries received more financial assistance from major world powers to compensate, partly, for the rise in food prices. The United States secured \$4.5 billion for food security for the benefit of Africa at the G7 Summit held in June 2022 (Whitehouse, 2022). France also promised to help African agriculture with its Food and Agriculture Resilience Mission (FARM). Russia did not pledge financial assistance, instead, it would "supply food and crops only to its friends, because food was its 'quiet' weapon," former Russian president Dmitry Medvedev declared in March 2022. He alluded, perhaps, to the fact that Russia may 'weaponize' commodities (*Al Jazeera*, 2022). During a visit to Bamako in February 2023, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov hoped that the supplies of wheat, fertilizers, and oil products from his country would resume shortly (Iratni, 2023a).

-The problematic transfer of technological innovation

Africa needs huge foreign investments, technology transfers, and expertise that major powers are less inclined to provide. The main concerns of developed nations lay on securing raw materials and energy supplies as well as market shares and not on permitting African countries to get access to modern technologies. Indeed, the stage of industrialization is becoming obsolete, as the world has moved to digital technologies, rendering the transformation process of raw materials into consuming products not as vital as it used to be in the past.

Major powers seem quite reluctant to contribute to the sustainable development of Africa by adopting new technologies, investing in machinery, and securing reliable supplies. Conversely, African enterprises should refrain from imitating the processes and technologies of foreign firms. There is a need to find innovative solutions to transform, digital, sectors of the African economy, such as education, agriculture, and health.

Major powers should offer investments to support homegrown digital solutions in Africa because the transfer of innovative technologies is not easy. However, US technology firms are returning to Africa to test artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies because of this continent's variety of entrepreneurial ecosystems, such as tech incubators, accelerators, and co-working spaces.

The Science, Technology, and Innovation Strategy for Africa 2024 (STISA 2024), adopted by the heads of government and States, urged member States to build technical competencies, invest in STI infrastructure, promote innovation and entrepreneurship, and put in place national and regional STI policies (AU.Int, 2024).

IV-The new world power game: Africa in the eye of the storm?

The new cold war that is sweeping the world has greatly shaped African politics in the sense that the competition between major powers seems more accentuated. Thus, Africa tends to fall heavily in this power scramble and shifting alignments, a matter that questions its ability to emerge as a powerhouse to shape not only its destiny but also the future configuration of the world system.

-Enduring foreign entanglements in a rapidly changing context

A journal excerpt has outlined that "foreign military intervention in Africa is controversial when happens, and occasionally controversial when it does not"(The New Humanitarian, 2017). This is perhaps the striking paradox of Africa, and it remains controversial that African countries have subtly profited from foreign military interventions, whatever the justifications evoked.

The military initiatives conducted by France and the United Kingdom during the civil war that occurred in Libya in 2011, have pushed the United Nations Security Council to launch air strikes to "protect civilians" in this country. Rather, they have contributed to creating political chaos, encouraging the emergence of jihadist movements, and hastening the fragmentation of this country.

France's military presence in Africa is shrinking because it failed to defeat terrorist groups in the Sahel-Sahara region and calm down the popular protests against French domination over its West African former colonies that have occurred since 2021.

Russia intervened directly in Libya in support of the forces backed by Marshall Haftar's Libyan National Army, which contested the authority of the UN-recognized Government of the National Union (GNA) based in Tripoli. In contrast, Turkey came to rescue the GNA with troops and arms to secure its geostrategic interests, which consisted of gaining access to

Libya's energy resources and protecting naval routes in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea, amid hostilities shown by some countries, notably Greece (Iratni, 2018).

To help some African countries preserve their control over their natural resources, and fight the rebels who contest their political authority and legitimacy, Russia prompted to send officers and military experts to these conflict-ridden countries. In addition, the Wagner groups, supposedly private mercenaries landed in Libya to support the forces of Marshall Haftar. They assisted Sudan's President Omar El Bashir to curb a growing opposition to his regime (Russia Monitor, 2019), and protect the regime of Faustin-Archange Touadéra, which faced a rebellion after the withdrawal of French troops from the Central African Republic (ADF, 2022). They landed also in Mozambique to back the regime's fight against Islamic insurgents who sought to get control of Cabo Delgado, a Muslim-dominated gas-rich province.

Media reports that Russia is increasing efforts to influence elections in some African countries since its strategy focuses on shoring up authoritarian regimes in unstable yet resource-rich States, such as Mozambique, Madagascar, and RCA (Sauer, 2022). It was also reported that several officers involved in the August 2020 coup in Mali had recently returned from training in Russia (Siegle, 2023). Elsewhere in Africa, Russia tried to hasten the weakening of French military presence in Central and West Africa and hurried to fill the security vacuum left by France's withdrawal from the Republic of Central Africa, Mali, and Burkina Faso because of the emergence of regimes hostile to Françafrique, perceived as a means to perpetuate French neo-colonialism.

The Chinese People's Navy (PLA) has been active in fighting maritime terrorism and piracy in the Pacific Ocean in coordination with countries in the Horn of Africa and with facilities provided by the Chinese naval base located in Djibouti. It has employed more than 40 naval task forces in Africa, escorted 7.000 Chinese and foreign ships, and conducted port calls, joint military drills, and offshore military education, which led to improved interoperability, knowledge of foreign forces, surveillance, and intelligence skills across Africa, at a relatively low cost (Chaudhry, 2023).

Such a deployment suitably fits China's basing ambitions in the Indian and Atlantic Oceans, based on the need to have a military component to

sustain its 'One Belt, One Road' grand economic design. China is strengthening this approach to respond to the United States-inspired 'Build Back Better World Partnership' launched in June 2021 by the G7 advanced economies.

-Unexpected shifting alignments

The war in Ukraine induced some important fractures within the world's great geostrategic spaces, which may lead to new alliances and question Africa's weight in the coming world geostrategic configuration.

One can notice recently, the reluctance of Europe to fully support Kyiv in its war against Moscow, the hesitation of NATO to confront Russia, the pledge of French President Macron for the 'strategic autonomy' of Europe vis-à-vis the US. Other world realignments are occurring, such as the reinforcement of the BRICS, the Chinese-Russian 'honeymoon,' the Saudi-Iran rapprochement, and the decision taken by Japan and India to launch the 'Asian-Africa growth corridor' in order to counterbalance Chinese 'Road and Belt Initiative.' Furthermore, Japan did not fail to express resentment against China's ambitions and attempted to offset Chinese influence in Africa by promoting private investments in this continent, lobbying to reform the UN Security Council and obtain a permanent seat in this organ to inflict Asian representation, which has fallen into the exclusive hands of China (Pathirana, 2021). Arguably, these new international shifts may benefit Africa providing adaptation measures and adequate global reforms. Globally, African countries prefer to stick to the principles of non-alignment to avoid "being pigeonholed as part of a Western position or an Eastern position," says Alex Vines (Chatham House, 2023).

There is a belief that a multipolar world would create geopolitical opportunities for Africa, especially under the impulse of a rising China, on the one hand, and an insurgent Russia, on the other. Probably, the war in Ukraine will boost China's Global Security Initiative that aims to promote convergent security interests with the African continent. Such an initiative would 'build effective and sustainable security architecture and create an opening for African countries with fractured relations with the West, who would likely find a security partnership with China attractive' (Mboya, 2022).

-The harsh process of making Africa a powerhouse

As foreign powers are wooing Africa amid the new global tensions, this continent may "benefit from this rivalry if it plays its cards astutely, and does not rush towards the first courtier with what seems like a good deal," said a British political scientist (*Al Jazeera*, 2023). Concisely, Africa would greatly benefit from eschewing the role of a rustic pendulum between the Eastern and Western blocs.

A diplomatic offensive is unfolding in Africa in the light of increasing rivalry between the United States Russia and China mainly, and is currently playing out more clearly on the African continent than at any other time since the Cold War.

Antony Blinken, the US Secretary of State, visited South Africa, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Rwanda in early August 2022. In Pretoria, Antony Blinken considered the US-South Africa Strategic Dialogue as a "vital forum and a serious commitment of both countries and not only as a joint work but also regionally and globally" (*Al Jazeera*, 2022b).

Sergei Lavrov, the Russian Foreign Minister toured many African countries in July 2022 and January 2023, and expressed his appreciation related to "the considered African position as to the situation in and around Ukraine" (*Al Jazeera*, 2022).

French President Emmanuel Macron went to Cameroon, Benin, and Guinea-Bissau in July 2022. In Yaoundé, Emmanuel Macron affirmed that France "remains resolutely committed to the security of the continent, acting in support and at the request of our African" (France 24, 2022). This declaration aims to reassure France's support to the fight waged by the Sahel-Sahara countries against terrorism, despite the partial withdrawal of the French troops deployed in this region, and military pullout from Mali and Niger. These moves resulted from a tactical change in French security strategy that favored a supportive role to local forces rather than taking the lead in this fight, and from criticisms made against French military presence in the Sahel-Sahara region, as highlighted by street protests organized in some Sahel Saharan capitals in 2022-3.

The European Union incepted a new cooperation framework with Africa through a 'renewed partnership' and a joint vision for 2030

announced in February 2022. At this meeting, Africa spoke in the name of its interests and not as "an annex of global powers" (Yade, 2022).

The war in Ukraine gave many African countries the latitude and opportunity to disentangle from the influence and dependency on major powers, according to the following considerations:

-On the political level:

Twenty-eight out of 54 African countries supported the resolution adopted by the United Nations in March 2022 urging the immediate and complete withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukraine. In addition, only 10 African countries voted in April of the same year in favor of the resolution that intended to suspend Russia's membership in the Council of UN Human Rights. These voting attitudes confirmed the non-alignment of many African countries with the Western theses, despite their heavy economic, financial, and military dependence on the United States, and the European Union (Iratni 2023a).

-On the economic level:

The setting up of the African Continental Free-Trade Area (AfCTFA) will bring bright prospects to the African global economy according to the World Bank's projections. This international financial institution expects AfCTFA to lift 30 million Africans out of extreme poverty, boost the incomes of nearly 68 million other Africans who live on less than \$5.5 a day, increase the continent's income by \$540 billion by 2030, and spur Africa's exports by \$650 billion (The World Bank, 2020).

The excessive rise of the prices of grain and food products due to the consequences of the war in Ukraine will certainly incite Africa to reverse its situation from being a self-sufficient food producer in the 1970s to a large food importer in the 2020s. The African continent has 60 % of the world's available arable land, and agriculture is the source of livelihood for 70 percent of the population. Yet, the continent generates only 10 percent of global agricultural output (AU food security).

There is a need to facilitate access to land, increase food production, and reduce the effects of drought and climate change. AU's Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Program (CAADP) has recommended measures to develop agro-processing and market sectors, ensure the

transition to a green economy by promoting sustainable natural resource management, disseminating innovation and technology for the transformation of agriculture (AU.int, 2021).

-On the demographic level:

Africa boasts a huge youth potential. In recent years, a little more than one billion Africans have outpaced Asia in terms of annual growth, with a rate of 2.6 % compared to 1.1%. By 2030, Africa will host a population of 1.7 billion people, while projections indicate that by 2050, Africa's population will double, and one in every four people in the world will be African (*The New York Times*, 2023). Moreover, by 2100, one in three people on Earth will come from Africa, and this continent will be the host of almost half of the young people in the world (Council on Foreign Relations, 2020).

Conclusion:

Major powers could benefit by empowering Africa and helping it to become a responsible international actor and a reliable partner, rather than considering this continent as a source of economic plunder, a stage for wars by proxy, and a pollution dustbin. The adhesion of the AU to the G20 Group in September 2023 seems a good progress in this direction.

Major powers should take off lenses that depict Africa as a crippled continent vowed to political chaos and economic bankruptcy. They need to enter new partnerships void of paternalistic attitudes or temptations of hegemony.

Equally, the responsibility for the many plagues in Africa resulted from bad governance, lack of democracy, and the ill management of national economies. Moreover, authoritarian rule is taking firm roots in Africa, after a period of transitional democratic experiments.

If it is obvious that there is no development without security, it is also evident that there is no human progress without democracy. What is pertinent to ensure, is human security in its broader sense, and the emancipation of societies and individuals. Empowering civil societies remains the impetus to build solid States and powerful armies, able to efficiently fight terrorism and generate sustainable development through the subtle use of digital devices and innovative technologies. Africa has not

only the needed human potential but also abundant natural resources, particularly rare minerals. What is lacking is only political will.

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