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**“NOTHING BALANCES IN THE BALANCE OF POWER”: POWER POLITICS
AND
AFRICAN SECURITY GOVERNANCE**

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Abstract

Numerous academic studies have thoroughly examined and recorded the historical and modern aspects of great power politics, shedding light on the underlying power dynamics, strategic interests, and geopolitical rivalries that shape the international system. Explaining how these processes affect security governance and regional stability as they resonate throughout the African continent, however, has received less attention. In light of this, the paper aims to investigate the framework of great power politics in Africa through a nuanced analysis, providing the groundwork for a more thorough comprehension of the complex interplay between major global powers and African security dynamics. This paper adopts the interpretive qualitative method for data analysis in order to examine the impact of great power politics on Africa and its implications for African security governance. It relies on both primary and secondary data collection methods (from academic literature, government publications, and media reports), in addition to key informant interviews, to extract crucial information about the complexities and implications of the interactions of major global powers in African security governance vis-à-vis the aspect of major balancer. The paper highlights the impact it has on regional stability and security challenges on the continent, demonstrating the relevance of comprehending the interplay between great power politics and African security governance in today's complex international relations environment.

Keywords: Great/Super powers, Politics, Security, Governance, Africa

Introduction

Foreign entities have consistently attempted to expand their influence across Africa since the colonial era, which arguably has affected the way security is administered and controlled (Aleyomi, 2024; Brown, 2012; Danso & Aning, 2022; Fisher & Anderson, 2015). The way this process developed over time and how it most recently changed as a result of the conflict between the US and China are both fascinating. There are significant differences between these two powers' approaches to engaging African countries, which makes matters more complicated when those countries must manage several ties and variables. These links are fundamentally understandable because they contribute to the explanation of why African security governance operates as it does now. The main argument asserts that, while engagement with major powers has brought about certain advantages, such as finance and assistance for security measures, it has also presented difficulties, some of which make it challenging for African nations to properly manage security.



If one examines how the powers offer security aid differently, it becomes evident that while America provides governance and counterterrorism, China offers infrastructure and non-interference (Benabdallah, 2020; Cheng, Mawdsley & Liu, 2023; Cooley & Nexon, 2020;

Kardon, 2022; Oluwashakin & Aleyomi, 2023). In order to demonstrate a thorough understanding of the effects of great power politics on security governance in Africa, this chapter examines historical backdrop as well as current patterns and relationships. The chapter unpacks the historical and contemporary dimensions of great power politics, elucidating the underlying power dynamics, strategic interests, and geopolitical rivalries shaping the international system. Through a nuanced analysis, it elucidates how these dynamics reverberate across the African continent, influencing security governance and regional stability. Thereby, highlights the relevance of understanding the interplay between great power politics and African security governance in today's global landscape, emphasizing the impact it has on regional stability and international relations.

Furthermore, this chapter is divided into sections. Immediately after the introduction section, the next section outlines the key themes and concepts that will be explored in throughout the chapter. The theoretical framework section offers a roadmap for the reader, giving them a clear understanding of the overarching framework and the specific issues that will be addressed. By scrutinizing the conceptual framework of great power politics, the section lays the groundwork for a deeper understanding of the intricate relationship between major global players and African security dynamics. This serves as a crucial foundation for the subsequent sections, elucidating key concepts that underpin the intricate interplay of power, security, and governance in the African context so as to provide a comprehensive grasp of the objectives of the study, which is to underscore comprehensive analysis of great power politics and its implications for African security governance.

Definition and Conceptual Clarifications

The concept of great power politics also includes non-state actors, such as multinational corporations, non-governmental organizations, and transnational criminal networks, whose activities intersect with the influence of major global powers in African security governance (Aleyomi, 2021; Ghosh, 2025; Jakobi, 2016; Saifullah & Ahmad, 2020). However, the focus of the current effort is on the state's actors and governmental organization, especially as it regards the role of the United States of America and China influence vis-à-vis rivalries in the African security governance. The framework also considers the historical, cultural, and ideological factors that underpin the engagement of great powers in Africa, as well as the evolving nature of the international system and its impact on African security dynamics. Understanding the definition and conceptual framework of great power politics is therefore essential for analyzing the complexities of African security governance and developing effective strategies for addressing the challenges and opportunities associated with the involvement of major global powers in the continent.

Great Power Politics can be defined as the rivalry that exists between the world's most powerful states in a bid to achieve their goals. O'Dell (2019) defines great powers as those countries with a significant GDP, military, and diplomatic power within their ability to project influence internationally. In the African case, this takes the form of the struggle between powerful countries, such as the United States, on one side and emerging ones, such as China, on the other for the control of influence, resources, and allies in the African continent. Ehrhart et al. (2014) define security governance as the coordinated management and regulation of issues by multiple



and distinct authorities, involving the interventions of both public and private entities, formal and informal arrangements, shaped by discourse and norms, and intentionally aimed at specific policy outcomes.

The concept is well understood in Africa due to the fact that it involves the participation of state agencies, regional groups, and foreign partners in the management of security concerns. State-society relations are a phrase that describes the power dynamic that exists between governmental organizations and the societies that exist within them. According to Bagayoko et al. (2016), the history of colonialism in Africa has had a significant impact on these relations which can be seen in the contemporary problems of governance and security concerns that are present on the continent. This idea is fundamental in explaining how security governance occurs at the state and societal levels.

In the context of African security governance, the concept of great power politics refers to the influence and interactions of major global powers, such as the United States, China, Russia, and the European Union, in shaping the security dynamics of the African continent. This involves the strategic competition, cooperation, and conflict between these powers as they seek to advance their political, economic, and security interests in Africa. The conceptual framework of great power politics in African security governance encompasses the geopolitical, geoeconomic, and geostrategic dimensions of the involvement of major global powers in the continent, as well as the implications for African states and regional organizations.

The conceptual framework used to analyze these dynamics is largely informed by realist theory in international relations, whereby power politics and state interests form the basis of interaction (Tripp, 2013). However, this framework has to be adjusted to fit the African context, since the domestic and international politics in Africa have different dynamics to those found in other parts of the world. As Kuwali (2023) rightly noted that security governance as a concept in Africa has to do with both traditional and human security dimensions. Using this framework, one can analyze the nature of competition between great powers in Africa and its impact on security governance on the continent when factoring in the agency of African actors. It assists in understanding why some interaction modalities may be observed between external actors and African countries and how these may impact on security processes in Africa.

Colonialism/Imperialism and the Scramble for Africa: Whither the Balancer?

The colonial period can be regarded as one of the critical phases in the history of Africa, which was initiated and led by imperialistic motives of European countries during the “Scramble for Africa”. This period began towards the later part of the 19th century and was accorded international recognition at the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 where the African territories were parceled out among the European powers with no input from the Africans (Mlambo et al., 2024). European colonizers used Africa as a source of raw materials that was used to support industrial growth back in Europe at the expense of Africa while they systematically reorganized African societies and economies through colonization (Ayoolu & Ademuyiwa, 2021).

At this stage, sociopolitical structures of the African communities were severely shaken and the colonial masters started drawing artificial boundaries, either putting together ethnically unrelated groups of people or splitting a united one (Crocker, 2019). This exploitation of labor and natural resources for export, as well as the lack of a diverse balance of trade, led to the dependence of local economies on European ones. In addition, forced assimilation policies



aimed at eradicating the indigenous peoples' culture as well as promote European culture (Ayoolu & Ademuyiwa, 2021).

Prior to the arrival of European colonisers, Africa was subjected to a different form of trade: the enslavement of human beings, which involved the transportation of millions of Africans across the Atlantic Ocean. The patterns of socioeconomic transformation that were characteristic of the colonial period and remained later on were created as a result of this. Dependency theory provides an explanation for the way in which structurally adverse conditions were maintained as a result of Africa's incorporation into the global capitalist system as a supplier of cheap labour (Mlambo et al., 2024).

Post-Colonial Periods

Self-rule was a beacon of liberty in Africa, and most people believed there was a greater future ahead of them, but the truth was far from that. Although colonialism was over, many African countries became trapped in neocolonial dependencies. Kwame Nkrumah famously defined neocolonialism as a scenario in which former colonial countries colonized Africa indirectly through manners like aid dependencies and trade relations (Nwune, 2021). Such arrangements were often accompanied by strings that deprived African nations of sovereignty (Nwune, 2021). Among all the aspects of neocolonialism, one of the most noticeable is the impact on leadership. African presidents often depended on support from the outside to cling to power and, therefore, owed their allegiance more to the external backers than the populace (Bagayoko et al., 2016). This process contributed to corruption and weakened the efforts to establish effective and equitable governance systems. Instead of concentrating on national development, most leaders focused on the appreciation of their external sponsors (Bagayoko et al., 2016).

The Cold War became another twist in the fate of Africa and its journey to post-colonialism. It also became a region of superpower competition as both global powers, the United States of America and the Soviet Union, struggled for dominance. Each of them backed up non-democratic states that favoured their political views without taking many accounts of their partners' abuses of people's rights or their crisis of governance (Firman, 2019; Oluwashakin & Aleyomi, 2023). This external interference worsened the governance challenges as most African governments focused on international alliances with little attention to local problems. Another outcome of the Cold War was that many African states were militarized (Aleyomi, 2024; Crocker, 2019). Superpowers delivered military equipment and trained militias to support their allies' fights and prop up authoritarian rule. These dynamics consolidated the state fragility because governments use their militaries to contain and demonstrate rather than to foster stability (Crocker, 2019). This militarization culture continues to influence African security today because most countries fail to solve internal conflicts or professionally transform their militaries.

After the Cold War, the continent of Africa was subjected to a "second scramble," but this was for economic control. Amid these transformations, new players, including China, joined the stage by launching large-scale investments in infrastructure and extraction of natural resources (Mlambo et al., 2024). Although these investments have positively impacted the economy in some aspects, they have also led to fresh concern over new and emerging structural dependencies. For instance, most African countries have borrowed heavily from direct and national debts in funding Chinese-sponsored projects, leaving these countries in financial deficits, akin to what colonial masters used to do to their colonies (Mlambo et al., 2024).



Governance Challenges and Security Implications

The government of Africa has been impacted by external meddling in a variety of different ways throughout the course of history. According to Bagayoko et al. (2016), neither European

imperialism nor neo-imperialism were successful in establishing institutions that were able to provide services or maintain stability. Because of this, many regions have been left without any government frameworks, and those who have adopted such systems have been forced to fill the void. With regard to the governance of security in Africa, hybrid security governance has developed as a new phenomenon. According to Bagayoko et al. (2016), this strategy incorporates both state and non-state actors, such as NGOs and private security companies, in the process of resolving security challenges.

Consequently, there are situations in which hybrid governance can be advantageous; however, the majority of the time, it is detrimental as it adds to the dominance of prominent actors while disregarding the rights of affected people. According to Enns et al.'s research from 2020, private security organisations collaborate with governmental actors to protect exploitative facilities in Africa, such as mines, to the disadvantage of the people that live in the surrounding area. The displacement of local communities' resource monopoly, social spits, and animosity can occasionally result from these arrangements, hence eroding social capital (Enns et al., 2020).

Another factor that weakens Africa's security sectors is corruption and political interference. A common problem in many African states is the absence or weakness of accountability mechanisms, so security forces are notoriously known to be above the law (Kuwali, 2023). This destabilizes the communities and undermines people's confidence in their leadership and security. Kuwali (2023) proposes more powerful accountability mechanisms to enhance the protection and representation of public interests rather than personal or political ones by security actors. The African crisis also points towards the continued influence of external actors in African security. There is usually a very poor match between the objectives of programs designed to develop local capacity and the requirements of African countries. For example, foreign-led training initiatives may focus on counterterrorism without addressing the root causes of insecurity, such as poverty and inequality (Firman, 2019). Firman (2019) argues that these programs must be more inclusive and better tailored to local contexts to be genuinely effective

Theoretical Framework

Realism and Power Politics

Realism is a prominent theory in international relations, particularly in analysing state behaviour within the global system. Realism fundamentally posits that the international system functions in a condition of anarchy, signifying the absence of a supreme authority above sovereign states. Consequently, states prioritise their existence and security. To accomplish this, they seek to establish and sustain power, which realism recognises as the primary motivator of state behaviour (Tripp, 2013).

The concept of power politics is fundamental to realism. It perceives states as rational entities perpetually vying for power, as power is synonymous with security. Hans Morgenthau, a classical realist, contended that the quest for power is inherent in human nature, seen in the interactions among states (Ylönen, 2022). This struggle frequently results in alliances, conflicts, and fluctuating loyalties contingent upon the strategic objectives of a state.

Contemporary iterations of realism, such as offensive realism, extend this concept further. John Mearsheimer posits that states endeavour not only for survival but also to enhance their power in relation to others. This struggle for supremacy frequently leads to zero-sum results, wherein the advantage of one state equates to the disadvantage of another (Woldearegay, 2024).

Applying Realism to Africa

Realism provides a useful lens for analysing the reasons behind the great nations' strong interest in Africa is realism. The continent's abundance of natural riches, strategic location, and expanding economic potential have made it a long-time hotbed of power struggles. In the past, when European nations partitioned Africa in order to grow their empires and take advantage of its abundant resources, the continent was at the epicentre of power politics (Woldearegay, 2024). Despite the formal end of colonialism, the fundamental dynamics of power struggle are still very much in place. Major countries such as the United States, China, Russia, and the European Union are now very interested in Africa. According to realism, this interest is attained by obtaining assets, taking charge, and exerting constant influence on the system. One example of a power consolidation approach is China's Belt and Road Initiative, which involves significant infrastructural projects throughout Africa. However, the United States has used security alliances and free-trade agreements to restrain China's growing influence in the region (Woldearegay, 2024).

The relationship between great powers and African nations is another implication of realism. An outstanding illustration of power politics is the competition for resources like minerals, oil, and gas. Possession of these resources gives states both an advantageous economic standing and the vital force needed to gain influence inside the system. Great powers occasionally work directly with African governments or establish alliances that enable them to get these essential resources (Ogunnubi & Oyewole, 2020). Another important consideration is geographic location. Africa continues to be a hotspot for big powers due to its advantageous location and control over important trade routes like the Red Sea and Suez Canal (Ylönen, 2022). According to realism, states maintain their dominance on the international scene and are in a strong position when they can function efficiently in these trade corridors. Therefore, Africa has become a playground for great power rivalry due to the importance of geography in the continent's foreign policy (Ylönen, 2022).

Alliances and Institutions

The significance of alliances in realism is also apparent in Africa. Certain major powers endeavour to collaborate with African nations to fulfil their objectives. For example, the United States has utilised counterterrorism collaboration to establish security partnership agreements with African nations (Woldearegay, 2024). These alliances provide the United States with a strategic presence on the continent while advancing its global security initiatives. Similarly, China has utilised platforms like the Forum for China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) to strengthen its relations with African nations and protect its interests (Woldearegay, 2024). Realism perceives organisations like the African Union (AU) as tools through which major powers operate at the institutional level. This assertion is valid as the AU is anticipated to represent the African continent; thus, interactions with external actors mirror the prevailing power relations. For instance, major countries utilise AU summits and initiatives to establish influence over governments in the region and mitigate competition (Tripp, 2013). This substantiates realism's position that international institutions are not neutral entities but rather arenas where states pursue strategic objectives.



Limitations of Realism in Africa

One common critique is that realism gives little attention to non-state actors like multinational corporations, local governments and civil society organizations. These actors often play crucial roles in shaping Africa's international relations. For instance, in the Horn of Africa, customary authorities and local actors frequently exert more influence than state institutions in matters of

security and justice (Jackson & Stratford-Tuke, 2023). Another criticism is that realism tends to overlook the potential for genuine cooperation and mutual benefit. While the competition among great powers is undeniable, their actions in Africa are not always purely exploitative. Investments in infrastructure and development, for example, have contributed to economic growth in several African countries. However, realists would argue that these benefits are secondary to the strategic goals of the powers involved.

Contemporary Great Power Competition in Africa: US-China Rivalry

Among the most major geopolitical issues that are currently influencing the continent of Africa is the rivalry that exists between the United States of America and China in Africa. Both of these nations have distinct and competing goals in Africa, which has resulted in a strong amount of struggle for influence. On one hand, with its presence anchored in economic initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China has emerged as Africa's greatest commercial partner. On the other hand, the United States of America is actively seeking to counter China's growing dominance by building its own economic and security partnerships (Munyati, 2024). This is being done in an effort to undermine China's expanding influence.

The Chinese strategy places a greater emphasis on forming relationships with African nations in the areas of infrastructure and trade rather than other things. Recent years have seen a fast expansion in China's investments in Africa, with funding being directed towards vital industries such as transportation, mining, and power generation. For instance, China provides funding for the construction of highways, ports, and railroads which in turn stimulates the economic expansion of African countries and the flow of resources to China (Munyati, 2024). As a result of this policy, China has attained the status of a strategic partner and has become firmly established in Africa's agenda for economic growth and development.

Furthermore, the United States has focused on political liberal democracy, human rights, and security. Events such as the U.S-Africa Leaders' Summit bear evidence of the continued effort by the United States in the quest to foster its partnerships in Africa. Recently, the United States committed \$55 billion to causes such as climate change, governance, and economic growth in Africa (Galileo, 2024). However, this newfound engagement is widely seen as an effort to undermine China's influence rather than a long-term diplomatic strategy. This competition has put African nations in a rather precarious position. They have to balance these two superpowers to come up with the best solutions for their people and economies. China structures its agreements around tangible infrastructure projects with minimal political conditions, whereas the United States prioritizes the promotion of improved governance and security for long-term sustainability (Galileo, 2024). It is, therefore, a challenging feat for African leaders to balance these relations, as sometimes the interests of these superpowers are not in line with Africa's development agenda.

Great Power Interests in Africa***Economic Interests***

Africa has always been the focus of external powers due to its endowed natural resources. Africa is endowed with large deposits of oil, natural gas, metals, and even the strategic rare earth metals essential in manufacturing many products. For instance, the Democratic Republic of Congo holds more than half of the global cobalt reserves used in battery production for electric cars (Munyati, 2024). Not surprisingly, acquiring these resources defines the degree of great power interest in Africa (Enns et al., 2020). An example of China's economic interest in Africa is investing in nations with abundant resources. In its Belt and Road Initiative, China

has offered funds to finance large infrastructure projects in return for access to vital resources. This arrangement allows the African nations to put up much-needed infrastructure, though at a price.

Essentially, most African countries have relatively borrowed a lot of funds, making their long-run economic development and sustainability a worry and risking falling foul of "debt traps" (Munyati, 2024). The United States also seeks to secure access to Africa's resources but focuses more on promoting trade through initiatives like the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) (Galileo, 2024). This act provides African nations preferential access to U.S. markets, encouraging exports of goods such as textiles and agricultural products. While the U.S. approach is less resource-focused than China's, it still reflects an economic strategy to maintain a foothold in the region (Galileo, 2024).

Political Interests

Politically, great powers view Africa as a strategic battleground for influence in global governance. Africa, which is comprised of 54 countries, constitutes a strong voting bloc in international organisations such as the United Nations. By linking its development aims with the African Union's Agenda 2063, which places an emphasis on infrastructural and economic integration, China has been able to establish political alliances (Munyati, 2024). The purpose of these efforts is to garner support from African nations for China's stances on global problems, such as its claims in the South China Sea and its policies regarding Taiwan. The United States of America, on the other hand, serves as a counter-narrative to China's model by utilising its diplomatic efforts to advocate for democratic governance and human rights.

Thus, this was made abundantly clear during Secretary of State Antony Blinken's trips to African countries, during which he emphasised the United States' commitment to democracy and regional security (Aleyomi & Nwagwu, 2023; Galileo, 2024). On the other hand, opponents contend that the United States' commitment has frequently been inconsistent, with a greater emphasis placed on fighting China than on solving the urgent needs of Africa.

Security Interests

Security concerns are another critical area of great power competition in Africa. There are challenges like terrorism, organized crimes, and civil instabilities, which give external players the chance to foster military and security cooperation. The United States has been very active in addressing these challenges, mainly through its Africa Command - AFRICOM (Lellou, 2024). This endeavor aims to strengthen the African militaries, build capacity in intelligence, and cooperate in the war against terror and insecurity. China has been more involved in providing security in Africa than in the past, but its involvement is fast increasing. 2017, it set up its first overseas military base in Djibouti, close to the Bab el Mandeb, a critical transit point.



Such a base captures China's general objectives to defend its assets and procure a military presence (Munyati, 2024). Also, it has provided troops to the United Nations peace missions in Africa, making China a security ally on the continent. Therefore, even though the U.S. and China are actively involved in African security, their strategies are different.

African Security Governance: Challenges and Opportunities

One of the challenges that the African states' grapple with in managing security governance includes the effects of colonialism, which fashioned the basic treatment of security in the African continent in a way that seeks to protect regimes at the expense of the citizenry (Aleyomi & Nwagwu, 2023; Nwizu & Alozie, 2018). This colonial heritage has left many African states

with militaries and police forces that are often in place to defend the ruling classes rather than the population as a whole and has added to problems of accountability. Most nations have proved to have poor governance, especially in the security institutions where corruption has been high, thus eradicating the professionalism and trust of the public (Kuwali, 2023). Surveys by Transparency International show that more than 50% of the people in such countries as Nigeria and Côte d'Ivoire believe that their military and police forces are involved in corruption, which undermines the credibility of security governance (Kuwali, 2023).

Ethnic and inter-communal conflict is also another key challenge in the region. Sudan and Ethiopia are examples of countries that have experienced persistent conflict mainly due to political marginalization and resource competition. Weak institutional structures usually do not address these tensions, leading to situations where security forces enjoy anarchy (Nwizu & Alozie, 2018). Moreover, the availability of small arms in many countries across the continent distorts the security management process and results in violence or insecurity in vulnerable areas (Munyi, 2020). Despite these challenges, the future looks brighter with the inclusion of civil society organizations or such regional bodies as the African Union (AU). For instance, the AU's institutions, such as The Peace and Security Council, have embarked on efforts to enhance the collaboration on conflict prevention and engagement in dialogue processes among AU member states. In addition, several new technologies, such as satellite monitoring and communication imperative, pose new ways for African states to enhance border security and apprehend insurgencies. Nevertheless, tapping into these opportunities demands a lot of political will and commitment to building adequate institutional capacity.

The Role of the United States and China

The roles of the great powers, especially the United States and China, greatly influence security governance in Africa. Firstly, these two nations have different approaches emanating from their respective strategic interests and underlying ideological systems. Promoting governance and democratization has been central to the United States' security cooperation strategy with African states. These policies include training, counterterrorism assistance, and monetary support to strengthen the security apparatus, for example, through the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) (Blair, Marty, & Roessler, 2021). Although these measures have solidified specific competencies, skeptics claim that they instead focus on countering terrorism threats rather than pursuing governance issues. For instance, through supporting Nigeria in its fight against Boko Haram, the United States has concentrated on supporting Nigeria's tactical engagements, not on building its security sector to become more efficient, professional, and responsive to accountability (Blair et al., 2021).

In contrast, China's policy does not interfere with other countries' affairs; it uses economic and construction assistance and military partnerships. It is argued that Chinese perceptions regarding security investment in Africa result from business considerations like safeguarding infrastructure projects and resource exploitation zones (Krukowska, 2024). For example, the Chinese government has supplied weapons, innovations, and production to various African states with no governance standards or procedures to address administrative vices (Krukowska, 2024). While this has been useful in cultivating goodwill among African leaders, this approach has been associated with the problem of perpetuating autocratic rule and reproducing dependency.

Impact of Great Power Politics

Socioeconomic Implications

Great power politics impacts African security governance in terms of its economic and social aspects. Foreign aid and investment help provide essential resources but contribute to establishing vulnerable dependencies on external actors, weakening national governments. For instance, China's infrastructure investment, although it makes improvements where Africa is deficient more often than not, focuses on Beijing's geopolitical concerns rather than the continent's needs (Krukowska, 2024). Such projects can increase debt liabilities, making African states susceptible to economic pressure. Likewise, sometimes, the USAID programs may have been focused on the quest for democracy but rather interpreted as vehicles for power struggles rather than genuine support for the African agenda (Blair et al., 2021). Socially, great power involvement has had both positive and negative impacts. On the one hand, foreign direct investment in education, health, and technology improves living standards, especially in some countries. On the other hand, the connections between outside entities lead to tensions between local groups supported by different sides. For instance, investments involving China in countries like Zambia have sparked a social outcry, most notably on labour rights and environmental issues depicting the social impacts of unequal foreign interaction (Krukowska, 2024).

Arms Sales and Military Assistance

Great powers' arms exports and military support greatly influence Africa's security. Munyi (2020) reported increased Chinese arms exports to Africa, where China supplied 20 % of arms imported by African countries between 2009 and 2018. Such sales tend to involve second-tier importing countries such as Kenya and Uganda, which value China's weaponry because of its availability and relatively low cost (Munyi, 2020). Even as these transactions contribute to the military strength of recipient states, they can potentially escalate the arms race and increase the intensity of conflicts in a region. Equally, the United States is essential in arms sales and military training on the African continent to African countries using the Foreign Military Financing (FMF) scheme (Blair et al., 2021). However, this support is expected to be given depending on good governance standards, making it difficult for regimes with a bad human rights record. Whereas China's non-conditionality increases the number of participants in the initiative, it may indirectly support authoritarian governments, whereas U.S. conditionality may scare off potential partners.

African Responses to Great Power Involvement/Regional Dynamics

The Role of the African Union in Great Power Politics

In the context of great power politics, the African Union (AU) has become one of the key players in determining the security governance of Africa. The AU's main goal since its founding has been to promote peace and security in Africa while making an effort to manage

outside influences and appropriately uphold the continent's autonomy. The African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) is one such program that oversees, controls, and settles disputes. In order to reaffirm its independence from foreign rule, the AU interacts with world leaders while highlighting homegrown strategies (Oluwashakin & Aleyomi, 2023; Shiferaw, 2021). The AU's active involvement in the peacekeeping operations demonstrates the proactive approach. Through the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), it has committed troops directly to unstable regions like Somalia and spearheaded initiatives like the African Standby Force (ASF) (Staeger, 2023). However, its independence is threatened by flaws like its complete reliance on grants from foreign sources, primarily the United Nations and the European Union. The implementation of autonomous policies is hampered by the AU's practical embrace of the donor nations' strategic interests due to its financial dependence (Aleyomi & Abu Bakar, 2018; Staeger, 2023). Additionally, the goal of AU policymaking is to have what could be regarded as a non-alignment policy in the ever-complicated world that is becoming increasingly polarized. For instance, the AU remained diplomatically neutral during the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, focussing on humanitarian issues and food insecurity rather than siding with either the Eastern or Western alliances (Staeger, 2023). This approach encourages regional stability and African independence within the international system.

Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and Security Governance

Even though many actors are involved in defining the security responses to external activities, the Regional Economic Communities (RECs), like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), contribute significantly to shaping the responses in Africa (Kuwali, 2023). These sub-regional organizations intervene early in times of conflict; more so, they fill the vacuum that the AU cannot occupy early on. They are instrumental in filling the security woes that neighboring nations may sometimes manipulate. For instance, the ECOWAS has been actively involved in the West African conflicts through military and diplomatic support in the Mali and Guinea crises (Kuwali, 2023). Such actions are motivated by the pursuit of stability in the region, although they are also seen in the context of potential threats, including the aggravation of the processes connected with great power competition, such as the spread of proxy wars. Likewise, IGAD's role in mediating the South Sudan peace process shows that regional structures are key to preventing the negative impact of external interference (Nwizu & Alozie, 2018). Some challenges affecting RECs include inadequate funding and decoupled political commitment among the member states. These weaknesses are exploited by great powers that offer support that serves their interest, creating a division within these organizations. However, to preserve regional sovereignty, RECs promote other collective security systems and use their geostrategic value (Aleyomi, 2020; Blair et al., 2021).

Navigating External Influences in Security Governance

Foreign influence in the security system in African nations entails conditions that alter policy and management of security, hence embracing the narratives of the external actors rather than the indigenous ones. For example, Chinese security cooperation focuses on arms sales and peacekeeping and defends China's economic agenda based on principles of non-interference. However, critics argue that its approach supports authoritarian regimes and erodes democratic processes and institutions (Krukowska, 2024). On the other hand, Western nations aid and support the governance systems that are in line with liberal democracies. This inconsistency between the conditionality from the West and China's resource-based approach puts African states in a dilemma, where they struggle to deal with these external factors while at the same



time trying to address their internal security demands (Aleyomi, 2021; 2024; Blair et al., 2021; Owwoye *et al.*, 2024).

In response, African institutions are beginning to demand the formation of a single voice for the continent in matters of global security. This ambition is captured in the AU's Agenda 2063, including pan-Africanism and the African economic community that aims to foster an "integrated and peaceful Africa" driven by its people (Shiferaw, 2021). Nevertheless, the realization of this vision has inherent internal barriers and external vulnerabilities that have limited Africa's security governance potential (Shiferaw, 2021). This paper concludes that for the African states to address the challenges posed by great power involvement in ASM, they need to improve their institutional mechanisms and regional cooperation that strengthens their security governance.

Conclusion

History shows that colonial and post-colonial interventions have left lasting marks, and now, the rivalry between the U.S. and China adds another layer of complexity. African nations have had to learn to work with these external powers while maintaining their independence in security decisions. The contest between great powers may not only divide African security initiatives but also limit the efforts of the major balancer especially the U.S. After all, nothing balances in the balance of power because the external partners with which different African countries cooperate may not always be on the same side. It is evident that foreign aid has contributed to offering resources for African nations, but this support is rarely free and comes with conditions and requirements that may inhibit African countries from exercising their sovereignty concerning security. For the African states, the option of democracy promoted by the United States starkly contrasts with China's non-interference policy. Subsequently, future studies should focus on identifying engagement rules between the African regional organizations in the face of great power influences. More research should be done to determine how African states can diversify relations and work in their interest toward developing security benchmarks.



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