



Beneath the Cover of China's Rising Engagement in Africa: A Security Perspective

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Article Information

DOI: 10.9734/ARJASS/2018/42838

Editor(s):

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(5) Senibi. K. Victoria, Covenant University, Nigeria.
Complete Peer review History: <http://www.sciencedomain.org/review-history/25685>

Original Research Article

Received 13th May 2018
Accepted 20th July 2018
Published 26th July 2018

ABSTRACT

With the soaring increase in demand for oil owing to its rapid economic growth and expansion, coupled with her quest to build a strong and formidable security system, China has no option than to ensure her energy security. For a country whose oil consumption has been increasing yearly, the need to secure sustainable and affordable energy supplies is imperative. China's policy of self-reliance with regard to energy security is no longer feasible. The country's growing dependence on the global energy supplies and oil-rich countries such as Russia and the West Asia region has become complex. For a country that hopes to achieve greater economic progress and secure maximum economic growth for its people, securing energy supplies is very crucial, especially when every great and progressing country's ultimate interest is to secure a place in the international community.

Using a historical comparative approach in analysing China's growing engagement in Africa, the paper suggests that China's rising interest on the continent is a strategic move to have a more reliable and secure energy supply without interruptions. China is very much aware of the United

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States' hegemonic control in West Asia and the Middle East. With regard to oil supply from Russia, the stakes are high factoring in scepticism since it is only a tactical arrangement. China has, therefore, turned to Africa, especially in the oil producing countries like Angola and Sudan in hopes of balancing the security danger and threat it faces in its energy security domain.

Keywords: China; power; energy security; neorealism; strategic resource; geopolitics.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent times, as far as China's relations with Africa are concerned, the most significant and thought provocative question is no longer about giant extrapolations and estimations about the amount of oil consumption needed to drive China's development and to propel her to the heights of global dominance and power, but the strategic initiatives and steps she has taken in this area to meet her energy demand and deficit and how such steps are being carried out and demonstrated in her various policies.

China's need for oil and gas is no longer a conjecture but a fact, the need to reduce her dependence on coal as the primary energy supply is also no longer speculation but a reality considering the amount of carbon emission and environmental hazards involved in coal burning [1,2,3,4]. C Most importantly what seems to be driving this necessity is the hope of China to disentangle herself from what scholars have described as the Asia energy complex interdependence, thus reckoning the danger that looms from being overly enmeshed in the Asian energy complex [5]. Furthermore, there is scepticism on the part of China regarding the tactical relations it has with Russia and Kyrgyzstan [6,7].

Having the United States (US) 'roaming' at your backyard is very much a bother to China [8]. US preponderance in the region and her control of the Middle East coupled with the tumultuous situation in the region is an unwelcome reality the People's Republic of China (PRC) is confronted with. All these account for China's need to re-evaluate and revisit her energy security issues and to secure an alternative source of supply. With these concerns, the relevance of Africa, therefore, is worth over emphasising – a scenario that is well illuminated by the various policies and plans China and Africa have had over the past two decades. China's overwhelming presence in Africa and her rising engagement in the continent give a glimpse of the pragmatic initiatives and steps she is taking to meet the challenge of her energy supply and sustainability.

Drawing lessons from Wilhelmine Germany, imperial Japan, Nazi Germany, and the Soviet Union, China's emphasis on the peaceful rise and later peaceful development was not only an assurance to the international community, but also it offered a breathing space for her in accelerating her development. Despite widespread fears and uncertainty about China's growing economic clout and political stature, Beijing remains committed to a 'peaceful rise' [9]: eradicating poverty through the enhancement of economic globalisation and improving relations with the rest of the world. As it emerges as a great power, China knows too well that its continued development and its quest for regional hegemony and global assertiveness are predicated upon world peace and the sustenance of the status quo [10].

Despite China's reiteration of the need for the peaceful development of all and its emphasis on peaceful development and growth, fear of China asserting its power still looms large. Debates on if China can rise peacefully among others have dominated in international relations discourse and have generated various arguments and opinions on the tremendous strides in development and economic progress China is witnessing and what it means for the international community [8,11,12] and [13]). These apprehensions and fears are not groundless if we regard the recent seemingly oil grab situation and some of China's domestic policies concerning energy security. Again it is said that history informs the decision of great men and leaders - China's growing importance in Asia has created security concerns and security competition. This is further reinforced by China's seemingly antagonising attitude in the East Asian region despite its policy of maintaining peripheral security environment [14]. Furthermore, its military modernization and revolution in military affairs, her rising engagement in Africa with regards to its aid regime as a basis for developing her soft power abroad and also as foreign policy tool together with her compelling need for resources, especially oil and gas gives a sense of the subtlety and underlying

assertiveness in China's approach to its political and economic development [12,13,15].

In addition to this is what history and traditional realism have taught us in the last century about great powers: the rise of big powers inevitably leads them into conflict with other powers [10,8]. On this premise, it would be a misapprehension to disregard China's quest for dominance and regional hegemony reckoning its fast economic growth in the international system [8]. Moreover, global interdependence has become more vibrant and intense which is evinced by China's opening up policies and how Chinese market is enmeshed in the global market, notable is her energy dependence on the global energy market. However, despite this interdependence, the paper tends to disagree with proponents who suggest that the existence of the current global architecture renders politics as an only ideological struggle for control of the future and that the growing interdependence and multiple channels of communication seek to reduce frictions and tensions among states. Recent activities by China for resources and the seemingly 'aggressive' nature of its foreign policy leave such assumptions weak and untenable. Thus, power politics (military and economic), still occupies the centre stage of interstate relations and international affairs, and China exudes just that with her specific policies like her energy security policy and her strategic calculations. These attest to China's comprehension of the workings of the power politics in the international system and the need for her to assert herself in global issues, and also as a force in the international system. States' policies are still and even more so, in this global architecture, being increasingly informed by the centrality of power. Thus, one's 'standing' in the global arena and the degree of assertiveness is commensurable with the nature and perception of power and influence one commands in the system.

China's foreign policies orientation, though subtle and mostly shrouded in secrecy, from what we have come to know and understand by its energy security concerns and its tasking of its energy companies, coupled with the environmental threats it faces due to her over-dependence on coal only suggest her dire need for the difference in energy supply. The caveat, however, is China's awareness of the dangers of its external reliance and the imminent threat that could pose for its territorial and sovereign independence.

Assuming that China will continue to grow irrespective of a decline in the figures of its GDP,

the paper proposes that China's presence in Africa, through its aid and developmental assistance primarily in the oil-producing countries, is a strategic tool for the enhancement of its security both in Asia and the globe. Thus, the argument is that every great power in history has confronted the question of energy sustainability and affordability; a scenario that the PRC is currently struggling with. More so, for the past three centuries, energy has been the backbone of any country's development, and development and security thrive on energy. Consequently, given its current energy needs, it is imperative that China with its quest for dominance to tackle the unpredictability of energy security concerns, is working assiduously to have access and control over energy supplies, and it is this urgent need that has propelled the Dragon to increase its investment while strengthening its friendship with the cradle of human origins - Africa.

Africa has eventually become a strategic point for the realisation of China's energy needs and consequently, her overall security agenda and aid and financial assistance are used as the primary tools for driving this process [13,15]. Coupled with her strict adherence to the doctrine of non-interference as espoused by Zhou Enlai in the five principles of peaceful coexistence and Hu Jintao's idea of peaceful rise, China has managed to capture the hearts and trust of these countries [9].

Though China purports to be aiding African countries in their development, with history serving as a precedent and guide, and with any other growing economic power, this paper argues that there is more to what China preaches - China has a real motive and an underlying reason behind its recent overwhelming interest in Africa - that is, having access to uninterrupted supply of oil and other natural resources. The point is that securing energy supplies is one of the critical challenges China has to surmount for the furtherance of her assertive role in both the Asian region and the international arena. China's rising engagement in Africa, therefore, is a careful calculation on the part of the leadership to bolster its GDP growth and development which in turn will propel her into global dominance. Energy security, therefore, is an independent variable which causes a change in the level of capability of both China's economy and military. Succinctly, energy security reinforces China's overall economic and military capability which has the goal of global assertiveness and regional dominance (power).

There is, therefore, causality between energy security and power (economic and military capabilities - a mutual inextricability), and China's current relation with Africa is a careful calculation of alternatives to achieve clear immutable goals - a strategic move at a very precise and appropriate moment considering the growing dissatisfaction in Africa about the West.

Though much research has been done on China-Africa relations, little is often said about how energy security has actually propelled this relationship. It is this gap in the subject that this paper seeks to fill. The paper, therefore, posits that the motive behind China's interest in Africa and its increasing engagement with the continent is an interest that stems from its security uncertainty and concerns which largely affects its quest to assert herself in the international domain. Again this piece seeks to interrogate aid as a security tool for China, the nexus between politics and economics and how that informs a country's standing in the international system and lastly, the implication this relationship has on the overall development of Africa.

In the essay that follows, some key terms are operationalised. The paper will look at the neorealist assumption of states' behaviour with regard to security issues and how recent Chinese policies on Africa feature in the overall realist framework. Attention will then be turned on the history of China - Africa relations and China's aid in Africa in particular. Further discussions will centre on the many debates by scholars on China's engagement with Africa, the pros and cons. This is followed by a critical assessment of where China - Africa relations stand with emphasis on what that relation mean for China's energy security and its quest for dominance in the international system. The last section will draw conclusions based on the previously discussed issues.

1.1 Operational Definition of Concepts

1.1.1 Energy security

In this study, energy security refers to continuous access to affordable energy supply, where energy will mean oil and gas. Energy security can thus be understood as the association between national security on the one hand, and the availability of natural resources for energy consumption on the other hand. Our conceptualization of energy security is thus in tandem with the definition provided by the

International Energy Agency (IEA) which describes energy security as a country's ability to have reliable access to the energy it needs; and the ability to buy energy at an affordable price [16]. By adopting this definition, we also agree with Phillip Cornell's assertion that the failure in defining energy security in a more nuanced fashion, that is a definition devoid of excessive politicization or militarization of energy issues can easily lead to confusion and aggressive policies that may eventually hamper the achievement of energy security [17].

1.1.2 Geopolitics

Geopolitics refers to analysis of the geographic influences on power relationships in international relations. The use of the term in this paper will also encompass how access to strategic resources influence or inhibit the outcomes of policies and decision making, where strategic resource will refer basically to oil and oil-related products.

1.1.3 Power

According to Robert Dahl, "A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do" [18, p. 202-203]. Here the authors' conceptualize power using Dahl's definition to mean the ability to influence outcomes and decisions of other people. In this sense, power involves both persuasive and coercive apparatuses. This conceptualization thus implies the use of military, economic and diplomatic capabilities to influence outcomes and decisions in the international system.

1.1.4 Neorealism/structural realism

Neorealism in this paper refers to the competition and conflict arising out of the absence of order in the international system. Thus neorealism posits that the interaction of sovereign states can be explained by the pressures exerted on them by the anarchic structure of the international system, which limits and constrains their choices [19].

2. THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

We adopt a historical comparative approach in analyzing China's growing engagement in Africa. Through this approach, we compare China's history, trend, and rate of development with that of most developed western nations. We seek to draw inferences from these patterns that energy security, particularly oil, have been a key factor in

propelling and sustaining the economies, militaries, and hegemonic influences of great powers in the international system. China has acquired the understanding that energy security is a major pillar to her national security. Consequently, in her efforts to attain and maintain the great power status, it has learnt from history how the rise of great powers is usually deemed as a threat to the existing hegemon and has subsequently adopted a mild but pragmatic and persistent approach in pursuing her national interest in Africa, particularly her national security through heavy investments in energy resources.

Though the paper adopts a narrative perspective that seeks to illustrate how China has over the years intensified her activities on the Africa continent, it is also an empirical study in the sense that it showcases how states have over the ages pursued energy security which forms the nucleus of their national security in the contemporary world. In addition, as a qualitative study, we dwell more on analyzing journal articles, policy and official documents, as well as documents from the internet. Moreover, we also review the dailies, press releases, news items, and official reports by some relevant institutions. The paper thus dwells solely on secondary sources of information for the analysis.

3. NEOREALISM AND ENERGY SECURITY: THE THEORETICAL BASIS FOR THE STUDY

The collapse of the Berlin wall in 1989 and the subsequent demise of Soviet Union and communism seemed to have rendered realist assumptions and argument about the behaviours that flow from inter-states relations in an anarchic system unimaginable and flawed due to the emergence of unipolarity and US' hegemony. This thought of the inadequacy of realism to explain the post-cold war scenario and an over emphasis of an emerging deep multiple channels of communication and transnational relations coupled with its side-lining of the centrality of power and security in the international system have over time proven weak and unsustainable. The international system today is very much driven by power politics and security maximization. Today, interstate relations continue to be defined in terms of power and security and this is pronounced recently through states battle for control over resources, especially oil.

Considered one of the traditional theories of international relations, especially for security studies, realism both in its classical and structural forms, presents an understanding of the nature of international politics and the behaviours that flow from the interaction and proposes possible outcomes and decisions which further determine the overall policy decisions of political actors. Succinctly, classical realism includes the key early and mid-twentieth century scholars who developed a notion of the 'tragic' nature of international politics which posits that there was a fundamental difference between domestic politics and international politics since inter-state politics lacks any principal sovereign arbiter who has the ability to repress the relentless ambitions for power by states, and the natural human predisposition to aggression ([8]; [20]; [21]; [22]; [23]; [24]; [25]; and [26]). The pugnacity of man's argument by Morgenthau and Quincy Wright in explaining why wars do happen proved insufficient ([22]; [23]; and [27]). Kenneth Waltz provides a more rigorous and parsimonious model of realism to better explain states' behaviours and general patterns on interstate interaction ([19]; [28]).

This paper heavily draws on the structural realist arguments and assumptions to explaining what in part we refer to as China's real intention in Africa. Mearsheimer [8] sums this theory in the following words:

Survival is a state's most important goal, because a state cannot pursue any other goals if it does not survive. The basic structure of the international system forces states concerned about their security to compete with each other for power. The ultimate goal of every great power is to maximize its share of world power and eventually dominate the system [8, p. 1].

In a similar vein, some scholars have opined that anarchy in the international system is the permissive cause of war [29]. With this understanding, energy security issues and resources become important when we put in perspective of realist thoughts. Energy and resources issues therefore cease to be mere geological issue without consequences, but rather a geopolitical and strategic interest which states will employ both persuasive and coercive apparatuses to have access to and control over. In this sense, we consequently draw much insight from geopolitics and perceive a relation between energy resources and minerals, and power (being it military and economic). Beri and

Sinha [29] capture the relevance of oil when they remarked that proponents of realism believe that oil is a highly strategic resource, a vital commodity for whose relevance governments must enter into a death of life struggle to ensure sufficient supply of it.

In addition to this, Dannreuther [24] argues about how much scholarship on the politics of international politics adopts implicitly a realist and geopolitical theoretical approach to understanding how intrinsic energy security related issues are significant in world affairs. He further opines that the key underlying assumptions and arguments of those who adopt this approach can be reduced to the following:

- Access to and control of natural resources, of which energy is the most critical, is a key ingredient of national power and national interest.
- Energy resources are becoming scarcer and more insecure (drawing often from the 'peak oil' thesis and the 'resource curse' and 'resource wars' literature).
- States will increasingly compete for access and control over these resources, thus leading to the increasingly, if not the inevitable likelihood of conflicts and wars over these resources [24, p. 3].

There are debates over what constitutes energy security and these arguments have been sometimes hindered by a lack of clear understanding concerning the different components of the energy security problem and their policy implications. A commonly accepted practical definition of this concept is adequacy of energy supply at a reasonable price. A definition of energy security will thus imply in this argument the accessibility and affordability of oil. Oil security thus means the existence of consistent and sufficient supply of energy for a reasonable price over a long term period.

In recent times, oil geopolitics has become a major component in the global energy security arena. Belyi [30] has argued that the global nature of the oil market has prompted some to suggest that even if an energy-producing country could magically and inexpensively raise its domestic output to eliminate total imports, a shock in the world oil market will affect its domestic price and eventually threaten the stability of its economy. It is in view of this that it has been suggested that efforts aimed at combating oil insecurity should also be made at the global arena [30].

The importance of energy to domestic governments and the world is evinced in the events that occurred in the Middle East between 1956 and 1973. For instance, Gamal Abd al-Nasser of Egypt on July 26, 1956 froze the assets of international oil companies and defied the West by nationalizing the Suez Canal. This event prompted France and the UK to take retaliatory measures by blocking all Egyptian accounts in France and UK. They further threatened to seize the Canal and followed the threat by teaming up with Israel to attack it on October 29, 1956 [31].

In 1967, a similar incidence took place when the Suez Canal was again blocked by Egypt during the Arab-Israeli six-day war. This time around, the governments of Abu Dhabi, Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait, Libya, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia, as well as Lebanon and Syria decided to halt the export of oil to the US, UK and West Germany - countries whose policies, they believed, were either supportive of Israel or hostile to the Arab states in conflict Israel. An analogous incidence also occurred on October 6 1973 [31].

These stated incidences consequently had a devastating toll on countries on the global oil economic market and more so on countries whose economies highly depended on the oil from the Middle East. Eventually, the realization to have access to adequate, affordable and sustainable oil supply became clear - the backbone of a growing economy is predicated on constant energy supply and therefore governments need to control both the prices and accessibility of oil. Access to these energy resources therefore implies competition and conflict; a zero-sum game where each state is competing to meet its legitimate interests.

The works of Michael Klare [32,33,34,35] underscores the tenacity of competition that exists between states in their quest to access and control energy resources. The kernel of his arguments are essentially realist which sufficiently explains China's stands on energy security matters and why drastic and pragmatic steps are being taken by the leadership of the PRC to secure frequent energy supply.

Thus international conflict over oil and other natural resources is becoming more and more likely and the competition fiercer. With what has become known in international lexicon as oil grab, emerging great powers such as China understand that the only way to secure a place in

the international system and to dominate her region is not only by depending on its population growth and current economic growth. The question rather seems to be the continuous growth of its economy which will translate into its military capabilities and ensure internal cohesion, and the answer to this is found in her ability to access and control strategic resources like oil and gas. Leadership of the PRC perceive that the insecurity of the Malacca straits, and the prospect of a military embargo of its oil supplies, represents a fundamental threat to China's core national interests. Similarly, it underlay the concerns of the US Congress that CNOOC's bid for Unocal in 2005 would, if successful, represent a critical threat to US national interests and its energy security [24]. Thus, adding to Klare's; [34,35]. arguments, these concerns from the PRC and the US are both well founded.

4. UNDERSTANDING CHINA'S GROWING ENGAGEMENT IN AFRICA

This section explains the nature and reasons for China's growing engagement in Africa. The section consequently highlights some of the policies the PRC has undertaken over the years to entice African countries and to strengthen the bond of friendship that exist between the two. It finally assesses how these policies and friendship enhances China's energy security.

4.1 China in Africa: Strategy, Diplomacy or Aid?

Over the recent past decade, Africa has seen tremendous aid and developmental assistance from China. Relations between the PRC and Africa have a long history and have seen several changes over the course of time. Two of the notable phases of China's role in Africa are related to the Cold War era and, in recent times, China's ventures in Africa which are motivated primarily by the pursuit for energy security [36].

The resurgence of China-Africa relations in the past decade has seen tremendous momentum. Aning and Lecoutre (2008) have argued that China's current engagement with Africa should be viewed within the context of globalization in the aftermath of the Cold War; a relationship which to them is "voluntarily focused on economic and technological cooperation for the sake of development" [36, p. 40]. Besides, evidence exist to support claims that China's

goal in Africa is to use "oil diplomacy" to cover up its ambitions for strategic expansion, and that the PRC's foreign investment are a major tool for developing the country's foreign policy since such investment decisions are usually made by bureaucrats-cum-politicians and as such these policies while aiming at providing adequate fiscal returns, mainly, but 'tactfully' focuses more on scoring political points [4,11,37]. Thus, the PRC's investment in Africa highlights different aspects of China's energy policy. Consequently, a careful analysis reveals pointers that suggest that China's energy security policy is not by happenstance, but by clear calculation and strategy.

Over the years, studies have shown that while oil is a foremost source of Chinese interest in Africa, "it is far from being the only one" since the PRC is vigorously pursuing various mineral resources such as aluminum, bauxite, copper, iron ore, manganese, uranium, etc. [11, p. 938]. Accordingly, evidence shows that China's top trading partners in Africa have always been those countries with abundant mineral resources, especially the oil-producing countries [11]. Taylor [11] has subsequently argued that China's "oil diplomacy" in Africa is propelled by two main objectives namely securing oil supplies to feed the growing domestic demand in China; and positioning China as a "global player in the international oil market" (p. 938). Whereas the former is a short term goal, the latter is a long term objective and as Taylor (2006) argues, Beijing actually pursues both objectives by "playing on African leaders' historic suspicion of western intentions" (p. 938).

Consequently, most of the literature on Sino-Africa relations explores the perceived economic benefits of China's Africa strategy [11,12,13,38,39]. These benefits and gains are sometimes overemphasized thus disregarding the nuances and the underlying complexities of China's Africa strategy. There is an overwhelming focus on China's economic interests in Africa, the role played by the Chinese government and companies, and the economic and social impacts of such activities on the ground. For instance, Aning and Lecoutre (2008) postulate that China's presence in Africa has to a greater extent offered the continent considerable benefits than the continent has seen with its many years of relations to the Western countries [36]. Such arguments, though true to some extent, also seems simplistic as it ignores the fundamental questions of "why the sudden

upsurge in Sino-Africa relations?"; "what does it mean for China's security and overall comprehensive national power?" and "where does Africa really feature in this grand strategy?"

The argument of this paper is not to disregard the successes chalked by Africa's engagement with China over the recent past and the benefits it seeks to enjoy from the billions of 'aid' coming into the continent for developmental purposes; nor does the paper intend to overlook the challenges faced on the ground through this interaction. What the paper argues for is an exposition of what such strategic policies, especially 'aid' from China is being informed by - its energy security concerns which explain why most aid agreements are based on resources in Africa. What this paper seeks to do is to correlate and draw some relations with China's engagement in Africa to its broader security concerns and to show how they are mutually constitutive.

5. CHINA'S AID AND DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE TO AFRICA: A CRITICAL SECURITY ASSESSMENT

Africa fits perfectly in China's "going out" strategy for several reasons. To begin with, Africa's rich energy reserves, minerals and raw materials directly fuel China's quest for natural resources to boost its domestic economic growth. By the early 2000s, China had already accumulated a large foreign exchange reserve. During this same period, the country witnessed the depletion of domestic energy and natural resources which consequently became a growing constraint on its economic development [40]. Secondly, China's vigorous engagement with African countries in the previous decades has resulted in relatively good relationships, making Africa a friendly, desirable partner compared to the challenging states it encountered in other parts of the world.

According to statistics from the Ministry of Commerce, China's investment in Africa grew from \$1.57 billion in 2007 to \$5.49 billion in 2008. The growth was disrupted by the international financial crisis in 2009 (down to \$1.44 billion) but climbed back to \$2.11 billion in 2010 and then \$3.17 billion in 2011. Despite this growth, Africa constitutes only a small fraction of China's total global investment. In 2011, China's investment in Africa was merely 4.3 percent of its global total, significantly less than China's investment in Asia (60.9 percent), Latin America (16 percent) and Europe (11.1 percent). Whereas trade between

China and Africa rose by a fifth in the first quarter of 2017, China's direct investment in Africa soared by 64 percent during the same period [41]. Moreover, recent statistics from China's Ministry of Commerce and the China Customs indicate that in January 2018, the import and export value of China-Africa trade amounted to US\$16.5 billion, up 13.7 percent year on year, 21.9 percent. The information further indicates that China's exports to Africa reached US\$8.31 billion, while her imports from Africa reached US\$8.19 billion, up 41.4 percent with a trade surplus of US\$130 million [42].

It must be noted that the Chinese government have over the years actively promoted investment in Africa through concessional and commercial loans, as well as regular and preferential export buyer's credits. From 2009 to 2012, China provided \$10 billion in financing to Africa in the form of "concessional loans." During Chinese President Xi's first overseas trip to Africa in March 2013, this commitment was renewed and increased to \$20 billion during the three years between 2012 and 2015. Moreover, at a summit in Johannesburg in 2015, President Xi also announced plans to plough \$60 billion into African development projects [41]. Thus, China's investments in Africa are sometimes mingled with foreign aid to maximize viability and flexibility.

In addition, much of Chinese financing is associated with securing Africa's natural resources. China usually adopts what has come to be termed as the "Angola Model" in dealing with most African countries. Thus, the PRC uses resource-backed financing agreements to reach deals with recipient nations that rely on commodities, such as oil or natural resources, to secure low-interest loans [37]. It was this approach which in 2005 was used in acquiring blocks of oil fields in Angola and this coincided with the announcement of a \$2 billion loan from China Exim bank to the Angolan government. A similar approach was adopted in 2006 that aided Chinese oil companies in winning exploitation rights to multiple oil blocks through \$4 billion in loans in Angola. The same can be said of Sinopec's acquisition of a fifty percent stake in Block 18 in 2010 which coincided with the disbursement of the first tranche of China Exim Bank funding in the same country. In addition, the China Railway Group used the same model to secure the mining rights to the Democratic Republic of the Congo's (DRC) copper and cobalt mines in the year 2008 [37]. China also

reached similar unparalleled deals with several other resource-rich African countries between 2004 and 2011. According to Chinese analysts, Africa is China's second-largest supplier of service contracts, and that every RMB ¥1 billion China provides to Africa in the name of 'assistance' actually yields a return of ¥6 billion [37]. The China Development Bank launched the first phase of the China–Africa Development Fund (CADF) in 2007. This is an equity fund that had the mandate of providing \$5 billion for ventures launched by Chinese firms in Africa [37, 12].

Given the vast geographic distance between the two, Africa hardly poses any direct physical threat to China's immediate national security. Nonetheless, as the PRC's economic activities continue to witness rapid expansion on the continent, the physical security of Chinese investments and nationals has become the top challenge for Beijing [43], thus, the need to have more Chinese security personnel and installations around the continent. This has eventually culminated in the creation of China's first overseas military base in Djibouti and the increased number of supposedly peace keepers with the UN in various parts of the African continent. The point must be emphasised that most of these 'peace-keepers' are usually stationed in or are approximately closer to places where Chinese investments abound under the cover of what the Chinese refer to as 'military operations other than war' (MOOTW). The PRC argues that these 'peace-keepers' are meant for targeting humanitarian relief, disaster management and counter-piracy [44].

6. REALISM IN SILK: CHINA'S ENERGY EXPLOITS IN AFRICA

The question of survival is very critical for every state. The Westphalian state's existential need for internal cohesion is directly linked with its very persistence. In China's situation, controlling internal dissent and forging greater nationalism and perpetuation of the party is in large linked to the party's ability to deliver on the promises of socio-economic development to the populace. In fact given recent dissidents and increasing elements in Taiwanese and Hong Kong independence elements, coupled with the fact that there are still some in Tibet who subtly support the course of the Dalai Lama, it is only natural that the PRC builds a strong and formidable economy (which is hinged on energy

security). This will in the end be a key, if not the most formidable element to entice the youth of these seemingly dissenting groups within the Chinese community. Hence, continuous economic progress and growth is critical to the overall security of the state. Thus, an energy secured China, with well developed economy has the clouts to naturally dim the frequent domestic strife and unrest from minority groups from the far west and north of the country such as the Uyghurs and disaffected dissidents in the three Special Administrative Regions (Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macao).

Again economic growth means an expansion in the military capabilities and an increase in the military spending/budget. Energy therefore seems to be the missing link in this regard; and it means the survival and perpetuation of China. To put differently, the survival of the state which is the most important goal of every state, in China's situation seems to be threatened by the insufficient amount of energy needed to boost its economic growth. What this implies therefore is for China to maximize her security and power which are legitimate and core to the national interest.

China's recent activities in the gulf region, her deployment of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy, activities in Africa especially Angola and Sudan, her exclusive claims of the South China Sea (be it legitimate or otherwise), and bilateral relations with Venezuela and other South and Latin American states are geared toward security maximization which aims at resolving the existential threat of energy disruptions. To illustrate this further is China's naval policy off the Somali coast and the building of the military base in Djibouti- a country which is already hosting a US military base. Some scholars have posited that China's entrance into naval policing off the Somali coast is a historic event [44]. The argument being that this is one of the few times China has engaged its fleet in the sovereign waters of another state and that, at least on this occasion, it may be contrary to the PRC's usual non-intervention policy of respecting the sovereignty of other states. Other arguments also suggest that China's sending of convoy vessels to the Aden Gulf and seas off the Somali coast is based on UN Security Council Resolutions and with consideration of the practice of other countries [11].

Though both arguments may be laudable and well founded, it does not change the fact that the

safety of Chinese ships and personnel on the route and protection of its vessels is clearly demonstrated in this singular act which in itself is about protecting core national interest abroad and thus China's core *developmental security interest*. As at the end of December 2008, about 1,265 Chinese commercial ships were sailing through the Aden Gulf (the figure has actually increased over the past decade), that is, three to four ships per day on average. Of these ships, information indicates that about 20% of them are frequently attacked [45]. Clearly, protecting these cargoes and vessels supersedes any other higher goal of international obligation. The argument of adhering to a UN resolution or out of humanitarian concern is therefore weak and difficult to sustain. Also partaking in UN-sanctioned activity clearly helps China in projecting her power abroad and also to be seen as a responsible great power.

With the current difficulty, she faces in developing her global dominance, focusing on the strategic crafting of soft power, and periodic naval deployment is an avenue of reassuring the international community of her responsibility and commitment to global peace and development and at the same time projection of her military might, specifically her sea power.

With regards to securing oil resources on the African continent, Ian Taylor once listed a couple of agreements and deals that he uses to describe what he terms China's 'oil diplomacy'. These include Sinopec's \$525 million deal in Algeria which aimed at developing the Zarzaitine oilfields, CNPC's purchase of several Algerian refineries amounting to \$350 million, China's heavy investments in the oil fields in Angola, Congo-Brazzaville, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Madagascar, Namibia, Nigeria, Sudan, etc. [11, pp. 944-945]. All these billions of investments by China in Africa's oil resources were undertaken within virtually half a decade (between 2001 and 2006), and there have been billions more added over the last decade [41].

China's national petroleum company CNPC (China National Petroleum Corporation) also successfully gained a permit to partner with the South African Petroleum Company to exploit an oil field off the coast of Nigeria. This is significant because this area was once regarded as a fortified precinct for Western companies like Exxon Mobil, Shell and Chevron. Although some might argue this new non-Western oil player in

Africa to be a good thing, others have indicated that this is actually part of China's overall energy security plan: thus, for the PRC to continue its growth, it must control energy resources. Consequently, as a way of positioning herself well against any anticipated and unanticipated competitions, the PRC has a responsibility of diversifying her energy imports so as not to be overly dependent on the Middle East. According to a study by Kopiński, Polus and Taylor [38], resource security is undoubtedly the biggest driving force behind China's increased involvement in Africa. Thus, the volatility of the Middle East, as well as competition from other economies, has forced Beijing to encourage Chinese oil companies to seek other sources of oil to fuel China's rapidly growing economy and this has consequently led them to Africa - a continent filled with abundant oil resources. The study asserts that though China usually claims its relation with African countries is a win-win affair, there is enough evidence to show that the positive implications have the potential to be overshadowed by the negative. Consequently, by focusing primarily on exporting natural resources, in particular oil, African states may find themselves open to market shocks which may devastate fragile developing economies. Thus, in order to avoid this, Africa must shift its current activities in the natural resource sector towards secondary and tertiary production. This however depends very much on the political economies and modalities of governance in various African countries and has little per se to do with China [38].

7. CHINA'S SECURITY IMPERATIVE; AFRICA'S DISADVANTAGE

China expresses her current relations with Africa as positive sum cooperation [9]. Most African countries prefer to deal with China now as the century relations that existed between the West and Africa has come under series of attacks - as being exploitative and dictatorial. Unlike China, most Chinese leaders and their African counterparts claim, the West has exploited African countries for far too long, and that it is time for the African continent to free itself from the 'bondage' and shackles of the West by turning to the East (China in particular). Thus, Chinese leaders have over the years called for an end to the seemingly hostage situations African countries find themselves in. This they claim to be doing by giving interest free and concessional loans as well as development aid that have the capacity to break the unequal trade

patterns and dictatorial relations between Africans and the West. They have also focused on providing the needed access to capital markets, while refraining from interfering in the internal affairs of African countries.

Notwithstanding these seemingly positive trends been touted, little or nothing is usually said about how the activities of the 'saviours' of the African continent actually impacts negatively on the continent and the real motive behind these well-trumpeted goodwill gestures and supposedly win-win cooperation. The point is that evidence exist to point several situations of a "win-lose" situation, and that aside oil, Africa actually has a negative trade balance with China [46]. Moreover, due in part to the competition from Chinese companies and conglomerates, the industrial capacity of most African countries have seen ruins. There has been greater disparity between the rich and the poor. Most African economies are in shambles due to the debt servicing. There is therefore greater disarticulation in the societies of these countries resulting in exacerbation of violence and internal instability.

Indeed, given the nature of the PRC's policy of non-interference and respect for sovereignty, African leaders (especially the corrupt and authoritarian) are fond of the Chinese and pursue several policies with China, even when they know the policy may not be beneficial to their own people but only serve their selfish interest. Thus, Africa's natural resources are mortgaged to the Chinese for meagre projects. Questionable deals are struck across the continent - putting the continent's crude oil, mineral resources, metals, forestry products, etc. in the hands of the Chinese. No plans are made for the continent's youth and future generations. All that matters to the corrupt African leader is his immediate selfish gains.

Thus, the PRC's principle of non-interference in domestic politics of other states also means continuous economic engagement with autocratic regimes and subsequently support for illiberal regimes which in turn have adverse effect for the continent. For instance, in Zimbabwe, oppressive rule was sustained owing to some extent China's substantial military support to the former president Robert Mugabe. Beginning from 2000, Mugabe's Zimbabwe was faced with a series of punitive measures by the Western countries. Faced with increased international isolation and economic crisis reaching epic proportions, knowing the massive support he

enjoyed from China, and the fact that that support was expected to continue unabated, Mugabe in 2005 announced a new "Look East" policy in which he claimed that Zimbabwe was turning its back to the West and facing the East "from where the sun rises" [47]. Similarly, evidence exist to point at China indiscriminately providing the brutal Sudanese army with weapons that were used against dissenting views from the Darfur region [11].

The point here is not to encourage China to interfere in the affairs of African countries. However, a more careful approach could be adopted, especially when dealing with despotic dictators and prebendal autocrats across the continent. Moreover, China cannot be really blamed for supposedly signing shady and unprofitable deals in Africa. Thus, Africans and African leaders (misleaders) have a responsibility of making better deals with China. This is so because it is the legitimate right of every state to pursue its national interest, and this is always reflected in every endeavour of any well-meaning state.

Aside all other reasons, China's interest in Africa is in the continent's natural resources and oil in particular. It would therefore be a big understatement for African countries to think of having a 'free-lunch' with the 'Dragon' without catching some heat from its breath. Indeed it is entirely right to agree with Aning and Lecoutre [36] that "China's energetic diplomatic and business activities in Africa can only be properly understood if viewed in the context of China's Africa policy" [36, p. 42] - a policy that is quite similar to that of all rational states in the international system - the pursuit of national interest.

8. CHINA'S STRATEGIC ENGAGEMENT IN AFRICA: LEARNING FROM HISTORY

As history has shown, oil producing countries can use this well-envied resource as a 'weapon' to cause havoc to presumably unfriendly countries and 'foes'. Thus, through activities such as price hikes and reduction in productivity or even an introduction of an embargo, these oil producers may be able to hamper the ability of other states in purchasing energy resources that are considered necessary in sustaining the military and national security capacity, thereby rendering such states vulnerable in the event of an attack. Thus, to China, establishing closer

relations with African countries, especially the oil rich nations, becomes an imperative not just because of the relative economic gains, but also for her own national security. Hence the need for the PRC not just to build trust with Africans, but more importantly, to own and control the sources of energy production across the continent. Consequently, China's activities with emphasis on Africa are very much motivated by security maximization and pragmatism. One can therefore argue that these policies and activities stem from legitimate concerns and interest of China.

The Peak Oil Review for 21 May 2018 reveals that the PRC's oil demand growth has actually exceeded the expectations for the year and that the languishing domestic crude oil production has prompted increasing imports to meet the nascent demand. Thus, whereas crude oil production in March remained in the region of 3.76 million b/d, the figure was woefully inadequate compared to the country's consumption given its over 1,390.08 million population (excluding those in the SARs) [48]. Moreover, China's gas consumption increased by 14 percent and this has consequently driven LNG prices higher [49]. This reiterates the need for the PRC to have more access to and control over oil and this it can safely do only in Africa where it has much leverage.

Though China is the world's largest producer of coal, contributing to about 50% of coal production [50], given the current world order, it cannot rely on this coal for any meaningful energy security; the world has changed, and it keeps changing. The relative effectiveness of oil as a source of energy far overshadows the glorious days of coal, hence the need for the PRC to secure this vital resource from its African friends. It is therefore not for nothing that just within a year Chinese companies would sign over \$70 billion worth of contracts in Africa [39]. Thus, the PRC knows too well what would be the returns on her investments in Africa; it does not just "splash its cash just to please its friends" [51].

During the colonial era, European nations, particularly Britain, France and the Dutch used corporations such as British Petroleum, Shell and others to develop oil wherever it occurred. Thus, these European nations, anticipating the relevance of energy (oil) for their national security begun securing these resources at an

earlier stage in their development and this they did by applying their "age-old method of economic development" in "securing petroleum in less developed portions of the world, including Mexico, the Black Sea area and, ultimately, the Middle East" [52]. Presumably, the British and their allies won many of their wars due to the availability of machines (trucks, motor cars and motorcycles) all of which were powered by oil. Thus, it is only appropriate to assert that given China's rate of growth and development, and considering the somehow adversarial relations that usually exist between her and most western powers, particularly the US which has acquired a lot of oil resources and is comparatively more secured in terms of its energy security, coupled with her military might, the PRC's intensified engagement with the African continent (and when much investment is made in the energy sector-oil), it would not be out of place to argue that China is seeking to boost her energy security which in turn solidifies her national security.

As at the time of its entry into the First World War, the US produced and supplied about 70 percent of the world's oil and it was this advantage of having the "greatest weapon in the fighting of World War I" that have continued to influence the US' role in history [52]. For an emerging power like China, it is an imperative to have, maintain, and control petroleum supply which forms the basis of the modern state's security. Consequently, insufficiency in supply would mean compromising the state's security.

The point that has to be reiterated is that energy security is crucial to a state's security since energy has constantly been essential for the very sustenance of a state's military. Thus, history has revealed that at the tactical level, denying energy supply to a military is a key and decisive moment to turning "battles, wars, and political trajectories" [17].

Though the PRC is quite aware of the fact that military tools are usually effective in guaranteeing a state's physical security, it is also aware of the reality that "swinging the blunt instruments of security policy" frequently cannot be the best way to guarantee her energy security in today's complex international system [17]. It is for this reason that it has found it imperative to adopt and maintain the five principles of peaceful coexistence- a policy which sinks quite well with most African leaders.

9. CONCLUSION

What this paper sought to do was to shed light on the underlying reason behind China's rising engagement in Africa. The paper argues that this sudden resurgence of China-Africa relations stem from an existential threat on the part of the Chinese leadership to secure and have access to constant energy supply. Energy is an integral part in any country's development, especially for China.

At the rate of her development, China will need to shield herself from the interruptions that usually occur in the energy domain. The current policy on Africa and her rising engagement in the region is therefore strategic and timely considering all aspects. With hopes of regional hegemony and global recognition, maximisation of her material capability is only right since no state can be sure of the others intention or future intentions of other states.

More so with United States' presence in East Asia and Japan's military resurgence (a shift from military pacifism), questions about China's security has become paramount. With Africa, a continent apart from China regarding location, she poses less threat and challenge to China's overall security. Politically, maintaining a friendly relation with Africa rather enhances her chance in the UN General Assembly should the Taiwan issue arise. Thus China's current interest in Africa is undergirded by strategic policies put in place to ensure her survival and rejuvenation at home and in the international system.

Moreover, the PRC's development finance which is usually mixed with aid and backed by Africa's natural and mineral resources does not necessarily serve to benefit only the recipient countries, instead, it also favours Chinese state-owned enterprises as can be attested to by the works of some Chinese scholars [37,43,53]. This consequently bolsters China's economy, making it attractive, appealing and enticing the youth from the three SARs. In the end, every rational youth who sees the Mainland prosper economically and becomes militarily stronger as a result of energy security would prefer to be associated with a Greater China than a relatively isolated tiny island with little or no opportunities for growth.

The point must also be noted that since energy has become an indispensable component of

contemporary world, and particularly as a force that "powers militaries" - without which "generals cannot order airstrikes, armies cannot transport ground troops, and bases cannot operate", it is only imperative for China to acquire it and control its source [16].

Having recognised what is actually prompting China's active engagement in Africa, African leaders must then know 'how' to relate with the Chinese. China is not the Santa Claus to be doling out billions of dollars for nothing (even Santa does not do that). China is in Africa for a legitimate concern- energy security, so African leaders must also pursue the legitimate concerns of their people.

Thus, as Mugabe did in 2005, all African states may choose to 'look East' from where the sun rises and turn their backs to the West where the sun sets. However, it must be also noted that despite the beauty of the rising sun, one cannot really set their eyes on it for long; for the sun's rays have the tendency to blind the beholder and can also produce several unwelcomed consequences.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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Peer-review history:
The peer review history for this paper can be accessed here:
<http://www.sciencedomain.org/review-history/25685>