

## CHINESE AMBITIOUS STRIVE TO LEAD A NEW WORLD ORDER AND ITS IMPLICATION FOR THE AFRICAN CONTINENT

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### ABSTRACT

The World is presently undergoing two critical transitions – the energy transition to net zero emissions, which has become a topic of great concerns because of the existential threat to humanity, and a possible geopolitical world order transition from the Western-dominated Bretton wood system, to a multipolar, shared future model orchestrated by China and its allies. China has become a fierce contender of the global leadership with a mantra for a change from the American led World Order, having itself benefited immensely from the Bretton wood institutions under the American hegemony. With its economic growth and technological advancement, China is now championing a new world order, and many countries are already aligning with this vision, especially as China provides huge economic support in the form of loans and through its One Belt One Road Initiatives, which, without doubt has benefited some countries on the African continent. China's call is also clearly heard in the formation and rapid expansion of BRICS Group, which has also been welcome by other countries, as a platform to break free from the Western hegemony. That notwithstanding, China generous infrastructural project, has in most cases been branded as a debt trap, and this is where it is important for Africa to be more careful and detailed when negotiating any debt with China. Africa must also remain unaligned in view of the current scramble by both Western and Eastern Powers for its natural resources to fuel their energy demands, especially for rare earth minerals for the energy transition technologies. Africa must visibly wear its Africana Agenda in any fora to protect its political and economic sovereignty, while dealing with its Western and Eastern suitors for its resources.

**Keywords:** World order, BRICS, One Belt One Road Initiative, Bretton Wood, Debt trap.

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

World order as a term could mean different things when viewed from either analytical or prescriptive lenses: world order under the analytical context refers to the arrangement of power and authority that provides the framework for the conduct of diplomacy and world politics on a global scale. Prescriptively, world order carries the idea of a preferred arrangement of power and authority that is associated with the realization of such values as peace, economic growth and equity, human rights, and environmental quality and sustainability. (Falk, 2023). Though, the term resonates more in contemporary world, Grinin et al, 2016, noted that the idea of world order has had its origin from ancient times with no clear framework, as humanity walked through a long and perilous way to the establishment of certain international rules and foundations of co-existence. It is evident that the relations between states emerge following the establishment of certain system of states, which took place only in the third millennium BC

with clear evidence of upswing and downswing cycles of political hegemony. Early episodes of the struggle for hegemony in the core of the Afro Eurasian world-system (in the Near East) according to Grinin et al, 2016, are associated with the rises and falls of the Old Babylonian and Old Assyrian Kingdom (the first half of the second millennium BCE), a clash between the New Kingdom of Egypt and the Hittite Empire (the second half of the second millennium BCE), New Babylonian and Neo-Assyrian Empire (the first half of the first millennium BCE). At that time, the region was the most advanced (and the largest) part of the cultural oecumene, or the known, or habitable world, which positions the clashes within its realm as ancestral for the struggle for the global order.

The struggle for hegemony, no doubt enhanced the links within the world system and supported its unity despite the discord among the ancient states. The struggle also birthed diffusion of innovations, in particular, of iron metallurgy in the late second and first millennia BCE, which unfortunately, has remained the turf since ancient times until the present for violent fights at external arenas for technological advances. It is widely known that by the end of the Middle Ages and beginning of the Age of Discoveries (when globalization had started its new powerful expansion) the political landscape of the forming world system had experienced numerous transformations. (Grinin et al, 2016).

## 1.1 The Progenitor of modern World Order or System

For several centuries, the defining framework for world order has been primarily associated with the Peace of Westphalia negotiated in 1648 at the end of the more than thirty years war, and treated as the beginning of the modern world (Falk, 2023). The Peace of Westphalia, signed in 1648, ended the thirty years wars from 1618-1648 between feuding Catholic and Protestant estates within the Holy Roman Empire which gradually evolved to become a conflict involving most of Europe. The war was also, and more importantly as far as the lasting effects on international affairs is concerned, about the right of princes in the Empire to sovereign rule. Throughout the conflict, the Catholic Hapsburgs fought Protestant princes of Germany who were supported by France, Sweden, and Denmark (Patton, 2019). The Peace of Westphalia thus created the framework for modern international relations, which includes the concepts of state sovereignty, mediation between nations, and diplomacy. This peace, which consisted of two different peace conferences, was the first attempt at modern international diplomacy and formally solidified the beginnings of religious toleration from a political perspective. It was one of the first attempts at codifying an international set of laws and essentially provided the basis for international communities like the European Union and the United Nations and even laid the groundwork for an early American nation. The Westphalian system remains the model for international politics around the world and the concept of state sovereignty, solidified by the peace, is still the basis for modern international treaties and conventions. (Patton, 2019).

According to Falk, 2023, this statist world order was clearly Eurocentric in nature that hinged on the relationships between the main European states and with non-Western political communities based on hierarchy, with the superior Western states as lords over the subordinated non-Western states. The characteristic form for this hierarchical arrangement was based on colonial empires, with the Western actors as autocratic in character pillared under their monarchical structures. It is important to understand that this state system exhibited a strong tension between a series of juridical ideas based on the equality and autonomy of states

and the realities of power that reflected inequalities. Falk, 2023 added that the state system evolved largely through tests of power associated with the major states as war was considered a discretionary instrument of a sovereign state. That the states used the instrument of war as a legislative function in the absence of a reliable peaceful means to achieve adjustments in view of changing power balances and differing policy priorities.

While the formal protocols of the Westphalian form of world order did give rise to norms of mutual respect for territorial sovereignty, the geopolitical protocols of power paid little attention to such restraints. As was earlier mentioned in this paper, the Westphalian peace agreement was precursor to the American Revolution, and particularly the French Revolution, both of which, inadvertently shifted the world order focus to internal state/society relations and ended the autocratic traditions of monarchy that had dominated domestic politics in the early centuries of the Westphalian era. The American Revolution brought an initial legitimization of anti-colonial wars of emancipation by enshrining political independence from the British Empire, which further led to both political and economic independence and the emergence of democracy, with its distinctive American, republican state. The French revolution on the order hand ended, at least temporarily, royal rule, and proclaiming liberty, equality, and fraternity as 'the rights of man' (now 'humans'), as the necessary foundation of a legitimate state, not only for France, but for any sovereign political community. It was this French idea of rights, also embodied in the American Declaration of Independence that laid the foundation for the ethos of self-determination, which was not set forth explicitly until more than a century later. (Falk, 2023).

## 2.0 THE BRETTON WOOD WORLD ORDER

The Bretton Wood Agreement, which would later transmute into the American Century or World Order was reached in 1944 by 730 delegates, who were the representatives of the 44 allied nations at the time when the world economy was very shaky, and the allied nations were seeking for solutions that would address the prevailing issues that plagued economic system. Though that gathering was essentially designed to address pressing international financial relations following the war (its formal name was the United Nations Monetary and Financial Conference), its impact soon extended to the political sphere as well, and by extension to associated legal and social issues. The Bretton Wood Agreement or System was thus founded on the enduring principles of political democracy, market-based economic transactions, and transparent international rules, regulations, and laws. (Jannace and Tiffany, 2019)

The Bretton Wood System was to provide, as of then, an enduring solution to the global economy, caused by self-centered and uncoordinated policy decisions made by independent state actors who placed their own perceived needs above all else, regardless of collateral outcomes. While such behavior might have had relatively negligible consequence in prior times, the increasing interconnectedness of the world system through advances in technology and trade relations, spurred by the leadership of Great Britain in the latter half of the 19th Century, meant that unilateral decision making could have serious and potentially mortal spill-over effects for other participants, whether active or innocent bystanders. (Jannace and Tiffany, 2019). Prior to the Bretton Wood System, the world was run through "Great Power" rivalries and intrigues from the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1814 up to the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, with all European states, and later by both the United States and Japan as key its

participants. The result of course was a world system so fragile that disruption and chaos were almost bound to occur at some point, which it finally did in horrifying fashion, starting in 1914 and lasting through 1945. Only the unprecedented destruction of World War II forced the termination to that old order, generating from its ashes a belief by many that finally the time for tectonic-level change had arrived.

Under new leadership from a remarkable union of men, principally Americans who had not previously commanded a world stage, these individuals were fiercely determined to prevent future catastrophes through a fundamental reordering of the fractured world system. The result was the conference at Bretton Woods that gave birth to a new World Order or System. Though the British economist J. Maynard Keynes, the creator of macroeconomics and arguably the greatest economic theoretician since Adam Smith, was the principal architect of many of the new concepts encased in the Bretton Wood System, it was the principles and concepts enshrined in the American experiment of nationhood that ultimately emerged as the foundational factors in the Bretton wood system. This emergence of the Bretton Wood System thus threw off the historical isolationism that had hindered an American role in world affairs for so long, and in its place an embrace of global economic and political engagement based on a philosophy of Western values regarding trade and finance: the rule of laws and regulations, and adjudicative means to resolve differences as they arose. (Jannace and Tiffany, 2019).

These Western values formed the basis of the various institutions created out of the Bretton Wood System to manage outcomes in an orderly and principled fashion that valued economic (and related political) stability. The institutions included the International Monetary Fund (“IMF”), the World Bank, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (“IBRD”), the “Bretton Woods Agreement” itself that set fixed currency exchange rates among participant nations, and the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (the GATT, a watered down substitute for the originally proposed International Trade Organization (“ITO”) that was vetoed by recalcitrant isolationist elements of the Republican Party in the US Senate). The GATT was replaced by the World Trade Organization (“WTO”) as the principal global body regulating international commerce in 1995. (Jannace and Tiffany, 2019).

With time, these institutions with the Bretton Wood Agreement became loosely defined as the “Washington Consensus,” upon which the global economy would operate under a market system of exchange and favoritism for deregulation over public controls, the liberalization of trade and the reduction of cross-border barriers, the preeminence of the private sector over state enterprise, and respect for private property and legal mechanisms to insure its protection. Through the Bretton Wood System was original conceived as an economic system, it later evolved to include political and legal underpinning, such as democracy, judicial system equity and transparency, a respect for individual freedoms such as expression, religion, and other basic human rights. (Jannace and Tiffany, 2019). To ensure proper management of these principles, newer institutions emerged such as the United Nations (“UN”) and its several off-shoots (e.g., UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (“UNESCO”), and the International Labor Organization (“ILO”), originally formed in 1919 and integrated into the UN in 1946), the International Court of Justice, the Permanent Court of Arbitration (“PCA”), and many other such bodies formed in the post-World War II era to address international issues as the nations of the world converged into what has been defined as “globalization.” The new world order also means bringing in defense-related organizations such as The North Atlantic Treaty

Organization (“NATO”) and the relatively short-lived South East Asia Treaty Organization (“SEATO”), as well as various UN agencies devoted to non-nuclear proliferation. (Jannace and Tiffany, 2019).

Undoubtedly, a direct result of the Bretton Wood System was the opening and deepening of financial, technological, and trade channels between nations both large and small, advanced and emerging, hemispherically north and south, with a rise in global wealth and prosperity. While wealth and income distribution obviously did not quickly shift to perfect (or even reasonable) equality, the establishment of capitalist regimes in far flung corners of the world that had not previously been able to participate in such a system did generate hope and aspirations for millions, especially so in the so-called “emerging markets.” A more significant outcome of the Bretton Wood System was the management of global conflicts to avert another global war, and perhaps the ultimate vindication of the beneficial effects of the Bretton wood System was the demise and disintegration of the Soviet Union in December of 1991.

Finally, and yet ironically, according to Jannace and Tiffany, 2019, a collateral outcome of the BWS was the rise of the Emerging Nations especially that of the People’s Republic of China, an event that is arguably the most significant transformation since the maturation of the United States as the world’s premier economic power in the latter decades of the 19th Century. Sadly, this unintended consequences of the rise of China through the Bretton Wood System, has turned out to portend a possible end to the Bretton Wood System as China represents a powerful threat to the underlying values and principles of what the Bretton Woods System stood for.

### **3.0 THE GLOBAL WORLD ORDER AND THE PERIOD OF THE COLD WAR**

The Cold War was a period of geopolitical tension marked by competition and confrontation between communist nations led by the Soviet Union and Western democracies including the United States. Though, the United States and the Soviets fought together as allies against Nazi Germany during World War II, their relations were never truly friendly, as Americans had long been wary of Soviet communism and Russian leader Joseph Stalin’s tyrannical rule. The Soviets on the other hand resented Americans’ refusal to give them a leading role in the international community, as well as America’s delayed entry into World War II, in which millions of Russians died. These grievances ripened into an overwhelming sense of mutual distrust and enmity that never developed into open warfare (thus the term “cold war”). Soviet expansionism into Eastern Europe fueled many Americans’ fears of a Russian plan to control the world. Meanwhile, the Soviet Union came to resent what they perceived as America’s officials’ bellicose rhetoric, arms buildup and strident approach to international relations. In such a hostile atmosphere, no single party was entirely to blame for the Cold War; in fact, some historians believe it was inevitable. (History.Com Editors, 2023)

#### **3.1 The End of the Cold War and its Effects on Global World Order**

President Richard Nixon (1913-1994) of United States of America, as soon as he took office, began to implement a new approach to international relations, by attempting to dislodge the hostile, “bi-polar” system into one that requires diplomacy instead of military action to create more poles. Nixon thus encouraged the United Nations to recognize the communist Chinese government and, after a trip there in 1972, began to establish diplomatic relations with Beijing. At the same time, he adopted a policy of “détente”-”relaxation” toward the Soviet Union. In

1972, he and Soviet premier Leonid Brezhnev (1906-1982) signed the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT I), which prohibited the manufacture of nuclear missiles by both sides and took a step toward reducing the decades-old threat of nuclear war. Regardless of these well intentioned efforts by Nixon, the Cold War heated up again under President Ronald Reagan (1911-2004), who like many leaders of his generation, believed that the spread of the communist systems and ideologies anywhere in the world threatened freedom everywhere. President Reagan, then as part of the Pax-Americana ideology and World Order, evolved what became known as the Reagan Doctrine by providing financial and military aid to anticommunist governments and insurgencies around the world, especially in the developing world in places like Grenada and El Salvador. (History.Com Editors 2023)

While President Reagan continued his fight on communism in Central America, the Soviet Union was unfortunately facing threats of disintegration due to severe economic problems and growing political, which propelled Premier Mikhail Gorbachev to introduce two policies-“glasnost” or political openness, and “perestroika,” or economic reform in 1985. Soviet influence eventually waned out in Eastern Europe, and in 1989, every other communist state in the region replaced its government with a noncommunist one. In November 1989, the Berlin Wall—the most visible symbol of the decades-long Cold War was finally destroyed, just over two years after Reagan had challenged the Soviet premier in a speech at Brandenburg Gate in Berlin: “Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall.” By 1991, the Soviet Union itself had fallen apart, leading to the final knell of the the Cold War. (History.Com Editors 2023)

### 3.2 The Post-Cold War Era

The end of the Cold War in the early 1990s has had a dual impact on international relations—the withdrawal of the Soviet military from Eastern Europe and the democratization process in many states previously ruled by Marxist dictatorships, which aided in resolving several Third World conflicts that had become prolonged during the Cold War. The end of the cold war also reduced the East-West tension and the attendant inter-state conflicts, some of which occurred due to the superpower ideological rivalry during the Cold War. (Yilmaz, 2008).

The end of the Cold War can be said to have brought about both stability and instability to international relations: the collapse of the “Soviet Empire” brought about the emergence, or re-emergence, of many serious conflicts in several areas that had been relatively quiescent during the Cold War. Some of these new conflicts have been taking place within the former Soviet Union, such as the war between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh, and the fighting in Chechnya. There were also other conflicts such as religious militancy, terrorism, North-South conflict, and severe competition over scarce resources. With the collapse of communist regimes in Eastern Europe and disintegration of the Soviet Union, the bipolar international system dominating the Cold War period disappeared, leaving its place to basically a unipolar system under the leadership of the United States, speaking especially from a military/political point of view: other countries turned to American military protection. Consequently, the “American Empire” or hegemony spread as far as the Persian Gulf, Iraq, and the Middle East, in general, where the armed forces of the United States have established a semi-permanent foothold and thousands of soldiers deployed at bases keep a watch on Iran, Syria, and other “potential enemies”. The American military presence in the Persian Gulf for example, guaranteed weak states against attacks by their stronger neighbors, while their

presence in Asia stabilized the region in which a number of states might otherwise feel compelled to develop much larger military forces than they currently have, such as in Japan, where the American military protects Japan against foreign enemies. (Yilmaz, 2008)

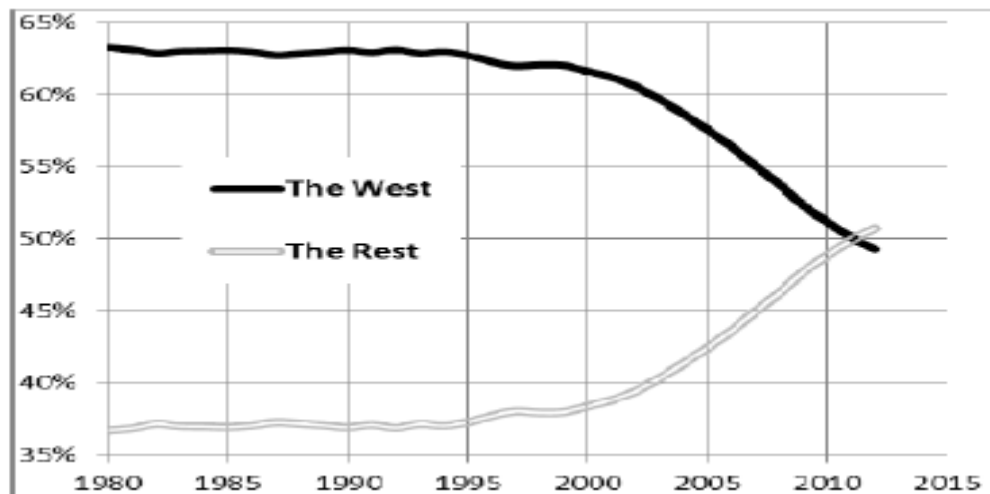
Moreover, the American military power enhances military coalition, both permanent (such as NATO) and ad hoc (such as peacekeeping missions), something that would also encourage other countries to often follow, even if reluctantly, when America leads the coalition. The presence of the American military also provided a check on almost any country that would want to embark on the use of force beyond its borders. The end of the Cold War also brought about a multipolar international system, that though the United States exhibited great economic power, but it is not the only power, as there are other power centers, most notably, the European Union, the Organization of Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, as well as many nation-states outside of these integrations or organizations. For instance, the United States insisted on sharing the cost of the military operations in Kuwait, Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere with other major powers or relevant countries, which is a reflection of a mixture of both unipolar and multipolar system in which at least five major powers, the United States, Europe, China, Japan, and Russia, dominate in international affairs. Another feature of the post-Cold War era is the influence and dominance of Western systems and Western influences. NATO expanded to involve Eastern Europe, a region previously under the Soviet influence; in the same way, the European Union expanded towards Eastern Europe, symbolizing, once again. Particularly with the 2004 expansion, eight formerly communist countries, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Poland, Hungary, Slovenia, Slovakia, and Check Republic (with the exception of Cyprus and Malta) joined the Union. And in 2007, two other previously communist states, Bulgaria and Romania, became full members of the European Union.

Finally, the dissolution of the Soviet Union, shattering the bipolar system, resulted in power gaps in some regions and triggered struggles for influence. In the post-Cold War environment, states that seemed to be in the same bloc or former allies became competing rivals. For instance, the European Union, as well as Japan, rose as rival centers of power against established United States dominance, so also the rise of China and the resurgence of the Russian Federation as powerful rivals to the United States. States -or integrations- aspiring to become world powers (such as Russia, China, and the European Union), are all seeking to strengthen their position as regional powers with burgeoning ambition to become global powers in the future (like Iran and Turkey), while the United States still holding onto its position continued to strategize to reach their goals in Eurasia. (Yilmaz, 2008)

#### **4.0 THE CRISES AND CHALLENGES OF THE “PAX-AMERICAN EMPIRE”**

The collapse of the socialist bloc and the Soviet Union destroyed the previous bipolar world order and led to the establishment of a hegemony dominated by America. This Western dominated world started in the late 1980s and early 1990s and became almost synonymous to the idea of Pax Americana. However, while this dominance continued, there began another shift in the world order, caused by the countries' uneven economic and technological development. So over the last three or four decades, globalization has been constantly and significantly effecting the changes in the world order, with a visible shift towards the developing world. One of the main reasons was the so-called ‘deindustrialization’ which meant a transition of a significant part of production, economy, and technology from developed to

developing countries. The result is the Western countries' weakening economic growth and their diminishing role in the global arena, while the rest of the world (developing countries) increases the influence as shown in Figure. 1. (Grinin et al, 2016). Thus, during the two decades starting from 1991, as the European economies experienced weakening growth and continuing stagnation in Japan, some developing economies began to emerge in Asia (China and India) and in other developing regions (from Mexico to Malaysia).



**Fig. 1. Dynamics of the share of the West and the rest of the world ('the Rest') in the global GDP after 1980 (based on the World Bank data on the GDP calculated in 2005 purchasing power parity international dollars)**

The American Empire suffered a great set back in 2001, being at the peak of their might, when the United States America, USA, was stricken by unexpected 9/11 events, which heralded a turning point in their foreign policy. The USA thus abandoned their own principles of freedom and started surveillance over their own citizens, as well as the leaders and population of other countries, and completely ignored the international law and principle of sovereignty. The financial and economic crises of 2006–2010 also pointed to the descent of the Pax Americana world order. The American people were thus left with the hope of a technological or other miracle that will revive the American power, or for the US ability to control the rivals. It became obvious that ascent to a new world leadership will strongly depend on who will lead this new technological pattern, especially if these innovations are converted into military supremacy. (Grinin et al, 2016). This is why both developed and emerging and developing economies spend significant portions on innovative technologies. But it is quite clear that the USA has much more financial resources, and hence can continue to hold the leading position preserve its world leadership for a much longer time. This notwithstanding, the burden of the only superpower is beginning to weigh heavily on America and overwhelming, and according to some political analysts and economists, hopes for a prompt and avalanching failure of the USA are groundless: it probably will proceed gradually while objective circumstances, including the growth of peripheral countries will promote it. (Grinin et al, 2016)

According to Grinin et al, 2016, while, the world hastily looks towards a new non-American world order, indeed the weakening of the USA leadership will bring with it an avalanche of



problems, as it will not be just a simple change of the leadership, but will lead to the fundamental change of the whole structure of the world economic and political order, since the USA concentrates too many aspects of the global leadership. A new world leader will have to thus build such concentrates in different spheres of the global community, a situation that may not happen in the immediate future, no other country now, will be able to concentrate as many leader's functions simultaneously as held by the USA.

## 4.1 The Epoch of New Coalitions and the Outlines of the New World Order

Thus, the search for a new balance has brought the world to the period which can be referred to as the epoch of new coalitions, which can be exemplified by the formation of BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa). First introduced in 2001 by an American analyst Jim O'Neil as an appropriate acronym, BRICS has become quite a real, dynamic, and multilinear alliance. Within the BRICS framework trade with the partners tends to increase, with China playing especially important role in this regard. Unfortunately, there is an insufficient cooperation between the BRICS partners in cultural, scientific, educational and technological spheres; also the member-states' intellectual influence on the global processes is far from the American influence. To implement the idea of the rise of BRICS and related developing countries, there should be developed an ideology which will attract 'intellectual masses'. (Grinin et al, 2016)

Evidently, the BRICS coalition has won the appeal of many more countries, with more than 40 countries including Iran, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Argentina, Algeria, Bolivia, Indonesia, Egypt, Ethiopia, Cuba, Democratic Republic of Congo, Comoros, Gabon, Kazakhstan and Nigeria, that expressing interest in joining the bloc, and despite pre-summit reports of division over the potential expansion, leaders from the five-nation bloc announced that Saudi Arabia, Iran, Ethiopia, Egypt, Argentina and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) would join the group starting in 2024. With the addition of these six countries, BRICS now represents 42 percent of the world's population and 36 percent of global GDP. The primarily economic bloc was originally created as an alternative to the U.S.-led international order, with the goal of offering growing countries in the Global South a counterbalance to Western institutions. (Ashby et al, 2023). While the flexibility of partnerships within the World-System framework will probably increase for some time, some of the emerging alliances and coalitions can turn chimeric, ephemeral or fantastic. According to Grinin et al, 2016, some of the new alliances and coalitions will transform from temporary into permanent ones and become effective supranational forms. During this process some new norms of international law will be developed whose necessity has already been much spoken about for some decades. Thus, the foundations of the future world order must undergo certain transformations. Grinin et al, 2016 opined that the new world order must necessarily call for: 1) a rather solid balance of power and interests; 2) new models of the supranational government and coordination of the global processes; and 3) new ideologies.

Achieving the first task would require parties to recognize the principle of pluralism of political regimes when any regime (including the democratic one) has its advantages and drawbacks. The refusal to impose democracy at all accounts can become a crucial constituent in creating a common frame of interests and rules. Reaching a compromise in the second task will further require parties to reject the idea of universal democracy at all levels. The European Union's

experience has shown that at the supranational scale the democratic procedures work rather improperly. The new world order would thus need a comprehensive search for new patterns which would lack an ideological bias. (Grinin et al, 2016).

## 5.0 THE EMERGENCE OF CHINA AND ITS GEOPOLITICAL AMBITIONS

For most of the twentieth century, despite some positive developments, China was not internationally perceived as "rising." due to excessive foreign intervention, ideological struggles between Communists and Nationalists, a devastating 1937–1945 war with Japan, followed by a civil war. (Tai-Ting Liu, 2018). There was also the Mao's successful 1949 Communist Revolution that greatly reduced agricultural production in China and led to mass famine between 1958–1962, while the 1966–1976 Cultural Revolution threw the country into a decade of hierarchical struggles and social chaos. By 1976, although China had begun to recover from the worst devastations of the Cultural Revolution, it was an economically backward country compared to Western Europe and Japan. It was not until the succession of Deng Xiaoping in 1978 and his introduction of gradual market reforms that China began to move onto the path of development again. China's rapid growth at an average of 10 percent annually in the post-Cold War period was echoed at the start of the new century by another wave of highspeed growth that averaged more than 10 percent per year for a decade. According to Chinese intellectual and government adviser, Zheng Bijian "China does not seek hegemony or predominance in world affairs . . . China's development depends on world peace—a peace that its development will in turn reinforce." (Tai-Ting Liu, 2018). As growth continued, China's influence soon spilled over into other realms. The rise of China gave way to a global surge of interest in Chinese language, culture, and history, while politically, many observers began debating the power transition between China and the US, and the formation of a new international order hinged on the G-2. Geopolitically, the rise of China has complicated the old post-World War II international order founded on the ideological divide between liberalism and communism, and pushed many countries, particularly in Asia, to make efforts toward adjusting to a new regional reality that is increasingly centered on Chinese and American influences. China's rise challenges US preeminence in Asia and suggests new geopolitical possibilities. (Tai-Ting Liu, 2018). The Chinese President, Xi Jinping has a plan for how the world should work, and one year into his norm-shattering third term as Chinese leader, he's escalating his push to challenge America's global leadership — and put his vision front and center. That bid was in the spotlight like never before last month in Beijing, when Xi, flanked by Russian President Vladimir Putin, United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres, and some two dozen top dignitaries from around the world, hailed China as the only country capable of navigating the challenges of the 21st century. "Changes of the world, of our times, and of historical significance are unfolding like never before," Xi told his audience at the Belt and Road Forum. China, he said, would "make relentless efforts to achieve modernization for all countries" and work to build a "shared future for mankind." (McCarthy, 2023)

### 5.1 The One Belt, One Road Initiative, and the Prospects of China's Rise

As China's economic growth continues, rising past Japan and potentially overtaking the US as the largest economy in the world in the near future under President Xi Jinping, China harbors new ambitions to sustain its growth in the new century. In his visit to Kazakhstan in 2013, Xi announced the establishment of the "One Belt, One Road" OBOR initiative consisting of the

Silk Road Economic Belt and the Twenty-First Century Maritime Silk Road. The OBOR initiative is envisioned to be a global integration project that will realize market integration of more than sixty countries along the planned roads through trade and infrastructural cooperation. (Tai-Ting Liu, 2018). “The Silk Road Economic Belt” and “21st Century Maritime Silk Road” (or Belt and Road Initiative “BRI” hereafter) as shown in figure 2, encompasses 66 countries across Central & Eastern Eurasia and the maritime Asia Pacific. It covers 63% of the global population and over 1/3rd of the world’s GDP. It contains almost every current major world religion, and straddles six of the seven fault lines between civilizations, as envisaged by Samuel P. Huntington. BRI is China’s unilateral vision for the future structure of the greater Eurasian region. It attempts to promote infrastructure connectivity and investment through land-locked continental Eurasia, develop efficient maritime connections from the South China Sea and Africa to Western Europe, and hopes to exert China’s comprehensive geo-economic, geopolitical and strategic influence in the whole region. (Yu, 2019).



**Figure 2:** Map of the BRI

Several scholars have attempted to equate China’s BRI to the Grand Strategy of the U.S. post-WWII in its international significance and objectives. The U.S. over this period of time established multilateral financial institutions including the IMF and the World Bank, and supranational institutions including the United Nations. It initiated the Marshall Plan to promote regional economic growth, NATO as the regional security framework, and the Bretton Woods system to establish the U.S. Dollar-standard for the global monetary system. China has built a comparable multilateral regional framework over this period, very similar to the grand strategy of the U.S. post-WWII. There has been much speculation about the total scale of investment under China’s BRI. Popular estimates range from \$1 trillion to \$8 trillion across the established multilateral investment platforms and debt financing through China’s policy banks, including the China Development Bank and EXIM Bank. (Yu, 2019). China’s BRI works in coordination with President Xi’s Two ‘One Hundred Year Plans’: the first One Hundred Year Plan is that by 2021, upon the centennial anniversary of the founding of the Chinese Communist Party, China should reach the living standards of the poorer countries in Europe; the other is that by 2049, China should attain ‘modernity’, and be among the greatest nations of the world. The Belt and Road Initiative will serve as China’s transitory grand strategy between 2013 and around 2050. If BRI were executed successfully over the coming three decades, China’s ultimate grand strategy by 2050 would be to assert a Chinese version of a

global order. Just as the Post-WWII grand strategy of the U.S. served as the means for the ultimate foreign policy objective of Pax-Americana, BRI is China's grand strategy, but not the end in itself of China's grand strategy, rather a means to its ultimate end, i.e. Pax-Sinica, (Yu, 2019).

In pursuit of its global ambition through the OBOR, China held the first Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in Beijing in May 2017, which was attended by twenty-nine foreign heads of state and representatives from more than 130 countries. In terms of geopolitics, China's pivot toward the West overturned the long-term Eurocentric conception of the world and provides renewed significance to Eurasia. China's turn toward Central Asia is an important move that exposes China's ambition, and thanks to the OBOR initiative, the "five stans" in Central Asia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, suddenly gained in strategic importance and garnered global attention. (Tai-Ting Liu, 2018). Furthermore, Eastern Europe, as the doorway that leads to the terminal point of the Silk Road Economic Belt in the European continent, also advanced its strategic status greatly due to the OBOR initiative. a survey of regional reactions toward China's rise reveals that most countries are wary of the growing influence of Beijing and have adopted various measures to provide balance against Chinese influence. While China is no doubt an important driver of the global economy and the Chinese market offers numerous opportunities for the world, the sheer size and unspoken intent of China have caused many neighboring countries to remain anxious and watchful. Geopolitically, concerns have translated into actions that compete with or move away from Chinese influence, with many of the strategies centered on cooperation with India and Southeast Asia. Noting China's successful push westward toward Central Asia, the strategic turn toward Southeast Asia by India, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, among others, suggests the emergence of a potential counterbalancing force in Southeast Asia. It remains to be seen whether competitions in Southeast Asia will develop into a confrontation involving China and major players like India and China. (Tai-Ting Liu, 2018). It is therefore no secret that Xi Jinping's China is displaying a superpower's ambition, and the signs that China is gearing up to contest America's global leadership are unmistakable, and they are ubiquitous. Not least, there is the fact that a country that formerly disguised its ambitions now asserts them openly. China has entered a "new era," Xi announced in 2017, and must "take center stage in the world." (Sullivan and Brands, 2020).

If true superpower status is China's desired destination, Sullivan, and Brands, 2020, suggested two possible pathways for China to achieve this ambition: (a) the first route is the road that runs through China's home region, specifically the Western Pacific with focus on building regional primacy as a springboard to global power, a similar strategy that the USA adopted in its journey to global leadership. This model of establishing global influence by first establishing regional hegemony, does not mean physically occupying neighboring countries (with the potential exception of Taiwan), as the Soviet Union did during the Cold War. But rather, Beijing must make itself the dominant player in the Western Pacific, out to the first island chain (which runs from Japan to Taiwan to the Philippines) and beyond; it must gain an effective veto over the security and economic choices of its neighbors; it must rupture America's alliances in the region and push U.S. military forces farther away from China's shores. If China cannot do this, it will never have a secure regional base from which to project power globally. It will be confronted by persistent security challenges along its vulnerable maritime periphery; it will have to focus its energies and military assets on defense rather than

offense. And so long as Washington retains a strong military position along the first island chain, regional powers from Vietnam to Taiwan to Japan, it will try to resist China's rise rather than accommodate it. Put simply, China cannot be a true global power if it remains surrounded by U.S. allies and security partners, military bases, and other outposts of a hostile superpower.

The second road according to Sullivan and Brands, 2020, is very different because it seems to defy the historical laws of strategy and geopolitics. This approach focuses less on building a position of unassailable strength in the Western Pacific than on outflanking the U.S. alliance system and force presence in that region by developing China's economic, diplomatic, and political influence on a global scale. Under this second model, China has used a mixture of inducement, coercion, and political manipulation in an effort to weaken America's relationships with its military partners and treaty allies. Chinese officials have promoted the idea of "Asia for Asians" a not-so-veiled reference to the idea that the region should settle its affairs without the meddling of the United States. When Xi and his advisors unveiled the concept of a "New Model of Major-Country Relations," the core proposition was that the United States and China could get along if each country stayed on its side of the Pacific. Finally, the People's Liberation Army has made no secret of the fact that it is building the military power -projection capabilities necessary to subjugate Taiwan, a development that would upend the regional balance of power overnight and call the rest of America's commitments in the Western Pacific into question. Some analysts believe that a U.S.-China war in the Taiwan Strait would be either now or within a few years essentially a toss-up. All of these policies bespeak a basic insecurity with America's strategic proximity to China. And, of course, all are consistent with the narrower goal of regional dominance. But they are also consistent with what one would expect if Beijing were trying to mimic America's path to global power. (Sullivan and Brands, 2020).

## 5.2 China- America Geopolitical Rivalry

McCarthy, 2023 reported that China released a policy document of more than 13,000-words in September 2023 that outlined Beijing's vision for global governance and identified what it views as the source of current global challenges: "Some countries' hegemonic, abusive, and aggressive actions against others ... are causing great harm" and putting global security and development at risk, it reads. The document thus proffered a global community of shared future, with economic development and stability as priorities as countries treat each other as equals to work together for "common prosperity. In such a shared future, countries will also be free of "bloc politics," ideological competition and military alliances, and of being held responsible for upholding "universal values" "defined by a handful of Western countries,"

The Chinese Vision, according to McCarthy, 2023, is woven through three new "global initiatives" announced by Xi over the past two years focusing on development, security and civilization. These initiatives resonate some of Beijing's long-standing talking points, and though are largely short on detail, present a case that a US-led system is no longer suited for the current era and therefore signal a concerted push to reshape the post-World War II order championed by the US and other Western democracies. It asserts that the current international framework was designed to ensure, in theory at least, that even as governments have sovereignty over their countries, they also share rules and principles to ensure peace and uphold basic political and human rights for their populations. The deterioration of bilateral relations

between the US and China heralds a new chapter in their relationship, one broadly characterized by mutual distrust and competition. The introduction of economic reforms under Deng Xiaoping ushered in a period of tremendous growth in China, and by the 1990s the focal point of China–US relations was their economic coupling in the 1990s, and American economists overwhelmingly supported China's bid to join the World Trade Organization, WTO in 2001. The combination of America's high-tech knowhow and capital with China's low-wage labour fostered tremendous economic growth on both sides of the Pacific. This supposed symbiotic relationship –what was coined as ‘ChiMerica’ was undermined when the American housing bubble burst and the collapse of the securitised sub-prime mortgage market sent shockwaves through the global economy. (Schindler and DiCarlo, 2022).

China reaction to the 2008 financial crises was decisive: they generated demand for state-owned heavy industry, primarily through a spending spree on large-scale infrastructure projects combined with an emphasis on boosting growth in lagging central and western regions, such that by 2019 many local government officials claimed they were unable to identify any infrastructure needs. This infrastructural saturation prompted the Chinese Government, under Xi Jinping, to encourage state-owned enterprises to export their expertise and services in the construction and infrastructure sectors, which later became known as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Under this framework, Chinese firms scaled up their overseas operations at a blistering pace across Eurasia, Africa and even Latin America, setting off alarm bells in Washington. (Schindler and DiCarlo, 2022). The most critical feature of the changed landscape is the huge growth and consolidation in Chinese economic power over the past two decades, the translation of that economic weight into diplomatic power and military capacity over the past decade, and the rapid intensification of both internal oppression and external ambition in the Xi Jinping. Over the course of the past decade, China has gone from being a weighty actor in Asia and a “rising” power in the rest of the world, to a clear number two position in world affairs with a stake and role in economic, technological, development, and political affairs in every region of the world, as well as a growing military capacity to challenge the U.S. in the western Pacific. China has also gained influence in several important multilateral institutions. It started by running candidates and building coalitions for influence in the U.N.’s technical agencies in Geneva, notably the World Health Organization (to major and deleterious effect), and the economic departments of the U.N. (very modest in their influence). Its impact has grown with its ambition and with the U.S. draw-down of its engagement in multilateral institutions under the Trump administration. (Alexandre Marc and Jones, 2021). Chinese firms became assertive with their erstwhile American partners, a situation that led to frustration in corporate boardrooms across the US, and consequence was that China began to lose its most steadfast ally in the US –Wall Street. (Schindler and DiCarlo, 2022). It was Donald Trump that trumpeted an anti-China rhetoric on the campaign trail that eventually evolved as his administration's foreign policy and in 2018 a coordinated policy framework began to take shape in Washington. What follows was series of bi-/multi-lateral economic and security agreements with governments across Asia (e.g., Blue-DotNetwork and the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue) and a full blown ‘trade war’ with China. (Schindler and DiCarlo, 2022).

Despite a vitriolic political climate throughout the final months of Trump's presidency, a bipartisan consensus on the ‘China challenge’ remained intact in Washington, and Biden elevated it to an ideological ‘contest of systems’ between democracy and authoritarianism and marshalled the world's liberal democracies to confront this challenge. Also tagged as Biden’s

Doctrine, this “China challenge” became the G7’s supposed answer to China's BRI –the Build Back Better World program –as well as a UK–US agreement to transfer nuclear submarine technology to Australia. (Schindler and DiCarlo, 2022). The Biden administration reflects a consolidating American consensus that China poses a systematic challenge to U.S. power and values, one that has to be met by vigorous competition, and perhaps outright confrontation. If anything, the Biden administration has added a strong human rights dimension with very open criticism of China’s brutal oppression of its Uyghur minority and the suppression of democracy in Hong Kong. The Trump administration had already strongly criticized China for its treatment of minorities and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo designated the treatment of the Uyghurs as a genocide in his last full day in office.<sup>32</sup> That view of China is still resisted in some parts of Europe, but is gaining adherents in the strategic communities of London, Paris, and Berlin, and wider communities in northern Europe and Australia to say nothing of Tokyo and New Delhi, which have long been convinced of the aggressive nature of Chinese foreign policy. (Marc and Jones, 2021).

According to Marc and Jones, 2021, besides the geopolitical strives between USA and China, and even Europe, Japan has slowly but steadily increased its arms spending and widened its policy space for militarized response to putative Chinese aggression especially through its surface navy and submarine forces. India and China have seen repeated clashes along their contested Himalayan boundary, and their respective navies are sailing in tense proximity to one another in the Indian Ocean, the Andaman Sea, and the western Pacific. India and Russia maintain traditional diplomatic ties and an arms relationship, though even that has come under strain as a growing body of the Indian strategic community has sought to deepen strategic ties to the U.S. in order to balance China. The China and USA geopolitical stand-off can be referred to as a period that depicts “asymmetric bipolarity” where the U.S. and China wield power at levels substantially beyond any other actor, and with decision making in Beijing and Washington constituting an essential shaping fact for virtually every actor on virtually every issue on the globe. But unlike during the Cold War, where the two superpowers were vastly more powerful than their next most powerful ally/client, now the gap in power and capacity between the top two and the next tier is much smaller. Taken as a bloc, the EU is nearly as large, economically, as the U.S., though the U.S. substantially exceeds it in military and technological terms; and Russia is a close peer to China in military terms, though vastly outstripped by it in economic ones. As a result, there are many domains of policy that operate more like a “multipolar” world especially in the economic domains. And that includes fragile states. (Marc and Jones, 2021)

## **6.0 AFRICA’S STRATEGIC SHIFT FROM THE WESTERN HEGEMONY**

African countries are already shifting their gaze from the Western dominated hegemony towards the East to emerging and re-emerging powers for partnerships. Such moves according to Olukoshi, 2023, must be measured to avoid moving from one unhappy partnership to another. It is no secret that African countries have long been discontent with the existing multilateral system dominated by the Western Superpowers, which they joined as rule-takers from a vast colonial territory. There is much in the history and contemporary experiences of African partnerships with the West that the countries of the continent are right to be uncomfortable and even outraged about, including perceived Western political, economic, and cultural imposition, double standards, and conditional support.

The continent with 55 member states in the United Nations, is also endowed with vast natural resources, an overwhelmingly youthful population, and strong prospects of becoming the next global growth must find its place as a joint rule-maker, rather than being served with the short end of the stick. Various African political leaders have embraced the erosion of the West's long-running and unchallenged hegemony in global affairs and the emergence of various alternative centres of power and influence as an opportunity to exercise newfound choice in international relations, pursuing partnerships with different countries to serve their national interests. Ethiopia, for example, has embraced Chinese aid and investments while continuing to tap into Western development assistance. (Olukoshi, 2023). Many African leaders are therefore looking east to China, India, Russia, Turkey, and other emerging powers, large and medium, for partnership. For instance, Zimbabwe was the first to officially espouse a "Look East Policy", which it adopted in 2003 when the United States and the European Union imposed sanctions against the government's alleged assault on human rights and the rule of law and began to work closely with China as a strategic, economic, military, and political partner. China is now Africa's biggest trading partner, with \$117.51 billion worth of imports from the continent and \$164.49 billion of exports to it in 2022. Naturally, by diversifying their cooperation with countries of the east, policymakers hope to reduce the vulnerabilities that are associated with a one-sided dependence on the West. As summed up by the former president of Senegal, Abdoulaye Wade, China "has a much greater sense of the personal urgency of development in Africa than many Western nations". African policymakers have begun to attend periodic summit-level meetings with new centres of power such as China, India, Russia, and Turkey. They have done so, of course, while continuing to participate in summits with the EU, the US, France, and Japan. Alongside the expansion of trade with the east, development assistance and commercial loans have also ballooned, supporting Africa's major domestic infrastructure development agenda. (Olukoshi, 2023).

## 6.1 Conceptualizing the evolution of the Afro-Sino Relationship

The evolution of China-Africa relations according to Obiorah, 2008, which has often been downplayed or ignored entirely by many contemporary Western commentators, was not a one-way traffic, with a passive Africa responding to Chinese overtures; on the contrary, African individuals and governments of their own motion, initiated contact and sought relations with China; African liberation movements sought assistance from China from the 1950s and post-independence leaders such as Julius Nyerere of Tanzania and Kenneth Kaunda looked to China for models of political and socio-economic organization as the emergent African states embarked on nation-building in the 1960s.

Obiorah, 2008 showed that the initial contacts between Africa and China were not confined to inter-governmental (or inter-party) relations, but also through long standing personal and commercial links between them. From the 1950s, businesspeople from Hong Kong and Taiwan as well the overseas Chinese diaspora in South-East Asia began to establish trading ties with African counterparts. Taiwan and Hong Kong were widely known across Africa by the early 1970s as sources for imports of cheap textiles and consumer goods with African traders visiting regularly to place orders and negotiate deals with Chinese trade partners. For instance, traders from southeastern Nigeria established extensive trade networks, often based on personal relationships, with Hong Kong and Taiwan manufacturers and traders as well as with overseas Chinese communities in south-east Asia. This led to the setting up of representative offices



and trading outposts in African countries in the late 1970s and eventually began to invest in manufacturing and trading operations in Africa. By the late 1980s, there was a visible increase in Chinese residents and Chinese-owned businesses in many African countries. Some Chinese firms were quick to take advantage of the introduction of preferential textile quotas for Africa by the US government in the late 1990s to establish operations in African countries to exploit this opportunity. Also, the increased popularity of kung fu movies in the 1970s led to the establishment of schools of martial arts and enhanced interest in Buddhism and Confucianism among young people in major African cities; these developments led to relatively greater awareness of China among ordinary Africans - although often with distorted perceptions of Chinese history and culture. With time, Africans began to visit and settled in Chinese cities as students, traders or employees of Chinese businesses. This was closely followed by some Chinese companies, universities and schools to begin to recruit employees (including academics and foreign language teachers) from the African diaspora in Europe and North America. All of these have deepened the population of Africans in China and may soon attain some political significance. (Obiorah, 2008).

## **6.2 The China and African relationship models**

According to Pannell, 2008, China's design and plan for its relations with Africa in the 21st century is centered on three key elements, namely (1) diplomacy and support for Chinese policies in international affairs, (2) search for resources, especially energy, and (3) new markets for Chinese products and services in tandem with creation of jobs. All of these elements were set in motion prior to the 21st century; however, the latter two have become major imperatives only in recent years. The key drivers of the Sino-Afro relationship in the 21st century is therefore built on commercial activities -trade and investment between China and various African countries. As part of its overall strategy, China hosted a major conference in Beijing in November, 2006 tagged Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) Summit, to highlight the strategic partnership that it has been striving to develop with a large number of African states. All but five African states attended the conference as a demonstration of “a new type of strategic partnership between China and Africa.” Fundamental to this new partnership, as the Chinese proclaim, is that it is founded and based on the principle of mutual benefits for both Africa and China. Implicit in such a claim is the somewhat invidious comparison to the policies of the former colonial powers and regimes that were seen as exploiters who came to Africa for their own benefit with little or no care for local peoples. The following sections elucidates the three key elements that drives the China-Africa relationship in the 21st century.

### **6.2.1 Diplomacy and Support for China's International Position.**

China seeks diplomatic and political support wherever it may find it in Africa, and the result has been remarkably successful in the long term. The goals appear multifaceted, but the key is to promote as much support for China diplomatically as possible. This has provided China a strong base of support in the international community and among international organizations and agencies such as the United Nations. A key tenet of this policy is the idea of “One China,” and the People's Republic of China (PRC) expects its African allies to vote in support of that policy and thus to assist in isolating Taiwan with the eventual goal of reuniting Taiwan with the Chinese motherland

## 6.2.2 Search for Energy and Mineral Resources.

While this goal has only recently taken on true significance, it may be regarded today as no less important as the goal of diplomatic support from the great majority of African states. For China's rise and drive to power is predicated on its economic growth. Given the truly enormous size and scale of the country's economy and its recent growth trajectory, the demand and search for resources of all kinds, and especially energy resources, has become increasingly pressing. In Africa this takes on both a political and economic dimension, but it is also manifested regionally, and has thus created a certain emerging geography. For example, the location of various resources assumes a great importance. Consider the occurrence of major metallic ores in such countries as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Zambia, and South Africa; the presence of oil and hydrocarbons in such places as Nigeria, Angola, Gabon, and Sudan; or wood products found in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa associated with tropical forests. The search for such resource regions is becoming an increasingly competitive contest that will no doubt become even more intense as populations and economies grow and develop in the future. (Pannell, 2008).

## 6.2.3 Development of Markets for Chinese Goods and Services.

The basic element of China's Africa policy is the search for markets for Chinese goods and services. This involves identifying and creating new markets for a variety of manufactured goods ranging from the simplest consumer items such as textiles, garments, footwear, household goods, and kitchenware that have high labor content to more sophisticated products such as tools, machinery, and transportation equipment as well as armaments and military supplies. The policy is implemented through sales by government and private vendors as well as the migration of Chinese peddlers and merchants who come to Africa to sell their goods and ply their trade. Another facet of this is the trade in services, often related to construction of infrastructure ranging from roads, railways, municipal buildings, and housing projects to schools, hospitals, water systems, dams, and power plants. The Chinese build all of these things, and can complete such projects quickly and efficiently, often using imported technicians and labor gangs from China at very competitive prices. Related to new markets for Chinese goods and services is the ancillary benefit that both the Chinese goods and services are primarily composed of Chinese labor content, so that this strategy seeks to create jobs for China's citizenry both at home and abroad. Employment is crucial to maintaining social and political stability in China and to the long-term viability of China's ruling Communist Party; the country is so large that it needs to create 7 million new jobs each year. (Pannell, 2008). Commenting also on the relationship between China and Africa, Sun, 2013, observed that China's growing economic presence in Africa can hardly be termed altruistic but is guided by the principle of "mutual benefits" to both sides. He noted that under the framework of "resources for development," Beijing mobilizes its vast state financial resources to invest broadly in infrastructure projects across Africa and extract natural resources in return. Moreover, these investments generate multiple layers of benefits for China, including contracts for Chinese service companies, the relocation of labor-intensive, heavy-pollution industries from China, political favors extracted from African governments on foreign policy issues at multilateral forums such as the United Nations, and a positive international image of China being a "responsible stakeholder."

These motivations according to Sun, 2013, are particularly true in explaining China's interests in resource-poor African countries. This strategy most likely will continue in the foreseeable future. In July 2012, China doubled its 2009 commitment to provide \$20 billion in financing to Africa to further its strategic blueprint in the next three years. Meanwhile, along with China's enhanced role in Africa is the reality that the U.S. is being increasingly edged out of the continent politically and economically. To compete with the Chinese presence and to counter the negative consequences of China's approach, the U.S. must become more engaged in Africa with effective strategies. China's unique approach also has tremendous implications for the U.S. role in global governance and the future of its African partners.

## 7.0 THE IMPACT OF CHINESE INVESTMENTS IN AFRICA

Over the last five decades, no country has gone through more changes than China. From a marginal actor and the least developed country to the largest economy in the world in purchasing power parity (PPP) terms, China's path to relevance and Great Power status is an irreversible reality. Throughout this period, China's presence in Africa has grown from minor relevance to the continent's largest trading partner, with expectations of more, mainly due to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). (Vinicius de Freitas, 2023)

The growing Chinese presence in Africa is not unnoticed as Africa has become a platform for clashes between the Great Powers, particularly the United States and China. This has evoked some negative campaigns mostly from the Western Lords against China with allegations of neocolonialism, debt trapping, corruption, employment of Chinese workers, and disregard for local human rights violations. To address such issues, Beijing has been actively modifying its approach to retaining its African foothold, particularly considering that African countries have been eager to explore new development models based on local know-how, innovation, and human capital. China has also been learning about the internal politics of African countries and has been limiting its exposure level to possible defaults or instabilities derived from unstable domestic situations. (Vinicius de Freitas, 2023). Regardless of the criticisms, China continues to lead even the developing world as the largest development and trading partner to Africa since 2009 with an ever-increasing trade volume, with Chinese demand for commodities—oil, minerals, and agricultural products contributing enormously to expanded trade, job creation, and economic growth. China has helped build much-needed infrastructure in Africa, positively impacting the output of goods and services, despite some countries still facing domestic governance and corruption challenges. The country accounts for more than \$282 billion in trade in 2022. Approximately 16% of Africa's total manufacturing imports came from China in 2018, a shift in a continent that so heavily depended on Europe. Twenty-five economic and trade cooperation zones have been created with China in sixteen African countries. Such zones, registered with China's Ministry of Commerce, had attracted 623 businesses with a total investment of \$7.35 billion by the end of 2020. Such cooperation zones have boosted local industrialization in various sectors, including natural resources, agriculture, manufacturing, and trade and logistics. One-third of Chinese companies have concentrated on manufacturing, one-quarter on services, and around one-fifth on trade, construction, and real estate. With such initiatives, the Chinese footprint has grown to approximately 12% of Africa's industrial output—about \$500 billion annually. As to the infrastructure sector, Chinese companies claim nearly 50% of Africa's contracted construction market. Also, China has invested heavily in the continent to expand the reach of its soft power, diplomatic influence, and infrastructure

initiatives to consolidate its interests and presence, without necessarily imposing its governance model on any of the countries in Africa it has maintained an active relationship with. (Vinicius de Freitas, 2023).

While there are claims and allegations of environmental degradation and resource depletion, Chinese companies continue to invest in mining activities, particularly in copper, cobalt, gold, and iron ore, particularly in Congo, Zambia, and South Africa. It is on record that Africa has approximately 90% of the entire global supply of platinum and cobalt, half of the world's gold, two-thirds of the manganese, 35% of the uranium, and nearly 75% of the world's coltan, used in electronic devices, particularly cell phones. Chinese aid programs sometimes criticized for lack of transparency have provided African countries with grants and loans to make improvements in areas including agriculture, education, infrastructure, and healthcare. In 2021, at the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), China committed \$10 billion in private FDI for 2022-2025. (Vinicius de Freitas, 2023). Creating such opportunities in Africa has supported lower unemployment rates, particularly among young people, which is fundamental in a continent that enjoys a positive demographic bonus. Through Chinese investments, African countries have diversified their economies and exports, with greater access to new sources of income generation and economic growth and improved overall prosperity. (Vinicius de Freitas, 2023). Regardless of these contributions to African growth, some analysts have viewed Chinese investments in Africa as creating debt-traps, economic dependence, and prioritization of Chinese interests over local needs, and accusations of increased corruption in Africa, bribery and unfair business practices to secure business transactions. However, a closer look at the model of Chinese diplomacy in relations to the Western dominant style, Vinicius de Freitas, 2023 noted that China: (i) has not made significant efforts to export its governance model; (ii) has heavily invested in Africa; and (iii) has not pursued the building up of a network of states obliged to supply natural resources and locations for military bases. Chinese investments have, in ever-increasing ways, profoundly impacted the continent through mutually beneficial cooperation, without interference in domestic politics and internal affairs. Investments in the continent will likely increase since Africa is an essential frontier in development. Once the global situation settles after the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, Chinese investment in Africa will continue to grow. (Vinicius de Freitas, 2023).

## 7.1 Issues of Chinese Investments as Debt Traps

Africa has received many funds through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which aims to create a new geopolitical order that will re-establish China's dominance in Asia and Eurasia. Though highly criticized by the United States, the BRI has been an essential tool of Chinese diplomacy since its launch in 2013. The debt-trapping issue—a claim that China is luring countries into unsustainable loans to build unnecessary infrastructure and to expand its strategic and military reach has been repeated in the media, particularly after the Sri Lanka's Hambantota Port situation. However, the Sri Lankan default is more related to its economic difficulties associated with the lack of tourism during the COVID-19 pandemic than the debt service it owed to China.

China has an appetite for large infrastructure projects because of its history and the fact that other sectors would not provide Chinese companies with the identical multiples they find in their own country, hence the BRI expansion into the African continent with visible

infrastructure deficits. These projects, according to Vinicius de Freitas, 2023, were not selected by China, but are the sole responsibilities of the host governments based on their needs and goals of development. Regardless, some of these projects suffer due to adverse economic, environmental, and political challenges of the host government, which has forced Beijing in those cases to alter course and change policies occasionally. Chinese loans have provided African countries with the necessary funding to build infrastructure and foster economic growth, mainly through trade, filling up a financing gap Western countries have not been willing to deal with. These loans have been used primarily to develop Africa's poor infrastructure: about 40% has been utilized for power generation and transmission and 30% for upgrading outdated transport facilities. Also, Chinese loans have low interest rates and long repayment periods, and of recent China has also announced that some least-developed countries would be exempted from outstanding debt

However, the issue of debt trapping became topical because of China's significant role in providing these huge loans for infrastructure projects under favorable terms, such as low-interest rates and extended repayment periods, without thoroughly reviewing the economic viabilities of such projects. There are also issues of lack of transparency in some of the transactions and loans in Africa, with limited accountability and public scrutiny. Three situations are generally referred in the issue of debt-trapping: Djibouti, Kenya, and Zambia. In the case of Djibouti, where China has built its first overseas military base and has invested significantly in ports and infrastructure, the debt levels have increased substantially, leading to concerns that, eventually, China could enhance its influence in the country and affect its sovereignty. In Kenya, China's ever-increasing infrastructure investments, notably the Standard Gauge Railway, have faced criticism because of high costs and corruption charges, and may lead the country to default. Zambia also received Chinese investment for major infrastructure projects energy and transportation. Because of falling prices in the copper industry one of Zambia's most important sectors the possibility of default could lead to a Chinese takeover of the country's strategic assets. (Vinicius de Freitas, 2023).

## **8.0 GREAT POWERS RIVALRY AND SCRAMBLE FOR AFRICA**

Great-power competition, a classic aspect of international relations, is based on traditional power politics, particularly a permanent contest for supremacy regionally or globally. The issue of great power competition is particularly relevant in the context of China's rise, the relative decline of the United States, and Russia's resurgence. Three distinctive elements power, security, and status are the most significant stakes in geopolitical competition. Other factors, such as neighbourhood and subregion, may affect the quest for great-power status. (Vinicius de Freitas, 2023). In Africa, rivalry and competition for influence and resources between the European Union, the United States, Russia, and China are occurring. Throughout history, Africa has attracted significant international interest because of its natural resources, economic potential, and its geostrategic location as the continent within the reach of the larger consumption centers of the world. Again, Africa prides itself as the youngest continent a positive demographic bonus with growing consumer power. The continent therefore is a ready bride for big suitors for its natural endowments, and therefore have enjoyed foreign direct investment (FDI) inflow, growing economic markets, and infrastructure opportunities. With African abundance in natural resources-oil, gas, minerals, and agricultural commodities access to such goods has been an essential driver for competition between the Great Powers. All

players-Russia, China, the EU and the U.S. have sought cooperation agreements to secure access to resources and diverse energy sources.

While China focuses on infrastructure on the continent through its BRI vehicle since 2000, with interests on ports, railways and energy facilities, the United States worries more on military cooperation with the most military presence in the region. However, China has also recently established its first overseas military base in Djibouti. Russia, which has had an active presence since the Soviet Union period, also has significant cooperation agreements with many African countries. Diplomatic engagement with Africa has also grown with both China and the United States launching various initiatives to enhance diplomatic cooperation with African countries. China has established and developed the relevance of its Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), while the United States has its own frameworks, like Prosper Africa, to promote economic growth and improved governance. China adopts a 'no-strings-attached' approach in Africa, with a particular focus on economic development and infrastructure, while Western countries seek to emphasise governance and human rights. The Chinese strategy has allowed African countries to implement projects faster to address current issues and challenges. (Vinicius de Freitas, 2023).

## 9.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As new or (re-)emerging powers seek strategic inroads in a richly endowed continent such as Africa with many valuable assets of global interest, they naturally present themselves as either representing a new approach to international affairs and partnership or offering a much better package of 'friendship' and 'solidarity' than older partnerships. African leaders might be tempted to accept such messages but must not be blinded by those offers; they must be open, and yet very diligent in entering any bilateral or multilateral relationships and economic partnerships. Regardless of the accrued benefits in the huge infrastructure projects by China, African leaders must fully recognize the consequences of those huge debts that they owe to China, and be very strategic in handling such existing liabilities and new loans.

Some commentators argue that Africa is already suffering the consequences of engaging in a more competitive multipolar world without clarity of vision and purpose. Various centres of power, from the EU and the US, to India, Turkey, Russia, and the United Arab Emirates, are competing for the continent's natural resources, markets, and military bases. As they seek avenues to plug African countries into their global geopolitical schemes, the region is becoming fragmented, undermining its capacity for coordinated collective action. However, despite the slow pace so far, it is not too late for the continent to play a robust and autonomous role in defining the rules of a new world order. To do so, African leaders need to avoid becoming beholden to any power centre and rather pursue an enlightened non-alignment that foregrounds the sovereignty of continent and the security, welfare, and freedom of its peoples. One obvious way of doing this is to develop common positions on various issues of concern, such as reversing the export of priced raw materials to the world and in turn importing overpriced finished products, sometimes from its own raw materials.

The continent also need increased investment in coordinated continental action under the auspices of a properly revamped African Union and a willingness to take much bolder collective action in order to claim a rightful place for Africa in global governance systems and

processes. In taking on a proactive role in the making of a new world order, African diplomacy could blunt the dangerous rivalries that are threatening the world. Above all, Africa must not carry over a syndrome of dependency into the new global order. It is time for the continent to stand up for itself. (Olukoshi, 2023). The good news and a very welcome one indeed was the recent admission of the African Union as a permanent member of the G20 during the G20 summit in India in September 2023. The AU, which was previously an “invited international organization”, was granted full member status at the G20’s summit in Delhi, India. The move gives the continent the same status as the European Union, which sits alongside 19 countries including the UK, Russia and the US. The G20 represents around 85% of global GDP and 75% of global trade, as well as two-thirds of the world’s population, prior to the AU joining. The permanent members of the G20 are now Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, South Korea, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Türkiye, United Kingdom and United States, along with the EU and the AU. (Munyati, 2023).

In its relationship with China, and even with the developed economies, going forward, African leaders must determine their paths and futures, and to safeguard their long-term interests, must keep a strategic distance to ensure that it promotes Africa’s interests first. China-Africa Cooperation should be able to create a new base from which growth can be shared more widely. Africa mustn’t therefore accept all the claims and allegations and accusations from the Western Lords on China without deliberate self-appraisal of its relationships with China.

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