

The United States and China's Competition for Africa's Resources: An Analysis of its  
Implications for Security and Development in the Region

by

Christian Nzubechi Akubueze

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**Supervisor:** George A. MacLean, PhD, Political Science

**Examining Board:** Herb Emery, PhD, Political Science, Chair  
Suzzane Hindmarch, PhD, Political Science  
Omar Faruque, PhD, Sociology

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## ABSTRACT

Between 1881 and 1914, European colonial powers – namely the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Belgium, Spain, Portugal, and Italy invaded Africa in what became known as the Scramble for Africa, resulting in the arbitrary division of the region and plundering its resources. Africa has faced three major external pressures: colonialism, Cold War ideological battles, and the current U.S.-China rivalry. The competition between the United States and China centers around access to Africa’s abundant resources, especially oil. This study examined the security and development implications of the U.S.-China competition for Africa’s resources. Using a qualitative case study research method, the research collected data qualitatively through secondary sources. The study employed neorealism (or structural realism) as its analytical framework. The findings reveal that the United States and China have pursued different strategies to secure access to the region’s oil, which has had significant regional development and security implications.

## DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my parents, Mr. and Mrs. R.C. Akubueze, and my brother Engr. Emmanuel Akubueze, Dr. Smart Akubueze, and sister, Maureen Okonkwo, for their support and encouragement throughout my study.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### Background to the Study

The world's colonial powers, namely the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Belgium, Spain, Portugal, and Italy, invaded Africa between 1881 and 1914, in what was termed the "Scramble for Africa." This invasion's outcome was the region's arbitrary division into colonies and the plunder of its abundant natural resources (Ezenekwe, Nkamnebe, Uzonwanne, Nzeribe, & Madichie, 2022). As noted by Kurecic, (2014), the great power competition for Africa's resources in the post-WWII era was centred around oil and gas which is abundant in Africa. Hence, the reason for the contestation by the world's economic powers was to gain access to and control of the oil in Africa while strategic resources, labour, and control of vital geopolitical territory in part, were also issues. As submitted by Okeke (2008), "historically, Africa is well known for its strategic resource riches. For ages, European countries have competed to control Africa's resources." It is on this note that Clarke inferred that:

Africa has been at the centre of world interest and competitive power positioning by foreign states, interests and companies, as well as local ethnicities and elites for the last 150 years. It has now become a cockpit again for a new surge of interests – this time in respect of oil and gas resources as great powers, mid-range states, African politics and the corporate oil interests of global, regional and local players vie for position, privilege and ascendance (Clarke, 2003: 34).

According to De Freitas (2023), the interest in Africa is due to its natural resources and economic potential. Furthermore, the strategic geographic positioning of Africa adds to its significance, as it is optimally situated relative to major global consumption hubs. The modern oil demand has accentuated the rivalry and scramble for Africa's resources. What may be new in this regard is the entry of Asian and other new nations into the keen

competition. Africa possesses only 9 percent of the world's proven petroleum reserves compared to almost 62 percent for the Middle East (Shinn, 2014). This notwithstanding, Kurecic (2014) noted the general acceptance among the economic powers that most of the potential sources of oil in Africa are yet to be fully explored, while in the Middle East, many sources have already been explored and used up to some degree. The implication of this is that it creates a potential for more oil reserves. Since they accept that there are more potential sources of oil than is proven in Africa, more oil discoveries are bound to happen in Africa, and as such Africa now becomes a strategic location for the competing states. The importance of Africa's oil resources in the contemporary global economy stems from the fact that the growing energy demand is estimated to rise by more than 50 percent by the year 2030, roughly 80% would still be met by fossil fuels, which are limited resources (G8 Saint Petersburg, 2006).

Makwerere and Chipaike (2012) state that the new scramble for Africa's resources mirrors past endeavours. Still, a significant difference lies in the heightened involvement of those seeking access to Africa's resources. The rising economies of China, Brazil, India, and South Korea have led them to become active participants in the new competition. Nevertheless, the United States and China have been the most active participants in this oil resource competition (Makwerere & Chipaike, 2012). According to Shikwati (2009), Africa has drawn global attention due to its substantial oil reserves, which constitute approximately 13 percent of the world's known oil reserves. Major oil-producing countries in the region include Angola, Nigeria, Libya, and Equatorial Guinea. Notably, about 70 percent of Africa's oil production is concentrated in West Africa's Gulf of Guinea, stretching from the Ivory Coast to Angola (Shikwati, 2009).

The interest in Africa's oil by the economic superpowers as noted by Ezenekwe, Nkamnebe, Uzonwanne, Nzeribe, and Madichie (2022), is not a modern dynamic and can be attributed to so many reasons. According to these authors, the attraction to Africa's oil is motivated by the quality of its crude known as 'sweet' crude. The 'sweet' crude is significant because the nature of crude oil from different sources is not only different or less identical, oil from the same well at different times of extraction is also differing in characteristics in terms of chemical composition (Roussel & Boulet, 1995). In terms of hydrogen sulfide and carbon dioxide, sweet crude oil contains small amounts and is therefore in high demand, most especially in industrialized nations. Additionally, Africa provides a relatively favorable environment vis-a-vis contractual agreements; therefore, most foreign oil corporations are attracted to Africa due to the production-sharing agreements, which have lucrative profits in exchange for relatively low upfront costs (Ezenekwe, Nkamnebe, Uzonwanne, Nzeribe, & Madichie, 2022). This means that due to the profitability of the production-sharing agreements, these foreign oil corporations in exchange for their investments gain a share of the produced oil and its profits at relatively low upfront costs.

According to Hong (2008), the Chinese and American never-ending competition for geopolitical and economic advantages in Africa is fueled by interest in natural resources, markets, investment outlets, and political influence within its varied nation-states. As noted by Klare and Volman (2006), the Department of Energy's International Energy Outlook for 2025 reported that the world oil production capacity will increase from 80.0 million barrels per day (mbd) in 2002 to a projected 122.2 mbd in 2025; in the same period, world oil consumption will increase from 78.2 million barrels per day (mbd)

to 119.2 mbd by 2025. World oil capacity is predicted to produce 122.2 mbd by 2025 and based on the current rate of oil discovery and development, Africa will provide 13.2% of the total amount. The oil consumption of China is expected to double whereas the United States oil consumption will also rise by almost 40% (Klare & Volman, 2006).

The attention Africa has attracted among corporate and political decision-makers according to Frynas and Paulo (2006) is due to crude oil being one of the world's most important strategic resources. Frynas and Paulo (2006) reasoned that thanks to the oil and gas wealth in the region, Africa is experiencing what they described as a 'New Scramble' between the United States and the People's Republic of China. The African region has experienced three "scrambles," beginning with the invasion of Africa by the colonial powers of the UK, France, Germany, Spain, Portugal, Belgium, and Italy between 1881 and 1914 which featured the division of Africa into colonies; the second period is the ideological Cold War rivalry in the aftermath of World War II period; and the current period is the ongoing competition between the United States and China in Africa along with the presence of other great, middle, and emerging powers (Aissaoui, 2001; Ezenekwe, Nkamnebe, Uzonwanne, Nzeribe & Madichie, 2022; Wengraff, 2018).

As African oil tends to be of high quality and low in sulfur, it has become a major interest for the competing states, particularly the United States which now considers Africa a high-priority area (Bush, 2001). According to Bush, the United States now sees Africa as having the potential to supply an ever-increasing share of the USA's energy needs. For instance, historically, Africa and sub-Saharan Africa, in particular, were not a high-priority area for the United States Department of Defense. But Klare and Volman (2006) posit that this is no longer the case as the United States Department of Defense has

increased its military activities in the region because of the growing dependence on African oil by the United States. To ensure an uninterrupted supply of oil from Africa to the United States, the US Navy increased its presence in African waters centred in the Gulf of Guinea which happens to be the body of water closest to the major West African oil producers and where most of Africa's most promising offshore reserves are located (Klare & Volman, 2006).

Conteh-Morgan (2019) reveals how the great power competition between China and the United States has militarized the region. According to Conteh-Morgan, the United States quest to consolidate its hegemonic dominance, and China's efforts to ensure its geo-economic interests, have made both countries protect those interests through a strong military presence on the continent. Also, China sees Africa as an area of significant economic strategic interest, while the United States, on the other hand, finds its interest, vision, and influence being challenged by the escalating Chinese influence in Africa (Brooks & Shin, 2006). Although China and the United States have different approaches to Africa, they share similar interests. Faced with competition from China for oil resources in Africa, the U.S. feels insecure about the way China pretends to cultivate its principle of mutual benefits to both Africa and itself as it invests in infrastructure and harvests natural resources in return (Ainebyona & Sukal, 2018). The United States has pushed this agenda in reaction to China's growing influence in the region stressing that China's claim that their interest in Africa is for economic benefits of the region is not what their real reason is. Instead, it is a tactic by China to loot natural resource endowments through conditional mega-funding projects.

China's quest for oil in Africa is motivated by three factors according to Kong (2011). First, the decline in China's oil imports from the Asia Pacific region left Africa as China's second-largest oil supplier. Second, China's attempt to diversify away from its dependence on the Middle East has resulted in the prominent position Africa occupies as China's source of imported oil. Third, Africa's oil has some unique features, such as its convenient location for transport, outstanding oil reserve growth potential, low density and sulfur content, and openness to foreign oil investment. As noted by Ghazvinian (2007), these attributes give Africa's oil special appeal for other oil-importing economies and are also accountable for causing the so-called 'scramble' for the region's oil. The result is the competitive nature of the oil landscape in Africa.

In the present global economy, the significance of Africa's oil points towards the fact that by the year 2030, the growing energy demand is estimated to rise by more than 50 percent, of which 80 percent would still be met by fossil fuels which happens to be limited resources (Statement on Global Energy Security, 2006).

This research has been designed to examine the security and economic implications of the United States and China's scramble for Africa's resources.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Africa is blessed with huge oil resources and many other sought-after natural resources, but unfortunately, the continent has not taken advantage of huge oil wealth to engender progress and development. Instead, it is still grappling with underdevelopment despite having the resources that can be utilized to develop the region. According to Siyum

(2018), the 54 countries in Africa constitute the least developed continent of the Third World despite the abundance of mineral and natural resources at their disposal.

Hence, due to this crude oil abundance, it has attracted attention and caused heated competition in the continent headed by the United States, China, Europe, Russia, and other emerging economies namely India, Japan, and Turkey. As noted by Forest and Soussa (2006), global security services and militaries depend largely on oil to run their transport and weapons systems, and most industries depend on crude oil to function not to mention national economies. These economic powers have therefore increased their military presence in Africa to help ensure unimpeded export of natural resources thereby raising security concerns in the continent.

The growing Chinese presence in Africa presents a major concern for the United States. The region has turned into a battleground for the competitive economic contest between the United States and China (Haas, 2017). As noted by De Freitas (2023), African countries could take advantage of this great power competition in their favour and boost economic development in the region through investment and the transfer of technology. However, despite the opportunities presented for African nations, it also poses challenges such as managing competing interests and ensuring sustainable development (De Freitas, 2023).

### **Aim and Objective of the Study**

This research aims to examine the United States and China's competition for Africa's oil resources and its implications for security and development in the region. In line with this, the research shall pursue the following specific objectives: First, an in-depth

exploration will be undertaken to examine the security implications of the United States and China's contestation for oil resources in Africa. Second, the research endeavours to decipher the implications of the growing Chinese presence in Africa on the strategic interests of the United States. Third, an economic lens will be applied to examine how Africa can benefit amidst the intense competition for oil between the United States, China, and other great powers. And finally, the research aims to identify why abundant resources have not brought wealth to the African states.

This study seeks to answer the following research questions: How does the scramble between China and the United States for Africa's oil resources impact the continent's security? What effects does China's growing influence in Africa have on U.S. strategic interests? In what ways can Africa leverage the United States-China rivalry over oil to foster its development? Why has Africa's resource abundance failed to translate into widespread economic development?

### **Significance of the Study**

This study of the United States and China's competition for Africa's resources is significant for several reasons. This research will seek to contribute and bring fresh insight to the understanding of the trajectory of the United States and China's competition for oil resources in Africa and how they have affected security and development in the region. As a result, it will reveal how the United States and China, in their quest to appropriate the oil wealth in Africa to satisfy their interests, have turned the continent into a battlefield for great power competition, with increased military presence in these countries. These economic powers have initiated and adopted various policies for various purposes, which have significantly affected the region's security and development. This research will also

seek to add to the existing literature in this area of study and stimulate further investigation in this field of study.

The existing literature provides valuable insights into what scholars have already written on the topic, including the effects of the U.S. and China's scramble for oil on security in Africa, the implications of China's growing presence for U.S. strategic interest, contradictions of natural resource abundance, and the potential for leveraging great power competition to maximize Africa's economic opportunities. However, the research aims to address gaps in the existing literature. The literature does not explicitly examine the distinct periods of the scramble for Africa, its resources, and the strategies employed by these great powers, particularly the United States and China. These gaps will be addressed in the empirical chapters by examining in detail these gaps that were not sufficiently covered.

### **Scope of the Study**

The scope of this research will cover the security and development implications of the United States and China's competition for oil in Africa. Specifically, the scope of the research will focus on West Africa and the Gulf of Guinea which happens to be the centrepiece of the great power competition for oil in Africa, particularly in the offshore areas of the coasts of Nigeria, Angola, and other West African states. Finally, the reference to the entire African continent in this research is to capture great power competition elsewhere in Africa that will be relevant to the study.

## **Methodology and Data Sources**

The proposed research method to be adopted for this research is the qualitative case study research method. The case study research method is fitting for research work that focuses on a particular event, person, group, or situation (Wokocha, 2015). Also, it investigates and analyzes a single or collective case intended to capture the complexity of the object of study (Stake, 1995). Similarly, Ary, Jacobs, and Razavieh (2002) define the case study research method as “an in-depth study of a single unit, such as one individual, one group, one organization, one program, and so on.” This research work focuses on a particular event – the competition for oil resources in Africa by the United States and China, while the oil-rich countries where this intense competition is happening will serve as the case study.

Data for this study will be collected using the qualitative method. The qualitative research method is a set of non-statistical inquiry techniques and processes used to collect data about social phenomena (McNabb, 2021). Qualitative data “refers to some collection of words, symbols, pictures or other non-numeric records, materials or artifacts that are collected by a researcher and are data that have relevance to the social group under study” (McNabb, 2021). Qualitative research does not usually adopt statistical procedures or other means of quantification, rather it focuses on understanding the nature of the research problem instead of the quantity of observed characteristics (Strauss & Corbin, 1994).

In line with the above, the research will adopt secondary sources of data. Justifying the adoption of secondary sources of data for research, Ebo (2009) posited that the secondary sources of information are existing literature, research reports, government reports and/or documents, institutional publications, and statistical reports. In the same

vein, Wokocha (2015) opined that secondary sources of data include all the types of information from the primary sources, but this time, they are recorded, reported, or supplied by someone else, who is not directly present at the actual place of occurrence. Hence, when a primary piece of data is refined after it is generated by classification, publication, or analysis, it creates a secondary piece of data (Wokocha, 2015). Flowing from the points above, this research will therefore, be based on secondary sources such as peer-reviewed journal articles, books on relative subjects in international relations, articles from prominent global news media corporations with reputations of high journalistic standards, statements by world leaders, government documents and/or reports, information released from state departments and international organizations, international legal documents, amongst others.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Literature Review**

As noted by Northey, Tepperman, and Albanese (2023), the best record we know of a topic in a particular field of study is existing scholarly research; that is where this research begins. Hence, the focus of the literature review begins with what scholars have already written to show the missing links that these scholars still need to cover. Considering the above, the literature review will focus on examining existing literature related to the research questions, including the security implications of China and the United States competition for Africa's oil, China's expanding influence in Africa and its impact on U.S. strategic interests, and the contradiction of natural resource abundance and widespread underdevelopment. The study will then identify gaps in the existing literature, which will be addressed in the subsequent empirical chapter. Suffice it to say that the research begins where gaps appear in what has already been written.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework chosen for this research is neorealism or the structural realist theory. Neorealism is among the 'family of theories' that make up the realist school of thought. However, it deviates from other variants of the realist school in its assumptions about power and the use of power. Neorealism as a theory was popularized by Kenneth Waltz in his 1979 book "Theory of International Politics" (Waltz, 1979). As Waltz posited, neorealism attributes conflict and war to changes in the distribution or hierarchy of power in the international system (Waltz, 1986). In the international system, according to neorealism, national power and military power are highly important to the survival of

states. According to Mearsheimer (2001), access to energy is important because it is integral to latent power which states convert into economic and military power.

One important element of state power involves energy resources. These energy resources are characterized by scarcity and insecurity resulting in competition among states to have access and jurisdiction over these energy resources such as oil. Oil and energy are important to any nation, and just as Raphael and Stokes (2022: 364) pointed out, “controlling the conditions under which this resource is produced, exported, and delivered to consumers has become a key strategic concern for powerful states.” To the realists, energy sufficiency is a condition that must be satisfied for a nation to achieve economic growth in addition to a strong military. Both China and the United States see Africa as an important strategic region for their energy security. As Zweig and Jianhai (2005) point out, in addition to the continued economic growth of China, its social stability and ultimately the survival of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is also dependent on securing the supply of resources. We are witnessing the intense competition for oil by the US and China, as well as the adoption of various strategies to enhance their access to oil and natural resources, because of the importance of oil and energy to state power. For example, China has on several occasions provided direct and indirect support to oil-producing states in Africa. As a strategy to enhance their access to oil and natural resources, “China has built better relations with some African leaders by selling arms to them” (Paul, 2010: 63). Also, China has provided military support to some African countries whose natural resource export predominantly goes to Europe to garner considerable advantages in those countries (Zambalis, 2010). This strategy of China, as

noted by Ghazvinian (2007), is a threat to its competitors. Ghazvinian noted how China has already passed the USA as the biggest customer for crude oil from Angola.

It is important to note the defensive versus offensive divide in neorealism. Offensive realism, as presented by Mearsheimer (2001), sees the world as competitive; hence states try to maximize their power and pursue hegemony when possible. Consequently, offensive realism, unlike defensive realism, sees international politics as more competitive (Glaser, 2022). Offensive realists hardly see any conditions for cooperation by the competing states, unlike defensive realism. The behaviour of China, the United States, and other great powers in Africa in this contemporary ‘scramble’ highlights competition and contest. These competing states are concerned about maximizing their power and control over oil resources in Africa. As put forward by Glaser (2022), it is a straightforward explanation that the more powerful a state is, the better the prospect of defending itself if attacked. States need a strong military and economy to achieve this purpose; therefore, access to oil becomes integral because it can be converted into strengthening economic and military power. On this premise, realist theorists are increasingly doubtful that the great power’s thirst for oil can avoid escalating into ‘resource wars’, particularly over energy sources. This situation risks undermining international cooperation as states compete (and eventually conflict) over control of major oil regions (Raphael & Stokes, 2022: 366). Sharing a similar analysis is Michael Klare, who stressed that we are witnessing:

The energy equivalent of an arms race to secure control over whatever remaining deposits of oil and natural gas are up for sale on the planet, along with reserves of other vital minerals. This resource race is already one of the contemporary landscape and, in our lifetimes, may become the most conspicuous one – a voracious, zero-sum contest that,

if allowed to continue along present paths, can only lead to conflict among major powers (Klare, 2008: 30).

### **The Security Implications of the United States and China's Scramble for Oil Resources in Africa**

The competition for oil resources in Africa between the United States, China, and other emerging powers holds seeds of confrontation and conflict that could ultimately impact the region's peace, security, and economic development. Historically, Raphael and Stokes (2022) note that the quest to ensure stability in the oil supply from the oil-rich regions has greatly affected the human security of its inhabitants. According to these authors, the demand for energy use is growing and will likely stay the same in the foreseeable future. As a result, there is a widening 'energy gap' as the energy demand no longer meets its supply as most of the global energy consumption is obtained from oil which happens to be crucial to the workings of industrialized and industrializing economies whose transportation, industrial production, and commercial activity are dependent on oil. Hence, the powerful states now compete to control the conditions under which oil is produced, exported, and delivered to consumers (Raphael & Stokes, 2022).

The ongoing militarization and securitization of the region are attributed to the Sino-American contestation for oil resources in the continent. Conteh-Morgan (2019) states that both countries seek to protect their interests. For the United States, it is necessary to maintain its hegemonic dominance over regional resources. In contrast, China's efforts are geared toward protecting its geo-economic interests. Spurred by the above motives, Conteh-Morgan notes that both countries use robust military presence to protect their interests. Conteh-Morgan (2021) reveals how both country's deployment and

accumulation of capabilities such as the armed forces, arms transfers, and military bases have increased. Similarly, the features of militarization are arms transfers, deployment of troops, peacekeeping activities, military engagement against terrorist groups, anti-piracy activities, and the establishment of military bases (Nsia-Pepira, 2014; Keenan, 2008).

Treading along the part regarding the militarization and securitization of the continent by China and the United States, Albrecht (1977) notes the increased deployment and build-up of capabilities such as armed forces, arms transfers, and military bases by China and the United States. The author reasoned that the war on terrorism, piracy, domestic rebellions against incumbent regimes, and the need to protect geopolitical and economic interests coupled with the ongoing great-power competition directs these actions. According to Volman (2009), China has deployed military instruments such as arms sales, military training initiatives, and security aid assistance to enhance its connections with African countries, aiming to promote the advancement of strategic objectives. The United States on the other hand, has built ties with repressive African regimes, particularly in oil-rich countries such as Algeria, Nigeria, Angola, Chad, and Equatorial Guinea coupled with the apparent decrease in its pressures for democratization, respect for human rights, and financial transparency in recent years.

Again, the powerful states need a stable and friendly environment for their oil exploration. Hence, they adopt different covert and overt strategies to ensure oil flow. In places where there exist threats by forces considered to be against their geo-strategic and economic interests and friendly regimes, they provide arms to support those governmental and non-governmental forces helping the incumbent regime survive such threats which in turn means protecting its local and national interest in general (Raphael, 2022; Conteh-

Morgan, 2021; Klare & Volman, 2006). Nsia-Pepira (2014) posited that sales of arms, military training and advice, establishment of security commands and intelligence, and joint overt and covert military operations with selected security allies have been the fallouts of the United States military involvement in Africa.

The need to protect the strategic interests of the competing powers has led to the proliferation of both small arms and light weapons in the continent. The problem is that this weapon sometimes finds its way into the wrong hands who use it to protect their interests thereby causing insecurity. As noted by Gelot and Sandor (2019), the lack of legitimacy of African regimes in addition to the never-ending realities of gross economic inequalities, and relative deprivation, which generates social unrest impels the regimes to utilize these weapons to fight for their survival.

China has upgraded potential threats from a low political priority concern to a high political priority concern driven by the dangers of terrorism and piracy to its strategic interests. These threats prompted China to take decisive measures, deploying combat troops and establishing its first-ever foreign naval base in Djibouti (Conteh-Morgan, 2019). These measures, however, have had negative effects on security in the region. As Conteh-Morgan (2019) argued, the consequences of the militarization and securitization of Africa by external powers, specifically the U.S. and China have fueled a surge in terrorist and rebel attacks against both foreign actors and incumbent African regimes. Because the terrorists and rebels are determined to win the struggle against state actors, a power struggle between the forces of destabilization (terrorists and rebels), and those of military security promotion (the U.S., China, and incumbent African regimes) therefore ensues. As the external economic interests and military presence of China and the United

States continue to grow in Africa's oil-rich nations, the greater will be the frequency of terrorist attacks on such countries as Nigeria, Niger, Angola, and South Sudan, among others (Conteh-Morgan, 2019).

Volman (2009) examines the impacts of the scramble for African oil on security, noting that African governments have exploited the competition between the United States and China to the detriment of their citizens. First, repressive, and undemocratic governments in Africa have leveraged their increased revenues to buy arms to prolong their stay in power. Second, the internal political conflicts in the oil-rich nations have been exacerbated by the backing of political factions by the U.S. and China, leading to heightened conflicts within African borders. Volman contends that these dynamics bolster the internal security capabilities of repressive and undemocratic governments, encouraging the use of force to remain in power and block political reform (Volman, 2009).

According to Conteh-Morgan (2021), the decision by the United States and China to strengthen their ties with African states through military cooperation relationships is influenced by the need to protect their citizens and economic interests and the incumbent regimes against violent extremism which in turn guarantees their local and national interests in general. The domestic and externally driven violent extremists pose a threat to the U.S. and China and obstruct the flow of oil and other resources. Militarization becomes a permanent relationship between great powers and African countries. Similarly, Brookes and Shin (2006) assert that China compensates its African allies through diplomatic attention, along with providing financial and military assistance. This worsens forced

displacements of populations and contributes to massive human rights abuses in conflict-ridden countries such as Sudan and Zimbabwe.

Klare and Volman (2006) observed that China's assistance to regimes notorious for human rights abuses such as Sudan and Zimbabwe is not dissimilar from that of the major Western powers who are all ardent partakers in the 'oil rush' in Africa. This observation stems from the aggressiveness that surrounds China's quest for oil assets on the continent, which is characterized by arms sales, financial aid, and various other means. The authors conclude by explaining the security implications of the above situation. Klare and Volman argue that conflicts over the allocation of oil revenues, particularly when the ruling regime monopolizes these profits and at the detriment of other groups in the country, are often aggravated by the U.S. and China's military involvement. This escalation leads to political unrest and most times turns into violence, as marginalized groups perceive armed resistance as their only means of gaining an equal share of oil proceeds. Moreover, with the implicit backing of the United States and China, African regimes are spurred to rely on force to quell such challenges and maintain their grip on power (Klare & Volman, 2006).

Ainebyona and Sukal (2018) contend that competition among China, the United States, and Western nations for Africa's oil, alongside other valuable resources such as uranium, gold, and diamonds, is just one factor contributing to insecurity and armed conflicts across numerous African countries. The authors note that high levels of corruption in many African states are contributing to the dysfunctional nature of legal authorities and the emergence of polarized intra-state groups. The authors attribute the root cause of this issue to the self-serving interests of the competing states (China and the

U.S.), blaming them for compromising good governance for their self interests. Ainebyona and Sukal assert that the unrest in oil-rich countries poses a massive threat to human security, exemplified by high human mortality rates, displacements of local populations, widespread human rights abuses, and environmental degradation (Ainebyona & Sukal, 2018).

Saliu and Saka (2017) note the security challenges facing the Gulf of Guinea due to its significance to China and the United States. The authors highlight the intense scramble among these nations for the region's abundant oil and gas resources as evidence of its significance. Moreover, being surrounded by Nigeria and Angola, two major oil producers in Sub-Saharan Africa, as well as other oil producers such as Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, the Republic of Congo, and Cameroon, further heightens this competition, resulting in national and region-wide security challenges. Examples include the Niger Delta militancy in Nigeria, conflicts in the oil-producing Cabinda enclave in Angola, oil bunkering, piracy, and hijacking of seafaring vessels (Brown, 2013). These security issues not only increase weapons and arms use within the troubled spots but also have broader implications spreading across the region. As noted by Onuoha (2010: 379),

The smuggling of arms from Angola and other criminal transit routes in the region into Nigeria conspired with other factors to render the insurgency in the Niger Delta region almost intractable. The proliferation of arms and weapons, arising partly from states importation of these to quell internal unrest and partly from growing patronage by non-state actors to pressure for the redistribution of social largesse (oil revenue), has created a contradiction between resource abundance and human security in the region.

Obi (2015: 2) notes that the security implications of China's entry into the scramble for Africa's oil are at three levels: "at the intra and interstate levels, and between the world's established and emerging powers." The author emphasized that out of the

three levels, it is the conflict between the great powers exemplified by the scramble between Western IOCs and Chinese national oil companies (NOCs) for access to Africa's oil that is posing the biggest security challenge. Obi (2015) is critical of China's engagement with Africa, especially its "opaque aid-for-oil" deals with Petro-states and its policy of "non-interference." This criticism follows the argument that such policy gives rise to crises, conflict, and insecurity on the continent given that it provides resources for despotic leaders who use it to protect their interests.

Onuoha (2010) expressed concern about the resource diplomacy tactics employed by China and the United States in African oil-producing countries. The author observes that the pursuit of 'friendship' with these countries compels them to employ a combination of political and military strategies, resulting in the militarization of the continent. According to Onuoha (2010), giving arms and financial assistance to some countries, along with regular investment in the security forces of oil-producing states to ensure unimpeded oil supply, poses a challenge to achieving sustainable peace in the continent. As Wang and Zou (2014) put it, the transfer of Chinese arms to African countries is one of the most controversial aspects of China's engagement in Africa. Also, the United States backs various efforts aimed at strengthening the capacity of the security forces of oil-producing African states to ensure the uninterrupted flow of oil to the U.S. It does this through three notable channels:

The first of these is the sale of arms to African governments through the Foreign Military Sales program and the Commercial Sales programs. The second is the provision of military training and education programs both in Africa and in the United States for African troops and officers through the International Military Education and Training program, the African Contingency Operations Training Assistance program (the successor to the African Crisis Response Initiative program created by

the Clinton Administration in 1997), and the African Regional Peacekeeping Program. Finally, the Pentagon is conducting joint military exercises with military forces throughout the continent in order to train local forces and to enhance the ability of US forces to engage in military operations in Africa (Volman, 2003: 577).

China has on several occasions reiterated its desire to maintain the ‘non-interference’ principle in Africa. However, evidence abounds, where China, to maintain the oil flows from Africa has skirted the principle of non-interference and intervened in politics which affected security in those places. Ali (2018) cites China’s role in the South Sudanese war which was motivated by the need to protect its oil investments. Beijing’s relations with Sudan and tacit involvement in the civil war are perceived to have caused social devastation, human rights violations, displacement, and unrestricted environmental damage. As Dziadosz (2012) notes, during the Sudanese war, Chinese oil companies were blamed for worsening the security situation by providing Sudan with money used to crush South Sudan’s rebellion and wipe out villages.

According to Raphael and Stokes (2022: 364), “controlling the condition under which this resource is produced, exported, and delivered to consumers has become a key strategic concern for powerful states.” This has, therefore, led to the continued military intervention in oil-rich regions by the world’s great powers to ensure the continuous flow of oil. For instance, Obi (2008) notes the heightened securitization of Nigeria’s Niger Delta region by the United States post-9/11. The United States views the oil from this region as a vital ‘globally needed’ resource whose uninterrupted flow along with the safety of transnational oil investments and oil workers must be safeguarded at all costs, even by military means. Klare (2007:1-7) further illustrates this stance, arguing that “the United States military has been metamorphosed into a global protection service whose primary

mission is to defend America's overseas sources of oil and natural gas while patrolling the world's major pipelines and supply routes.”

### **The Growing Chinese Presence in Africa and its Implications on the United States Strategic Interests**

Due to the geo-strategic importance of Africa to the United States in terms of natural resources, China's growing influence in Africa threatens the interests of the United States through several global and regional initiatives such as public diplomacy, trade, natural resources extraction, infrastructure development among others (Waweru, 2019). According to Thompson (2005: 20), “China's deepening integration into the global economy and emergence as an economic power has seen its influence expand in Africa, reshaping political and economic relationships on the continent and heightening concern in the United States that China's role could challenge the U.S. traditional economic and security interests in the region.” Furthermore, China's growing position in Africa has been described as a zero-sum equation, with it having the potential to eventually undermine U.S. interests in the region (Thompson, 2005). China's identification of Africa as key to its economic and strategic interests has been conceived by the United States as a threat to its vision of a prosperous Africa where democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law, free market ideology are consolidated (Brookes & Shin, 2006).

In their analysis of the implications of China's growing influence in Africa, Lyman and Morrison (2006) observe that similar to China, the United States is in a period of deepening engagement in Africa, acknowledging that US national interests in Africa have grown to include substantial energy stakes, regional security and counterterrorism, and intensifying competition with China and other countries that may have strategic

engagement in Africa. Klare and Volman (2006) further highlight that the United States seeks to enhance the operational conditions for its firms in Africa by strengthening the internal security capabilities of friendly governments and empowering African governments in combating any local or indigenous forces that could obstruct the free flow of oil exports. Nevertheless, China's expanding influence in Africa poses a challenge to the U.S. objectives in the region.

Following a neorealist logic, Sari (2019) submits that China's extensive involvement in Africa is a threat to US hegemony. He explains the present great power rivalry in Africa between China and the United States, noting that since the 2000s, China's involvement in Africa has been in parallel with its economic growth and thirst for oil. Consequently, China has become Africa's biggest trading partner and source of aid and investment for African countries, eclipsing the United States. China has leveraged this advantage to challenge the United States in the region, employing its growing influence to advance its strategic goal of maximizing relative power and pursuing hegemony as a counterbalance to U.S. power in the international system. Militarily, China is also challenging the United States in Africa, evident by its decision to establish its first overseas military base in Djibouti. Explaining how this poses a threat to the U.S., Sari (2019) remarked that the United States is concerned that the Chinese military could spy on US military activities because the base is located some miles away from Camp Lemonnier, one of the largest and key U.S. military installations overseas, and home to the US African Command (AFRICOM) facilities.

Similarly, Nyiayaana and Nwankpa (2022) note that the formation of AFRICOM by the United States is an acceptance that the increasing Chinese presence in Africa poses

a threat to U.S. interests, especially with the ongoing competition for geopolitical influence and strategic control of natural resources and markets in Africa by both countries. Hence the need for the United States to contain the Chinese influence in the region. Highlighting the nature and implications of Chinese threats to US interests in Africa, Townsend (2020; 4) reported to the American Congress that:

China is outpacing all of its competitors in Africa, where, with the construction of a military port and helicopter landing pads, it is converting its first overseas military base in Djibouti into a power projection platform. We know they seek to open more bases and their unprofitable seaport investments in East Africa and Southern Africa track closely with involvement by Chinese military forces. These Chinese seaports are not genuine commercial ports; these investments are geo-economic tools to increase the PRC's geopolitical influence throughout the continent. China continues investing heavily in African infrastructure and maintains 52 embassies in Africa – three more than the U.S. and a 24% increase since 2012.

Conteh-Morgan (2021) examines China's motives for its growing presence in Africa. He notes that China aims to use Africa as an avenue to end the United States power and influence and establish an equal playing ground between the great powers and African States. China's strategic partnerships with the region as seen in the close relationship in such areas as economic, political, educational, cultural, and security areas are geared towards achieving the stated objectives. Furthermore, these efforts by China are in line with its general goal of ending the U.S. hegemonic power and creating a more multipolar world; hence, China is utilizing its vast and growing economic power and establishing cooperative strategic partnerships in Africa. Lyman (2005) shares a similar view, noting that China's engagement with Africa goes beyond economic objectives as it is seeking to be recognized as a major power.

Furthermore, Conteh-Morgan (2021) detailed how multipolarity is a key foreign policy strategy of China to dilute US power preponderance in Africa. Having identified that, the author notes that China's deep economic power projection in the continent, close economic ties with African states through the "One China" policy particularly with key geopolitical and economic states in the region, promotion of increased cooperation between Asian and African states, and making the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) an integral arm of China's foreign policy and diplomatic strategy are directed towards upstaging the U.S. presence in Africa. Additionally, the US power decentralization that China is pursuing in Africa as noted by Conteh-Morgan (2021) is incongruent with its overall foreign policy which is to create a more multipolar world. China has already started establishing strategic partnerships with states known for their close cooperation with the United States in economic, political, cultural, educational, and security matters.

According to Lyman (2005), China's expanding influence in Africa threatens areas where the US historically held significant political leverage, particularly in the oil and gas industries. The author remarks that in contrast to previous eras when the United States could easily threaten rogue states by restricting American and other oil companies' involvement, exemplified by the situation in Sudan during the 1980s and 1990s leading to Canada's withdrawal from the sector under US pressure, China's presence now provides alternative options. American oil companies, as indicated by Lyman (2005), recognize the changing dynamic. For example, in Angola, BP has partnered with China's state-owned oil company in a joint venture.

While there is still widespread influence of the United States in Africa, China is, however, closing this gap as it has continued to use its investments to woo both strategic and non-strategic African states with the sole purpose of weakening US power and influence with Africa. The implication for the United States is that it will destabilize the total dependence of these African states on the United States by offering them an alternative great-power ally in China (Hanusch, 2012; Shinn & Eisenman, 2012). Countries such as Zimbabwe and Sudan, which have poor relations with the United States and the West, have leveraged this alternative. Also, countries that have good relations with the United States are now in a position where they can choose between the United States and China (Shinn, 2011).

Several of China's activities in Africa as noted by Conteh-Morgan (2018: 40) are challenging to U.S. foreign policy interests in the region. These activities are "China's extensive involvement in Africa's economies through aid, trade, and investments, its deepening bilateral and multilateral political ties with African states, and its vigorous introduction of Chinese culture through Confucius Institutes." The author points out that although, China does not threaten the United States defensive capability, but through its "soft" power tactics, backed by its four trillion dollars in reserves, China is consolidating its influence and becoming politically attractive to African countries.

Yi-Chong (2008: 30) lists three sets of concerns for the United States:

- (1) China's interests in Africa will directly affect the interests of the US in securing access to African oil;
- (2) the way China expands its influence in Africa undermines democratic norms and practices, particularly human rights, transparency, and other good governance practices; and
- (3) China's expansion in Africa is part of its global strategy to challenge US leadership.

Furthermore, the author notes that international competition is a zero-sum game, particularly as it concerns energy resources. Consequently, “if China takes one barrel of oil from Africa, it would mean one barrel less for the US; if China expands its trade with African countries, the US would lose out in those markets” (Yi-Chong, 2008: 30).

### **The Contradiction of Natural Resource Abundance and Widespread Underdevelopment in Africa**

Oil and other natural resources are naturally seen as an advantage economically to countries endowed with it; however, in Africa, many resource-rich countries are characterized instead by glaring poverty, slow economic growth, and low levels of human capital as is indicated in their low human development index (Nkurunziza, Tsowou, & Cazzaniga, 2017). As Basedau (2005) puts it, resource abundance in Africa has given rise to what is termed the ‘paradox of plenty’ because instead of producing the expected outcome, it creates adverse outcomes such as poverty, economic decline, and conflicts. The contradiction of natural resource abundance and widespread underdevelopment stems from the inability of the African states to capitalize on their wealth in natural resources such as oil to engender progress and development. As noted by Siyum (2018), despite possessing abundant wealth of natural resources, Africa still ranks as the least developed continent of the Third World. Many reasons have been ascribed to this contradiction, such as the lack of political commitment exemplified by bad choices and resource governance of African leaders, religion, weak institutions, corruption, poor economic policies, geography, cross-border conflict and terrorism, and colonialism (Sachs, 2005; Siyum, 2018). Auty (2003) remarks that rather than the African leaders using the gains of the resource wealth to create wealth and develop human capital, they instead seek to gain

more political and popular support by diverting the returns from natural resources to support their quest.

Adams et al (2019) discuss the dilemma of abundant natural resources leading to adverse effects, attributing globalization as a major contributing factor. According to these authors, multinational companies, through globalization, exert excessive control of available resources in these countries, constituting a significant resource curse in the oil-rich countries. Mehlum, Moene, and Torvik (2006) further explore the resource curse hypothesis, arguing that poor institutional frameworks are responsible for the conundrum of plentiful natural resources coexisting with pervasive underdevelopment in Africa. The authors maintain that in contexts where institutions in Africa prefer exploitation, the wealth generated from natural resources becomes an impediment to development. On the contrary, in countries with supportive institutions, resource wealth often promotes sustainable development (Mehlum, Moene, & Torvik, 2006). The role of multinational corporations as explained by Babiyaemye (2020) is that they dominate African natural resources, reinforcing the specialization of resource-rich African countries in the export of raw materials and limiting their ability to avoid the resource curse through industrialization and diversification of their economies. Ackah-Baidoo (2012) maintains that in Africa, multinational companies are under little or no pressure to abide by corporate social responsibility commitments because the institutions cannot ensure compliance.

Sachs and Warner (1997) explain why countries with abundant natural resources grow slowly, contending that poor economic policies relating to international trade are the major factors contributing to the adverse growth of resource-rich African countries. Furthermore, resource-abundant countries are usually high-price economies, thereby

hindering their potential for diversified export-driven growth. These countries grapple with the shrinking of their manufacturing sectors as the oil demand escalates. The authors express dismay over the absence of conscious effort from oil-rich African countries to diversify their economic base by promoting non-resource industries alongside their oil industry.

Nwonwu (2016) explores the dynamics of African politics and resource governance. He posits that Africa's political landscape still exhibits signs of immaturity, particularly evident in its leadership, governance structures, and resource management. African leaders often appropriate and relish in the use of state natural resources, leading them to become reluctant to relinquish power voluntarily and constitutionally. For many of these leaders, there is a seamless connection between holding public office, controlling state resources, and their interests. Consequently, they annex public goods and divert the gains from natural resources into their private ownership and control. Furthermore, bad resource governance has spurred civil wars, particularly in oil-rich regions, where neglect, marginalization, social discrimination, and environmental degradation are prevalent. Revenue from these resources often fails to benefit the local population, leading to grievances and desires for secession, as exemplified by the Nigerian Civil War of 1967-1970 (Nwonwu, 2016). On the issue of leadership, Moti (2019: 484) remarks that "leadership implies critical management of critical resource endowments in a country. Governance and leadership crises in Africa are reinforced by the inability of leaders to identify, sieve, and apply relevant development policy options. There is the get-rich-quick mania in Africa, especially among political leaders. The inordinate ambition for wealth accumulation is an offshoot of corrupt practices which are aspects of underdevelopment."

Ndikumana and Abderrahim (2010) explore the reason for the natural resource curse in Africa, investigating whether it stems from the inadequate tax revenue derived from the natural resources sector or the failure to expand their revenue beyond the natural resource sector to the non-resource revenue avenues. The authors observed that, despite the wealth of natural resources, the underutilization of these abundant resources is primarily due to the inability of African nations to generate the actual revenue they rightly deserve, stemming from their ineffective management and harnessing of these resources.

African nations rich in oil have received substantial foreign earnings from oil exploration, presenting an opportunity to improve the living conditions of the population if effectively utilized and managed. However, Kalu and Ott (2019) observe that this has not translated into the anticipated economic growth and development across most African countries. The authors attribute this to challenges such as the high cost of natural resources management due to inadequate infrastructure, poor education systems, over-reliance on foreign expertise, managerial deficiencies, and pervasive corruption.

According to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) (2006) on Nigeria, oil-producing states receive massive resources on the basis based on derivation revenue. However, the level of the economic well-being of the people does not correspond to the allocated funds. This discrepancy, as noted by Ukiwo (2013), arises from the diversion and misappropriation of these funds. For instance, in 2005, the governor of Bayelsa State in Nigeria, an oil-producing state was impeached for money laundering offences. Additionally, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) in Nigeria has alleged that governors in other oil-producing states are misappropriating oil wealth. Some of the tactics employed by these politicians, according to Human Rights

Watch (2007), include awarding contracts for gigantic projects, budgeting large sums of money as security votes, making returns to political godfathers, employing ghost workers, sponsorship of foreign trips, diverting worker's salaries, and budgeting funds for projects financed by other tiers of government, oil companies or multinational corporations.

Ranis (1991) examines the underlying factors contributing to the poor performance of resource-rich countries. The author emphasizes a combination of external and internal factors. For the external factors, Ranis posited three main assertions. First, the oil-rich African countries export unrefined oil at a significantly cheap rate. Second, the adverse effects of the Dutch Disease, a negative economic consequence that is caused by the overdependence of a country on one natural resource (Abenabe & Ekpotuatin, 2014: 120), seriously weaken the competitiveness of the non-booming trade sectors. Third, the prices of primary products experience higher volatility than manufactured goods, resulting in growth downturns in the absence of export diversification. Concerning internal factors, three main assertions are also posited by Ranis, maintaining that they revolve around the mismanagement of revenues from natural resource rents. First, the rents divert attention from the process of wealth creation and into rent-seeking activities. Second, the rents from natural resources support the import substitution process long after its contribution to development has ceased to be positive. Third, the rents distract governments from investing in human capital development.

According to Hirschman (1958), secondary and refined resources found primarily in industrialized countries possess a greater potential to enhance economic growth compared to primary and crude oil exports. In examining the trade relations between primary and secondary exporters of natural resources, Prebisch (1964) concludes that

countries that export primary commodities such as crude oil trail behind industrialized nations due to unfavourable terms of trade for crude commodity exports.

Shaxson (2007), delves into the interplay among oil, corruption and the resource curse within African nations abundant in oil. The author contends that the failure of these oil-rich countries to harness their resources for national development has resulted in adverse consequences. Shaxson (2007) argues that countries with a pre-existing state of poverty and weakness are more vulnerable to negative impacts following oil discovery. This is primarily due to African countries focusing on the oil sector at the expense of other sectors. Furthermore, the author notes that governance has become a problem due to challenges in dealing with corruption. He states that in countries where cheating and bribery are prevalent, individuals have little incentive to refrain from joining such activities.

Patey (2010) submits that effective management poses a major challenge for resource-rich African countries. Citing Sudan as a case study, he highlights the Sudanese government's struggle since 2005 in managing the political and economic effects of the nation's resources. Southern Sudan in recent years has been grappling with issues such as corruption among elites, a lack of social benefits, and environmental degradation, heightening tensions between the central government in Khartoum and Southern Sudan. Consequently, localized conflicts have escalated. According to Patey (2010: 619), "at the national level, the lack of transparency around Khartoum's oil revenue transfers to the South undermines prospects for peace. Mismanagement and corruption in the oil sector are also a growing concern in Southern Sudan, where tensions fester around the SPLM's

management of its oil revenues. At the local level, the lack of peace dividend amid evident environmental degradation from oil development has motivated local armed resistance.”

Mabikke (2012) in his work titled “Africa’s Wealth of Resources, blessing or Curse” attributes the contradiction of natural resource abundance and underdevelopment in Africa partly to leadership crisis and poor management of resource endowments. The author explains that African political leaders have failed to judiciously put resource abundance to good use due to greed and corrupt practices. The lack of strong legal and political institutions, and the presence of multiple power groups/actors, coupled with dictatorial and repressive governments has led to the poor management of oil resource wealth. Strong legal and political institutions according to the author play a major role in the development of any country. Unfortunately, this is missing in most resource-rich African countries. Also, the oil and mineral sector in African countries is proliferated by different actors such as governments, Transnational Corporations, NGOs, and Donor Agencies among others that exert a certain degree of power and multiple interests (Mabikke, 2012).

Bazilian et al (2013) in their article “Oil, energy poverty and resource dependence in West Africa” discuss the situation of emerging oil-producing countries in the Gulf of Guinea and the challenges they encounter. According to these authors, oil wealth can potentially strengthen the institutions of states in the Gulf of Guinea, thereby mitigating social and economic disparities and fostering national prosperity. Nonetheless, the authors point out that deficiencies have hampered progress in this regard in infrastructure, transparency, and increasingly poor governance.

## **Navigating the Great Power Competition in Africa: Maximizing Economic Opportunities for the Continent**

The great power competition for Africa's resources according to Akpuru-Aja (2012) presents a viable opportunity for economic development if effectively utilized by African political leadership. The author points out that if aids are used judiciously for their intended purposes, particularly in infrastructure development, they can spur the rapid socio-economic transformation of the African continent.

According to Sun (2016), the United States and China's engagement in Africa has the potential to contain transnational threats in the region. The author submits that both countries have considerable interests at stake in Africa, necessitating a peaceful and stable domestic environment for bilateral cooperation on African security issues. The region has been bedevilled by the terrorist affiliates of ISIS and al-Qaeda, as well as rebel violence in countries rich in minerals such as South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Nigeria. While there exists the possibility of their presence provoking violence and exacerbating the overall political vulnerability of African states which sometimes stems from direct attacks on Chinese and American entities. The United States and China acknowledge an inherent responsibility to African peace and security issues as great powers. Consequently, the need to protect their vested interests in the continent spurs China and the United States to cooperate in the areas of peace and security exemplified by their U.N. peacekeeping and anti-piracy efforts in Africa (Sun, 2016). For instance, "the Chinese government provided the AU mission in Somalia with a contribution of \$4.5 million worth of equipment and materials for use in combating al-Shabaab. This builds on

earlier support of \$1.8 million provided in 2007 to the African mission in Sudan” (Alden, 2014: 6).

It is on this premise that President Xi Jinping in 2014 emphasized the need for China to protect its overseas interests and continue to develop the capacity to provide such protection (Xinhua, 2014). It is, therefore, in China’s interest to support any quest to ensure a politically stable region for economic reasons, this works to the benefit of African nations as it reduces the cost implications for African leaders. Considering the above, Shinn (2015) challenged African leaders to derive the most benefit from China’s expanding security interests in the region. The author notes the several pledges made by China since the 2012 Forum on China-Africa Cooperation meeting on helping African countries in combatting their security needs. To quote Shinn, 2015: 136), “it is now the responsibility of the African Union, African sub-regional organizations, and individual African states to hold China to these pledges. Some involve financial support while others require greater policy intervention.”

The expansion of military trade programs in Africa by the United States and China is evident through their provision of military arms, military equipment, and technical assistance, constituting a significant investment in Africa where military expenditures are much smaller. Even though, as noted by Klare and Volman (2006), the US focuses its aid on Angola and Nigeria, the top two oil suppliers to the United States, they also support several multilateral or regional initiatives aimed at bolstering African state’s internal security capabilities. The authors maintain that these initiatives have the potential to extend beyond their original design of improving anti-terrorism efforts and international peacekeeping operations to address broader security concerns in the region. Consequently,

“the skills and techniques being imparted – small unit manoeuvres, counterinsurgency, and light infantry operations could be employed to suppress ethnic, religious, and sectarian strife” (Klare & Volman, 2006: 299).

Africa has experienced increased trade, investment, and economic development model due to the scramble for oil between the great powers. Corroborating this view are Brookes and Shin (2006: 5), the authors submit that “China’s burgeoning relationship with Africa is alarming not only because it has facilitated Chinese energy and weapons dealings, but also because it is competing with U.S.–African trade. In the year 2000, China established the China-Africa Corporation Forum (CACF) to foster stronger trade and investment relations between China and African countries in both the government and private sectors. During this period alone, trade between China and Africa amounted to US\$10.6 billion, exceeding 10 billion for the first time, and in 2003, it rose to US\$18.545 billion (Thompson, 2005).

Amid the rivalry over Africa’s resources between China and the United States, the region stands poised to capitalize on the heightened attention it is receiving as both countries vie to outcompete each other through various strategic investments. Faced with China’s expansive and deepening engagements in Africa, the United States has taken the continent more seriously (Sari, 2019). As noted by Conteh-Morgan (2018: 39), “the competition between China and the U.S. in Africa began as mild rivalry during the Clinton Administration, progressed to moderate rivalry during the George W. Bush Administration and became intense during the Obama Administration.” China, on the other hand, endeavours to deepen its ties with Africa’s minerals-rich countries, and as Sari (2019) put it, “to ensure access to key mineral resources, China offers “gifts” or economic

incentives in the form of stadiums, new roads, and hospitals, etc., to generate appreciation in sealing economic deals.”

According to Conteh-Morgan (2018), both China and the United States have adopted multifaceted strategies to bolster their power and influence across African nations. Unlike the Cold War period, when Africa was not considered geopolitically important compared to other regions such as Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, it has now elevated from a non-geostrategic region to one that is both strategic and central to U.S. national security, as evidenced by the formation of AFRICOM. Since the late 1990s, China has enhanced the geostrategic importance of Africa by according the continent both geo-economic and geopolitical significance. This is evident through enormous levels of aid, trade, and investment efforts by China, as well as the deepening geopolitical ties between specific African countries and China, which involve inter-political party cooperation, and particularly the establishment of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2000. Similarly, in a bid to rival China’s attention to Africa, the U.S. has also accorded geo-economic and geopolitical significance to Africa, exemplified by the creation of AFRICOM (Conteh-Morgan, 2018).

As the United States endeavours to match China’s attention towards Africa, China also massively deepens its involvement with African countries to strengthen its ties. Consequently, both countries persist in making significant investments in the African continent. As noted by Conteh-Morgan (2018: 50), “by 2014, over 50 percent of China’s foreign aid was being disbursed to Africa, with an emphasis that there were no strings attached. The vast amounts of foreign aid and investment activities by China may be seen in the construction of infrastructure projects such as roads, railways, schools, and

hospitals, as well as the reopening of mines which employ some Africans. China is also steadily engaged in pockets of conspicuous industrialization – at no cost to Africa – such as the construction of the 20-story African Union building in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. It was a gift to the African Union of a very modern \$200 million building.” Investing in infrastructure additionally promotes economic integration. For instance, Steinberg (2020) highlights China’s railway construction accelerated the economic integration of Ethiopia and Djibouti. The author further states that the presence of these great powers could increase competition, leading to what the author termed a ‘race to investments.’

Treading along the path regarding race to investments, Zhao (2014) observes that there is hardly an African country without a sizeable Chinese presence. As both countries compete to satisfy their interests, the crucial infrastructure they provide can be leveraged by those African countries. Furthermore, China and the United States are skyrocketing their direct investments signalling intent to become the continent’s single largest trading partner. According to the author, “while America still reigns in terms of cumulative direct investment in a few countries, China’s involvement provided a welcome infusion of competition that raised the prices of African resources and reduced prices for the construction of projects on which many Chinese firms bid” (Zhao, 2014: 1038). Tiboris (2019) suggests that the US recognition of China’s growing presence in Africa has a positive impact on the continent. This recognition prompts the United States to intensify its investment in African infrastructure, particularly in sectors and areas where China is unable to operate effectively, thereby enhancing diplomatic relations. In turn, this motivates China to improve its development practices.

Ongodia (2017), delves into the implications of the Sino-US competition in Africa, highlighting both short and long-term positives. He emphasizes that socioeconomic development and intra-African trade have been enhanced by the vital infrastructure that China is providing such as roads, and power dams. Additionally, China's provision of cheap consumable goods has mitigated the adverse effects of liberalization reforms imposed on Africa since the 1980s. Over the past decade, Africa has registered over 5% economic growth, largely attributed to China's demand for natural resources, especially minerals. Furthermore, Ongodia (2017) points out that the United States and China have positively impacted Africa's health sector, notably in combating devastating diseases such as HIV/AIDS, Malaria, and Ebola. Driven by the competition, both countries have increased Direct Foreign Investments in Africa. Politically, the US stance and active support for democracy and human rights issues is gradually gaining impact in Africa. China and the United States contribute to capacity-building efforts in Africa through educational and training facilities across various fields. To quote the author, "Sino-US competition in Africa has provided the continent with a 'window of opportunity' in navigating the international community that has not existed since the Cold War era of Soviet-American competition" (Ongodia, 2017: 43).

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **FINDINGS/EVIDENCE/ARGUMENT**

#### **AN OVERVIEW OF THE PERIODS OF THE SCRAMBLE FOR AFRICA AND ITS RESOURCES**

As described earlier in this thesis, the African region has experienced three “scrambles”: the colonial invasion, the ideological Cold War rivalry, and the current scramble for resources, particularly oil and gas reserves in the Gulf of Guinea. This section examines these different stages of great power competition in Africa, revealing each period's distinctive dynamics and features. It explores the objectives, motives, and strategies of the two major competitors in the current scramble, the United States and China.

#### **The Invasion and Scramble for Africa by the Colonial Powers**

The term ‘Scramble for Africa’ according to Beck (2019), refers to the period of European imperial expansion into Africa. The word ‘scramble’ highlights the competition among European powers to conquer territories for empire-building. Nutting (1971) traces the origins of this scramble to Prince Henry the Navigator of Portugal, who sent fleets around the region and claimed coastal territories. As Portuguese supremacy declined, emerging European powers such as Germany, the Netherlands, Britain, France, Italy, and Belgium began competing for colonies, leading to inter-colonial rivalries (Sari, 2020). MacKenzie (1983) notes that by the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Europeans recognized Africa’s economic potential, particularly for products such as palm oil and groundnuts, ivory, and spices that could be supplied to Europe. This recognition prompted a deeper

European presence in Africa's interior. By the 1870s and 1880s, the focus of colonial explorers shifted from geographic and natural observation to efforts aimed at occupying, dividing, and colonizing Africa. Nationalistic motives drove these activities, as each country sought to thwart the activities of others in the escalating scramble for the continent (MacKenzie, 1983).

The highlight of the first scramble for Africa was the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 when the European powers commenced their exploratory missions into Africa and engaged in bilateral agreements regarding spheres of influence. Over the ensuing four decades, Africa underwent a process of partitioning by the Europeans who established protectorates, free-trade areas, and colonies (Michalopoulos & Papaioannou, 2016). As Chukwu and Obah-Akpowoghaha (2023) noted, the European's quest for access and control of territorial bases in Africa was keenly contested, leading to conflicts among themselves. This prompted the then German Chancellor, Otto Von Bismarck, to host a conference in Berlin from 1884 to 1885 to establish a level playing field for the interested parties in the scramble to acquire territories without further conflicts. Sari (2020) notes that leveraging his diplomacy skills, Otto von Bismarck knew that the international tensions with the traditional colonial powers to acquire overseas territories in Africa would be costly without any set rules and procedures to pacify the parties involved. This move paid off as it successfully averted war between the European powers. The 1860s marked the onset of the scramble which lasted till 1914, during which almost all African territories were subjected to the domination of powerful European nations such as Britain, France, Germany, Belgium, Italy, Portugal, and Spain (Beck, 2019).

According to Uwechue (1991), during the initial phase of the African scramble and partitioning of Africa, European powers entered into trade and friendship treaties with African rulers between 1880 and 1900. In the subsequent phase, European participants finalized treaties with each other, largely determined by the initial agreements, which outlined their spheres of influence and established the boundaries of their new territories. As Chukwu and Obah-Akpowoghaha (2023: 6) put it, “through military might, economic spheres of influence, and annexation, European nations subjugated the continents of Africa. The division of Africa was more or less an accidental by-product of the diplomatic conflicts among the European powers; especially between Britain and France.”

Furthermore, Michalopoulos and Papaioannou (2016: 1807), note that “the event that stands for the partitioning of Africa is the conference that Otto von Bismarck organized in Berlin from November 1884 until February 1885.” This conference and its resulting decisions were made without the consultation of African peoples and without considering local conditions. As Asiwaju (1985: 1) noted, “the Berlin conference, despite its importance for the subsequent history of Africa, was essentially a European affair: there was no African representation, and African concerns were, if they mattered at all, completely marginal to the basic economic, strategic, and political interests of the negotiating European powers.” For Rosenberg (2019), the purpose of the Berlin conference was for the major European powers to agree and avoid disagreement over the control of Africa. Consequently, the region mostly under traditional and local control became disarticulated, ushering in a hodgepodge of geometric boundaries that divided Africa into 50 irregular countries. The new countries created by these European powers lacked rhyme or reason, divided coherent groups of people, and merged disparate groups

who did not get along (Rosenberg, 2019). Osabu-Kle (2012) notes that the absence of African states in the conference showed a tactically executed conspiracy. The author elucidates this conspiracy, noting that:

According to this conspiracy of the participating countries, the colonization of Africa was to be carried out in three stages. The first stage involved agents of imperialism tricking African rulers into signing ambiguous treaties of protection with the European powers. Private companies of Europe and officials of European governments were actively involved in this tricking process. In the treaty, the European agent and trickster would promise an undertaking by his country to protect an African ruler from aggression and the African ruler would promise not to enter into the same kind of treaty with any other European power (Osabu-Kle, 2012: 3).

Yahaya (2023) notes that the Berlin Conference destroyed Africa in many ways, stating that it was a moment when major European powers seized the opportunity to assert dominance over the continent. The author noted that by the time African countries gained independence in the 1950s and 1960s, the political fragmentation caused by the conference had become deeply entrenched, making it difficult for Africa to overcome its divisive legacy nor operate satisfactorily. As Yahaya (2023: 33) puts it, “at the time of the conference, 80 percent of Africa remained under traditional or local rulers. Africa at the conference had its boundaries divided into fifty irregular countries. The colonial masters superimposed their cultures and religions over one thousand indigenous cultures and religions of Africa. The new countries lacked cohesion or reason for coexistence. These groups of people merged together by colonial masters were disparate groups who really did not get along.” As noted by Fentahun (2023: 1), “the artificial border induced conflicts; ethnic partitioning sowed the seed for later irredentist and secessionist movements; and the mono-crop legacy yielded agricultural fluctuation. Many of the economic, social, and

political problems facing Africa are rooted in colonial legacies and neocolonialism conspiracies.”

According to Carmody (2011), the Berlin Conference and the subsequent partitioning of Africa operated under the ‘effective occupation’ principle. This principle stipulated that a European power’s claim to a territory depended on its ability to demonstrate effective control over it. European powers achieved this by deploying troops and administrators to govern the claimed territories.

The early 1880s, according to Boddy-Evans (2019), marked the beginning of the European nation’s intense scramble for African territories. In 1881, Tunisia became a French protectorate, and in 1882, Britain occupied Egypt, with Italy occupying Eritrea. British and French Somaliland were created in 1884, while German South West Africa, Cameroon, German East Africa, and Togo were established in 1884, with Spain annexing the Rio de Oro (Boddy-Evans, 2019). Rosenberg (2019) submitted that at the time of the early scramble for Africa, only the coastal areas of Africa were under the control of the European powers. However, this changed at the Berlin Conference as the European powers scrambled to take over the continent's interior.

Rosenberg (2019) lists major European power’s holdings in Africa from the first scramble as follows:

- Great Britain desired a Cape-to-Cairo collection of colonies and almost succeeded through their occupation of Egypt, Sudan (Anglo-Egyptian Sudan), Uganda, Kenya (British East Africa), South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe (Rhodesia), and Botswana. The British also controlled Nigeria and Ghana (Gold Coast).

- France took much of western Africa, from Mauritania to Chad (French West Africa), as well as Gabon and the Republic of Congo (French Equatorial Africa).
- Belgium and King Leopold II controlled the Democratic Republic of Congo (Belgian Congo).
- Portugal took Mozambique in the east and Angola in the west.
- Italy's holdings were Somalia (Italian Somaliland) and a portion of Ethiopia.
- Germany took Namibia (German Southwest Africa) and Tanzania (German East Africa).
- Spain claimed the smallest territory – Equatorial Guinea (Rio Muni).

### **The Post-WWII Ideological Cold War Rivalry and Competition for Africa**

The ideological Cold War (1945 to 1991) rivalry between the United States and the USSR caused divisions and polarizations within the global political landscape, significantly impacting the world. Africa, too, was affected by this Cold War rivalry, with much of its political and economic history in the last 30 years being shaped by the superpower rivalry (Ayeni, 1993). As Thomson (2022: 157) puts it “the vast majority of African countries gained their independence in the 20-year period between 1955 and 1975. This was a time when global politics were dominated by the Cold War. Newly created sovereign African states were therefore thrust into an international political system where the capitalist West engaged in ideological combat with the communist East.” According to Boutros-Ghali (1992), three dimensions characterized the Cold War – an arms race, ideological competitions between two blocs, the United States and the USSR (the US and its allies pushed for a capitalist socio-political order while the USSR and her allies championed the spread of socialist-communist socio-political and economic order), and

the competition for territory spurred by quest among the two superpowers. The insecurity and conflicts that arose due to the actions of the US and USSR were felt at both the international, national, and regional levels (Boutros-Ghali, 1992).

In the beginning, Africa occupied a peripheral position in the US-USSR rivalry but during the Cold War, it became evident that East-West rivalry had global effects, including rivalry in Africa (Sari, 2020). As noted by Maxwell (1980: 515), “any separation of Africa from the complex web of East-West relations is impossible.” However, this is not to say that Africa was top of the list of the Cold War rival’s agenda. As argued earlier, Africa was impoverished and peripheral, but its significance during the ideological Cold War rivalry arose from the Western and Eastern bloc’s efforts to prevent each other from gaining dominance. Each bloc believed that any advantage for one would result in a loss for the other. As a result, both the Communist and Capitalist blocs became deeply invested in shaping Africa's political and economic future, extending different forms of aid and grants to Africa. Pro-free market African leaders received support from the United States while the USSR and to some extent China and Cuba granted different forms of aid to the pro-communist African leaders (Kalu, 2020). For Schmidt (2013), the support the nationalist movements in Algeria, Angola, Congo, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Mali, and Mozambique received from the USSR was in pursuit of the ideological rivalry between the East and the West. The scramble for Africa intensified during the Cold War, encompassing their relationships and what Brzezinski (1964: 3) described as the “clash between two images of the world.”

Although Europe was the center of the nuclear stalemate between the United States and the USSR during the Cold War, both nations also sought possible strategic advantages

in other parts of the world, extending their rivalries to the African continent. Despite Africa's relatively minor importance to Washington DC and Moscow officials, the outcomes of their involvement in the continent significantly impacted Africa (Thomson, 2022). The United States and the USSR presented themselves as natural allies for newly independent African states, having not participated in the initial colonial scramble for Africa and the Berlin Conference's partitioning of Africa. The Soviet Union initially gained an upper hand due to shared anti-imperialist sentiments with African nationalists and the pursuit of socialism by many African leaders post-independence. Consequently, Moscow officials maintained a generally sympathetic approach toward Africa (Thomson, 2022). The United States, on the other hand, aimed to prevent the spread of socialism in Africa. Thomson explains this intention, stating that:

The global containment of communism was the primary foreign policy goal of the United States during the years of the Cold War. Not only did this involve the United States shoring up democracies in Western Europe, with the provision of Marshall Aid and deployment of troops, it also led Washington to seek out allies on other continents. Friendly governments in far-off places, it was reasoned, could act as a bulwark against potential Soviet expansion (Thomson, 2022: 160).

Numerous economic and strategic factors influenced the decision of the United States and the USSR to participate in the scramble for Africa. The USSR, for example, was drawn to Africa's mineral resources, previously controlled by Europe. To access and acquire strategic resources needed for its military and space programs, the USSR sought to strengthen its relations with African States, especially Zaire and South Africa. Strategically, by controlling African resources, the Soviet Union could also block the West's access to them (Thomson, 1980). On the other hand, the United States looked to southern Africa's strategic minerals in their confrontation with the USSR. Hence, the

United States was worried by the Soviet plans for African resources, prompting a former US secretary of state, Alexander Haig, to interpret the USSR's presence in Africa as a threat to US mineral security which requires ready and adequate supplies and could undermine U.S. foreign policy interests in Africa (Shafer, 1982).

Furthermore, Sari (2020) emphasizes Africa's geographical significance as another reason for the superpower competition during the Cold War. For example, militarily, West Africa was a vital military asset due to its location on the North Atlantic coastline. South Africa, overlooking the Cape of Good Hope, was a key supply route between the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. East Africa, situated near the oil-rich Middle East, provided another strategic supply route through the Gulf of Aden and the Persian Gulf (Sari, 2020).

Kalu (2020), in his analysis of the Cold War's impact on Africa, argues that beyond providing financial and material assistance to nationalist movements in the region and aiding the independence process, the actions of the United States and the USSR such as supplying arms to African countries laid the groundwork for a violent political culture on the continent. The author notes that while the initial intentions of the US and USSR were not to create violent conflicts in Africa, their efforts to achieve their respective ideological interests led them to provide funds and military hardware to African countries (Kalu, 2020). As observed by Kalu (2018), the foreign policies of the United States and the USSR toward Africa during the Cold War significantly impacted the continent's political culture. He argues that the financial and military assistance provided by the US and Soviet Union to domestic actors in African countries intensified the crises, eventually embedding these conflicts as a permanent feature of African politics.

Daniel and Nagar (2016) posit that the United States was so emersed in preventing the spread of communism in Africa that it disregarded democratic principles, exemplified by its support for undemocratic governments such as Mobutu Sese Seko in Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo), despite the undemocratic means he used to gain power. Additionally, these authors noted that the USSR's communist bloc supported national liberation movements in African countries such as Guinea Bissau, South Africa, Angola, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and Namibia (formerly South West Africa).

The United States and USSR in their pursuit of economic and ideological domination during the Cold War period turned Africa into a center for a proxy war as both the Western and Soviet imperialists fought some of their Cold War battles on the continent (Kalu, 2018). For instance, Thomson (2022) explains that the US and USSR were in the habit of supporting different domestic warring factions in African countries. This was evident in Angola, where the USSR backed the MPLA government, and the US supported the UNITA rebel movements. This situation internationalized domestic conflicts and led to the emergence of proxy wars. As Thomson (2022: 165) noted, "the Cold War becomes a hot war, and African lives are lost." The involvement of international actors (the United States and the Soviet Union) complicated the quelling of domestic conflicts because any resolution had to align with the interests of these superpowers who provided financial and material support. Additionally, access to advanced weaponry from the capitalist West or the communist East resulted in greater destruction and more deaths (Thomson, 2022). As Ohaegbulam (1981: 170) stated, "the competing groups in Angola, for example, received from the superpowers and their allies far more deadly weapons to fight one another than were ever available to them to oppose Portuguese colonialism."

Also, during the Ethiopia-Somalia War (Ogaden War) of 1977-1978, the United States and the Soviet Union supported opposing sides. The Soviet Union and Cuban and Eastern allies heavily backed Ethiopia by supplying military hardware and advising and training Ethiopian armies. This support was driven by the Soviet desire to promote Marxist ideology in Ethiopia, as the Ethiopian government was moulding their ideology towards Marxist-Leninism and the Russian Revolution. For the Soviet Union, the alliance with Ethiopia established the USSR as a major power in Africa, demonstrating its ability to project military power globally in a direct rivalry with the US and provide an alternative to the influence of the United States and its Western allies (Westad, 2005). Conversely, the United States and its Western allies were alarmed by the Soviet involvement with Ethiopia and opposed the Soviet and Cuban-backed Ethiopian forces (Tareke, 2000).

### **The Current Scramble for Africa's Oil: The United States Vs China**

The African continent, according to Gonzalez (2016: 85) “has always been subject to developed capitalist countries greed, whose oil companies, supported by their governments, continue to seek licenses to explore crude oil and gas reserves, in what has been called the new scramble for Africa.” For him, “guaranteeing energy supply has become a matter of natural security for all countries, especially for those with high levels of consumption and industrial development” (Gonzalez, 2016: 85). As Frynas and Paulo (2007: 230) noted, “crude oil is one of the world’s most important strategic resources, and Africa has attracted a lot of attention among corporate and political decision-makers because of growing global oil demand.”

According to Beri and Sinha (2009), Africa holds 13 percent of the world's known oil reserves, with major contributions from Nigeria, Libya, Equatorial Guinea, and Angola. Approximately 70 percent of Africa's oil production comes from West Africa's Gulf of Guinea. This abundant oil presence has attracted global attention from countries such as China, the United States, and other emerging economies such as India, Europe, Japan, and Turkey. The United States sources 15 percent of its oil supplies from Africa. China is heavily interested in oil production in Angola, Algeria, Chad, and Sudan and is expanding its interests in Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, and Nigeria (Beri & Sinha, 2009).

The United States and China are engaged in the scramble to access and control strategic resources, particularly oil, which Xu (2008: 1207) identifies as a focal point of competition. According to Xu, both countries are new players in this current scramble for Africa, as neither participated in the first two rounds of scrambling. Now, they are leading the competition for Africa, pursuing much broader objectives that encompass access to oil and gas in the region. For instance, the Gulf of Guinea is highlighted on the US strategic map as a part of a broader strategy to diversify energy supplies, extend anti-terrorism efforts to Africa, and prevent rising powers, especially China, from dominating the continent. Meanwhile, China, on the other hand, is leveraging its growing influence in Africa to access energy and other natural resources, expand its economic activities, and increase its political influence in the continent (Xu, 2008: 1208). Both countries have thus undertaken various activities to achieve their goals, evidenced by the US's increased military spending, presence and activities in the region. Meanwhile, China is flexing its economic power by expanding bilateral trade, investing heavily, and increasing its foreign aid. Indeed, both countries have gone as far as courting some of Africa's most egregious

regimes, providing aid in the form of weapons to autocratic regimes as long as their interest in oil in those countries is protected (Currier, 2006).

Drawing on their non-involvement in the colonial scramble and partitioning of Africa, the United States and China pursue imperialist objectives as they vie for influence on the continent. These objectives include mining for minerals, garnering diplomatic support, and expanding global influence, with little regard for local development (Alden, 2005; Martin, 2004). The competition between China and the United States for Africa's resources has intensified, with both countries stepping up their economic activities on the continent. China's trade volumes with Africa have surged to \$100 billion, raising concerns in Europe and the United States, traditionally the main partners of Africa's mineral-rich countries. The U.S. is particularly worried about China acquiring several multi-billion-dollar contracts for Nigerian and Angolan oil (Ye, 2010).

Commenting on the current scramble for Africa, Makwerere and Chipaike (2012: 311) write, "the new scramble that has taken root in the present era is no different from its predecessor except that countries with interest in African resources have increased significantly." The authors contend, "while the first scramble was premised on the strong arm tactics of the different colonisers, the new scramble is more subtle and indirect. It utilises soft power tactics ranging from investments in infrastructure and provision of benevolent economic and humanitarian aid to preferential trade agreements."

## **The Scramble for Gulf of Guinea's Oil and Gas Reserves**

The Gulf of Guinea region is strategically positioned, hence, the reason for the scramble by great powers, including the United States and China. As noted by Abiodun and Dahiru (2020: 80), “the Gulf of Guinea is endowed with abundant mineral and natural resources. The region comprised of about 472 million people in 26 countries, has an estimated 24 billion barrels crude oil reserves; contributes five million barrels daily to global chain for 40 percent and 29 percent of Europe’s and America’s petroleum products consumption.” Regarding global energy security, oil and gas are key resources that drive them. Despite the attempts to reduce reliance on fossil fuels such as petroleum, coal, and natural gas, “oil remains the world’s leading fuel, at 33.1% of global energy consumption” (BP Statistical Review of World Energy, 2013: 2). Additionally, “global oil production reached a record level of just over 96 million barrels per day in 2023 while oil consumption exceeded 100 million barrels of oil per day (mbpd) for the first time ever” (Energy Institute, 2024: 20). According to the British Petroleum’s (BP) Energy Outlook of 2023, oil is expected to continue playing a major role in the global energy system for the next 15-20 years (BP, 2023). Global oil and gas energy security depends on the volume of reserves, supply stability, and the ability to protect and maintain regular suppliers. In this context, the Gulf of Guinea stands out in the contemporary global setting, offering a more stable and secure source of future petroleum needs compared to other regions (Lubeck, Watts & Lipschutz, 2007).

Considering the above, the Gulf of Guinea has become a focal point in the great power competition in Africa. Great powers are striving to secure access to oil and ensure their energy security, along with pursuing other strategic interests. Countries in the Gulf

of Guinea include Nigeria, Cameroon, Angola, Benin, Equatorial Guinea, Ghana, Gabon, Ivory Coast, Togo, Sao Tome and Principe, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, the Gambia, and Senegal (Singh, 2023). According to Morcos (2021), the Gulf of Guinea is strategically located in the Atlantic Ocean, making it a significant zone for both opportunities and vulnerabilities, especially for the United States and its allies. Furthermore, the author highlights that the Gulf of Guinea has become a “confluence of threats,” prompting increased involvement from great powers. This situation owes much to the global demand for scarce natural resources by developed and developing economies, compounded by instability in the international oil and gas supplier nations such as the Middle East and Russia. As a result, the US, China, and other emerging economies are seeking new, more reliable energy sources (Gonzalez, 2016; Osaretin, 2011). Highlighting the importance of the Gulf of Guinea to the U.S. and China, Saliu and Saka (2017: 94) submitted:

Nowhere is the Gulf of Guinea importance to great powers geo-strategic calculations better reflected than in the new scramble for the region’s abundant oil and natural resources. In specific terms, the United States and China and their multinational oil corporations have engaged in high stakes competition to corner significant portion of the region’s newly discovered super-size offshore oil and natural gas fields.

Industrialized nations are keen on reducing their reliance on Middle Eastern oil, prompting the search for new oil supply regions. Cann (2007) points out that among the promising new areas (the Caspian Sea and the Gulf of Guinea), the Gulf of Guinea stands out as the best alternative for Western and Chinese economies. According to the author, the Caspian Sea poses challenges due to its inland location and the necessity for pipelines to pass through politically sensitive areas such as Russia or Iran. Also, Russia and Iran are major competitors in the energy market, as such the United States and China want to avoid

rigorous oversight processes. The Gulf of Guinea benefits from its proximity to the sea, making its oil more accessible and less politically constrained. Furthermore, most oilfields in the Gulf of Guinea, except in Chad and parts of Nigeria, are offshore, making them easier to protect and requiring only straightforward bilateral agreements (Cann, 2007). Regarding transportation, the Gulf of Guinea also offers great advantages over other oil-producing regions. Much of its oil lies underneath the Atlantic or near the West African coast, making it simpler to transport than oil from the Persian Gulf or the Caspian Sea (Dao, 2002).

Halleson (2009) asserts that the Gulf of Guinea is rich in oil, gas, and minerals reserves, positioning it as one of the world's most promising areas for oil exploration. For instance, Nigeria is the largest crude oil producer in the Gulf of Guinea and ranks as the eighth-largest oil exporter globally. It also has abundant natural gas reserves of roughly 184 trillion cubic feet. Angola follows closely, being the second-largest oil producer in the Gulf of Guinea. Cameroon, with its significant oil reserves, ranks as the sixth largest oil-exporting country in Africa. The Democratic Republic of Congo and Gabon are also notable oil producers in the Gulf of Guinea. Additionally, newcomers such as Chad, Equatorial Guinea, Sao Tome and Principe have recently joined the ranks of oil producers in the Gulf of Guinea (Halleson, 2009). Considering the above, the Gulf of Guinea has dominated crude oil production and trade in Africa.

These unfolding developments, therefore, hold substantial and wide-ranging implications for the region as the oil-thirsty countries compete to protect their oil interests. As Obi (2005: 40) noted, the global project to secure the region is aimed at “controlling both the territorial space and resources within it.” For instance, the United States often

rationalizes its military buildup in Africa by citing the need to combat terrorism and address growing instability in the oil-rich Gulf of Guinea (Foster, 2006). Similarly, Goldwyn and Morrison (2005: 9) note that “the governance and stability of Angola and Nigeria, the subregion’s top two energy producers, as well as the governance and stability of Equatorial Guinea, Chad, and Gabon, the next three most important suppliers, are essential to the success of U.S. multiple foreign policy goals – democracy, poverty alleviation, counterterrorism, regional integration and energy security.” Considering this, the U.S. has been actively engaged in conflicts in the Gulf of Guinea’s oil-rich countries. During Angola’s prolonged Civil War, the United States played a significant role by fueling and supporting Jonas Savimbi’s UNITA, a terrorist army, until a ceasefire was reached after Savimbi died in 2002. The persistent unrest and insurgency in Nigeria’s southern Niger Delta, where onshore oil production is concentrated, and the dangerous polarity between the Islamic north and Christian south, remain significant concerns for the United States and its oil interests (Goldwyn & Morrison, 2005).

According to Osaretin (2011), the huge oil and gas reserves in the Gulf of Guinea make it an important oil strategic area in the world and an increasingly vital supplier zone to both advanced and advancing economies. He predicts that oil production in the area will grow rapidly in the coming years and decades. Consequently, the policies of the United States and China towards the region are primarily focused on furthering their national interests. China’s emergence as an economic power has led it to deepen its integration into the global economy and expand its influence in the Gulf of Guinea, thereby reshaping political and economic relationships and raising concerns in the United States (Osaretin, 2011).

The major actors in the scramble for control of the huge oil reserves in the Gulf of Guinea are the United States and China. Since the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, China has established a major stronghold in Angola and made notable routes into Gabon, Nigeria and Cameroon across various economic sectors (Kah, 2017). China has leveraged on its extended large concessional loans to Angola, the Gulf of Guinea's second-largest oil producer with significant oil reserves, to establish a strong link with the country. Consequently, since 2006, China has surpassed the United States, Angola's main trading partners throughout much of its modern history, to become its leading trading partner (Alves, 2010). China's oil stakes in Nigeria, Equatorial Guinea, and Gabon have increased significantly. Previously, these countries were predominantly the US, the EU, and France-controlled territories. For instance, before 2005, when China signed an \$800 million crude oil sale agreement with Nigeria allowing the purchase of 30,000 barrels per day for five years, Nigeria's oil industry was dominated by the United States, Britain, and France (Onuoha, 2010). According to Onuoha (2010), the United States has taken measures to counter China's presence in the Gulf of Guinea oil sector. Such steps include increasing its military presence in the Gulf of Guinea, evidenced by establishing the African Command (AFRICOM) in 2007.

Since the late 1990s, various factors have driven the US oil rush in the Gulf of Guinea. These factors include the crisis and instability in the Middle East, which prompted attempts to reduce to some extent US dependence on this ever-turbulent region; tightening international oil markets; declining domestic crude oil production alongside rising oil consumption; and high expectations that West Africa would become one of the fastest-growing sources of oil and natural gas for the American market. Additionally, the United

States sought access to cheap and reliable low-sulphur oil imports and aimed to counter China's influence in the African oil business (Klare & Volman, 2006a; Klare & Volman, 2006b; Krueger, 2002; Watts, 2006).

According to Onuoha (2009), the United States is not the only country involved in the scramble for the Gulf of Guinea's oil, noting that China is also in need of the region's oil. He stated further that China is a catalyst in the 'new scramble' or 'oil rush'. According to the author:

China's renewed diplomatic vigour is largely driven by its transformation from energy self-sufficiently to the world's second largest importer of oil. China's relations with Africa gained unprecedented traction in 2006 with the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation. Though not the first of its kind, the 2006 Forum served as a watershed in China-Africa relations owing to the visibility of the subject and the attention devoted to it. The emergence of China as a global economic power since the 1990s has driven a massive increase in oil consumption (Onuoha, 2009: 252).

The competition between the United States and China for oil and gas in the Gulf of Guinea exemplifies the broader trend of global powers vying to exploit Africa's natural resources, both fossil and non-fossil. This phenomenon is referred to in the literature as 'the new scramble for Africa' and its resources (Xu, 2008; Frynas & Paulo, 2007).

## **AN ASSESSMENT OF THE ROLE OF OIL IN THE NEW SCRAMBLE FOR AFRICA BY THE UNITED STATES AND CHINA: THE STRATEGIES**

### **The Role of Oil in the United States-Africa Relations**

According to Van Rooyen and Solomon (2007: 12), “the United States and Africa have had a strenuous relationship marred by uncertainties and dogmatic policy shifts. During the 1990s, American policy-makers and media largely ignored Africa. What little attention Africa received revolved around war, conflict and famine.” To quote Noonari (2013: 103), the United States never regarded Africa as a key region in its foreign policy as they treated it “as a backwater.” However, it was not until after WWII that US-Africa relations began, as the United States, along with its Western European allies spearheaded the reconstitution movement and established a liberal international order (Waweru, 2019). Additionally, the U.S. African policy post-WWII was determined by the persistent quest to foist American values of democracy and human rights, forming the foundation of the U.S. “rhetorical commitments to Africa.” However, how these objectives were pursued generally remained shaped by U.S. geo-strategic interests – “containing the Soviet/Communism expansionism on the continent and building ideological affiliations with African countries” (Simeon, 2010: 58).

The 1960s marked the period of decolonization in Africa, which unfortunately coincided with the Cold War. Consequently, African countries found themselves in the ensuing ideological rivalry between the United States and the USSR. During this time, the U.S. became more involved in Africa to curb the spread of communism. From the 1960s to the late 1980s, U.S. relations with Africa were primarily driven by its

geostrategic interests in containing communism, which took precedence over other interests (Waweru, 2019). According to Kraxberger (2005: 48), “during the Cold War, Africa was a chessboard for superpower maneuvers; it was not the primary terrain for the bipolar struggle, but it was nonetheless a component of wider Soviet and American designs. American policymakers and other elites assessed Africa as an important region in the quest for client states.”

The dissolution of the USSR marked the end of the Cold War with the United States emerging as the only global superpower remaining in the Cold War scramble for Africa and the overall great power in world politics. Since the United States interest in Africa during the Cold War was motivated by the need to respond to USSR involvement in Africa and prevent the spread of communism in the region, Africa, therefore, lost its place in the U.S. strategic projections for the post-Cold War era and thus global power rivalry (Sari, 2019; Waweru, 2019). Consequently, Africa ranked low in U.S. strategic considerations, as evidenced by the official policy declaration in the US Department of Defense (DOD) report of August 1995, “U.S. Security Strategy for Sub-Saharan Africa”:

America’s security interests in Africa are very limited. At present we have no permanent or significant military presence anywhere in Africa: We have no bases; we station no combat forces; and we homeport no ships. We do desire access to facilities and material, which have been and might be especially important in the event of contingencies or evacuations. But ultimately we see very little traditional strategic interests in Africa (DOD, 1995).

Post-Cold War US-Africa relations were influenced by humanitarianism, as demonstrated by U.S. humanitarian interventions in African countries such as Liberia and Somalia. However, the humanitarian interventions of the U.S. in Africa at this time were also characterized by selectivity, with the United States choosing not to mediate in other

cases requiring international action, such as the Rwandan genocide in 1994 (Kraxberger, 2012). Furthermore, Kraxberger (2005: 53) noted that “by the latter half of the decade, selective engagement had become highly selective engagement.” Former client and frontline Cold War states lost their usefulness in the American geopolitical code. For instance, “in the mid-1990s, Somalia, a former strategic ally of Washington, became a failed state after American troops and United Nations workers withdrew from the country. Angola’s UNITA and Congo-Kinshasa suffered similar fates: once American allies, these places became expendable” (Kraxberger, 2005: 53).

Ugwuja (2018) notes that, historically, the mutual need for each other is the most crucial among the many factors that have necessitated the U.S. relationship with Africa. Africa’s natural resources are critical to the U.S. industrial output. Africa holds an enormous quantity and numerous natural resources spread across the sub-regions in the continent. For instance, “countries such as Nigeria, Angola, Sudan, Algeria, Libya, Gabon, and Equatorial Guinea together produce a sizeable portion of the world’s crude oil” (Ugwuja, 2018: 9).

Just as Klare and Volman (2006: 297b) put it, “but now, as a result of growing US reliance on African oil and the uncertain security climate in the region, the DoD is paying closer attention to Africa, and there is a noticeable increase in US military activities in the region.” Similarly, Volman (2007: 737) notes that President Bush administration’s declaration and elevation of Africa’s oil supplies to a “strategic national interest” of the U.S. and the subsequent ruling that America was engaged in a Global War on Terrorism after World Trade Center, Pennsylvania, and the Pentagon attacks on 11 September 2001, suddenly lifted Africa’s status in U.S. national security policy and military affairs. The

challenges presented by the uneven distribution and concentration of oil in regions, particularly those with strained relations with the U.S. due to the clash of civilizations, have necessitated that the United States seek alternative sources for oil (Amusan, 2016). Arab states possess huge oil reserves, but the United States regards many of them as rogue states. Additionally, Saudi Arabia, a key oil supplier and ally of the United States, experienced strained relations post-9/11 when the United States included it on its terrorist list (Amusan, 2016).

Similarly, the US interest in Africa reappeared with the emergence of China as a rival to US global hegemony and its growing influence in Africa following new oil discoveries in the region (Sari, 2019). Ndumbe (2004) argues that the U.S. approach during the Cold War, which involved backing economic assistance programs by international financial institutions such as the World Bank and providing technical support through the United States Agency for International Development, was primarily aimed at fending off the Soviets and their allies. However, this approach did not entail a strategic commitment to the region.

Faced with the challenges posed by China's growing influence in Africa, the United States revoked its earlier stance and began to engage with the region more intensively. Conteh-Morgan (2018) submits that the increasing U.S. interest in Africa is a response to China's extensive interest in the continent. The author notes that this response by the United States "began as mild rivalry during the Clinton Administration, progressed to moderate rivalry during the George W. Bush Administration and became intense during the Obama Administration" (Conteh-Morgan, 2018: 39). Under President Bush Administration, the United States engaged with Africa from a "war on terror" perspective

due to the 9/11 terrorist attacks. As a result, President Bush increased U.S. foreign aid and its military presence in various regions, particularly in the Sahel and East Africa. Numerous development programs such as the President's Emergency Program for Aids Relief (PEPFAR), and Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) were adopted under the Bush administration (Ongodia, 2017). However, these programs failed to record a significant impact as they were characterized by failures caused by "the absence of an overarching strategic vision that would integrate the different agencies and give them coherence" (Van de Walle, 2009: 11).

During the second term of the Bush administration (2004-2009), the U.S. perception of Africa changed significantly. Recognizing the increasing importance of African oil, the region gained new strategic importance for U.S. interests. At the same time, the United States finally came to understand the growing magnitude of Chinese influence in Africa (Ongodia, 2017). As Yi Chong (2008) noted, African oil is a priority for the United States because of factors such as the increasing demand for domestic energy, advent discoveries and oil production in Africa, and the entry of new players into the African region. This recognition informed the U.S.'s decision to reestablish its presence on the continent, resulting in meetings and the formation of task forces to defend its interests. Yi Chong (2008: 19) notes that:

In January 2002, a symposium on "African Oil: A Priority for US National Security and African Development" was attended by various officials in the Bush administration, politicians, international consultants, oil companies and think tanks (IASPS). In July 2003, another task force on Rising US Energy Stakes in Africa was created in the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), funded by the US Institute of Peace, a government institution created by Congress. Two years later, another task force was organized by the Council on Foreign Relations to study the oil situation in Africa as

an issue of current importance to US foreign policy. All these efforts concluded ‘the Gulf of Guinea is a nexus of vital US foreign policy priorities’ and a comprehensive and long-term strategy for dealing with Africa was needed.

For instance, during an 11-day visit to Africa, Hillary Clinton, then U.S. Secretary of State under President Obama, publicly condemned China's presence on the continent. She cautioned African states about cooperating with powers that exploit Africa’s resources and emphasized that the U.S. partnership model ensures sustainable relationships that bring value instead of extracting it. Clinton also asserted the U.S. stance and commitment to democracy and universal human rights: “America will stand up for democracy and universal human rights even when it might be easier to look the other way and keep resources flowing” (Smith, 2012).

The United States intensified its rivalry with China in Africa during President Trump’s administration. This was marked by a December 13, 2018, announcement by John R. Bolton, the then National Security Advisor, who outlined the administration’s new Africa strategy. This strategy prioritized trade and investment, combatting terrorism, and better targeting U.S. foreign aid in Africa. Bolton emphasized the U.S. increased promotion of private sector engagements in Africa as crucial for development and stressed the need to continue supporting U.S. investment in the continent (Tremann, 2018). However, Tremann (2018), argues that the speech’s positive aspects were lost since the new U.S. Africa strategy seemed more focused on countering China than on Africa itself. According to Bolton, the greatest threat to the U.S. in Africa is not from migration or extremism, but from China (and to a lesser extent, Russia). He claimed that through its “corrupt” and “predatory” business practices on the continent, China is

“deliberately and aggressively” targeting its investments to gain a competitive advantage over the United States (Tremann, 2018).

Analyzing the complex nature of the U.S. interests in Africa, Frynas and Paulo (2007) emphasize that combating terrorism is the foremost concern for the U.S. The weak nature of African states has led to coup attempts, particularly in new and established oil-producing countries such as Sao Tome and Principe, Mauritania, and Equatorial Guinea. Additionally, these oil-producing countries in the continent are prone to religious fundamentalism and terrorism caused mainly by their inability to equitably distribute the revenues generated from natural resources such as oil. Consequently, “Washington views it in its interest to prevent Africa – particularly oil-producing countries – from inheriting the Middle Eastern scenario of constant political instability” (Frynas & Paulo, 2007: 237). As noted by Van Rooyen and Solomon (2007), the primary concern of the United States is to curb international terrorism and ensure future energy security for its economy. Therefore, the focus in Africa has shifted towards addressing the role played by weak and failed countries that foster terrorism and terrorist networks.

### **The United States Strategies**

In the quest to gain access to Africa’s resources and quell China’s rising influence on the continent, the United States has utilized various strategies to meet this objective. Just as Makwerere and Chipaike (2012: 312) noted:

The USA promulgated the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), the Africa Command (AFRICOM), Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) among many other similar initiatives to extend a benevolent hand to African countries in an effort aimed at both establishing even stronger relations with and finding more acceptable

ways of resource exploitation and securing national security interests in the continent.

Discussing U.S. strategy towards oil, Saad and Loubna (2024: 291) note that “the US administration has turned its attention to revitalizing American policy in Africa and enhancing control over African oil. As a result, American interests have been distributed across all oil-rich regions and vital minerals. Especially West Africa.” Given the volatile nature of oil production regions caused by high levels of political and security instability and China’s growing influence in Africa’s energy resources, the U.S. strategy in Africa is geared towards safeguarding alternative sources of oil. In Africa, especially the Gulf of Guinea region, oil reserves are abundant, providing an ideal opportunity for the United States to pursue its strategies by diversifying its petroleum supply sources or defending those supply routes through military measures (Khatawi, 2010: 216).

### **Security and Military Strategies of the United States**

Military activities are key components of the U.S. presence in Africa, as evidenced by the military bases established across the continent. The use of security and military strategies is aimed at securing U.S. strategic interests in Africa, including countering security threats to oil from extremist terrorists and managing China’s increasing influence in Africa’s energy resources. A notable example is the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM), which was established during President Bush’s administration and became fully operational on October 1, 2008. AFRICOM oversees a range of military and security operations in Africa, funded by the State and Defense Department (Volman, 2008). The creation of AFRICOM as a stand-alone command in 2008, as noted by Sari (2019: 9) “demonstrated Africa’s changing position from peripheral to central in

US strategic projections in parallel with rising US security interests in the continent.” Concerning U.S. national interests, Conteh-Morgan (2018) notes that AFRICOM offers the United States an opportunity to adopt a new set of policies in U.S.-Africa political, economic, and military relations.

According to Volman (2007), all through the Cold War, the United States did not institute any military command for Africa. Instead, the European Command, the Central Command, and the Pacific Command conducted military activities on behalf of the U.S. in Africa. The European Command oversaw most of the continent, while the Central Command was responsible for Egypt and the Horn of Africa region along with the Middle East and Central Asia. Meanwhile, the Pacific Command managed U.S. military relations with Madagascar and other islands in the Indian Ocean (Volman, 2007). Until AFRICOM was established, these three commands prioritized other regions over Africa, with only a few middle-ranked staff members dedicated to the continent. This arrangement reflected the fact that “Africa was chiefly viewed as a regional theater in the global Cold War, or as an adjunct to U.S.-European relations, or – as in the immediate post-Cold War period – as a region of little concern to the United States” (Volman, 2007: 737).

AFRICOM was designed to address not only military concerns such as security and defence but also other areas critical to U.S. interests, such as securing natural resources, countering China’s growing influence, and supporting development programs and humanitarian assistance (McFate, 2008). On February 6, 2007, when AFRICOM was announced, President George W. Bush, then U.S. President stated that “the command will enhance our efforts to help bring peace and security to the people of

Africa and promote our common goals of development, health, education, democracy, and economic growth in Africa” (The White House, 2007). Conteh-Morgan (2018: 48) further argued that with the establishment of AFRICOM, “the U.S. launched its containment of China policy on the continent.” This is reflected in the United States intensified diplomatic, military, economic, and other forms of engagement, which Conteh-Morgan described as “offshore balancing.” This strategy necessitates the ever-growing U.S. presence in Africa to match the rapid growth of China’s multipronged African engagement on the continent, which the U.S. views as a threat (Conteh-Morgan, 2018).

The U.S. policymakers according to Klare (2008), “have long viewed the protection of overseas oil supplies as an essential matter of “national security,” requiring the threat of – and sometimes the use of – military force.” This points to Barnes’s (2005) submission that the United States policymakers perceive terrorism and the risk of an interrupted oil supply as posing double dangers to its national security, which therefore needs to be averted. Consequently, their response is to set up a more substantial military presence in Africa. Davis (2009: 123) states that “AFRICOM is oriented toward China, terrorism, and oil, albeit indirectly. It fosters African security in a way congenial to U.S. interests and serves to counter Chinese influence that would adversely affect the favorable environment the United States seeks to foster.” This, lines up with Frynas and Paulo’s (2007: 237) claim that “the US base in Djibouti plays the dual role of monitoring extremism in the region whilst protecting its oil interests.”

The U.S. has sought to boost its influence in Africa and gain the loyalty of African governments. According to Mansur (2012), it has supplied military arms and

initiated military training programs in collaboration with individual African governments. Additionally, the United States has acquired basing rights and airfield access in Djibouti, Uganda, Mali, Senegal, and Gabon, as well as port facilities in Morocco and Tunisia. Utilizing the pretext of combating terrorism in the region, the United States has also expanded its covert intelligence operations across Africa. These operations not only aim to counter terrorism but also serve to demonstrate to its rivals its readiness and capability to defend its strategic interests, including ensuring the unimpeded flow of oil from Africa (Mansur, 2012).

AFRICOM has faced criticism from many critics, most especially, energy security expert Michael T. Klare who submitted that there is a direct relationship between the existence of AFRICOM and the U.S. interest in African oil (Klare, 2008). Similarly, Ongodia (2017) submitted that the U.S. increased military presence in Africa targets access to natural resources and indirectly China's intensive presence in the continent. Ongodia contends that by using U.S. troops as part of the new African Command, "the U.S. is intending to increase its presence in certain oil-rich areas, such as Sudan, Libya, Angola, Nigeria, Uganda, Kenya, ensuring in this way a beneficial investment climate for American oil firms and weakening China's relations with African governments."

The 1998 bombings of U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, along with the September 11 terrorist attacks and China's growing pursuit of oil assets in Africa since the 2000s, prompted the United States to increase its military, humanitarian, and economic activities on the continent. Concerned about its oil needs, the United States feared that the penetration of terrorist extremists into Africa could block oil flows,

thereby threatening national security. As a result, the DoD (Department of Defense) seeks to develop a modest capacity to combat localized, indigenous forces that might threaten the free flow of petroleum exports (Klare & Volman, 2006b). Then, after these events, the U.S. realized that Africa posed a great security threat. The National Security Strategy of the United States of America published in 2002 that:

In Africa, promise and opportunity sit side by side with disease, war, and desperate poverty. This threatens both a core value of the United States – preserving human dignity – and our strategic priority – combating global terror. American interests and American principles, therefore, lead in the same direction: we will work with others for an African continent that lives in liberty, peace, and growing prosperity. Together with our European allies, we must help strengthen Africa’s fragile states, help build indigenous capability to secure porous borders, and help build up the law enforcement and intelligence infrastructure to deny havens for terrorists (The National Security Strategy, 2002: 10-11).

However, De Arimateia da Cruz and Stephens (2010) argued that U.S. strategic interests in Africa extend beyond what is suggested by the National Security Strategy, as many other motivating factors have influenced the creation of AFRICOM.

Nyiayaana and Nwankpa (2022) argue that AFRICOM reflects America’s efforts to reinvent itself following the Cold War and the events of 9/11. U.S. involvement in Africa increased only after these pivotal moments. During the decade between the collapse of the Soviet Union and the start of the Global War on Terror (GWOT), the United States conducted only 20 military operations in Africa (Petry, 2011). AFRICOM underscores the significance of both the continuity and changes in the U.S. use of military might to safeguard its critical interests in Africa, especially concerning the new scramble for African resources (Petry, 2011; Davies, 2008; Large, 2008). Keenan (2008) disclosed that the Bush administration established a U.S. military structure for Africa to

secure access to and control over African oil. Keenan highlighted that President Bush “opted to use the ‘global war on terror’ (GWOT) as the justification rather than acknowledging that US military intervention in Africa was about resource control” (Keenan, 2008: 17).

As previously mentioned, AFRICOM was designed in part to counter China’s growing influence in Africa. Driven by the competition geopolitical influence and strategic control of the continent’s natural resources between the United States and China, AFRICOM’s emergence is linked to the U.S. efforts to contain and respond to the Chinese question in Africa (Nyiayaana & Nwankpa, 2022). Nyiayaana and Nwankpa (2022: 198), note, “in several regions of the world including Africa, the significance of strategic struggles for geopolitical influence is self-evident in the activities of the US and China with some repercussions that resemble Cold War politics of divide and rule.” For instance, in AFRICOM’s 2020 Report to the American Congress, the Commander highlighted the nature and actual implications of the rising Chinese threats to American interests in Africa as follows:

China is outpacing all of its competitors in Africa, where, with the construction of a military port and helicopter landing pads, it is converting its first overseas military base in Djibouti into a power projection platform. We know they seek to open more bases and their unprofitable seaport investments in East Africa and Southern Africa track closely with involvement of Chinese military forces. These Chinese seaports are not genuine commercial ports; these investments are geo-economic tools to increase the PRC’s geopolitical influence throughout the continent. China continues to invest heavily in African infrastructure and currently maintains 52 embassies in Africa – three more than the U.S. and a 24% increase since 2012 (Townsend, 2020: 3).

Also, regarding the containment of expansive China, Gilbert, Uzodike, and Isike (2009) note that the United States wants to contain any emerging contenders to its status as the dominant global power. In this context, China has garnered significant U.S. attention. First, the projection is that China's emerging power will rise to challenge American economic and military supremacy by 2020. Second, the United States seeks to checkmate China's aggressive expansion into Africa by limiting its economic and diplomatic activities (Gilbert, Uzodike & Isike, 2009). According to Conteh-Morgan (2019: 79), "China's already heavy presence and its growing involvement on the continent have been securitized, i.e. viewed as a "threat to U.S. national security." China's presence and activities on the continent have thus been elevated in the eyes of the West to the level of high politics as opposed to low politics."

China's rise and its growing involvement with African states are significant factors driving the U.S. militarization and securitization of Africa (Conteh-Morgan, 2019). The United States has reacted negatively to China's economic presence on the continent. The U.S. and China are vying to advance their strategic interests, including securing raw materials, promoting free trade, guaranteeing the physical military security of African states hosting their foreign direct investments, and even markets for their manufactured goods. This fierce competition has weakened the U.S. geopolitical and economic power projection in the continent, provoking security concerns or spatial insecurity for the United States regarding Africa. The U.S. established the Africa Command to ensure a "competitive presence instead of a total takeover by China" (Conteh-Morgan, 2019: 81).

The above points highlight the U.S. determination to protect its strategic interests in Africa, acknowledging that competition over energy resources may lead to conflicts and military confrontations. Furthermore, the establishment of a dedicated military command in Africa demonstrates that the US is framing its current interests on the continent by linking the issues of oil and terrorism or energy and security (Saad & Loubna, 2024: 295).

### **The Economic Instruments of the United States in Africa**

The United States has utilized economic instruments to enhance its relationship with Africa and counter China's economic activities on the continent. Observing China's economic strategies in Africa, the United States launched the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) in 2000 under the Clinton Administration, coinciding with China's establishment of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) the same year (Ongodia, 2017). According to Ongodia (2017), AGOA functions as the main economic act bolstering U.S.-Africa relations and stands as the only successful economic response to China in Africa, playing a predominant role in securing access to the continent's oil and natural resources. According to Ongodia, "energy resources have dominated the products imported from Africa under AGOA. Since exports under AGOA have increased from \$8.15 billion in 2001 to \$53 billion in 2011, 90% of which have been energy related products" (Ongodia, 2017: 33).

The U.S. economic initiatives in Africa highlight the important role of non-military approaches in improving its African relations. Saad and Loubna (2024: 293) explain thus:

The new form of American relations with Africa is based on new foundations that focus on investment inflows and improving trade relations primarily, as well as increasing cooperation in agricultural, cultural, health, technological, scientific, and economic fields. In this regard, the United States has taken several steps to strengthen its ties with Africa. Examples include the US-SADC (South African Development Community) Forum held in Botswana in April 1999, the enactment of the African Growth and Opportunity Act aimed at increasing trade between the United States and Africa, and the US-Africa Ministerial Conference for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century held in Washington in March 1999.

Through economic initiatives such as AGOA, the United States aims to fill a vacuum that existed before the establishment of AGOA as it lacked a comprehensive policy strategy towards Africa “except for a rag-tag band of economic and humanitarian aid programmes funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)” (Makwerere & Chipaike, 2012: 313).

China has strategically positioned itself politically and economically in Africa by providing substantial aid, engaging in trade, and investing heavily in the continent, thereby deepening political ties with African states. This economic influence, especially in securing access to natural resources, has spurred the United States to respond with similar efforts. AFRICOM is the U.S. military strategy for ensuring unhindered access to oil and managing China’s growing influence in Africa’s energy resources. Economically, the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) is the U.S. economic tool for advancing its strategic interests in Africa, mirroring China’s economic initiatives. As Conteh-Morgan (2018: 50) notes, “the U.S. has been trying to match China’s attention towards Africa, starting with the Clinton Administration and the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), the Bush Administration and the Emergency Plan for AIDS relief, and the more recent Obama U.S.-Africa summit, and

the Power Africa whose goal is to provide electricity to 600 million Africans on the continent.” The United States has thus expanded its geo-economic strategies beyond competing with China for access to energy resources to include “countering the very positive image that China is creating in Africa – that of a China that genuinely cares about Africa and is therefore locked in a relationship of “win-win,” mutual respect and equality with African nations” (Conteh-Morgan, 2018: 50).

As mentioned earlier, the U.S. economic strategies target Africa’s resources and growing Chinese presence, with the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) being no exception. Although it is presented as a win-win partnership aimed at advancing Africa’s development through increased trade and investment, the main motive is to leverage the AGOA to exploit the continent and strengthen U.S. political and economic influence in Africa. This is evidenced in the former United States Ambassador to the African Union, Michael Battle’s statement on the idea behind AGOA’s formation: “if we don’t invest on the African continent now, we will find that China and India have absorbed its resources without us, and we will wake up and wonder what happened to our golden opportunity of investment” (Jehron, 2012).

As is always the case with the US-Africa initiatives, AGOA comes with strict conditions attached to it by the United States. These conditions require total economic liberalization and structural reforms, including slashing government spending and removing price controls and subsidies, even in key sectors selected for industrial development. Other conditions include respect for internationally recognized human rights and worker’s rights, and above all, African countries must desist from acts that threaten U.S. national security and foreign policy interests (Sari, 2019: 10-11). The

effects of these conditions, as pointed out by Thompson (2004), is that they hinder the African state's sovereignty and freedom of association. For instance, during the Bush administration, the U.S. used AGOA conditions to pressure Angola, Guinea and Cameroon in the UN Security Council to support the U.S. invasion of Iraq (Thompson, 2004). For Jehron (2012), the real objective of AGOA, which is not mentioned, is to "pry open and exploit new markets for American goods and nullify barriers that could obstruct U.S. companies like Exxon, Shell, and Anglo-American, from extracting Africa's rich oil and mineral reserves."

### **Africa in China's Global Quest for Oil**

China's rise to economic power has increased its energy needs, consequently, as Van Rooyen and Solomon (2007: 5) put it, "China's foreign policy, diplomatic relationships and strategic outlook are increasingly driven by the quest for energy security." Energy security, in essence, equals the "availability of energy at all times in various forms and in sufficient quantities and at affordable prices" (Umbach, 2004: 141). China's shift toward securing energy suppliers began in 1993 when it became a net oil importer (Lee, 2005). Similarly, as French (2004) noted, China's relations with Africa are rooted in the continent's standing as a key supplier of hydrocarbons to meet China's rising demand for oil and gas. This has led China to maintain strong ties with African energy suppliers through investment, high-level visits, and a non-interference policy that benefits African regimes.

Considering the above, oil security has been at the forefront of China's foreign policy, making engagement with Africa critical to realizing this objective.

China first became a major actor in the African scene in the 1960s and 1970s, when, as part of its ideological rivalry with the Soviet Union, it supported certain national liberation movements in the area (notably those that were prepared to eschew Soviet aid, such as UNITA in Angola and ZANU in Zimbabwe) and friendly post-independence regimes. As parts of this efforts, China provided arms and military equipment and, after independence, helped build roads and railroads. This aid gave Beijing a respectable stature in Africa, at least in the eyes of certain grateful liberation groups and struggling governments (Klare & Volman, 2006: 303b).

In the 1980s, China's influence and involvement in Africa waned as it struggled to compete with Western aid programs. However, as China rose into a major global economic power and its need for oil and other natural resources grew, its interests in Africa were rekindled – this time with the financial power to engage more dramatically and competitively (Lyman, 2005). Kong (2011) explains the competitive nature of the global oil markets and why Africa provided China with an alternative oil market as thus:

Considering that oil is a finite commodity indispensable for every modern economy, the PRC inevitably faces competition in securing supplies overseas from other importing economies. As a late comer on the global oil markets, the country, therefore, has little alternative but to engage in a scavenger hunt for oil worldwide. Because attractive assets have been largely grabbed by Western oil majors that had been operating internationally for a several years by the time Chinese NOCs began their overseas expansion, the “two China's” often ended up in places that have unattractive oil assets, high political risks, and unsavory regimes, many of which happens to be in Africa known for being condemned by the typical syndrome of “resource curse” of the “paradox of the plenty.” (Kong, 2011: 3).

Over the last five decades, China has undergone more transformation than any other country, evolving from a minor actor and developing country to the world's largest economy in terms of purchasing power parity (PPP). During this period, China has also grown from having minimal influence to becoming Africa's largest trading partner. It has invested heavily in the continent to expand its soft power reach, diplomatic

influence, and infrastructure initiatives, thereby consolidating its interests and presence (De Freitas, 2023). A result of these changes, coupled with China's economic growth averaging 9% annually over the past two decades, has turned China into an oil-thirsty country. This reality has become the principal factor driving Beijing's foreign policy in Africa (Onuoha, 2010).

Africa's increasing importance in global energy did not go unnoticed by China due to its growing importance for reliable supplies of oil, as a result, China intensified its interest in the continent when it became clear that it could no longer rely on itself for oil. For some time, China was self-sufficient, especially after the Daqing oil field began production in 1963. However, since 1993, China's oil consumption has exceeded production. In 1993, China produced 2.8 million barrels of oil per day (mbpd) but consumed about 3 million barrels of oil per day. The gap between oil production and consumption has widened significantly since then. From 1995 to 2005, China's oil demand increased from 3.3 to 6.6 mbpd, while oil production rose from 2.9 mbpd to 3.6 mbpd. By 2018, China's oil production remained at 2.9 mbpd, whereas its consumption had soared to 13.5 mbpd (British Petroleum, 2019). Hong (2008) noted that over the years China has expanded its oil venture in Africa and explained thus:

Since 1999, crude oil imports from Africa have accounted for over 20% of its total oil imports, and in 2005, this percentage increased to 31% (38.47 mts/year). Angola, Sudan, Congo and Equatorial Guinea were among China's top ten oil importing partners in 2005, while other oil producing African countries such as Nigeria, Gabon and Cameroon are increasing their oil exports to China. The growing dependence on imported oil from the continent means that China will continue with its emphasis on Africa as part of its new energy strategy (Hong, 2007: 16)

Concerned with this widening gap between oil production and consumption and realizing the increasing dependence on imported oil, China deemed it unavoidable to engage in the global oil market. This led to adopting a “going out” strategy to secure and diversify its oil supplies. Consequently, Africa soon emerged as a key part of China’s attempts to diversify its foreign oil sources. This increased Chinese presence on the continent in the second half of the 1990s, as state-owned oil companies began to enter African oil fields. Since then, China has been exploiting and producing African oil and constructing infrastructure such as pipelines and ports to facilitate oil flows to China (Sari, 2019: 5). Africa’s position as one of the prolific frontiers of growing oil production according to Obi (2019) is strategically important to China’s interest in both energy security and Chinese State Oil Corporations (SOCs).

Hong (2007) identified several factors such as the declining importance of oil imports from China’s previous oil suppliers, the destabilization of the oil-producing regions of the Middle East and Central Asia, and the dominance of U.S., Japanese and European oil companies in key oil-producing regions except for Africa as factors influential in China’s oil rush in Africa. During the 1990s, China relied heavily on oil from the Persian Gulf and Asia Pacific regions, which together accounted for almost 87% of its oil imports in 1995 (45% from the Persian Gulf and 41% from Asia Pacific). However, oil imports from these regions have since declined, creating a gap in supply that China needed to address (Hong, 2007). The geopolitical shifts following the 9/11 attacks, including U.S. military actions in Afghanistan and Iraq, further heightened China’s oil insecurity and vulnerability. As Hong (2007: 10) noted, “Beijing is concerned that the U.S. reaction to the 9.11 terrorist attacks has further destabilized the

already far from stable oil-producing regions of the Middle East and Central Asia. China has to diversify its energy import strategy so as to security its oil supply” (Hong, 2007: 10).

Additionally, the dominance of U.S., Japanese, and European oil companies in key oil-producing regions outside Africa made it difficult for Chinese companies to compete, prompting them to look for alternative sources. For instance, “Southeast Asia was under the exclusive control of Western powers during the colonial period. The oil-producing territories of Indonesia, Brunei, Sarawak and Burma (Myanmar) were controlled by the Dutch or Britain. Western control and the head start of Western oil companies in exploration, development, transport, refining and petrochemical as well as natural gas industries had helped to entrench Western interests there” (Hong, 2007: 10-11).

Although many African states have benefited from China’s engagement on the continent, it is evident that the exploitation of the continent’s abundant resources remains the driving force behind China-Africa relations. Africa provides raw materials for China’s rapidly industrializing economy, including oil. This resource extraction is facilitated by huge Chinese investments and preferential trade agreements, which often include economic and humanitarian aid, bribery of top government officials, and other well-strategized activities designed to obscure their exploitative intentions (Makwerere & Chipaike, 2012).

Writing on what China wants from Africa, Hanauer and Morris (2014: 5-6) posit that China has four overarching strategic interests in Africa:

1. Access to natural resources, particularly oil and gas
2. Markets for Chinese exports
3. Political legitimacy in international fora, particularly in regards to China's principle of non-interference, "South-South solidarity," and adherence to the "one China" policy
4. Prosperity, security, and stability on the continent, both for Africans well-being and to ensure safety of China's investments and the continuation of its commercial activities.

### **China's Strategies**

China's strategies for meeting its objectives in Africa, according to Sari (2019: 6) are motivated by the need "to seize the opportunity that Africa presented and consolidate its influence in the continent since the end of the 1990s, China has extensively engaged with African countries, diplomatically, economically, militarily and culturally." Similarly, Klare and Volman (2006b) argued that Chinese strategies in its quest for Africa's oil are not an innovation but rather represent 'business as usual,' proceeding along lines long trodden by the United States, France, and Britain. These countries have historically adopted any available means to secure African oil, including economic incentives, diplomacy, and the provision of arms and military equipment. In Africa, China's oil diplomacy "involves large aid disbursements, increased trade concessions, soft commercial loans, and oil-for-arms deals" (Onuoha, 2010: 376).

## **Security and Military Strategies of China**

China's growing demand for oil and other strategic natural resources has driven it to increase its security and military presence in Africa to protect its economic interests. This points to Van Rooyen and Solomon's (2007: 9) submission that "China's primary focus in Africa is to secure concessions of strategic resources and minerals for the future benefit of the Chinese economy. Similarly, as noted by Kong (2011: 10), "the surging dependence of the Chinese economy on African oil, together with the growing Chinese NOC's oil investment in Africa, calls for the Chinese government to promote and protect the country's oil interests in the continent." Sari (2020) highlights that China's military and security goals in Africa have evolved beyond United Nations peacekeeping missions and anti-piracy activities of the 2000s. A key example of this progression is acquiring its first overseas military base in Djibouti in 2017. Furthermore, China seems to have embarked on a more deliberate and focused strategy of militarizing and securitizing Africa along the lines of a forum on China-Africa military and security cooperation. This forum points to China's determination to militarize Africa and elevate the continent into a top security foreign policy entity (Conteh-Morgan, 2019). As reported in the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission (2020: 167), "China has employed its own military assets, as well as security assistance from African partners, to protect Chinese companies, critical infrastructure, and resources in countries where it has significant economic interests."

Holslag (2009: 23) argued that "the deeper China ventures into the resource-abundant African continent, the more it stumbles upon various security challenges." According to Etyang and Panyako (2020: 339), "since the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century,

Chinese companies – both state and private entities have invested in various countries in Africa. Most of the investments have been in the natural resources and manufacturing sectors. Suffice to mention that China’s investments have been geared towards China’s strategic objectives, that is, accessing resources and leveraging on China’s technological advantage, especially in the construction industry.” Safeguarding these investments means that China must move to ensure peace and security in various regions of Africa. Aguirre (2014) emphasized that the violence in South Sudan threatens Chinese oil investment, with about 120 enterprises operating in South Sudan, and the deals between these companies and the Sudanese government involve billions of dollars. As oil represents a major part of the bilateral economic relationship, securing this investment and expanding into non-oil sectors prioritize stabilizing the region (Aguirre, 2014; Hang, 2014).

Although the United States has a greater presence militarily and in counter-terrorism activities in Africa, Benabdallah (2018) notes that China is in the process of trying to extend its activities in defence and military security areas underlined by its win-win or mutual benefit philosophy. Furthermore, the forum on China-Africa military serves as an avenue for China to create stronger military and security relationships between the People’s Liberation Army, Navy, Air Force, and African military (Conteh-Morgan, 2019). Conteh-Morgan (2019) argues that China’s increasing and deepening geopolitical, economic, and socio-cultural engagement with Africa, coupled with the continent’s importance to other superpowers such as the United States and Russia, necessitates China’s protection of its interests. This includes ensuring the security of its investments and nationals who now number roughly a million, safeguarding against

politically motivated attacks from rebels or terrorists who may perceive China as backing authoritarian regimes, and addressing violent protests against China by African workers related to labour disputes or economic insecurity caused by the large inflow of Chinese goods which undercut the profits of African business owners.

China views a stable and peaceful Africa as crucial to its strategic interests on the continent, which explains its expanding security engagement in Africa. As Li (2014) noted, without a peaceful and stable environment, Africa's rich resources cannot effectively contribute to the prosperity of the continent's economy if political crises or conflicts persist. Additionally, instability in Africa hinders the smooth operation of Chinese companies. For instance, China suffered significant losses due to conflicts and civil wars in Libya and Sudan. To prevent similar situations, China deems it necessary to expand its security presence in Africa to protect its economic, political and strategic interests (Qian, 2012). China has significant investments in Africa's energy and mineral extraction sectors, particularly in countries such as Nigeria, Algeria, Sudan, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Zambia. Sudan's oil sector, for example, is dominated by China's National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) (Hellstrom, 2009). To protect and safeguard these investments and economic interests, particularly from threats posed by conflicts and political instability, China has had to take a keen interest in the stability and development of those countries where its companies have invested. This was evident during the conflict in Sudan, where, to protect its interests, China deviated from its principle of state sovereignty and non-interference by openly encouraging Khartoum to allow UN peacekeepers into Darfur (Large, 2007).

As many international scholars have stressed, China's involvement in peacekeeping and security in Africa is due to the abundant natural resources on the continent. As Yu (2018: 6) pointed out, "China's natural resources turn out to be unlikely to sustain its economic development in the new century after its four decades of rapid growth since the late 1970s." Drawing from the International Energy Agency's projection on China's rising oil demands, as quoted by Hanson (2008), 'China's net oil imports will jump to 13.1 million barrels per day by 2030'.

China's military strategy in Africa contrasts to some degree with that of the United States. While expanding its political and economic engagement, China has taken a more restrained approach to deepening its military presence. China has mostly focused on alternative forms of military influence, such as military training programs, arms sales, joint exercises, and the deployment of military units under the auspices of UN missions to increase its influence and broader objectives (U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, 2020). However, China has also engaged in other military activities that have demonstrated more direct operational ends, particularly through its first overseas military base in Djibouti, used to expand its military presence in and around Africa. Furthermore, the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission (2020) suggests that China may consider opening a second military base in Africa if its economic and political influence continues to grow.

Considering the above, and as posited by Esiet (2022: 172), "Beijing's military activities in Africa have risen dramatically, in contrast to years of reluctance in getting involved in any continental security role." Africa is key to meeting China's growing energy needs, especially amid competition from the United States and other nations for

African resources. To safeguard its strategic interests, China must demonstrate its military presence on the continent.

### **Chinese Economic Strategies and its Infrastructure for Resources Model**

China has leveraged its economic power to deepen its relationship with Africa in the ongoing competition with the U.S. to access its resources. While military activities are key to the U.S. presence in Africa, China has prioritized economic initiatives as the key component of its strategy. Just as Xu (2008: 1216) noted:

Unlike the US military presence, China has rushed into Africa with its economic strength – expanding its bilateral trade with African countries, increasing its investment not only in resources but also in other sectors, and pumping in foreign aid in all forms (debt relief, education programs, medical teams and medicines) and providing Sub-Saharan African countries with duty-free access for their exports to China. The Chinese government insists that China and Africa have complementary economic and commercial needs. Africa is short of investment capital, has low manufacturing base, and is highly import-dependent. China can easily make capital, manufactured goods and markets available. It is willing to invest, build infrastructures and open markets in Africa in return for access to African oil and other resources. Promoting economic ties with African countries has been the cornerstone of its relationship with African countries since the mid-1990s.

Ongodia (2017) points out that China seeks to expand its economic relations with Africa, spurred by the continent's favourable conditions, including access to African markets and, in some cases, the weaknesses of some African states, which make the region attractive for China's economic expansion. China's economic engagement with Africa revolves mainly around aid, trade, and investment. China's aid consists of grants, zero-interest loans, debt relief and concessional loans. Although China presents this aid

as a support for African development projects, it often serves as a tool to enable China to extend its influence in the region's resources (Ongodia, 2017).

Furthermore, substantial instances of expanding Chinese presence in Africa have been evident, as Sino-African exchanges, foundation ventures, and asset arrangements reached a significant figure of \$207.2 billion in early 2020 (Mushitsi & San, 2024). China provides hardware and gear in exchange for commodities such as oil, minerals, and rural items. This exchange supports China's industrial and energy needs and contributes to Africa's monetary turn of events (Mushitsi & San, 2024). Regarding foundation ventures, China's presence has left an enduring presence, exemplified through key projects such as the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railroad, and as Mushitsi and San (2024: 4) put it:

The Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railroad, China contributes not exclusively to the monetary advancement of the particular districts included but additionally to the general improvement of exchange and network across the mainland. The apparent effect of such undertakings stretches out past superior planned operations; it implies an essential methodology by China to support its monetary and international impact in Africa. These foundation ventures make unmistakable advantages for African countries, encouraging financial development, working with exchange, and adding to the advancement of nearby networks.

Regarding asset arrangement, China realizes the importance of committing to empowering resource-rich African countries by providing significant assets. This approach has put China in an advantageous position, as evidenced by countries such as Angola and Zambia. For instance, Angola, a major player in the worldwide oil market, has turned into one of China's key oil suppliers. China has managed to maintain a regular

supply of oil from Angola through essential arrangements supporting its development energy requests (Mushitsi & San, 2024: 4-5).

China-Africa economic cooperation, particularly with resource-rich African states, is characterized by a contract structure of “resources for infrastructure,” sometimes called the “Angola model.” Through this model, the repayment of the loan or funds from China for infrastructure development is made in terms of natural resources (Executive Research Associate, 2009: 78). Adem (2010) point out that China has, therefore, utilized this arrangement to package natural resource exploitation with infrastructure development in Africa.

China has strategically employed economic engagement tools, including aid, investment, and trade, to ensure access to African oil resources. In Angola, for example, China leveraged these tools to forge an oil partnership. In 2005, China provided Angola with a \$2 billion oil-backed loan for infrastructure projects, followed by an additional \$1 billion loan in 2006. In exchange, a Chinese state-owned oil company acquired 40% of the offshore oil share from Angola’s state-owned oil company for \$1.4 billion, with Angola repaying the loan with ten thousand barrels of oil per day (Parenti, 2009). This points to Kong’s (2011) description of China’s policy instrument as a “project-for-oil” approach, as evidenced by Beijing’s habit of tying its projects to the procurement of oil and the repayment of loans with future oil production as witnessed in Angola. Considering its success in Angola, Kong (2011: 12) notes that “it has been replicated in other parts of Africa, such as Nigeria, Chad, and Ghana, and applied to Chinese acquisition of other raw materials, such as copper in the Democratic Republic of Congo. This approach has inherent attraction for Beijing: it enhances both China’s oil interests

and other dimensions of interests, such as exports of Chinese goods, services and technology, in Africa.”

The blueprint for infrastructure-for-resources loans was introduced in oil-rich Angola in 2004, with Sudan and Nigeria among the first countries to receive this aid from China. Alves (2012) points out that although China channels these loans to build infrastructures in non-oil industries such as water and electricity supply, transportation and housing, it undoubtedly paves the way for China to enter Africa’s oil sectors. As Alves (2012: 18) points out, “China’s infrastructure-for-oil loans over the past couple of years suggests that this economic instrument remains; nonetheless, an important tool for China to secure, if not equity stakes, surely a steady supply of oil in the medium to long term (that is to say, over the standard repayment period of 10-15 years).”

To create a different image for itself, in contrast to the US military presence, China identified an opportunity for a different strategy by utilizing resource-backed loans as a practical means of diversifying its natural resource supply (Butts & Bankus, 2009). This method allowed China to leverage economic assistance to gain long-term natural resource access. As Brautigam (2009) points out, China’s infrastructure for resources model was packaged to resource-rich African countries as innovative and unlike the approaches of the U.S. and Europe, creating the notion that African country’s resource-wealth could finally be directly converted into development projects. According to Alves (2013: 207), “these loans have been largely portrayed by Beijing as a win-win economic cooperation tool, through which China offers the provision of much needed infrastructure in exchange for access to natural resources that it lacks at home.”

Yaruingam and Sharma (2023) write that China's economic strategies are frequently viewed as more desirable than the U.S., which tend to be tied to factors such as democracy, decent governance, and respect for human rights. In contrast, China has successfully sold a development strategy in Africa that is not dependent upon economic and political conditions. Besada (2013: 87) attributes China's success in securing oil rights in Africa to "a wide range of economic instruments; particularly prestige, construction projects, financial assistance, and arms sales to cement ties with oil-producing states."

### **China's Soft Power Diplomacy Strategy**

According to Ongodia (2017: 37), "China's approach to Africa has undergone changes in the last decade, with noticeable emphasis on public diplomacy and soft power. The shift underlines the reality that economic trade, long the plank of Sino-Africa relations, are insufficient in promoting the kind of long-term, sustainable relationship that both Africa and China desire." At the 2012 FOCAC, the retired Chinese politician and former president and general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party referred to these policies as a "new type of China-Africa strategic partnership" (Ongodia, 2017: 37). China's attention to public diplomacy stems from its effort to prioritize soft power approach over hard power. He Wenping, Director of African Studies in the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, explained thus, "with its rapidly growing economy, China has begun to cultivate the attraction of its language, culture, political values and diplomacy around the world. Africa is perhaps the most important testing ground for the promotion of Chinese soft power" (Sun, 2014: 38).

Soft power, according to Joseph Nye, “is the ability to get people to want what you want through attraction rather than through the hard power of coercion. Soft power arises from the attractiveness of a country’s culture, political ideals, and policies” (Nye, 2011: 1). Furthermore, Nye (2008: 95) points out, “soft power is more than just persuasion or the ability to move people by argument, though that is important part of it. It is also the ability to entice and attract. In behavioral terms, soft power is attractive power. In terms of resources, soft power resources are assets that produce such attraction.” Given that China’s direct competitor in the scramble for oil resources in Africa – the United States, holds a significant advantage over China in terms of hard power resources, the adoption of an alternative strategy becomes necessary for China. As Morgan (2019: 388) points out, “improving China’s soft power – its ability to attract and influence without resorting to “hard” military or other coercive measures – is an important strategic goal.” In Africa, China has invested huge financial resources through the current use of soft-power instruments, namely trade, debt relief, aid and investment aimed at winning over African governments and citizens and consequently improving its influence on the continent (Liang, 2012).

China has utilized various soft power initiatives to realize its objectives in Africa. Njeru (2019) noted that such initiatives include development infrastructure, concessional loans, trade relationships, and smaller-scale grants. Zhao (2014: 1038) added that “Beijing’s development projects, from infrastructure to debt relief to providing medical support, are also part of a public diplomacy strategy to build goodwill and international support.” China has, in recent times, asserted its soft power diplomacy in Africa as a way to deepen its presence on the continent and make its acceptability less about its

ability to give out loans nor just a commercial relationship but that of a mutual and genuine friendship. China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs defence of China's role in Africa as highlighted in Sun's (2013) commentary on China's increasing interest in Africa further points to Beijing's soft power diplomacy strategies. The commentary reads thus:

China's intention in Africa is benign. Beijing has no intention to colonize the continent, dictate the politics or economy of the local countries or deprive them of development opportunities. On the contrary, China truly sees itself as Africa's "brother" and hopes to help African countries develop through infrastructure projects. Beijing seeks an approach different from that of the West, one that avoids the "meddling" with the internal affairs of African countries through conditional aid (Sun, 2013).

China's soft power strategy is geared towards enduring itself to Africa and further fostering anti-American sentiments on the continent. In contrast to the U.S., which often imposes one or more conditions on African nations before granting access to economic aid or trade programmes, China adopts a more business-only approach. For instance, where the United States ignored some countries due to ideological differences, such as Zimbabwe, China has moved in, emphasizing non-interference in internal politics. The U.S. imposed hard sanctions on Zimbabwe over the lack of democracy through its Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Act (ZIDERA), urging its financial lenders to Zimbabwe to discontinue any form of an economic bailout plan for Zimbabwe during the Mugabe regime due to the country's lack of democracy (Makwerere & Chipaike, 2012).

The non-interference stance of China is a strategy that China adopts in Africa to separate itself from the U.S. and West, positioning itself as fighting against a common enemy. As Snow (1995: 285) pointed out, "both Chinese and African elites like to adopt

the posture of having experienced – and continuing to face – the common enemies of imperialism and ‘neo-imperialism.’” With China in direct competition with the United States for influence on the continent, it leverages anti-American sentiments and suspicion of direct interference in African politics and the Western-centric norms that come with it.

China’s soft power diplomacy has yielded positive outcomes, particularly in gaining access to the continent’s strategic resources and edging its competitors in the scramble for Africa’s natural resources. This advantage stems from China’s sustained diplomatic efforts over the past decade in the continent. China has employed carefully thought-out strategic maneuvers that have positioned it as an appealing economic partner for Africa through mutually beneficial engagement (Hinga, Jun & Yiguan, 2013). Since the early 2000s, China has prioritized trade and cooperation by organizing forums aimed at strengthening China-Africa economic ties. One key initiative has been the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). During its First Ministerial Conference in Beijing, the goal was outlined, as Fernando (2007: 370) states, “the conference attempted to chart a direction for the development of a new, stable and long-term partnership featuring equality and mutual benefit between China and the countries of Africa. The two main items on the agenda of the conference were the establishment of ‘a new international political and economic order in the 21<sup>st</sup> century’ and ‘the strengthening of China-Africa economic cooperation and trade under the new circumstances.’”

China has consistently committed diplomatically, culturally, and financially to advancing its interests in Africa. As Zhao (2014) noted, China has demonstrated both a strong interest and ability to sustain its diplomatic efforts across Africa. This is evident

through the establishment of numerous embassies and consulates in Africa, along with frequent diplomatic visits from Chinese officials, including the Chinese Foreign Minister's regular visits to the region. Notably, in 2013, President Xi Jinping chose to tour Africa on his inaugural foreign trip. A key outcome of China's diplomatic strategy was the launching of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in October 2000. Additionally, initiatives such as the China-Africa Business Conference, the China-Africa Business Council, the China-Africa Development Fund and the Sino-Africa Business and Investment Forum have also furthered direct exchange and cooperation between Chinese and African entrepreneurs, encouraged Chinese investments and trade with Africa, and provided opportunities for Chinese companies to explore business and investment opportunity in Africa (Zhao, 2014).

As with other world powers such as the United States, China's soft power diplomacy in Africa has elicited mixed reactions across the continent. China's growing economic linkages have polarized opinions among Africans, especially on what China's true motives are. Some perceive China as an important partner – offering an alternative to traditional Western powers that lack colonial baggage, and one whose successful development model is worth adopting. On the other hand, China is also seen as an exploitative power that is driven by the desire to plunder the continent's natural resources, back non-democratic regimes, and flood the market with inferior or even dangerous products (Morgan, 2019).

## **China's Media Strategies/Activities**

To further strengthen its presence, China enhanced its extensive economic and security strategies with activities in the media to promote its interest and friendly power image in Africa. Media is a key component of China's soft power strategy, as such, there has been an increase in Chinese media outlets covering the entire continent, encouraging exchange and cooperation between African and Chinese media to enhance mutual understanding and balanced media coverage of each other (Zhao, 2014: 1037). China's expanding media presence in Africa is closely linked to the increasing global attention on its rising influence on the continent, particularly from the United States, which views this growing influence as a threat to its dominance over Africa's resources. According to Wu (2012), China is concerned about the dominance of traditional Western media in Africa, particularly how their biased reporting on China's presence in the region negatively affects the Sino-African relationship.

Over the years, global information flow has been dominated by Western media giants whose vast financial resources enable them to deploy reporters worldwide to collect information that fits within the framework of Western values and then spread those stories to countries lacking resources to send their reporters overseas. With this dominant position, Western media have often projected negative images of China, referring to it as a "neo-colonialist" or an "energy predator" due to its growing economic ties with Africa (International Department Central Committee of CPC, 2011). For instance, a New York Times opinion piece criticized China's aid programs as a 'rogue aid,' calling its development assistant 'nondemocratic' in origin and 'nontransparent' in practice, and equating it to that of Iran and Venezuela, claiming that China has 'the cash

and the will to reshape the world into a place very dissimilar to the one where we want to live.’ (Naim, 2007). The opinion piece argues that China’s interest in Africa is driven by the desire to access raw materials, questioning thus, “what better than a generous foreign-aid program to ensure the goodwill of a petro-power like Nigeria or a natural natural-resource-rich neighbour like Indonesia?” (Naim, 2007).

The United States has leveraged its African media influence to promote an anti-China narrative. In response, China aspires to establish its media presence in Africa to support its objectives and fight off the American-led anti-Chinese agenda. Consequently, As Ambassador Liu Guangyuan pointed out in a speech in 2013 on the importance of the media in China-Africa relations:

To realize the dreams of both China and Africa, our media must play a significant role. First, our media must break the monopoly of the current international discourse.... Second, our media should report China-Africa friendship positively...to nurture greater cooperation, friendship and partnership among our people.... Third, our media should serve common development interests shared between China and Africa (Guangyuan, 2013).

Considering the above, both China’s state-owned (CCTV Africa, China Daily Africa Weekly, Beijing Review, Xinhua News Agency, and China Radio International) and private media (Star Times, the private Chinese digital pay-tv operator) companies have entered Africa, thereby increasing China’s media visibility on the continent. Spurred by its position as Africa’s largest trade partner, China has equally committed itself to building communication infrastructure, helping improve state broadcasters' technical capabilities and training journalists from across Africa. These efforts are geared towards enhancing its influence and improving cooperation between China and the African continent (Yanqui, 2014). On the other hand, Memon and Sandano (2023:

82) commenting on what China aspires to achieve with these media companies in Africa, note that “China is trying to create a positive image of itself in the world.”

Media engagement is one of those efforts of China to increase its soft power in Africa, and this can be traced to China’s third Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in Beijing in 2006, where it outlined guidelines for media and communication (Bailard, 2016; Wekesa, 2013). Also outlined included opportunities to increase the presence and quality of Chinese media in the continent:

Since the third Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC)... the Chinese media have begun a steady march to get closer to Africa and to gain influence in its mediasphere. This process has displayed signs of continuity and discontinuity with China’s previous attempts to influence ideas and perceptions on the continent. It has included both old and new communication technologies and has developed through a mix of bold policy decisions, and trial and error (Gagliardone, 2013: 25).

China’s quest to exert its media presence in Africa became evident in 2006 when it relocated the Regional Editorial Office for Africa of its state-run news agency, Xinhua, from Paris to Nairobi, Kenya (Gagliardone, 2013: 25). According to Hansen (2016: 2) the number of Xinhua offices have grown since 2006 and as a result, has become primary source of information, competing with Western news agencies such as Reuters and Associated Press. Along with the Xinhua News Agency, China Radio International and China Central Television are also actively present in Africa, promoting a positive image of China in Africa (Shinn & Eisenman, 2012: 198).

This chapter discussed topics not covered in the literature review, providing a detailed examination of the various phases of the scramble for Africa’s resources and the strategies employed by the competing powers. With these findings established, the

following chapter will conclude the study by summarizing the findings and arguments presented throughout the research.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **CONCLUSION**

This study examined the security and development implications arising from the competition between the United States and China for Africa's resources. The research provides an in-depth analysis of the distinct periods of the scramble for Africa, focusing on its resources and the strategies employed by both nations.

The study addressed several key areas. First, it examined the security implications of the United States and China's contestation for oil resources in Africa. Second, it analyzed the implications of the growing Chinese presence in Africa on the strategic interests of the United States. Third, through an economic lens, it examined how Africa can leverage the competition between these global powers for its benefit. And finally, the study investigated why Africa's abundant resources have yet to translate into widespread wealth for its states. The structure of the research aligns with these objectives, with each chapter addressing specific aspects of the study.

Hence, the research was divided into four chapters. Chapter one provided the background information of the research, the problem statement, the aims and objectives of the study, the significance and scope of the study, and the methodology, including the data collection method.

Chapter Two, the literature review, began with the study's theoretical framework, employing neorealism or structural realism as its analytical foundation. Following this,

a review of existing scholarly literature on the subject was undertaken to address the questions posed in this research.

Chapter three focused on the major findings of the research, detailing the stages of great power competition in Africa, from the colonial invasion and scramble to the current scramble for oil by the United States and China. This chapter also analyzed the role of oil in the new scramble for Africa and compared the strategies employed by the two great powers to access Africa's resources while countering each other's influence on the continent.

Chapter four concluded the study, summarizing its findings.

The study's findings revealed not only the competition between the United States and China for access to Africa's oil resources but also its profound impact on the region's security and development. China has emerged as Africa's largest trading partner, with its growing influence driven by its rise as a global economic power and its increasing need for oil and other natural resources. To secure access to African oil and other resources and compete with the United States, China employed different strategies, including economic incentives, diplomacy and military initiatives.

For the United States, China's growing influence in Africa, especially following oil discoveries, posed a serious threat to its strategic interests. As the findings in the study revealed, the U.S., after a period of post-Cold War disappearance, intensified its focus on Africa to counter China's extensive involvement. Similar to China, the United States utilized a mix of military, economic, and diplomatic strategies to achieve its objectives, but they differed in terms of approach. China prioritized the soft power

approach over hard power to endear itself to Africa and foster anti-American sentiments on the continent, while the U.S. adopted a more direct and militarized stance. Militarily, China's strategy focused more on alternative forms of military influence, such as training programs and joint exercises, in contrast to the deepened military presence of the United States.

The scramble for oil in Africa has had significant security and developmental implications. The Sino-American competition has contributed to the region's militarization and securitization, with both nations building up their military capabilities, including armed forces, arms transfers, and military bases, to protect their geopolitical and economic interests. This militarization has led to the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, which often fall into the hands of rebels and criminals who use them against the state, thereby exacerbating insecurity in the region.

On the economic front, the study found that Africa could benefit from this rivalry if its resources are managed effectively. The strategic importance of the continent to both China and the United States has led to increased trade, investment, and development initiatives. Both countries are poised to outcompete each other and deepen ties with oil-rich countries in the continent by making significant investments in the African continent. As evidenced by the study's findings, the level of trade, investment, and economic development model increased over time due to the scramble for oil between China and the United States. For instance, China's establishment of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) prompted the U.S. to establish its counter-economic measure, the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). Through these initiatives, both countries have made substantial economic investments in Africa.

While the substantial economic investments by China and the United States in Africa grant them access to natural resources, the revenues generated from oil exploration have not been effectively utilized to improve the population's living conditions. The underperformance of resource-rich countries is thus attributed to a combination of internal and external factors, including the self-serving interests of oil-thirsty great powers and the mismanagement of resource revenues by African leaders.

Africa's development still has not reached the expected level, especially considering the continent's vast natural resource endowment. Despite being rich in oil and other resources, many countries on the continent continue to experience high poverty levels, slow economic growth, low human capital development, and poor infrastructure. A major barrier to the region's development is the bad leadership in the resource-rich countries, where corruption, poor economic policies, and stomach infrastructure have hindered development aligned with the continent's resource wealth. This persistent underdevelopment – often called the “resource curse” – is driven by internal and external factors. Internally, many African leaders have failed to manage resources effectively, usually enabling or participating in corrupt practices. Externally, multinational corporations from the West exert significant influence over these resources, frequently exploiting them at the expense of their development.

The wealth generated from oil and other natural resources must be managed judiciously and transparently to reverse this trend. Only then can Africa achieve the level of development that should naturally accompany its resource abundance.

The study contributes to existing scholarship by addressing gaps in the literature, particularly by analyzing the different phases of great power competition in Africa, their characteristics, and the objectives and strategies of the U.S. and China in the current scramble for oil resources – elements that were previously underexplored. The study’s findings reveal that while both nations (the U.S. and China) employ similar strategies to gain influence and access to Africa’s natural resources, their approaches to achieving these objectives differ significantly. This contribution enhances future scholars’ understanding of the evolving dynamics of U.S.-China competition in Africa by shedding light on less apparent aspects of this geopolitical rivalry.

However, the research faced certain limitations, particularly in data collection. As most of the data were sourced from secondary sources – including journal articles, global news and media corporations, government documents and/or reports, and internet sources – significant efforts were dedicated to validating the credibility of these sources. The process of gathering, analyzing, and cross-referencing extensive information from different sources proved time-consuming. Consequently, the study required a longer period to complete than initially anticipated due to these constraints.

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## CURRICULUM VITAE

Christian Nzubechi Akubueze

### Education

University of New Brunswick - MA in Political Science, 2025

Federal University Otuoke - BSC in Political Science, October 2017

### Publications

Akubueze, C. N., & Egegbara, J. C. (2024). Global Inequality Challenge: An Analysis of the Disparities in Wealth and Power. *African Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Research*, 7(2), 382-393. <https://doi.org/10.52589/AJSSHR-XCWUSE2J>

Akubueze, C. N. (2024). The Rise of China in the Decline of United States Hegemonic Power: A Threat to International Security? *Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Science*, 12(5), 107-114. <https://www.questjournals.org/jrhss/v12-i5.html>

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Akubueze, C. N., Oyinmiebi, P. T., & John, C. C. (2022). ECOWAS Common Currency Postponed Again: Will the Currency Ever be Launched? *African Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Research*, 5(5), 48-58. <https://doi.org/10.52589/AJSSHR-R6ZMVI8L>

## **Awards & Scholarships**

2024: Masters International Differential Scholarship School of Graduate Studies  
University of New Brunswick

2023: Magee Fellowships in the Humanities and Social Sciences, University of New  
Brunswick

2023: Masters International Differential Scholarship, School of Graduate Studies  
University of New Brunswick