

# Sino-Africa Security Relations: A Multidimensional Perspective

David Bashiel Kolleh<sup>a\*</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Liberia Institute of Public Administration (LIPA)

\*dbashiel83@gmail.com

**Abstract:** This paper examines Sino-African security relations from a multidimensional perspective. It investigates the historical context, encompassing colonial, post-colonial, and contemporary interactions, through the lenses of bilateral, multilateral, and International Relations (IR). Additionally, it underscores how China has utilized soft power diplomacy throughout Africa, including military training and logistical support for various African nations during and after their liberation struggles from colonialism. Over the past five decades, this approach has enabled China to position itself as a prominent geostrategic actor on the continent.

Methodologically, this paper employs a mix of analytical and qualitative approaches, utilizing official reports from the Chinese State Council, multilateral organizations, online publications, Sino-Africa scholarships, and other IR scholarships to provide deeper insight and understanding of the paper. This shift enables more profound insights into various realities, motivations, and understandings of different Sino-African relations from a multidimensional perspective.

The Literature reveals that, although Western Powers, including the United States and Britain, still have a significant foothold in Africa, China, through its soft power diplomacy, has now established strategic and comprehensive military and economic cooperation with more than 50 African countries. China has provided 5,000 training slots to senior military personnel from Africa, with an additional 2,000 since 2015-2018, including ten defence chiefs, eight defence ministers, and six presidents. Over the last decade, many African nations have viewed it as a key player in the global order.

The findings reveal that China has become a normative actor in Africa, not only as an economic actor, but also as a significant military player, challenging the conventional notion that Beijing primarily cares about strengthening ties with Africa due to the continent's rich natural resources. The findings show that China has held its third China-Africa Peace and Security Forum in Beijing, bringing defence and military departments, leaders from nearly 50 African countries, representatives from the African Union, military attachés from embassies of African countries in China, and other parts of Africa. The paper concludes that China's military expansion in Africa may shift the global order eastward, by realigning reliance away from the United States and Western Countries.

**Keywords:** China-Africa, Security-Relations, Military Cooperation, Bilateral Relations

## 1. Introduction

The historical relationship between China and Africa is a testament to the enduring nature of their connection, predating the involvement of many Western powers on the African continent. China's initial significant interaction with Africa, a feat of maritime exploration during the Ming Dynasty, marked the first quarter of the 15th century (Snow, 1988, pp. 30–1). This relationship, however, experienced a hiatus for several centuries until Chinese laborers and traders began arriving in various African regions in the latter part of the 18th century (Shinn & Eisenman, 2012, pp. 17–26). During Africa's liberation struggles from colonial rule in the mid-19th century, China emerged as a significant partner, providing military and technical aid to several African countries, including Angola, South Africa, Namibia, Uganda, and Zimbabwe. This paper primarily evaluates Sino-African security Relations from a multidimensional perspective, focusing on the contemporary security partnership between the two, including peacekeeping, military diplomacy, maritime security, technical military support, and security exchanges.

## 2. Background

Over the past decade, the bilateral relationship between Africa and China has undergone significant evolution, surpassing traditional diplomatic relations. This dynamic partnership, a testament to their mutual benefits, spans areas of cooperation including bilateral relations, security, economic partnership,

trade, and investment. The Forum on Africa Corporation (FOCAC) and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) have played significant roles in this relationship. FOCAC, the foundation of China's policy towards Africa, focuses on enhancing the quality of bilateral relations, while the BRI emphasizes the multilateral platform and connectivity through infrastructure development and investment.

When the State Council of China released the White Paper in 2021, it described Africa-China cooperation as being in the new era. The document was titled "China and Africa in the New Era: A Partnership of Equals." In this document, Beijing emphasizes that China and Africa will always be a community with a shared future. This highlights that developing solidarity and cooperation with African countries has been a cornerstone of China's foreign policy and a firm and longstanding strategy. The Chinese White Paper said, "After years of dedicated efforts, the tree of Africa-China corporation has flourished—it is tall and strong and cannot be shaken by any force." Beijing believes that the friendly relations between China and Africa have endured for half a century and have withstood the test of time. The paper said that the two sides have stood firmly together on critical junctures and significant issues.

Additionally, in August 2023, China held its third China-Africa Peace and Security Forum in Beijing. Defense departments, military leaders from nearly 50 African countries, representatives from the African Union, and military attachés from embassies of African countries in China attended the forum. China's top military brass and Minister of Defence, Li Shangfu, emphasized Beijing's



**Figure 1. China's first overseas military support base opens in Djibouti on August 1, 2017. (Source: CGTN)**

position on forming a lasting partnership with Africa on peace and security, as well as China's continued support for Africa.

China-Africa bilateral, multilateral cooperation, and diplomatic alliances, even at the United Nations (UN) and other global bodies, have reached new heights due to mutual respect and entrenched solidarity among them over the last few decades. For instance, according to the State Council (2021), China has established a comprehensive strategic and cooperative partnership with nine African countries, a comprehensive strategic partnership with three, a strategic partnership with six, and a comprehensive cooperative partnership with seven. China has set up binational commissions, diplomatic consultation or strategic dialogue mechanisms with 21 African countries and the AU Commission, and joint (mixed) committees on trade and economic cooperation with 51 African countries (Chinese State Council, 2021).

In 2016, China and the African Union (AU) established a human rights consultation mechanism. In 2017, China established a High-Level People-to-People Exchange Mechanism with South Africa, the first of its kind between China and an African country. China-Africa cooperation at the local level is flourishing. The two sides have held four cooperation forums between local governments since 2012. There are 160 pairs of sister provinces or cities between China and African countries, 48 of which have been established since 2013. This is a paradigm shift in the global order.

Unlike the West and the US's role on the continent, African leaders are witnessing a new kind of bilateral relationship with a world power. This appears to signal a new era in the relationship between the two parties. China's soft power approach in Africa, its noninterference policy on the continent, and its insistence that "African problems must have African solutions" are blistering echoes of hope throughout the continent.

### **3. Key Assumptions that Underpin the Relationship**

To fully understand the main course of the relationship that exists between the duo, scholars and researchers have made numerous assumptions about this partnership over the last two decades, which will inform this paper from an international relations (IR) perspective. It is imperative to understand the implications of a cemented China-Africa relationship. First, China's contemporary engagement in Africa as a normative power and a responsible global actor; second, the Chinese involvement in the African continent, characterized by its approach to bilateralism, multilateralism, and globalism. To better understand this, the following questions will be used as guidance:

A) How vital are Sino-African security Relations from a multi-faceted perspective, considering the changing dynamics in the global order? How can China, as a "Rising Power," benefit from any form of Security cooperation with Africa?

B) Can enhanced Security relations between the two sides further accelerate China's foreign investment portfolio through development on the African continent?

### **4. Major Arguments**

In providing answers to the questions enumerated above, I will employ two different tools: theoretical and normative. Theoretically, one would argue that China's behavior in Africa suggests it views itself as a 'normative power.' China wants to be seen as a responsible global actor. This will inform its position as an 'alternative' to the current global unipolar hegemony led by the United States. By doing so, China presents a refined and redefined version of itself as a responsible global power to the African continent. The second argument is that China's disposition in Africa does not directly indicate what it intends to do or whether it wants to

a doctrine of a responsible, civilized, and equal society that respects the sovereignty of other states and supports mutual respect. The third argument is that China employs soft power, including multilateralism, bilateral development cooperation, health and education diplomacy, development financing through the Export-Import Bank of China (EXIM), and people-to-people cooperation, as some of its foreign policy tools to establish a foothold on the continent.

China's foreign policy doctrine, which strictly adheres to a non-interventionist policy, adds more spice to the mix. By doing so, China is fostering cohesive relationships with nation-states in international affairs, thereby strengthening ties rather than merely pursuing transactions. This author believes this is a skilful approach to diplomacy and multilateralism that has paid off for Beijing over the past two decades. China utilizes coercive diplomacy rather than force compliance, or the use of force[deterrence].

Additionally, from a normative perspective, one would argue that China utilizes its liberal norms and values to its advantage in shaping foreign policy. Through this approach, Beijing is leveraging itself as a social player in the global order. China is not setting new standards or rules in Africa or elsewhere; it is collaborating with nation-states based on their history, common purpose, and shared values, which are different from Western-dominated approaches. For instance, the US and its Western allies have used the imposition of unilateral financial and economic sanctions, as well as travel restrictions on African countries in the last two decades, straining relationships between the West and Africa. A recent example is the US Congress's decision to pass a law that contradicts America's standing and its values for liberal democracy, respect for the rule of law, and the global mechanisms of the international doctrine of nation-states. On December 14, 2023, the US Congress passed a new law, arrogating powers to "criminally prosecute corrupt African leaders" (US Congress, 2023). This law is essentially a wanton and blatant violation of the doctrine of sovereignty. It is also illegal under international laws. Additionally, China and Africa are creating and co-constituting major multilateral and bilateral institutions, such as the FOCAC and the BRI, with the aim of not replacing the existing international order but rather counterbalancing it. In his meeting with President Joe Biden in December 2023, President Xi Jinping reiterated Beijing's position on this matter.

## **5. What is China's Current Role in Africa's Security Regime?**

China, as a "rising power," remains one of the most critical subjects in the global discourse of International Relations (IR). To negate or ignore the fact that China has established a comprehensive strategic and cooperative partnership with nine African countries, a comprehensive strategic partnership with three, a strategic partnership with six, and a comprehensive cooperative partnership with seven, as noted by the Chinese State Council (2021), would render geopolitics a lopsided outlook. Additionally, China has set up bi-national commissions, diplomatic consultation or strategic dialogue mechanisms with 21 African countries and the AU Commission, and joint (mixed) committees on trade and economic cooperation with 51 African countries. In 2016, China and the AU established a consultation mechanism on human rights. In 2017, China established a High-Level People-to-People Exchange Mechanism with South Africa, the first of its kind between China and an African country. This means that Beijing understands that Africa holds a massive threshold in its strategic global positioning as an alternative power. This is for two reasons.

First, Africa and China share similar concerns about Western neo-colonial dominance, and both have enjoyed a long-standing relationship that has lasted for almost half a century. They have built trust, and their relationship is thriving. The Chinese 2021 White Paper describes it as "rock solid." It is also essential to study the Sino-African security relationship from a multidimensional perspective, as China seeks a relationship with Africa in search of energy and mineral resources to fuel its economy, new export markets, and international political support. Furthermore, China shares a vision of mutually beneficial cooperation in practice. For example, trade between China and Africa increased roughly tenfold between 2000 and 2008, with energy and mineral resources taking up the lion's share of China's imports from Africa (Taylor, 2008, p. 38).

China continues to support African countries in playing a more active role in global governance and peace on the African continent. They are actively involved in combating piracy and armed conflict, as well as Western imperialism and neocolonialism. China maintains closed and high-level exchanges with the militaries of African countries, conducts professional and technological exchanges, and works on building and enhancing military academies and training centers. Additionally, they provide military hardware and software to prevent conflict and combat piracy, conduct joint military drills to strengthen national defense capabilities, and train military personnel from African countries. China has provided over 5,000 training slots to senior military personnel from Africa, with an additional 2,000 since 2015-2018, including ten defense chiefs, eight defense ministers, and six presidents (Paul Nantulya, 2023).

The literature on China's relations with Africa is vast. Whether it involves multilateral, bilateral, security, economic, trade, investment, or infrastructure development. Different authors view the discourse based on their respective interests and orientations. Some Western authors view China's engagement with Africa as a threat or a challenge to the current unipolar world order, mainly dominated by the United States. In contrast, others view China's security interests in Africa as primarily driven by its economic interests, aimed at protecting its investments across the continent. In any case, the different contexts are not void of flaws or at least some biases. Alden and Zheng (2017) argue that China's engagement in Africa has been characterized as non-interventionist in its pursuit of economic interests. This engagement, however, is on course to become more deeply involved in the region's security landscape. The authors argue that Beijing's desire to play a more significant role in continental security, while addressing the complexities of doing so, is crucial for preserving China's enduring foreign policy principles and expanding its economic interests on the continent.

## **6. Strengthening Sino-Africa Security Relations: A Peacekeeping Perspective**

China's growing role in African security has been profound to date, ranging from its extensive peacekeeping activities in several African countries to ongoing mediation in conflicts such as Sudan, and even training the armed forces of some countries (Chris et al., 2017). From the Chinese perspective, their goal is clear—ensuring that they collaborate with Africa to counter Western imperialism and the unipolar world order. China's Diplomacy in the New Era (China State Council, 2023) puts it more succinctly, namely, that China and Africa, over the years, have forged an "unbreakable bond in their fight against imperialism and colonialism and embarked on a path of cooperation and development."



The Chinese narrative further argues that its security relationship with Africa has concerned Washington and its Western allies, who have not hesitated to make wild accusations against their established peace and security cooperation. Similarly, China has supported African unity and the efforts of African countries to achieve self-reliance. It has also supported African countries in playing a more active role in global governance and assuming a larger role in international affairs (Lin et al., 2023). For instance, the Chinese military has maintained close, high-level exchanges with the militaries of African countries, conducted professional and technological exchanges, and built or improved military academies, hospitals, training centres, and other facilities (China's Diplomacy in the New Era, 2023). Furthermore, doing so has helped African countries train their military personnel and strengthen their security mechanism. In some instances, the two sides have also conducted joint military drills to enhance their national defence capabilities. Sara Van Hoeymissen (2011: 3-5) argues that China has explicitly endorsed regional conflict resolution mechanisms, which it perceives as having a less intrusive impact on the sovereignty of third-world countries than initiatives taken under the global collective security system led by the UN Security Council. Moreover, China's strengthening cooperation with African regional organizations and aligning its stance with the views emerging from these regional bodies is an important way in which China has responded to the rising security challenges and political demands it faces in Africa. China's openness to cooperation with all African countries, including those experiencing political instability or domestic conflict, has garnered particular attention. A key principle of China's foreign policy is a deep disinclination to get involved in the internal affairs of other states. China has thus been accused of embracing "pariah regimes" and has faced international calls to use its increasing influence and leverage with African governments to contribute more actively to resolving African security crises (Alden, 2007, pp. 59–66). To this, the Chinese government has insisted that it maintains its non-intervention policy. However, China's increased security interest in Africa is not happening in a vacuum—Beijing is aware of the role Africa played decades ago to ensure it was voted as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, as well as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and other global bodies. Ilaria Carrozza (2018, pp. 89-91-91) argues that the African continent has shifted its political focus from economic integration to security over the last 20 years. She claims that the 1990s witnessed the consolidation of economic integration communities, primarily through regional economic communities (RECs), while the 2000s brought a greater focus on security and the security-development nexus. Carrozza further argues that the shift has been accompanied by growing attention to nontraditional security threats while moving away from traditional, Cold War-type warfare. China's global influence is expanding in terms of both security and other areas. Its engagement with Africa is progressing rapidly, and peace and security are becoming increasingly important in the relationship between China and Africa. According to Faith Mabera (2020: 2-5), China's involvement in peace and security initiatives in Africa significantly changes Beijing's foreign and security policy. While China's primary focus in Africa has been economic, its material interests are broadening, and it is now prioritizing the strategic and operational benefits of engaging in security initiatives alongside its commercial pursuits. Additionally, it is the second-largest financial contributor to the UN peacekeeping budget, providing 10.25% of peacekeeping costs according to the United Nations Peacekeeping Index. In 2013, China deployed 395 combat troops to the

Multidimensional Integration Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), breaking its tradition of sending non-combat personnel to UN peacekeeping missions, such as medical staff, engineering, and logistics units. The Chinese unit included a protection force of 170 soldiers stationed at the UN regional headquarters in northern Mali. This contribution marked a significant milestone in China's involvement in peacekeeping, demonstrating the gradual expansion and deepening of China's engagement in multilateral peacekeeping operations. Since the mid-1990s, China's involvement in international peacekeeping has shifted from a minimalist approach to a more active one. China's approach to UN peacekeeping in the 1970s was premised on 'the principle of three no's'—no voting, no financial contribution, and no deployment (Sun 2017, p. 339). This oppositional stance can be attributed to China's negative experiences during the 'century of humiliation', marked by Western and Japanese imperialism, which ended in 1949. Furthermore, China's participation in the 1950–1953 Korean War, in which the People's Liberation Army (PLA) fought under a US-led command, conditioned China's leaders to a sceptical view of UN peacekeeping (Ayenagbo et al., 2012, p. 24).

Between 1990 and 2024, China has provided peacekeeping support through the UN and ECOMOG in various countries, including Liberia, Somalia, Angola, Cape Verde, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Guinea-Bissau, Mauritania, Mozambique, Tanzania, Sudan, South Sudan, Mali, and Zimbabwe.

## 7. China Global Security Initiative and Vision for World Peace

President Xi Jinping launched China's Global Security Initiative (GSI) at the Boao Forum for Asia in April 2022. Since then, the GSI has become a vital component of China's foreign policy, promoting world peace and security. In 2012, China launched the China-Africa Cooperative Partnership for Peace and Security initiative. Subsequently, in 2018, the China-Africa Defence and Security Forum was established, followed by the China-Africa Peace and Security Forum in 2019.

The Chinese government aims to expand its role as a global player and consolidate its position as one of the leaders in the global security architecture. Most Southeast Asian countries, except Vietnam, have expressed satisfaction with the initiative. In February 2023, through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Chinese State Council released a White Paper titled "Global Security Initiative Concept Paper." The paper highlighted the security challenges confronting the international community, as well as the tasks and risks underpinning regional security concerns, local security concerns, disease control, 'unilateralism and protectionism,' and traditional and non-traditional security issues. It also highlighted the growing global concerns of deficits in peace, development, security, and governance.

The paper presented a new vision of security, advocating for a concept of sheer security interests that respects and safeguards the security of every country, maintains security in both traditional and non-traditional domains, and enhances security governance in a coordinated manner. The paper also emphasized the importance of cooperation, promoting security through political dialogue and peaceful negotiation, and pursuing sustainable security by resolving conflicts through development and eliminating the root causes of insecurity. Sovereign equality and non-interference in internal affairs were also identified as fundamental principles of international law. China believes that all countries, regardless of size, strength, or wealth, are equal members of the international community. Their internal affairs brook

no external interference, their sovereignty and dignity must be respected, and their right to independently choose social systems and development paths must be upheld. China's GSI scored a significant milestone after successfully brokering a peace deal between Saudi Arabia and Iran in March 2023. Beijing helped mediate the deal between Tehran and Riyadh, whereby they agreed not to interfere in each other's affairs and to respect their counterpart's sovereignty. The US condemned the Saudis for the move. However, Tehran praised Beijing for the initiative, terming it "a landmark peace deal."

At the level of the United Nations, China has committed to the 'abiding purposes and principles of the UN Charter.' Beijing argues that multilateralism should be the hallmark of global governance, condemning the "Cold War mentality," unilateralism, bloc confrontation, and hegemonism. The six commitments of the GSI have long been embedded in China's national and international security discourse. They consolidate the basic norms of modern China's foreign policy codified in the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, including respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity, and non-interference. The GSI also replays the terms "common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable security" from the New Asian Security Concept. The only new addition to the GSI is the commitment "to take the legitimate security concerns of all countries seriously," which derives from the 'indivisible security concept.

## **8. Sino-Africa Joint Implementation of the Global Security Initiative**

China's cooperation with African countries on security-related initiatives is more comprehensive than that of any other continent. This cooperation has been ongoing since 2007 and predates President Xi's launch of the GSI in April 2022. China has been working with regional and subregional bodies such as the Economic Community of West Africa States (ECOWAS), South Africa Development Cooperation (SADC), and the Africa Union (AU), providing aid and support to facilitate intervention in peace and security crises in their member states through mediation, peacekeeping, and peace enforcement. This cooperation has helped to restore peace in war-torn countries in southern, central, western, and eastern Africa. China maintains a non-interventionist foreign policy position in Africa and calls for an "African Solution to African Problems," ensuring that regional peace and security mediation efforts are channelled through African structures. As a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), China has a substantial and potentially decisive voice on African peace and security issues. Moreover, Africa has gained importance on China's foreign policy agenda since the late 1990s. China's openness to cooperation with all African countries, including some facing political instability or domestic conflict, has attracted particular attention. A key principle of China's foreign policy is its reluctance to interfere in the internal affairs of other states. However, China has been accused of embracing "pariah regimes" and has faced international calls to use its increasing influence and leverage with African governments to contribute more actively to resolving African security crises. In recent years, China has strongly advocated for greater UN involvement in Somalia and the UN's takeover of the AU's peacekeeping tasks. China's position in this regard is remarkable, given that most other permanent members of the UN Security Council do not favor the deployment of UN peacekeeping troops in Somalia. A critical factor behind China's position is that the African Peace and Security Council has long pushed for a UN takeover of the AU

Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), the force that has been deployed in Somalia since 2007 (International Crisis Group 2009: 24). According to Chinese Foreign Ministry, China was reluctant to take on the issue but felt compelled to do so since African governments had requested China's assistance due to a lack of interest on the part of other major powers (Lynch, 2006). African support for UN intervention in Somalia was also crucial in persuading China to agree to deploy a UN peacekeeping force there in the early 1990s (Wheeler 2000: 186; He 2007: 29-30). In recent years, China has strongly advocated for greater UN involvement in Somalia and the UN's takeover of the AU's peacekeeping tasks. China's position in this regard is remarkable, given that most other permanent members of the UN Security Council do not favor the deployment of UN peacekeeping troops in Somalia. One important factor behind China's position is that the African Peace and Security Council has long pushed for a UN takeover of the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), the force that has been deployed in Somalia since 2007 (International Crisis Group 2009: 24). According to Chinese Foreign Ministry, China was reluctant to take on the issue but felt compelled to do so since African governments had requested China's assistance due to a lack of interest on the part of other major powers (Lynch, 2006). African support for UN intervention in Somalia was also crucial in persuading China to agree to deploy a UN peacekeeping force there in the early 1990s (Wheeler 2000: 186; He 2007: 29-30). Additionally, in May 2009, the AU took the unprecedented step of requesting the UNSC impose sanctions on Eritrea, an AU member state, for its alleged support of Islamist insurgents attempting to overthrow Somalia's government. China, which enjoys good relations with Eritrea (AFP, 2007; Shinn, 2005), abstained from voting on a Uganda-sponsored resolution that eventually succeeded in imposing an arms embargo and other sanctions on Eritrea in December 2009. Chinese Ambassador to the UN, Zhang Yesui, expressed his country's reservations about sanctions but also stressed China's appreciation for the AU's efforts to "resolve African issues in an African way" (People's Daily 2009; United Nations, 2009c). In March 2011, China abstained from voting in the UN Security Council on Resolution 1973 (2011), which imposed a no-fly zone over Libya and authorized member states to use "all necessary measures" to protect civilians under direct threat of attack in the country. Before and after the passing of the resolution, China expressed strong reservations about the use of force in international relations (Reuters, 2011a), but its diplomats explained that it had not blocked the action with a negative vote in consideration of the "special situation in Libya" and the wishes of the Arab League, the AU, and African countries (Jiang, 2011; United Nations, 2011). The reference to the AU was somewhat awkward, given that the AU had spoken out against outside military intervention in China's Security Strategy for Africa to regional organizations just days before the vote in the UNSC. However, all three AU members of the Council voted in favor of Resolution 1973. On the other hand, when a proposed resolution lacks the support of key African leaders and regional organizations, China is more comfortable expressing its opposition to it (Teitt 2008: 16). For instance, in July 2008, China joined Russia in casting a rare double veto against a US-sponsored resolution that sought to impose sanctions on the government of Zimbabwe. Also voting against the resolution was the SADC-appointed facilitator and regional key player, South Africa, a non-permanent SC member at the time. South Africa's ambassador to the UN, Dumisani Kumalo, explained that his country's vote reflected the positions of the SADC and the AU, which were both promoting dialogue to resolve the situation in Zimbabwe and

had decided against taking measures that might negatively impact the climate for dialogue (United Nations, 2008). He called on the UNSC to allow Africa to resolve its problems (New York Times, 2008). Chinese statements on Zimbabwe concurred with the view that punitive measures against the Zimbabwean government would be counterproductive. China also supported ongoing SADC and AU mediation initiatives in Zimbabwe, which it felt needed more time to succeed (Liu, 2008; United Nations, 2008a).

## **9. Why Maritime Security in the Horn of Africa is important to China**

The Horn of Africa is geostrategically important for the free flow of marine vessels carrying essential commodities from Asia to Africa, promoting the 'Blue Economy.' The security of this region is priceless for both China's manufacturing industries and those in other parts of Asia, as well as for the survival of most African economies, which are primarily driven by consumption. Brigid Gesami (2023) puts it more succinctly, indicating that the issue of maritime security in Africa is of utmost importance, carrying significant economic, political, and social implications for the continent. Africa's coasts and offshore resources, comprising essential elements such as oil and gas reserves, fishing stocks, and trade routes, play a pivotal role in the stability and prosperity of African nations. It is imperative to safeguard these resources and promote regional development, as they contribute to addressing a range of global challenges, including food security, energy security, and climate change. Over the past decade, the Chinese government has been keen to ensure that this region is secure and that there are fewer attacks on commercial vessels.

According to the World Maritime Incident Report for January 2023, piracy and armed robbery against ships decreased globally from 132 incidents in 2021 to 115 in 2022, with Southeast Asian waters being the most heavily affected, particularly in the Singapore Straits. Piracy-related incidents in the Gulf of Guinea decreased from 35 to 19, and maritime kidnappings dropped from 57 to 2 in 2023. While some pirate groups in the Gulf of Guinea have shifted their focus to oil-related criminal activities, piracy remains suppressed in East Africa, with no incidents recorded in 2022. Though the drastic fall in the number of incidents in the Horn of Africa can be attributed to the presence of other world powers such as the U.S., and security cooperation amongst regional players, Beijing's role in mediation in Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, and Djibouti—a region littered with political instability, poverty, weak governments, porous borders, and years of fragility due to armed conflicts is noteworthy. This region is vital to China because even before the formation of FOCAC in 2000, China had already invested in trade, economic revitalization, and infrastructure in almost all parts of East Africa. China's ambition to execute its "Maritime Silk Road" initiative, which would connect China, Europe, and Africa, is expected to stretch via the Horn of Africa region before reaching other parts. This solidifies why this region presents a significant geostrategic interest

to Beijing. Countries like Djibouti, Eritrea, Sudan, Ethiopia, and Kenya are strategically significant to the Maritime Silk Road (Breuer, 2017). Chinese demand for natural resources and markets in the East African Region is another explanation for the Chinese engagement in the region. On the part of the states in the Horn region, they have relatively easy access to financial support, primarily in the form of grants and concessional loans from the Chinese government (Gebru Assefa Leake, 2020). According to Gebru (2020), the current situation presents an opportunity for Horn of Africa states to circumvent the complex political and economic requirements of Western nations and their financial institutions. The points highlighted the shared interests between China and the Horn of Africa states, signifying mutual gains. As such, China must play a critical role in maintaining the region's peace, stability, and security. China's involvement in promoting peace and security in the Horn of Africa is pivotal. Since 2008, during the peak of attacks on commercial vessels by pirates, the Chinese Navy has conducted 26 escort missions, not only to Chinese but also to non-Chinese vessels in the coastal areas of Somalia and the Gulf of Aden (CGTN, 2017). In 2017, China dispatched a specialized navy unit, Dragon Commando, to rescue a merchant vessel in the Gulf of Aden. This marked the first time that China had deployed such a force, and the mission was a resounding success, resulting in the capture of three pirates and the safe release of 16 Filipino crew members. Since then, China has demonstrated a keen interest in combating piracy. Given the area's strategic importance, several major global powers, including France, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Japan, have established military bases in Djibouti. Djibouti is situated in the far eastern region of the Horn, and on August 1st, 2017, China inaugurated its first overseas military base in the country. The base, which costs \$ 590 million, is operated by the Chinese People's Liberation Army Navy. According to CGTN (August 2017), China's military base will enable it to fulfill its international obligations, such as participating in peacekeeping missions and humanitarian aid operations. China is currently playing an active role in monitoring the area to prevent piracy.

## **10. Key Findings**

This paper examines China's multidimensional security approach in Africa as an alternative norm in its foreign policy towards the continent and its contribution to continental peace and security. The researcher acknowledges the great powers' responsibility to help address the security predicaments of poor countries in the context of coercive diplomacy, recognizing the risk that African countries may allow global power plays from Western countries to overshadow the overall interests of the continent. Already, the U.S., according to the Pentagon's 2022 Defence Report, does not view Africa's strategic role as a key focus in its foreign relations. Therefore, the study proposes that a delicate balance between national interest in Africa and great power responsibility from China is necessary to enhance the possibility of a successful contribution to the continent's growth, encompassing security, economics, trade, investment, commerce, and infrastructure regimes.



The study argues that China's social normative paradigm asserts that relationships and interests are socially and culturally constructed. It also subscribes to the ontological assumption of reality as relativism, which recognizes the existence of multiple realities psychologically, culturally, and socially situated. China's foreign strategy has also played a vital role in building relationships with other countries in different fields, including investment, peacekeeping support, and political issues. African countries have benefited from China's successful execution of peaceful growth and other strategies, which has drawn cooperation from them. While changes in China's foreign strategy towards Africa can have various political and economic consequences, this study argues that the Sino-Africa relationship is witnessing a new era of cooperation, encompassing security, bilateral, multilateral, political, and trade and investment partnerships within a broader context. This is helping countries in the Southern Shara region to adapt to new changes and continue to engage constructively with China as a partner through win-win cooperation. China's increasing attention to Africa has helped reshape Africa's infrastructure deficiencies, and Beijing has expanded its diplomatic, technical, security, and economic commitment to almost all African countries. China's strategic interests in Africa, particularly in procuring resources, establishing new supply chains, providing African entrepreneurs with access to new markets and finished products, and transferring technology, education, and healthcare, have also been significant. However, this study focuses solely on the collaboration and relations between China and African countries in the contexts of security, economics, and politics, highlighting the need to examine the positive effects of cooperation between countries. Overall, this paper emphasizes the importance of international collaboration and the necessity of regular assessments of political and trade partners to prevent significant disruptions to economic and political activities resulting from changes in external policies. The paper examines the strategic implications and repercussions for Africa if China's foreign policy were to change, and it seeks to find ways to continue engaging constructively for mutual benefit.

## 11. Conclusion

Over the last two decades, China's involvement in Africa has signaled a significant shift in Beijing's foreign and security policies. While the primary focus has been on economic engagement, China's growing material interests have prompted a reorientation towards strategic and operational benefits, including playing the role of a security broker and patron. The complex African security environment has challenged China's non-interventionist stance, prompting a recalibration of its foreign policy objectives while preserving its image as a responsible global power. China's commitment to strengthening its relationship with Africa is evident through deliberate shifts in foreign policy, reassuring the continent of Beijing's faith. As China positions itself as a responsible power, it offers alternative platforms such as FOCAC and BRI to counterbalance the Western-dominated world order. In recent years, China has seen increased investment in African infrastructure development, health and education diplomacy, and peace and security initiatives. This multifaceted approach aligns with Beijing's strategy for a strategic and comprehensive partnership with Africa. China has participated in peacekeeping missions, counter-piracy operations, rescue and relief efforts, and post-conflict reconstruction and development activities across East, South, Central, and West Africa, ensuring that the continent remains stable and the business environment thrives.

## References:

1. Africa Centre for Strategic Studies, 2023, "China's 'Military-Political Work' and Professional Military Education in Africa," [www.africacenter.org](http://www.africacenter.org)
2. Anastasia Zaballa, 2020, "China in Africa: the history of Sino-African relations, place of Africa in Chinese Foreign Policy and the main spheres of cooperation," [www.researchgate.net](http://www.researchgate.net)
3. Knocks Tapiwa Zengeni, 2020, "Sino-Africa Relations: Emerging Concerns and Dynamics"
4. David H. Shinn, 2019, "China–Africa Ties in Historical Context"
5. China's first overseas military base opens in Djibouti, <https://news.cgtn.com/news>
6. Gebru Assefa Leake, 2020, "China's engagement in promoting peace and security in the Horn of Africa: An interplay of big Power responsibility and geopolitical interest."
7. Zhang Chun, 2017, "China-Africa Cooperative Partnership for Peace and Security," [www.link.springer.com](http://www.link.springer.com)
8. Cobus van Staden, May 3, 2022, "China's New 'Global Security Initiative' Promoted in Africa," [www.chinaglobalsouth.com](http://www.chinaglobalsouth.com)
9. "Maritime Incident Report - January 2023," [www.priavosecurity.com](http://www.priavosecurity.com)
10. Brigid Gesami, 2023, "A Brief Guide to African Maritime Security"
11. "China's Security Protection of Chinese Nationals in the Middle East - Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies vol. 17.2023-issue-1," [www.tandfonline.com](http://www.tandfonline.com)
12. Yutian Liang and Zhengke Zhou, 2023, "Beyond as bridges: The role of the Chinese voluntary associations in Chinese outward foreign direct investment in Southeast Asia"
13. "China's new Global Security Initiative: a rising power spreads its wings," 2023, <https://blog.prif.org>
14. Liu Haifang, 2018, "Coping with Security Challenges in African Society—The Roles of Overseas Chinese Associations in Africa"
15. Zhou Jinyan, 2023, "Africa's Path to Industrialisation: How Can China Contribute to the Continent's Economic Development?" [www.blogs.worldbank.org](http://www.blogs.worldbank.org)
16. "The road to recovery in Sub-Saharan Africa: Capitalizing on transformative opportunities from shifting FDI patterns," 2021
17. Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, 2024, "Africa Can Take Advantage of Tax Incentives to Boost Investment," [www.institute.global](http://www.institute.global)
18. International Institute of Sustainable Development (IISD), 2021 report
19. Statista, 2021, Report on Africa-China Trade Volume, [www.statista.com](http://www.statista.com)
20. China's Contribution to UN Peacekeeping Mission, 2012, [www.news.un.org](http://www.news.un.org)

21. "What shifting foreign investment patterns mean for Africa's recovery," World Economic Forum, 2021, [www.weforum.org](http://www.weforum.org)
22. Sara Van Hoeymissen, 2011, "Regional Organizations in China's Security Strategy for Africa: The Sense of Supporting 'African Solutions to African Problems'"
23. Ilaria Carrozza, 2018, "Africa-China Security Relations"
24. Faith Maber, 2020, "China's Evolving Approach to the African Peace and Security Agenda: Rationale, Trends, and Implications"
25. Ha Thi Hoang, 2023, "Why is China's Global Security Initiative Cautiously Perceived in East Asia, China's Diplomacy in the New Era, 2023."
26. Chris Alden and Zheng Yixiao, 2017, "China and Africa, building peace and Security cooperation on the Continent"
27. Paul Nantulya, 2023, Africa Centre for Strategic Studies.