

Ivano di Carlo
Elem Eyrice Tepeciklioğlu
Amanda Paul
Yu-Shan Wu



EDITING

Emi Vergels

GRAPHIC DESIGN

Jon Wainwright

DRAWING ON COVER

Jon Wainwright

PHOTOGRAPHY

Fred Dufour/AFP

Adem Altan/AFP

Ludovic Marin/AFP

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Eurasia goes to Africa

Ivano di Carlo
Elem Eyryce Tepeciklioğlu
Amanda Paul
Yu-Shan Wu

TABLE OF CONTENTS

About the EPC	4
About the FES	5
About the project	6
About the authors	7
Foreword by Renate Tenbusch, Director of FES EU Office	9
List of abbreviations	11
Introduction	12
1 China in Africa: Comprehensive and complicated links	17
Yu-Shan Wu	
2 Russia's return to Africa: Maximising gain from low-cost investments	31
Ivano di Carlo and Amanda Paul	
3 Turkey's African engagement: A critical analysis	47
Elem Eyrice Tepeciklioğlu	
4 Eurasia goes to Africa: Summary and conclusions	61
Ivano di Carlo and Amanda Paul	

ABOUT THE EPC



The **European Policy Centre** (EPC) is an independent, not-for-profit think tank dedicated to fostering European integration through analysis and debate, supporting and challenging European decision-makers at all levels to make informed decisions based on evidence and analysis, and providing a platform for engaging partners, stakeholders and citizens in EU policymaking and in the debate about the future of Europe.

The **Europe in the World** (EiW) programme scrutinises the impacts of a changing international system on Europe and probes how the EU and its member states can leverage their untapped potential to advance their interests and values on a regional and global level. It thus examines the evolution of EU relations with major powers, such as the US, China and Russia, and how Europe can contribute to a rules-based global order. Second, the Programme focuses on the role of the EU in fostering reforms, resilience and stability in neighbouring regions. It looks closely at the developments in Turkey and Ukraine. Third, the Programme examines how the EU can strengthen its security in the face of terrorism, jihadist radicalisation or hybrid and cyber threats. It also seeks to advance the debate on Europe's defence policy.

ABOUT THE FES



The **Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung** (FES) is a nonprofit German foundation funded by the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany, and headquartered in Bonn and Berlin. It was founded in 1925 and is named after Germany's first democratically elected President, Friedrich Ebert.

The FES is committed to the advancement of both sociopolitical and economic development in the spirit of social democracy, through civic education, research, and international cooperation. It is the oldest political foundation in Germany.

The EU Office of the FES, which opened in Brussels in 1973, participates in the EU integration process through dialogue, consultancy and information on the EU.

Its work focuses on topics such as democracy, gender equality, migration, socio-ecological transformation and the EU's role as a global actor.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

Throughout 2020, the EPC and the FES' EU Office in Brussels partnered in a project entitled "Eurasia goes to Africa". It intended to analyse the policies and objectives of China, Russia and Turkey in Africa.

The EPC and FES carried out an independent assessment of the historical ties between the three countries and the continent; their key economic and political interests; their involvement in the security landscape; and the effectiveness of their soft power tools, including in the domains of education, media, religion, and humanitarian and development aid.

Besides a series of online policy dialogues focusing on how foreign powers are engaging with Africa, the outcome of this joint research project is a book providing an in-depth analysis of Chinese, Russian and Turkish ties with Africa. Particular attention is paid to the future challenges in these engagements, especially the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, this publication analyses how all three countries are viewed by Africans, both elites and ordinary citizens.

The book concludes with a summary of the three case studies and a set of policy recommendations for both the EU and the US, aimed at boosting their respective policies for Africa and presenting areas for potential cooperation with other like-minded actors.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Ivano di Carlo is a Policy Analyst in the Europe in the World Programme at the EPC. Before joining the EPC, he worked at NATO, the European Investment Bank, the University of Warwick and Boeing. His primary research interests include global economic governance, security and defence, and the Asia-Pacific region, with a particular focus on the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). He holds an MA in International Political Economy from the University of Warwick. Furthermore, he holds a Double MA in Public Policy and Political Analysis from the Higher School of Economics in Moscow, and in International Politics and Markets from the University of Bologna, where he also obtained a BA in International and Diplomatic Affairs.

Elem Eyrice Tepeciklioğlu is a research assistant in the International Law Implementation and Research Center at Yaşar University, where she has been a faculty member since 2012. She received her PhD in 2013 and conducted her postdoctoral studies at the Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, between 2014-2015. Her areas of research interest include African affairs, rising powers in Africa, Turkish foreign policy, Turkey–Africa relations, federalism, conflict management, international relations theory and postcolonialism. She is the author of the book, *Africa in Turkish Foreign Policy: Recent Dynamics, Opportunities and Challenges*, which discusses various dimensions of Turkey’s African engagement while casting a critical analysis on the sustainability of Turkey–Africa relations. She is also the co-editor of the forthcoming *Turkey in Africa: A New Emerging Power?* and forthcoming *Africa in World Politics*.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Amanda Paul is a Senior Policy Analyst in the Europe in the World Programme at the EPC, where she focuses on Turkey, conflict resolution in the Black Sea region, EU foreign policy in its Eastern neighbourhood and Russian foreign policy in the former Soviet space and Middle East. Since 2016, she has led EPC work on preventing and countering violent extremism and the challenge of jihadist radicalisation. Paul is also a Senior Associate Fellow at the Kyiv-based International Centre for Policy Studies, and Senior Advisor for issues related to the Eurasia region at Stober, Poltavets and Associates Consultants. She has worked as a columnist in the Turkish media for ten years. Prior to joining the EPC, Paul worked with the Brussels-based Centre for European Policy Studies, the German multinational Türk Henkel, and for the European Commission. Paul holds an MA in International Relations from the University of Staffordshire.

Yu-Shan Wu is a research associate at the Africa–China Reporting Project, Department of Journalism, University of Witwatersrand. She previously undertook research on foreign policy issues at the South African Institute of International Affairs (2010-2017). She completed her PhD in International Relations at the Department of Political Sciences, University of Pretoria in 2019.

FOREWORD

This EPC publication is the result of fruitful cooperation between the European Policy Centre, the EU Office of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, and the authors. It provides an in-depth analysis of China's, Russia's and Turkey's engagement with Africa, including case studies and a set of policy recommendations for the European Union and the United States.

Africa is a dynamic and very heterogenic continent going through fundamental economic, political and security changes. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung closely accompanies these transformative processes with its activities on the ground. We see Africa as a global partner. While new – or even not so new – actors have recognised Africa's potential and are trying to use it to their own advantage, the continent's ties with the US and the EU are still very much characterised by a traditional donor-recipient relationship. Nevertheless, the latter two's policies towards the African continent are long outdated and in need of a comprehensive overhaul. While the US has further disengaged under the Trump Administration, the EU has at least announced its intention to focus more on the continent and launched a new Africa Strategy. Unfortunately, this strategy, published in March 2020, is largely trapped in a business-as-usual approach.

FOREWORD

Renewing their respective relationship with Africa requires the EU and the US to both fundamentally redesign their policies and take on board the growing political and economic influence of China, Russia and Turkey on the continent. It is high time to develop a new narrative on Africa, beef up support for its ongoing regional reform processes, and recognise it as a truly equal partner on the global stage. The EU, as well as the US, still need to define their role in Africa vis-à-vis China's engagement in particular, without ruling out trilateral cooperation in some policy areas. Above all, the EU and the US must make better use of their soft power engagement, by deepening their ties with Africa beyond traditional government interaction.

We very much hope that this book will find many interested readers among EU and US decision-makers and that the findings and recommendations presented will inform their policies. Of course, the recommendations described herein are not fully fledged strategies. However, we believe that they are valuable contributions to further discussions on how to give a forward-looking impetus to the EU–US partnership with Africa.

Renate Tenbusch

Director, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung EU Office

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AfCFTA	African Continental Free Trade Agreement
AKP	Justice and Development Party (Turkey)
AU	African Union
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa
CAR	Central African Republic
CSO	civil society organisation
DSSI	Debt Service Suspension Initiative
EPC	European Policy Centre
FES	Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung
FOCAC	Forum on China–Africa Cooperation
GDP	gross domestic product
GNA	Government of National Accord
IMF	International Monetary Fund
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	non-governmental organisation
ODA	official development assistance
PLA	People's Liberation Army (China)
PMC	private military contractors
PRC	People's Republic of China
RT	Russia Today
SAF	Somali Armed Forces
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SSA	sub-Saharan Africa
SU	Soviet Union
TMV	Turkish Maarif Foundation
TRT	Turkish Radio and Television Corporation
UN	United Nations
UNSC	United Nations Security Council

Introduction

by **Ivano di Carlo**, *Policy Analyst, European Policy Centre*
and **Amanda Paul**, *Senior Policy Analyst, European Policy Centre*

In only two decades, much has changed – and Africa has certainly not been ignored. Many countries around the world are now lavishing their attention on the continent.

Over the past few decades, Africa has undergone a significant transformation. It went from being dubbed the ‘hopeless continent’ by *The Economist* back in May 2000, to donning its “Africa rising” front cover in 2011. The periodical even went on to dedicate a Special Report to the continent in March 2020, with the headline, “Africa is changing so rapidly, it is becoming hard to ignore”.¹ Indeed, in only two decades, much has changed – and Africa has certainly not been ignored. Many countries around the world are now lavishing their attention on the continent.

Africa is the new land of opportunity. Its GDP grew by an average of 4.6% annually between 2000 and 2018, making it the second fastest-growing region in the world after Asia (7.4%).² Besides sustained economic growth, Africa has also achieved impressive results in many other political and social indicators. Home to the youngest population in the world and with a growing middle class, parts of Africa have almost halved their infant mortality rates, increased their literacy and life expectancy rates and advanced regional integration.

Despite these positive developments, significant challenges still remain. They include the uneven distribution of wealth, weak health systems, poor governance aggravated by state dysfunctionality and corruption, security problems, social conflicts and high unemployment. Furthermore, severe disparities remain between North and sub-Saharan Africa (SSA).

The economic, political and social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have exacerbated these challenges. All of the continent’s economies have suffered a significant GDP contraction, and worse may still be to come. Assessments of the impact of the pandemic on Africa’s GDP growth portray a highly uncertain situation, with African countries likely to experience a serious economic recession in the coming months. The more the pandemic protracts, the more the forecasts are updated downward.³ This, together with the

drop in global oil prices, the unprecedented blow to the tourism sector, economic shutdown measures, and the decline in remittances from abroad pose a severe threat to Africa's sustainable growth, regional stability, food security and social progress.

Nevertheless, whatever the impact of COVID-19 on Africa, the face of the continent will continue to change rapidly. Foreign powers have significantly increased their focus on Africa over the last few years, triggering what has been labelled – despite the controversial connotation – the ‘new scramble for Africa’. Both traditional and emerging powers are competing for influence in Africa, to gain international recognition as great powers, and feed voracious appetites for natural resources, strategic routes and solid bilateral partnerships. A diverse set of tools are being used to this end, including financial largess; political, social, military, religious and economic power; and personal links.

Unlike the previous ‘scrambles’ of the 19th century and Cold War, African nations have become stronger. They are no longer willing to be the passive recipients of external actors’ influences, whether they be old colonial masters or new rising powers. African voices in international affairs have significantly augmented, and this unfolding competition, if skilfully managed, would bring new opportunities to Africa and its peoples.

Today, a new geopolitical chess game is being played out on the continent. Among many other actors, China, Russia and Turkey are seeking to strengthen their economic and political engagements with Africa. China’s role and profile in Africa have been rapidly expanding: Beijing is the latter’s most important trading partner, with Sino–African trade topping \$200 billion per year.⁴ China is also beefing up its security presence and military cooperation on the continent, and its arms exports have surged over the last few years. However, Chinese engagement in Africa is highly controversial, with many analysts criticising Beijing’s tactics (i.e. ‘debt-trap diplomacy’).

Similarly, but without the same economic firepower, Russia’s presence in Africa is also growing, as part of President Vladimir Putin’s wider efforts to reassert Russia as a global player. The Russia–Africa Summit held in October 2019 was a confirmation of Moscow’s increased focus. Russia is seeking to maximise its gains from low-cost investments by leveraging its economic and military connections and expanding its footprint, not least in the security, arms, mining and energy fields.

Assessments of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Africa’s GDP growth portray a highly uncertain situation, with African countries likely to experience a serious economic recession in the coming months.

African nations are no longer willing to be the passive recipients of external actors’ influences, whether they be old colonial masters or new rising powers.

Competition over Africa's major resources and, in turn, its search for geopolitical allies reflects and is part of a broader geopolitical battle playing out in the world.

The EU and US have a common interest to double down on their engagement with Africa and set the stage for stronger partnerships. This will help Africa meet its development goals by 'finding African solutions to African problems'.

Finally, Turkey is also increasing its presence in Africa. While this is primarily in SSA, including around the Horn of Africa and Red Sea, Ankara's interest in North Africa, particularly Libya, has also increased. Turkey's Open to Africa policy aims to boost its diplomatic and commercial presence on the continent. While economic investments have been quite modest so far, there is also growth potential. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has attempted to fashion Turkey as a humanitarian power by providing economic aid, particularly to Muslim states. Ankara has also used religious diplomacy and development projects to assume a leading role in shaping the state-building agenda of several African countries.

Competition over Africa's major resources and, in turn, its search for geopolitical allies reflects and is part of a broader geopolitical battle playing out in the world. Similarly to Africa, the US and EU are also facing challenges and competition, from Russia, China and Turkey in Eurasia. While the EU and the US remain important partners for Africa, they are no longer the only game in town.

Increased interest and competition hold many positive outcomes for Africa. However, the EU and US also share concerns over the possible security-related, economic and political impacts of some of the policies of China, Russia and, to a lesser extent, Turkey.

Such concerning policies include the three countries' respective 'no strings attached' approaches to financing investments and infrastructure projects, arms sales to authoritarian leaders, deployment of mercenaries, mass disinformation campaigns targeting the US and EU, and 'debt-trap' bank loans. Indeed, former US National Security Advisor John Bolton accused China and Russia of carrying out "predatory practices" in Africa that threaten Washington's strategic, military and economic interests.⁵ Hence, the EU and US have a common interest to double down on their engagement with Africa and set the stage for stronger partnerships. This will help Africa meet its development goals by 'finding African solutions to African problems', be they armed conflicts, political violence or climate shocks.

The authors of this book have analysed the policies and objectives of China, Russia and Turkey in Africa. They focus on the historical ties of the three countries with the continent, as well as their key economic and political interests; involvement in the security landscape; and the effectiveness of soft power tools, including in the domains of education, media, religion, and humanitarian and

development aid. The three chapters also assess the levels of Chinese, Russian and Turkish political influence over Africa, along with future challenges in their engagement – especially given the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, the authors study how all three countries are viewed by Africans, both elites and ordinary citizens. Finally, they analyse the impacts that the three

countries' new political, security-related and economic engagements with Africa may exert on EU and US policies for and interests in the continent. The book concludes with a summary of the three case studies and a set of policy recommendations for both the EU and the US, aimed at boosting their policies for Africa and presenting areas for potential cooperation with other like-minded actors.

¹ *The Economist*, "[Hopeless Africa](#)", 11 May 2000; *The Economist*, "[Africa rising](#)", 03 December 2011; *The Economist*, "[Africa is changing so rapidly, it is becoming hard to ignore](#)", 26 March 2020.

² African Union Commission/Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2019), [Africa's Development Dynamics 2019: Achieving Production Transformation](#), Addis Ababa/Paris, p.17-19; Sayeh, Antoinette M., "[Africa: Second Fastest-Growing Region in the World](#)", *IMF Blog*, 10 June 2013.

³ E.g. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2020), "[COVID-19 in Africa: Regional socio-economic implications and policy priorities](#)", Paris.

⁴ *John Hopkins China-Africa Research Initiative*, "[China Exports to African Countries](#)" (accessed 26 June 2020).

⁵ Borger, Julian, "[US unveils new Africa policy to counter 'predatory' Russia and China](#)", *The Guardian*, 13 December 2018.

China in Africa: Comprehensive and complicated links

Yu-Shan Wu

1

China's relationship with Africa is often reported in global headlines as a simple, unidirectional flow emanating from the former towards the latter. However, links between both sides are increasingly dynamic and are evolving along changing circumstances and interests. This chapter explores this complex relationship. It will examine the contemporary historical ties between the two, where China's interests and objectives have demonstratively changed over time. The nature of the China–Africa relationship will also be explored through selected engagement areas before assessing the impact of its influence and, therefore, the implications for other external partners.

Both China and Africa found common ground as members of the developing world supporting principles of equality, common prosperity and Third World development.

The China–Africa relationship is multifaceted and representative of several of China's bilateral relationships.

Contemporary history and background

China–Africa relations began around the 1950s, after the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 and as the African continent emerged from colonialism. Both sides found common ground as members of the developing world supporting principles of equality, common prosperity and 'Third World' development, as exemplified by the Bandung Conference in 1955.¹ These principles continue to guide China's foreign policy towards Asia and Africa (see the following section). Relations between the 1950s and 1990s can be described as episodic.²

The 1950s to 1970s were characterised by China's political links with a newly independent Africa, as the world slipped deeper into the Cold War. China emphasised developing world solidarity and provided development assistance, such as the construction of the TAZARA Railway between 1970 and 1975. In return, the African continent offered China ideological support against both the US and the Soviet Union, and even for the removal of the Republic of China from its UN seat, which the PRC eventually attained in October 1971.

In the 1980s, China emphasised its links with industrialised nations (i.e. US, Europe, Japan) as its foreign policy focused on economic modernisation.³ However, these ties were later compromised as China came to be perceived as a pariah following the 1989 Tiananmen Square Incident. Beijing was consequently faced with international isolation and Western sanctions. It began to re-evaluate its foreign policy approach, re-emphasising its anti-imperialist rhetoric and

renewing relations with more sympathetic and supportive developing countries. The then Chinese Foreign Minister Qian Qichen toured 14 African nations between 1989 and 1992 while Chinese development assistance towards developing countries boosted distinctly.⁴ It was at this point that the foundation for today's China–Africa relations began to take shape.

By the 1990s, economic and political relations between the two regions took root, evolving from the initial historical links forged by its leaders. Africa was undergoing economic reform programmes that opened new opportunities, while China's rapidly developing economy provided the impetus for deeper links with Africa. There was already a proliferation of external partners deepening links with Africa, like Japan's 1993 Tokyo International Conference on African Development. Similarly, China and Africa both recognised the need for a more institutionalised – or, at least, regular – form of interaction that would help manage and consolidate their relations as well as create mutual understanding.⁶ A common interest underpinned this recognition for

a more equitable, international political and economic order. As such, the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), a triannual collective dialogue platform, was launched in 2000.

The FOCAC – alternately hosted in China and an African country – is where both sides address ongoing concerns and celebrate achievements, and China makes public pledges to the continent (e.g. it pledged \$60 billion worth of varied support in 2015 and 2018, respectively).⁷ A regular feature on the China–Africa calendar, the accompanying declarations and action plans are symbolic of both sides' commitment to deepen relations and their interest in fulfilling practical needs. The FOCAC has evolved over the last two decades from a purely intergovernmental exercise to now also include actors from think tank collaborations, scholarships and other forms of social exchanges and even security cooperation. The significance of the continent for China continues to be demonstrated by the 30-year long tradition of Chinese foreign ministers kickstarting their yearly overseas travel in Africa.⁸

China's key objectives in selected areas of engagement

As the history of relations testifies, China's engagement with Africa is compiled of multiple interests and changing objectives. Moreover, the relationship is multifaceted and representative of several of China's bilateral relationships. It notably shares comprehensive strategic partnerships with Algeria, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique, Namibia, Sierra Leone, South Africa and Zimbabwe.⁹

The guiding principles and objectives of China's relations with Africa are outlined in its official Africa Policy.¹⁰ It was originally

published in 2006 as China's second policy towards a continent, with the first concerning the EU.¹¹ The latest version was released in 2015 and emphasises the following key elements: boosting African industrialisation (labelled a key focus area of cooperation); modernising African agriculture; participating in African infrastructure development; strengthening financial cooperation; facilitating further trade and investment; bolstering resource and energy cooperation; and lastly, expanding marine economy cooperation.¹² Although the

Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is not explicitly stated in the 2015 version, the latter's interest areas do appear to align with it.

TRADE AND INVESTMENT

Ideological emphasis has made way for practical interests, including access to resources and markets. China has remained Africa's largest individual trading partner since 2009.¹³ China–Africa trade reached \$185 billion in 2018, an increase from \$155 billion in 2017 and a huge leap from just about \$10 billion in 2000. In 2018, exports to China were led by Angola and followed by South Africa and the Republic of the Congo.¹⁴ There is, however, an expected 14% drop in China–Africa trade for the first quarter of 2020, due to the negative economic impact of the COVID-19 crisis.¹⁵ As is the case with many of their trade relationships, African countries tend to import manufactured goods from China and export primary goods to it. The continent is also a potential market for Chinese firms (e.g. the giant telecoms firm, Huawei, provides affordable devices to consumers and assists the construction of digital infrastructure).

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Overall, Chinese foreign direct investment flows to Africa stood at \$5.4 billion in 2018. It surpassed the US in 2014, which in turn has been declining since.¹⁶ Still, the official numbers only partly tell the story and should be further disaggregated. A quarter of Chinese investments in 2018 targeted Nigeria and Angola, followed by Ethiopia, Kenya, Zambia and South Africa.¹⁷ From a global perspective, Africa comes after Asia and Europe in terms of receiving investments from China. Moreover, China is still catching up to some European countries' levels of investments in Africa. According to a 2019 UN Conference on Trade and Development report, France was the largest investor in Africa in 2017 at about \$64 billion, while China stood at \$43 billion.¹⁸

CONNECTIVITY

Africa has become closely linked to China's vision for transregional connectivity and cooperation, the BRI. While China's link to Africa was uncertain in 2013 when the project was founded, as the former was seemingly more preoccupied with its more immediate regions, intersection points have grown between the two thanks to the somewhat positive welcome from the latter. Furthermore, the BRI's priorities reflect those set out by the continent, like the African Union's (AU) Agenda 2063. A long-term plan to optimise the continent's resources, the Agenda emphasises

industrialisation and, more recently, the drive for an African Continental Free Trade Area. With a substantial industrial production capacity, China is a suitable partner for assisting and supporting the building (and financing) of transport infrastructure – air travel, roads, ports and railways – that forms the very backbone of these initiatives.

Regarding Chinese infrastructure projects, the PRC assisted in building the \$200 million AU headquarters in Addis Ababa, which was inaugurated in 2012. Beyond official relations, China has reportedly become Africa's single largest financier for infrastructure (i.e. one in every five projects).¹⁹ Chinese construction companies and project financing are largely involved in African power generation; ICT network infrastructure; mining; real estate; and transport, shipping and ports. Currently, the most financed area is the latter, and projects include the Addis Ababa Light Rail in Ethiopia (2015), the Abuja-Kaduna Railway in Nigeria (2016) and the much-publicised Mombasa-Nairobi Standard Gauge Railway in Kenya (2017). As of 2019, there are an estimated 46 existing or planned port projects that China is either financing, operating or helping construct.²⁰ These projects relate to the mutual interest in boosting industrialisation in Africa.

BRI-related projects may be predominantly located in East Africa, but Chinese representatives have assured that Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania and the Republic of the Congo will be the main demonstration countries for industrial cooperation. Additionally, South Africa is viewed as a locomotive for the continent's industrialisation efforts, while Angola, Egypt and Mozambique are considered partners in production capacity cooperation.²¹

GEOPOLITICAL INTERESTS AND SECURITY COOPERATION

There are also geopolitical interests. One example is China's desire to end Taiwan's diplomatic presence in Africa. Most recently, São Tomé and Príncipe switched allegiance in December 2016, which only leaves the Kingdom of Eswatini as the last of Taipei's allies.²² China has also become more diplomatically assertive under President Xi Jinping. His interests go beyond economic gains to also encompass agenda-setting. China is deepening its role in the development finance landscape with its support for 'alternative' institutions like the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank or the BRICS'²³ New Development Bank. Such institutions offer further options for African partners.

With a substantial industrial production capacity, China is a suitable partner for assisting and supporting the building and financing of transport infrastructure.

China has become more diplomatically assertive under President Xi Jinping. His interests go beyond economic gains to also encompass agenda-setting.

China also contributes to a broader notion of soft power because its ‘attractiveness’ includes development aid, business and investment.²⁴ These examples demonstrate that the boundaries between commerce and national interests are increasingly fluid in the global marketplace.

The boundaries between commerce and national interests are increasingly fluid in the global marketplace.

China’s relations with the African continent is not just about establishing new linkages; it is also required to safeguard and maintain the interests and relations already established.

China–Africa relations have expanded in a variety of areas since the first FOCAC meeting in 2006. China’s role in Africa’s security landscape began to increase around the 2012 FOCAC, following the Arab Spring, when it pledged technical and financial support to the AU’s peace support operations. By 2015, China emphasised strengthening military exchanges and cooperation in its second Africa Policy. Another development that same year came in the form of President Xi’s announcement at the UN General Assembly that China would provide 8,000 troops to peacekeeping missions, which mostly take place in Africa. In June 2019, 1,031 Chinese troops were deployed with the UN Mission in South Sudan.²⁵ Not long after, it also became the second-largest financial contributor to the UN peacekeeping budget after the US. Formal military exchanges also appear to be on the rise, including the creation of the China–Africa Defense and Security Forum in 2018 that gathered senior military officials from 49 African states as well as the AU in Beijing. Later that year, China’s People’s Liberation Army (PLA) conducted military drills in Cameroon, Gabon, Ghana and Nigeria. It also deployed medical units to assist the development of combat casualty care capabilities in Ethiopia, Sierra Leone, Sudan and Zambia.²⁶ Finally, a trilateral naval exercise between Russia, China and South Africa in late 2019 suggests the possibility for collaboration between external players in Africa.

While these examples of collaboration and international cooperation demonstrate China’s interest as a responsible global power, it is yet to reconcile with other sets of interests. The clearest sign of geopolitical interest is the establishment of its first overseas military logistics base in Djibouti in 2017 to help safeguard its economic interests as well as support its naval operations. Similarly to other external players like Russia, the Chinese arms industry is growing with its arms exports, particularly to Algeria, Morocco and Nigeria.²⁷

At the same time, China is also subjected to and impacted by the very environment in which it operates. As it expands its engagement with Africa, so have the range of reputational, corporate and civilian risks it faces increased.²⁸ For example, China was forced to evacuate thousands of its citizens during the 2011 Libya Crisis. The ongoing security of Chinese energy assets in places like Sudan and South Sudan are also continuously threatened. Therefore, China’s

relations with the continent is not just about establishing new linkages; it is also required to safeguard and maintain the interests and relations already established. China's response to security in Africa reflects that the former's policies are not strictly static, but rather morph along with an ever-evolving environment.

PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE LINKS AND OTHER AREAS OF ENGAGEMENT

China's presence in Africa must not be solely viewed through a purely political or economic lens. One example is its role in humanitarian aid, like its pledge of \$125 million to UN agencies and other organisations during the 2014 Ebola virus outbreak in West Africa.²⁹ While countries like Japan and the US contributed funds towards this crisis, China was commended for its significant role on the ground that involved the PLA, and PRC agencies and medical personnel.³⁰

Greater opportunities for exchange between both sides have also been created, such as educational exchanges and scholarships that could impact future opinion leaders. As of 2017, China surpasses the US and UK

in attracting anglophone African students.³¹ Furthermore, there are 54 Confucius Institutes that are linked to African universities, helping to promote Chinese culture and language in Africa.³² While some of these institutes have been criticised (and even shut down in places like the US)³³ due to issues with transparency, content and hiring practices, they are considered relatively successful in alleviating local university capacity demands and providing access points for learning Mandarin. In addition, having recognised the importance of providing its perspective to the world, China's state media are set up in Africa to report on and to the continent actively.

Another unique aspect of the relations is Chinese migration to Africa: there is an estimated one million Chinese in Africa. While headlines tend to focus on the much-politicised story of Chinese workers participating in African state projects, the reality is far more complex.³⁴ For example, Chinese migration to South Africa spans as far back as the 17th century and is characterised by different waves of migration and varied levels of assimilation to the local environment.

Assessing China's influence over Africa: Partner or predator?

China's influence in Africa varies across countries, sectors and interest groups. The former cannot overtly direct the behaviour of other states, as it must maintain its own credibility in a globalised world. Thus, China negotiates interests.³⁵ For example, the FOCAC relationship emphasises the African side's interest in reaching out to China, which is as equal as the reverse. This regular interaction platform gives both sides a greater opportunity to express their interests

and allows for a more integrated socialisation process.³⁶ These efforts were continued when China sent a permanent mission to the AU in Addis Ababa in 2015, and the latter reciprocated with representation in Beijing in 2018. Furthermore, African policymakers perceive China's practical approach as less prescriptive than those of their traditional partners, who tend to be their former colonisers.

The more China becomes involved in particular societies, the more it is drawn into their domestic political issues.

China's stronger economic positioning, along with its clear direction as a single partner means that it is more able to determine the structure of China–Africa relations.

However, the more China becomes involved in particular societies, the more it is drawn into their domestic political issues. This is, for example, true of its engagement with Zimbabwe during the 2000s. The popular narrative suggests that China supported pariah states to fulfil its economic interests. In reality, it was also subjected to the deep schism between the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front government and local civil society organisations (CSOs), as the latter grew concerned over non-transparent deals and how authorities were using Chinese investments.³⁷

Soft influence also draws from a range of other sources and cannot solely rely on political links. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, China's attractiveness to Africa includes its economic prowess. China's own expanding economy and prosperity, and technology and know-how have made it a welcome and willing partner. A 2016 Afrobarometer perceptions survey across 36 African nations supports this reputation.³⁸ While the US led in popularity in terms of its development model (30%), China came a close second (24%). The 2019/2020 preliminary results reflect similar findings.

Of course, China's relations with Africa creates both economic winners and losers in the relationship that, in turn, can impact perceptions of China: Is it a partner or a predator? The 2019 global media coverage and opinions over Africa's debt towards China displays these two diverging perspectives, where some US officials were quoted as warning against China's predatory practises, while leaders from countries like South Africa and Zambia publicly refuted these claims.³⁹

China's stronger economic positioning, along with its clear direction as a single partner – in contrast to the many countries and interests of Africa – means that it is more able to determine the structure of the China–Africa relations, thus highlighting an inconvenient asymmetry. Nevertheless, its own ability to engage with Africa is also affected by domestic factors. In late 2015, China's slowing economic growth and the fall in global commodity prices negatively impacted the bilateral trade with and investments in Africa.⁴⁰

Despite all the resources invested in the people-to-people links, China–Africa relations still must progress beyond the usual historical, political and economic aspects. China faces natural barriers of language and culture, being a relatively newer partner of Africa compared to others.⁴¹ Pockets of discrimination exist on both sides, as demonstrated by the

eviction of and refusal to accommodate African residents in hotels in Guangzhou at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.⁴² This represents a primary challenge to the fulfilment of ‘comprehensive’ relations. This instance starkly contrasts the deployment of Chinese medical staff to the continent, as well as the sharing of experiences and training related to the pandemic between March and May 2020. Moreover, both sides continue to view the other from a predominantly economic lens, rather than as places of rich culture and history.

Implications and lessons for other partners

China’s relationship with Africa reflects both deepening links and the challenges of engaging with Africa’s multiple states and interests. It demonstrates that Africa is not a neutral backdrop where external players can simply exert their interests and wishes. However, the more there are external partners of varied strength and dynamic competitiveness on the continent, the better the outcomes for the entire region. While the EU remains an important funder as well as trade and investment partner for Africa, the following aspects make China a partner of interest, too.

Firstly, in a world where states and societies are interlinked inextricably, it is no longer useful to act in a zero-sum manner. It is also vital to understand the African states’ perspectives. While Africa’s other partners may view China as a direct competitor in terms of trade and investment, it is also perceived as aiding the interests of the continent. This is the case with the US’ tension with Huawei, which, from an African perspective, provides valuable and affordable connectivity across the region.

In this regard, it is perhaps useful for the other external players to partner with and support current initiatives in place in Africa, such as those determined by itself (i.e. Agenda 2063) or Chinese initiatives (when it is practical to do so). The BRI may be a project initiated by China, but its aspirations cannot be fulfilled without further support. Part of its attractiveness is the offer of a more globally connected Africa, where trade and connectivity through transport infrastructure can minimise the physical distances between the continent and other regions, such as Southeast Asia and

Africa is not a neutral backdrop where external players can simply exert their interests and wishes.

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even Europe. Engaging in these intersections and common interest points as the China–Africa relationship continues to progress would be beneficial for all.

Secondly, as mentioned, China’s Africa Policy demonstrates a pragmatic approach. Rather than outline its own set framework of engagement or proclamations of intent, it links its engagements to the interests set out by African countries themselves, such as industrial development or the fast-track of intracontinental trade.⁴³ While some African policymakers have occasionally remarked positively on China’s successful ‘development model’, the latter has not actively pushed its path onto others. Again, this is because China itself does not follow a set of static policies, adapting them instead to new circumstances.⁴⁴ Furthermore, the PRC and Chinese businesses display more willingness to pledge funds and invest in projects in Africa that other external partners may deem too risky. This is not to say that they provide unlimited support, either. The China Development Bank reportedly withheld funds from the state-owned, South African power utility Eskom in 2019 due to operation and mismanagement problems.⁴⁵ Clearly, China’s approach is fluid and unfixed.

The long-standing narratives of ‘China the predator’ can backfire when they are perceived as hypocritical and as forcing African partners to choose sides.

The fact that many aspects of the China–Africa relationship have been institutionalised brings with it a degree of predictability and commitment.

Finally, other partners can learn from China’s experience, where its relations with African nations have had to develop further across the board, from people-to-people, to institutional and commercial links; and beyond the historical political ties. From an institutional perspective, the shared platforms mentioned above demonstrate China’s willingness to maintain relations and assure Africa that it does not wish to disengage. However, communicating its relations with Africa to its own critical public – which have limited knowledge about the continent – remains challenging. Similarly to Europe, Africa continues to be perceived as a source of migration-related problems, and a destination for aid rather than for business opportunities.⁴⁶ China is still learning to avoid engaging predominantly with African government channels and opt for private and civil society spaces instead, where EU engagement is arguably stronger. In fact, EU states have more experience to share with local African CSOs regarding their engagement with their *own* governments, which in turn engage and sign deals with China.

Still, the long-standing narratives of ‘China the predator’ – with one US diplomat warning of its “empty promises” and claiming that “[t]hey breed corruption, dependency”⁴⁷ – can also backfire when they are perceived as hypocritical and

as forcing African partners to choose sides. Further understanding of the complexity of the China–Africa dynamic is imperative,

including their multiple and overlapping interests; this will only mean better things for Africa.

Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates the unique attributes of China’s engagement and ties with Africa. The relationship will likely maintain, if not deepen, over the long term considering the multiple engagement platforms, which both sides partake in regularly to refine, update and assess linkages jointly. In other words, the fact that many aspects of the China–Africa relationship have been institutionalised brings with it a degree of predictability and commitment.

At the same time, relations are not just a product of formalised links, and their trajectories can also be affected by unpredictable factors. The COVID-19 pandemic has not only publicised the sobering differences between the societies in question but also brought globalisation to a halt like never before, as countries worldwide continue to focus inwards. Similarly, several African countries are left to grapple the

pandemic and its immediate impact on their economies, while postponing their long-term development aspirations and even debt repayments. So far, partners, such as the EU, China and international institutions, have been supportive of this moratorium. The question, in particular, is how the China–Africa relationship will look following the pandemic. This depends on whether natural synergies will persist and interests stay aligned in a post-COVID-19 reality.

What is certain is that the pace of China–Africa relations, sustained by seemingly limitless trade and travel, will take time to re-establish. The real test of the strength of these ties is whether they can progress beyond diplomatic expressions of support to fill pressing gaps in the African partners’ healthcare systems, diverge (social) media opinions between both sides, and continue mutually beneficial economic cooperation.

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6. Li, Anshan (2014), “[Origin of the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation](#)” in Zhao, Jinjun and Zhirui Chen (eds.), *China and the International Society: Adaptation and self-consciousness*, Hackensack: World Century Publishing Corporation: Hackensack, pp.276, 279.
7. See Tiezzi, Shannon, “[FOCAC 2018: Rebranding China in Africa](#)”, *The Diplomat*, 05 September 2018.
8. Chen, Song, “[Chinese FM’s traditional new year visits attest to friendship with Africa](#)”, *China Daily*, 07 January 2020.
9. See Shinn, David H. (2020), “[China in Africa: Testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission](#)”, Washington DC: U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission.
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Russia's return to Africa: Maximising gain from low-cost investments

Ivano di Carlo & Amanda Paul

2

Russia views Africa as a region of geopolitical and business opportunities, where it can increase its influence by using relatively low-cost and -risk strategies.

While Russia may not possess an extensive toolkit like other actors, it makes the most of the tools it does possess by skilfully employing its niche strengths in the arms, security and energy sectors.

In an interview to Russian News Agency TASS, ahead of the Russia–Africa Summit in October 2019, President Vladimir Putin stated, “Today, the development and strengthening of mutually beneficial ties with African countries and their integration associations is one of Russia’s foreign policy priorities.”¹ Russia views Africa as a region of geopolitical and business opportunities, where it can increase its influence by using relatively low-cost and -risk strategies.²

After a decades-long absence, Russia’s renewed interest in Africa coincides with its broader goal of expanding its global footprint, including in regions where it has been absent since the heyday of the Cold War. This revived interest intensified significantly after Western sanctions were placed on Russia, following the latter’s 2014 annexation of Crimea and the War in Donbas.

Russia has sought to rebuild old ties and develop new ones. However, Moscow’s political influence, military presence and economic weight in Africa are negligible compared to that of other global actors, such as the EU, US and China. Still, Russia is one of the continent’s fastest-growing trade partners in relative terms, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). While Russia may not possess an extensive toolkit like other actors, it makes the most of the tools it does possess by skilfully employing its niche strengths in the arms, security and energy sectors. It has also taken advantage of EU and US foreign policy blunders and Africa’s wariness of China’s growing clout to advance its ambitions.

This chapter looks at the drivers, objective and tools of Russian policy towards and engagement with Africa. It analyses whether Russia’s approach is merely opportunist or is actually coherent, how Africa views Russia, and to what extent Moscow’s growing presence affects EU and US interests.

An overview of Russia–Africa relations

Russia is no stranger to Africa. However, its presence on the continent has fluctuated over the decades, while its policy has changed in parallel with its own domestic challenges.

Until Joseph Stalin's death in 1953, the Soviet Union (SU) had little interest in Africa. As Western countries dominated the continent, Stalin considered African nations to be part of the capitalist system. The first major inroads took place in the mid-1950s under the leadership of Nikita Khrushchev. This coincided with the early stages of African independence and the global expansion of Soviet ideological persuasiveness. In fact, Khrushchev was a staunch supporter of the decolonisation process. He viewed it as an opportunity not only to participate in the global struggle for influence but also boost the SU's global prestige. He offered aid, arms, and military and political support to the liberation and communist movements of Africa. The SU's fiery, anti-imperialistic rhetoric gained significant influence in African countries where new local political elites were emerging.

During the Cold War, Africa became a site of the geopolitical chess game between the SU and the West, in the form of a series of proxy conflicts; a testing ground for ideological, economic and political dominance. In the late 1950s, for example, the then Republic of the Congo became one of the most volatile regions of the developing world.

In 1955, Egypt became the first African country to sign major arms and trade deals with the SU. President Gamal Abdel Nasser was one of the SU's closest allies and enjoyed Moscow's support in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Diplomatic ties were also established with the newly independent Algeria, Egypt, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Tanzania, Morocco and Libya – the 'Casablanca Bloc'. By the early 1970s, when Leonid Brezhnev was in the Kremlin, the SU had also developed friendly ties with many SSA countries, including Angola, Benin, Ethiopia and Mozambique. In the mid-1970s, some of these countries gained independence with the help of Soviet military assistance or via revolutionary leaders.

Africans were also invited to study in Soviet universities in the second half of the 20th century. Between 1954 and 1991, around 60,000 Africans studied in the SU. The Patrice Lumumba University in Moscow (renamed Peoples' Friendship University of Russia) – named after the first prime minister of the then Republic of the Congo who was assassinated in two interrelated plots by the US and Belgian governments –³ was a showpiece of Soviet soft power for the postcolonial world. Many prominent African politicians studied there.

The end of the 1980s marked the beginning of the end of the SU, with a progressive deterioration of the Russian political and economic system and mounting discontent

During the Cold War, Africa became a site of the geopolitical chess game between the SU and the West; a testing ground for ideological, economic and political dominance.

among its citizens. Economic stagnation and the failures of the *perestroika* and *glasnost* political reforms contributed to the SU's internal dismantling. Faced by multiple challenges, Russia's foreign policy took a heavy blow. After the fall of the SU, Moscow could no longer maintain the money, time nor effort needed to preserve its African partnerships. Busy with civil and economic chaos at home, Russia turned inwards. Russia's rapid withdrawal also had a profound impact on Africa. Marxist-inspired governments and movements lost their backers, while new conflicts became awash with weapons and mercenaries from the former Soviet sphere.

As with the Middle East, Moscow's renewed engagement with Africa has been boosted by an internally focused EU and a drop in interest from the Donald Trump Administration.

Since the turn of the century, Putin has presided over a more assertive Russian foreign policy. During his first presidential term in office between 2000 and 2004, Moscow gradually re-engaged with Africa – although the continent was far from a top priority. It is especially in the last six years, as Russia's ties with the West have deteriorated and it finds itself with an increasingly fragile and stagnating economy, that it doubled down on its engagement with the continent. This should be understood as part of a foreign policy pivot to find new opportunities around the world and consequently increase its economic reach and global influence.

The Kremlin seeks to demonstrate that the West cannot diplomatically isolate Russia, by cultivating new partnerships that boost its global status.

As with the Middle East, Moscow's renewed engagement with Africa has been boosted by an internally focused EU and a drop in interest from the Donald Trump Administration. Russia has used its Cold War legacy as a springboard to rekindle relations and regain a foothold in Africa. While the generation of African leaders and officials who trained in the SU decades ago is ageing, some, such as Angolan President João Lourenço, still hold influential positions.

A sign of Africa's rising importance to Russia is the increase of the latter's high-level visits. Although Putin has only visited the continent a handful of times, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has made some 15 tours over the last three years.⁴ Deputy Foreign Minister and Presidential Special Envoy for the Middle East and Africa Mikhail Bogdanov visited Africa over 50 times between 2014 and 2020.

The Kremlin has also hosted numerous African heads of state. For example, the 2019 Russia–Africa Summit saw some 45 heads of states and allegedly culminated in new deals worth \$12.5 billion.⁵ It kicked off a new chapter in Russia–Africa relations, underlining Russia's new aspirations and ambitions in the continent.

Why Africa?

As for other external actors, economic imperatives top Moscow's Africa agenda and drive its general reorientation towards new trade partners and markets. New export markets and investment opportunities, particularly those sanctioned off to Western markets, are crucial for Russian companies.

Although Africa is teeming with economic opportunities, there are also rising security threats. And yet, terrorism, illicit trafficking, piracy, the drug trade and civil wars can actually boost Russia's engagement with the affected countries due to its expertise in dealing with such issues. Furthermore, Russia considers itself to be well placed to help those countries affected by insurgencies, providing mercenaries to support local counterterrorism operations. These mercenaries are predominantly

from the Wagner Group, a private Russian paramilitary organisation – believed to be founded by Yevgeny Prigozhin, who has close ties to the Kremlin – and which operates in many combat zones in Africa. The murder of several Russian mercenaries alongside Russian troops by Mozambique-based Islamists in 2019 has not deterred Russia's approach.⁶

The Kremlin also seeks to demonstrate that the West cannot diplomatically isolate Russia, by cultivating new partnerships that boost its global status. Africa's 54 nations account for around a quarter of all votes at the UN, making it the largest regional voting bloc. Africa thereby offers Russia a pathway to circumvent EU and US efforts to apply sanctions and restrict Moscow's foreign policy.

Russia's expanding footprint: Guns, mercenaries, energy and minerals

Economically, Moscow prioritises gaining access to Africa's natural resources; increasing its arms, energy and agricultural exports; and establishing security cooperation with African armies. The Kremlin has an "extractive approach" toward doing business in Africa, aspiring to keep investments low and returns high.⁷

ARMS TRADE

Since 2015, Russia has signed military agreements with over 28 African countries. These envisage various forms of cooperation, including weapons sales, access to African seaports and airbases, African officers

training at Russian military academies, counterterrorism and peacekeeping efforts, and the presence of Russian military advisers.

Russia is the top arms supplier to Africa (49%), followed by the US (14%) and China (13%). Overall, Africa accounts for 17% of Russian global arms exports. North Africa is the main beneficiary, with only about a third of arms imports going to SSA.⁸

However, Russia exploited its intervention in Syria to showcase its military hardware. This led to new customers, particularly in SSA, where its share in arms exports increased from 19% to 28% between 2012 and 2018. Most of the countries in this region prefer

Russian weapons as they are cheaper and relatively more technologically advanced than those sold by some of Moscow's competitors. Moreover, Russia arms sales come with no (or just a few) strings attached. Thus, Russia has been able to build strong ties with some African countries. It has also benefitted from the readiness of some countries to make transactional deals (e.g. arms in exchange for access to energy and mining sectors).

Russia is also an important security partner of African countries, especially when it comes to bilateral military-technical cooperation and defence contracts. The Kremlin has signed military agreements to train African soldiers, provide military expertise to counterterrorism and violent extremism⁹ and send mercenaries to support the efforts of local armies. Partnering countries include the Central African Republic (CAR), Sudan, Libya, Madagascar and Mozambique.¹⁰

ENERGY AND MINERALS

The energy and natural resource sectors are crucial for Moscow. Sustaining energy exports and selling nuclear technology abroad is critical for the Russian economy and a central element of its Energy Strategy 2035.¹¹ In turn, with its growing population and economy, Africa is in desperate need of energy. For instance, the share of people without access to electricity in SSA accounts for almost 57%.¹² South Africa, to date, remains the only country in Africa with an active commercial nuclear power plant.

African governments lack energy infrastructure. Russia is broadening its global energy influence by selling nuclear technology to African countries, to increase both its profits and political might. In some cases, Russia has provided loans for them to build costly nuclear power plants. For instance, Egypt has signed an agreement with the Russian-owned energy corporation Rosatom to build the country's first nuclear

power plant. With expected costs of \$29 billion, it will be mostly financed by a \$25 billion Russian loan.¹³ Nigeria, Ethiopia, Rwanda and Zambia have also signed contracts with Russia in the nuclear field, while Moscow is in negotiations with a further 12 countries.¹⁴ However, in some cases, plans have fallen because of the high construction costs. For example, under President Cyril Ramaphosa, a South African court cancelled a nuclear power plant project which amounted to \$76 billion.¹⁵

Similarly, Russia has gained traction in the African oil and gas sector. For instance, it is constructing an oil refinery in Uganda and exploiting natural gas reserves in Mozambique. Russian energy conglomerate Lukoil reportedly has either projects or memoranda of understandings with Equatorial Guinea, Cameroon, Ghana, the Republic of the Congo and Nigeria.

Russian mining companies are well represented in Africa, notably the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Zimbabwe, Angola, Botswana, Namibia, the CAR and Guinea. They extract diamonds from Angola and platinum from Zimbabwe. Russian mining giant Alrosa boasts a large percentage of shares in Angola's Catoca diamond mine, while aluminium producer Rusal owns bauxite mines in Guinea, the country with the world's largest reserves.¹⁶ In some cases, Moscow has exchanged weapons and expertise for concessions to extract minerals and conduct geological explorations.¹⁷

While most Russia–Africa trade is based on the abovementioned sectors, there are also other fields where Russia is expanding, particularly agriculture and fertilisers. Overall, Russia's trade with Africa experienced a growth of 185% between 2005 and 2015, with turnover doubling to \$20 billion in 2018.¹⁸ North Africa is responsible for the lion's share, with Russia presently accounting for barely \$4 billion of SSA trade. However, the EU (35%), China (20%) and the US (6%) are still more important trade

partners for Africa than Russia.¹⁹ Hence, with Russia currently an economic dwarf, Putin has called to double the volume of trade with Africa in the next five years.

Russia's political influence

Russia's economic interests in Africa are also part of a broader geopolitical vision that considers economic opportunism to be a central element of the former's long-term strategy; to increase its influence over client states and establish new partnerships and ties via a tailor-made approach.

STRATEGIC LOCATIONS

North Africa is a particularly strategic region for Moscow as it is an entry point into SSA. Furthermore, the region offers access to both the warm waters of the Mediterranean Sea and, to a limited extent, the cold waves of the Atlantic, and thus proximity to EU and NATO member states. Indeed, Russia has long considered access to the Mediterranean to be an essential component of its power strategy. For example, Moscow's involvement in the Libyan conflict, via its support for the Libyan National Army's leader Khalifa Haftar, is driven by economic and geostrategic opportunities. Russia has provided military advisors, hardware and mercenaries to the Army.²⁰ However, as a swift Haftar victory is increasingly unlikely, Russia's position is evolving into what may be described as 'strategic ambiguity': leaving the door open to future cooperation with whoever ends up in power in Libya.

Likewise, having stronger and stable relations with countries on the Horn of Africa can offer Russia a springboard to extend its influence in the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Aden. According to a draft agreement between Russia and Sudan, the latter will provide land for the construction of a Russian naval facility for a period of 25 years, free of charge and with an automatic renewal of a further 10 years.²¹ The planned deal will allow Russia to have its first "logistical support centre" in Africa.²² Although the base's capacity would be limited to four ships at a time, nuclear-powered ships would be allowed to dock, thereby significantly boosting the combat capability of the Russian Navy in the Red Sea and Indian Ocean.

Russia has long considered access to the Mediterranean Sea to be an essential component of its power strategy.

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PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

Public diplomacy and media are another component of Russia's geopolitical toolkit. However, with few people-to-people ties and a limited understanding of the Russian language among Africans, Russia's soft power appeal among African citizens has been rather narrow. Still, Moscow seeks to target ordinary Africans via Russian-backed non-governmental organisations and media projects.²³ This includes the Russkiy Mir Foundation, which is active in nine African countries,²⁴ and the Afrique Panorama news service.

Russia's extensive disinformation campaigns have resulted in Facebook suspending networks of Russian accounts, for their interference in countries like the Central African Republic, Madagascar, Sudan and Cameron.

African votes are crucial for securing Russian-led initiatives in the UN. Russia's vote-buying approach has contributed to its building of a mutually constructive and beneficial dialogue with African countries.

Russian officials frequently depict EU and US democracy promotion efforts as a form of neo-colonialism.²⁵ They also often play the anti-colonial and -Western card via (dis)information campaigns on its RT TV channel and Sputnik news agency.²⁶ For example, propaganda outlets have pushed a narrative that Russia, not France, is to thank for creating stability in the CAR.²⁷ The streets of the capital, Bangui, are covered with propaganda posters proclaiming, "Russia: hand in hand with your army!"²⁸

Russia has assisted some African strongmen through election strategies.²⁹ However, *unlike* the Soviet period, Russia also has trolls, cyber-attacks and other tools at its disposal. Russia's extensive disinformation campaigns have resulted in Facebook suspending networks of Russian accounts, for their interference in countries like the CAR, Madagascar, Sudan and Cameron.³⁰

As in the 1960s, education is an important part of Russia's soft power outreach. The number of African students enrolled in Russia's educational institutes has grown substantially over the last years. Over 17,000 students from Africa study in Russian universities today.³¹ Many received Russian scholarships at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

There is emerging evidence that Russian-led initiatives are increasing in the continent, and as with other parts of the world, Russia prefers to cultivate direct relationships with African elites rather than engage with civil society.

ROLE IN INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Regional and international multilateral institutions are used by Russia to exert influence. For instance, the African Union has been a key target of Russian diplomacy. Advocating for

local peacekeeping solutions to African problems rather than Western-led missions, Moscow facilitated its role as an observer at various African peace talks, even going as far as to play a central role in the CAR peace process.

Moscow chairs the BRICS group this year.³² The organisation has also helped Russia strengthen its relations with Africa, particularly following South Africa's induction in 2010 – something Moscow supported strongly.³³ Moreover, launched in 2019, the International Agency for Sovereign Development, lead by Konstantin Malofeev, is focused on assisting “governments of developing countries, especially the countries of the African continent, in carrying out economic reforms, raising funds on international capital markets and unlocking potential of increasing shareholder value of the largest corporations in the region.”³⁴ Since 2017, Moscow has also been one of the main stakeholders of the African Export-Import Bank, a pan-African financial institution based in Cairo.

Following the Russia–Africa Summit in 2019, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs established the Secretariat of the Russia–Africa Partnership Forum. Its tasks are multiple, ranging from promoting cooperation between Russia and Africa to preparing for the second Russia–Africa Summit in 2022. The Ministry also created a non-profit organisation, the Association of Economic Cooperation with African States, that “seeks to promote Russian business on the African continent and unlock the continent’s enormous potential [by bringing onto their platform] leading Russian companies, business councils, government bodies and expert communities of Africa and Russia.”³⁵

African votes are crucial for securing Russian-led initiatives in the UN. Russia's vote-buying approach has contributed to its building of a mutually constructive and beneficial dialogue with African countries.

Some African countries supported Russia's disapproval of the US' invasion of Iraq in 2003, Russia voted against arms embargos and sanctions against Zimbabwe in 2008, Russia opposed France's intervention in Cote d'Ivoire in 2011, and several African countries opposed a resolution condemning the annexation of Crimea in 2014.

Africa has three rotating seats on the UN Security Council (UNSC), known as the 'A3', to which Russia regularly panders. In April 2019, Russia backed A3 efforts to block a UN statement on the Sudanese coup d'état.³⁶ Former US National Security Adviser John Bolton accused Russia of selling weapons to African countries in exchange of votes and deliberately and aggressively targeting investments to the region to gain a competitive advantage over the US.³⁷

THE DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE DIMENSION

Development assistance collapsed after the breakdown of the SU in the early 1990s. In terms of Russia's humanitarian and development assistance, it is mostly aid-in-kind and is predominantly channelled through the Ministry of Emergency Situations, often in response to natural and human-made disasters. While Russia has established some humanitarian assistance projects in the last three years (e.g. a Russian research centre of epidemiology in Guinea to fight against dangerous infectious diseases, allocating more than \$60 million to fight Ebola in Western Africa),³⁸ it is a drop in the ocean compared to the other global players.

The Kremlin understands debt relief to be a form of development assistance. It is constantly reminding African elites of its generosity in writing off the debts accrued during the Soviet period, totalling over \$20 billion. As stated by Putin, this was an act of pragmatism “because many of the African states were not able to pay interest on these loans”.³⁹ Over the last years, the Kremlin

has also forgiven the debts of Mozambique (\$40 million), Madagascar (\$89 million), Tanzania (unknown), and is expected to do the same for Ethiopia (\$163.6 million).⁴⁰

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The Russian narrative that Moscow and Africa share many interests in a changing world, and that African nations can rely on Russia as a partner to balance their ties with other third actors has been successful.

African perspectives of Russia

To a large extent, many African governments have welcomed Russia in thanks to its flexible, few- or no-strings-attached approach. The Russian narrative that Moscow and Africa share many interests in a changing world, and that African nations can rely on Russia as a partner to balance their ties with other third actors (i.e. the West, China) has been successful.⁴¹ Russia's approach of promoting collaboration and transactional relationships, rather than the Western method of making aid conditional on democracy and human rights promotion, has also been a winning formula. Many African leaders appreciate that Russia treats them as equal and valuable partners, unlike the EU or US, who they often view as patronising. African leaders also appreciate Russian support in the UN on topics of crucial importance to them – especially since 60% of UNSC issues concern Africa.⁴²

Unlike the West, Russia has never subjugated Africa, neither politically nor economically, and does not carry the historic burden of the Atlantic slave trade. Moreover, the SU's support for many African nations' struggle for independence has not been forgotten. As Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta stated at the Russia–Africa Summit,

“Russia played an unforgettable and highly valued role in Africa's struggle for liberation and independence. [...] African heroes including Kenya's founding father, Mzee Jomo Kenyatta [...] drew from the vision of the Soviet Union”.⁴³

The Russian narrative that Moscow is seeking to establish a multipolar world order is welcomed by African countries, given their parallel reassessment of their own roles in the

current international system. The fact that Russia, unlike Europe and the US, does not view Africa as a massive challenge, and a source of migration or, as President Trump stated, “a shithole”⁴⁴ is also appreciated.

However, from an economic point of view, Russia is just another (rather small) actor in the region. While Moscow actively responds to the sectorial niches of African countries, it certainly cannot overtake any of the other global actors’ significant economic investment, especially China. Overall, the growing group of external actors on African nations’ doorsteps, eager to do business, offers the latter more choices and bargaining power.

Russia’s perception among the broader African population is rather unclear given that the Kremlin has prioritised engaging with political elites instead of ordinary citizens. Its lack of involvement in huge and showy infrastructure projects and of soft power tools, especially humanitarian assistance, is another factor in the Kremlin’s lack of visibility amongst the general African public. For example, when compared to China and Turkey, which both carried out prolific COVID-19 diplomacy, Russia provided very little support to help Africa deal with the pandemic. Moreover, according to an Afrobarometer survey, Russia is not viewed as an attractive national development model in the continent, as it was outranked by the US (30%) and China (24%).⁴⁵

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2

Impact on the EU and the US

Russia’s growing presence in Africa predominantly represents a security and information challenge to both the EU and US, since the level of Moscow’s economic engagement with African countries is still too limited to pose a real threat to European and American economic interests. This is unlikely to change anytime soon, due to Russia’s weak economic situation.

Russian engagement with Africa risks undermining EU and US efforts to foster effective and good governance, political stability and transparency across the continent. In Africa, Moscow’s sponsored media disinformation campaigns aimed to influence elections. Russian military and security support to regional strongmen could potentially destabilise

countries while reducing Western influence. For example, Russian arms sales to the CAR could hinder the EU's civilian advisory mission there. The mission supports the reform of the CAR's internal security forces, to enable local authorities to mitigate security challenges.

The US has been particularly critical of what it views as malign Russian activity in Africa. During a visit to Angola in early 2019, Deputy Secretary of State John J. Sullivan claimed, "Russia often utilizes coercive, corrupt, and covert means to attempt to influence sovereign states, including their security and economic partnerships."⁴⁶ However, a lack of senior US engagement with Africa – leaving several ambassadorial posts vacant, President Trump's thoughtless comments about the continent, the decision

to scale back US troops globally – has created opportunities for Russia.

This is particularly the case in the African security sector. According to the US Department of Defense, there are now roughly 24 active militant Islamist groups operating in Africa, up from just 5 in 2010.⁴⁷ With the rise of jihadist groups in Africa, security and stability in the continent are eroding. This offers Russia new opportunities. Moscow also benefits from the failure of other missions deployed to deal with insurgencies. For example, despite ongoing efforts by French security forces since 2013, the security situation in the Sahel region has remained poor, resulting in local elites criticising France. Russia has strengthened security cooperation with both Chad and Mali.

Conclusion: A cost-effective success so far

Although Russia's return to Africa has come on the heels of China and some other countries, it has nevertheless quickly made its mark thanks to Moscow's historical ties to the continent. Furthermore, as in other parts of the world, Russia has successfully given the impression that it is a much more influential actor than it actually is, despite the Kremlin's (limited) financial largesse and selective approach for cooperation.

While Russia's renewed interests in Africa sometimes seems to be disguised as a grand strategy per se, in reality, it is a regional declination of Russia's global strategy to reaffirm its global geopolitical influence. Opportunism is a hallmark of Russia's foreign policy. While Russia has a more limited toolbox to project power and

influence than others, it uses its tools very efficiently and effectively.

Although it lags far behind its geopolitical competitors on many fronts (i.e. trade and investment, humanitarian aid, sustainable infrastructure), Russia has also advanced its Africa agenda on a very tight budget. This was achieved via minimal investment in strategic niche areas, savvy public relations and a nose for good opportunities.

Its transactional approach to business – debt-for-development swap programmes, 'arms/security for minerals/energy', 'votes for investment projects' – has offered some economic leverage, bringing much-needed cash into the Kremlin's coffers. This approach has also helped Russia strengthen

its power projection goals and undermine Western efforts to isolate the Kremlin. Russia's efforts to position itself as a skilled counterterrorism actor with a bargain-basement price tag, at a time when jihadist groups and other militias are on the rise, bring in more deals. Additionally, Russia's no-strings-attached approach are attractive to many African leaders. Some African countries' willingness to advance their key interests in the international arena aligns with Russia's desire to regain its global power status.

Nonetheless, looking at the bigger picture, there are clear limits to Moscow's power and influence in Africa. Russia is very much an economic dwarf compared to not only China, the EU and US but also other (re-)emerging actors like Turkey, Japan, the Gulf states, India and Brazil. Many of the latter also offer a flexible approach to business and are looking to advance their respective trade and political agendas with Africa. With African civil society demanding greater levels of democracy and freedoms, changes of leadership on the continent pose risks to Russian interests. Finally, the future of the Russia–Africa relationship will partly depend on the former's economic health.

While the economic repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to impact Russia's policy in Africa less than other states, it will still take a hit. Taken in parallel with the Russia–Saudi Arabia oil price war and the ongoing uncertainty in this sector, Russia will have to think and act very strategically in the coming years if it is to expand its influence in the continent further.

Some African countries' willingness to advance their key interests in the international arena aligns with Russia's desire to regain its global power status.

The future of the Russia–Africa relationship will depend on the former's economic health.

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Turkey's African engagement: A critical analysis

Elem Eyrice Tepeciklioğlu

3

Over the past decade, Turkey is slowly but surely raising its profile in Africa. This new engagement has been very proactive and bore fruit in a very short amount of time. This chapter on Turkey's Africa policy looks at the methods and tools Ankara uses to enhance its engagement with the continent. Turkey's interest in Africa, in particular sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), is driven by multiple factors, including its search for alternative

markets and a desire to diversify its foreign policy by establishing new alliances. Turkey's ambitions to play a greater role in international affairs also motivate its Africa strategy. For Turkey, African countries are not only attractive trading partners but are also viewed as credible allies in their search to advance its foreign policy interests and regional power projection.

An overview of Turkey–Africa relations

Turkey has a long history of interaction with Africa, dating back to the Ottoman period. From the 16th century, most of North Africa became part of the Ottoman Empire. Later, some parts of the Horn of Africa were also absorbed. However, the Empire's successor, the Republic of Turkey, significantly downgraded relations with former Ottoman territories, including those in Africa. Interest in Africa was only properly revived in the early 2000s when the Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power.

Following the collapse of the Empire in the 1920s, the new Republic's policymakers were occupied with urgent internal political issues, including establishing the new state structure. This partly explains why Africa was almost absent from Turkey's foreign policy agenda for a long time. Other reasons are related to Ankara's foreign policy priorities. Turkey's first president, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, prioritised modernisation and Westernisation efforts during the early republican era (1923-1945). Therefore, Africa remained outside the foreign policy interests of the new Republic. Meanwhile, most African nations were preoccupied with their own struggles against their European colonial masters.

Africa remained of little importance to Turkey even after many African nations gained independence. Although Turkey recognised their independence and established embassies in some, Turkish bureaucrats' prevalent political disinterest prevented its further engagement with the continent. However, Turkey's lack of interest in Africa was not only shaped by political choices. Its economic constraints also restricted the country's foreign policy horizon. During the 1950s, the Turkish economy suffered from low growth rates and trade imbalances.¹

During the Cold War years, Turkey's status in world affairs was mainly defined by its NATO membership, its alliance relationships, and security concerns emanating from Soviet demands on Turkish territory. These factors heavily affected Turkey's position in particular incidents regarding Africa. This included Turkey's support for British claims during the Suez Crisis, its key role in the Baghdad Pact,² and its failure to support the independence of many African countries in the UN General Assembly.

Believing that Turkey's pro-Western foreign policy course was responsible for its self-isolation from the developing world, Ankara

began to approach African countries in the 1960s. Turkey sought out their collective diplomatic support for the Cyprus issue, given that Africa now represented the largest voting bloc in the UN. Turkey sent goodwill delegations to various African countries to convince them of its position.³ However, Turkey's 1974 military intervention into Cyprus following a Greek-inspired coup left Turkey in a difficult position to interact with its Western allies.

Nonetheless, and besides a brief period during the government of Bülent Ecevit in the late 1970s when the Ministry of Foreign Affairs created a special desk for SSA countries, Africa continued to be of marginal importance for Turkey.

The end of the Cold War marked a significant shift in Turkish foreign policy: it became more dynamic and independent, aiming to diversify its external relations and enhance its regional presence in former Soviet territories and the Middle East. However, Turkey's attempt to play the role of 'big brother' in newly established South Caucasian and Central Asian states was not welcomed. Meanwhile, its candidacy to the EU did not progress much. Turkey's search for geopolitical alternatives led the incumbent coalition government to adopt the ambitious Africa Action Plan in the late 1990s.

Nevertheless, political and economic instability hindered the full implementation of the policy until the AKP came to power at the end of 2002. In 2005, the then prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, paid official visits to South Africa and Ethiopia, becoming the first Turkish prime minister to visit SSA. Turkey obtaining observer status in the African Union (AU) the same year also gave new impetus to its engagement with Africa. Relations were further upgraded in 2008 when Turkey became a strategic partner of the AU and organised the first Turkey–Africa Summit. The Summit created the institutional framework for Turkey's relations with the region and led to the establishment of numerous Turkish embassies across the continent.

Turkey's interest in Africa is driven by multiple factors, including its search for alternative markets and a desire to diversify its foreign policy by establishing new alliances.

Turkey obtaining observer status in the African Union in 2005 gave new impetus to its engagement with Africa.

What is behind Turkey's interest in Africa?

Various factors drive Turkey's increased interest and presence in Africa. As is the case with Africa's other external players, the rationale for Turkey's Africa policy is mainly based on economic imperatives. Africa's market potential for Turkish goods and services is particularly important for small and medium-sized Turkish companies looking for alternative export markets and investment opportunities.

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Turkey's deteriorating relations with its traditional partners, the US and EU, increased the importance of its other neighbours and regions, including Africa.

Interactions between the Turkish state and its business community, along with the participation of business associations in the foreign (economic) policymaking process, increased following the Turkish economy's integration into world markets during the 1980s.⁴ This period saw a gradual shift towards an export-oriented foreign policy. The liberalisation wave of the 1980s led to the emergence of a new conservative, Islamic entrepreneurial bourgeoisie in the conservative heartland of Anatolia. The rise of this bourgeoisie as "new game-setters"⁵ in Turkish foreign policy pushed policymakers to reformulate their policies towards new regions. The support of Turkey's business associations for Turkish foreign policy activism increased under AKP rule. In other words, domestic pressure from the private sector played an important role in extending foreign policy outreach beyond its immediate neighbourhood. Furthermore, the robust economic growth and vaunted political stability under a single-party government that followed long periods of coalition governments also enabled Ankara to follow a more assertive foreign policy. During this period, Turkey's quest for regional leadership emerged as a major factor driving its foreign policy.

Turkey's deteriorating relations with its traditional partners, the US and EU, due to differences over Washington's foreign policy in the Middle East – not least the US invasion of Iraq – and the politicisation of Turkey's EU accession process, increased the importance of its other neighbours and regions, including Africa. In addition to economic drivers and the search to diversify external relations, aspirations to strengthen Turkey's regional and international power ambitions were a further factor. Believing that Turkey should be able to play an active role in global affairs, Ankara sought to have a greater say in international organisations, regularly highlighting the need to reform global governance institutions like the UN.

For example, following his return from a tour of Africa in March 2018, President Erdoğan tweeted, “We want to walk with Africa as a new world order is being established.”⁶ His expression resonates with African countries that have been calling for greater African representation in international institutions.

Turkey’s increasing presence in Africa

The most obvious manifestation of Africa’s increasing importance in Turkish foreign policy is Ankara’s growing diplomatic trail across the continent. Today, Turkey has 42 diplomatic missions across Africa, with the aim of opening embassies in all African countries.⁷ High-profile visits to the continent have intensified Turkey’s rising profile. Erdoğan visited 23 African countries between 2005 and 2017; a record number of visits for a Turkish leader.⁸

Turkey’s interest in the continent is also made evident by growing commercial links. Although Turkey’s trade with Africa is still small when compared to that of other actors like the EU or China, the trade volume between the two parties has increased approximately seven-fold following the adoption of the Action Plan for opening up to Africa in the late 1990s, standing at \$21.4 billion in 2019.⁹ In addition to having commercial counsellors in 26 African countries, the Foreign Economic Relations Board of Turkey has business councils in 45 African countries. Turkey also enjoys free trade agreements with Morocco, Egypt, Tunisia and Mauritius, while deals with Sudan and Ghana are in the process of being approved.¹⁰

Turkish investment in Africa has also increased in recent years. While Turkey lags behind other players, including the EU, USA and China, a growing number of Turkish companies are financing a range of projects, especially in North Africa, South Africa, Ethiopia and Sudan. Employing mostly locals, Turkish business groups expanded their engagement in Africa in recent years. Turkish officials highlight that Turkish investment in Africa, estimated to be over \$6 billion in total, generates numerous employment opportunities in Africa (i.e. approximately 30,000 jobs in 2016).¹¹

President Erdoğan visited 23 African countries between 2005 and 2017; a record number of visits for a Turkish leader.

Turkish investors are mainly active in the construction and manufacturing sectors. Turkey has invested heavily in the Horn of Africa, with Turkish-owned companies being particularly visible in Somalia where Ankara has been an important aid provider since Erdoğan's visit in 2011. The government has built roads, hospitals and schools in Somalia, while Turkish companies helped rebuild the Port of Mogadishu and Aden Adde International Airport. It has also been recently reported that the Somali government invited Turkey to explore oil in its waters.¹²

In an effort to enhance its presence in the continent, Turkey has beefed up its aid activities. They are distributed via multiple public institutions, including the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency, the Ministry of Interior's Disaster and Emergency Management Authority, the Turkish Red Crescent, the Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet); and Turkish non-governmental organisations (NGOs), which usually initiate their activities in close cooperation with government authorities.

Turkey's bilateral official development assistance (ODA) has increased substantially in the last few years, totalling some \$8.4 billion in 2018. Nearly 80% of Turkey's ODA (\$6.7 billion) went to Syria, while Africa received \$134.8 million, which corresponds to less than 2%.¹³ During the COVID-19 outbreak, Turkey sent medical supplies to various African countries (i.e. South Africa, Libya, Chad, Niger, Somalia) to assist their fight against the pandemic. More specifically, Somalia is listed among the top ten recipients of Turkish ODA since 2011.¹⁴ Turkey even provided cash support to the country, to contribute to the urgent budget needs of its Transitional Federal Government.¹⁵ Other African countries receiving large sums of Turkish aid are Sudan, Libya, Djibouti, Niger and Gambia, respectively.¹⁶

Turkey's increasing humanitarian activities in Africa hardly makes it unique. However,

what distinguishes its efforts from others' is the on-the-ground-presence of Turkish aid workers that cooperate with, for example, local governments and NGOs. This increases the visibility of Turkey as a relatively new player, or a country re-emerging in the continent. However, there is also a risk that Turkey's assistance could lead to unintended yet serious consequences. For example, observers hold that Turkish initiatives in Somalia could be seen as favouring a particular clan over others, thus jeopardising the peace process.¹⁷

As part of Turkey's religious diplomacy, the Diyanet, Turkey's top religious body attached to the Turkish Presidency, aims to strengthen ties with Africa's Muslim population through its growing aid campaigns, especially in the religious months of Ramadan and Eid-al-Adha.¹⁸ Diyanet also provides scholarships to African students to study at Turkish institutions, builds and repairs mosques in some African countries, and organises summits that convene Turkish and African religious leaders.

Education provides another significant area of cooperation. As of April 2020, the Turkish Maarif Foundation has established 144 schools in 24 African countries.¹⁹ Recent data released by the Turkish Council of Higher Education reveals that the number of African students receiving undergraduate and graduate education at Turkish universities during the 2018-2019 school year reached 21,556.²⁰ The majority of these students are from countries with significant Muslim populations, such as Somalia, Egypt, Libya, Nigeria, Morocco and Sudan. Turkey's cultural diplomacy efforts are mostly initiated by the Yunus Emre Institute, which was established in 2007 to promote Turkish culture globally. Barring South Africa and Senegal, the cultural centres of the Institute in Africa are located in Muslim-majority countries.²¹

Turkish Airlines, Turkey's flag-carrier airline that flew to 58 destinations in 38 African countries until the COVID-19 outbreak,²²

has also helped enhance Turkey's soft power capacity in Africa. Furthermore, Turkey uses its public broadcasting channel, Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT), and official news agency, Anadolu Agency, to enhance its media outreach and increase the visibility of its activities. In order to present international news with a Turkish perspective, TRT World started broadcasting in 2015. As of early 2020, it was broadcasting in Swahili alongside English and French, the widely spoken languages in Africa.

Turkey's Africa policy, which focuses mainly on soft power instruments, recently started to also integrate hard power qualities. However, besides Somalia and Libya, Turkey's military engagement in Africa is minimal. In 2017, Turkey established its biggest overseas military presence in Mogadishu. Rather than a fully fledged military base,²³ Turkey set up a military academy to train and strengthen the Somali Armed Forces (SAF).²⁴ Turkey's holistic peacebuilding approach in the country combines humanitarian aid and development assistance efforts with state-building and mediation initiatives. Therefore, the military training facility aims to increase the capacity of the SAF, especially in their fight against the terrorist group, al-Shabaab. However, Turkey's signing of a deal with Sudan in the same year as renovating Ottoman-era historic buildings in the latter's strategically located Suakin Island on the Red Sea, together with Turkey's (and Qatar's) increasing presence in the Horn of Africa, are also viewed by the regional rivals of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt as a sign of Turkey's military ambitions in the Horn of Africa.²⁵

Turkey has increased its peacebuilding initiatives in Africa, including mediating various conflicts in, for example, Somalia, Sudan and Eritrea. As of 2020, Turkey contributes to three UN peacekeeping missions.²⁶ Still, Turkey's contribution to UN peacekeeping missions is small when compared to China and India. Overall, Somalia has been at the centre of Turkey's peacebuilding efforts in Africa, with Ankara being very active in Mogadishu's post-conflict reconstruction process.

African perspectives on Turkey's Africa policy

As it is mostly Turkish academics that study the Turkey–Africa relationship rather than African experts, it is difficult to properly evaluate what Africans think of Turkey's growing

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influence in the continent. However, in order to shape African views, Turkish bureaucrats often highlight the message that Turkey is seeking mutually beneficial cooperation with Africa. Turkey's Africa policy discourse presents itself as a state with a purely humanitarian agenda and emphasises its increasing aid activities significantly.

Turkey's Africa policy discourse presents itself as a state with a purely humanitarian agenda and emphasises its increasing aid activities significantly.

That Turkey shares special cultural, historical and religious affiliations with former Ottoman territories and has so far avoided being entangled in most of Africa's conflicts also help paint a positive picture of the country.

As mentioned earlier, Ankara is also seeking to enhance its profile and influence by providing humanitarian aid and development assistance, promoting Turkish culture and language through public institutions, and providing scholarships to African students studying in Turkish institutions. These practices not only deepen connections between Africans and Turks. The strengthening of ties at different social levels also helps shape local perceptions of Turkey and establish a positive image of the country. Perceptions of Turkey tend to be largely positive in countries that receive significant Turkish aid, such as Somalia, and Muslim-majority African countries, especially in former Ottoman territories.²⁷

That Turkey shares special cultural, historical and religious affiliations with former Ottoman territories and has so far avoided being entangled in most of Africa's conflicts also help paint a positive picture of the country (although Turkey's recent intervention into the Libyan conflict does risk tarnishing this reputation).²⁸ The official Turkish discourse towards Africa presents Turkey as a country that is against any interference in the internal affairs of African countries; a message reiterated by Turkish officials at almost every occasion. However, some commentators evaluate Turkey's Libyan engagement – including the Turkey–Libya maritime deal – as being more motivated by Turkey's national interests than Libya's.²⁹

The fact that Ankara does not impose any conditionality when providing aid also appeals to African nations, as it increases their bargaining power and thus allows them to manoeuvre around other external players. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the role of Turkish aid workers also plays an important role in shaping positive attitudes towards the country.

However, while the image of Turkey's seems to be largely positive, there are also areas of tension. One example is Ankara's demand that African countries close all schools affiliated with the Gülen movement, which Ankara claims carried out the 2016 failed military coup attempt and now regards as a terrorist organisation.³⁰ This risks generating concern among some African countries that Turkey is, in

fact, interfering in their internal affairs. Tensions arising from this issue risk jeopardising Turkey's relations with some regional powers where those schools still operate, including Nigeria and South Africa. Turkey's increasing reference to religion in its relations with Africa could also influence its relations with non-Muslim African countries negatively.³¹

Implications for the EU and the US

While Turkey's role in Africa cannot compete with that of its traditional Western partners, the former's increasing profile in the region has potential implications for EU and US interests in the continent.

Unlike a number of EU countries, Turkey does not have the legacy of a troublesome colonial past in much of Africa, nor partook in the Atlantic slave trade. Turkey also does not have long-term plans to enhance its military footprint in the continent, especially in SSA.³² Libya is exceptional, given that it is located in Turkey's near neighbourhood, where Ankara perceives a direct threat to its national (security) interests in the Eastern Mediterranean. While Ankara's militarised approach to the region has raised serious concerns from the West, Turkey broadly lacks the capacity to project hard power in distant regions. Moreover, Ankara is preoccupied with more immediate security concerns around its borders, including the conflict in Syria. Overall, Turkey is more interested in using soft power tools than hard power to gain leverage in the continent.

The fact that Turkish aid workers are more willing to operate in high-risk areas, coupled with the bilateral nature of Turkey's aid programmes, increases the visibility of its aid projects (e.g. Turkish flags printed on food packages distributed by Turkish aid agencies). This gives Turkey an advantage. Unlike the EU and the US, Turkey has a no-strings-attached policy for its aid: it is not contingent on meeting normative or political criteria. Nor does the policy impose any other conditionality, like privileged rights for its business ventures or the purchase of Turkish goods and services, as other investors in Africa – China, Russia and India – do. This tactic provides Turkey with further important leverage to forge new alliances with Africa

While Ankara's militarised approach to the region has raised serious concerns from the West, Turkey broadly lacks the capacity to project hard power in distant regions. Moreover, Ankara is preoccupied with more immediate security concerns around its borders, including the conflict in Syria.

while potentially also challenging the Western approach to aid that prioritises democracy, human rights and/or the promotion of the rule of law.

However, Turkey's increasing involvement is unlikely to undermine the positions of European and American firms. Turkish companies are mostly involved in infrastructure and construction projects. And yet, their presence in this area is still weak in comparison to Africa's more established partners that make huge investments in several African countries.³³ Nevertheless, the continent also looks for "new partnerships for trade and development from other regions, both developing and developed."³⁴ Turkey's presence is therefore likely to intensify the competition between Africa's external players.

Turkey's economic inroads are not aimed at undermining European or US interests in Africa's natural resource sector.

As a country which imports most of its energy needs from Middle Eastern countries and Russia, Turkey is seeking to enhance its cooperation with African countries in the energy sector to diversify its source countries. However, competition in this area is very fierce. Overall, Turkey's economic inroads are not aimed at undermining European or US interests in Africa's natural resource sector.

Turkey's Africa strategy has produced several valuable policy outcomes, especially in the humanitarian domain, and has helped strengthen Turkey's power projection goals. Still, as of yet, the country continues to lag behind Africa's traditional partners.

Competition exists in other areas, too. Turkey's increasing interest in Africa is part of a strategy to increase markets for Turkish products. As it looks for new markets to satisfy its business groups' desire to open up to new regions, its trade-related interests might overlap with those of the EU.

Turkey's involvement in Africa could help African countries balance their external relations and decrease their dependency on their Western partners. African countries may therefore seek to strengthen engagement with Turkey, particularly in areas such as education and development assistance. However, there are many areas where Turkey, the EU and the US could cooperate and combine their resources, for example, in helping African countries combat the effects of the COVID-19 crisis. Another issue is the irregular migration from Africa that challenges many Western countries and Turkey. The EU, the US and Turkey could work together to contain these irregular migration flows. Finally, they could also combine their resources to reduce insecurity, especially in countries heavily affected by terrorism, and counterbalance terrorist groups with their military expertise and knowledge of the region.

The challenges ahead

Turkey is re-emerging as a serious player in Africa. Turkey's Africa strategy has produced several valuable policy outcomes, especially in the humanitarian domain, and has helped strengthen Turkey's power projection goals. Still, as of yet, the country continues to lag behind Africa's traditional partners, which, despite their troublesome colonial pasts, maintain close relations with the region. Neither can Turkey compete with China, which is now the largest individual investor in the continent. It is, therefore, too soon to make predictions about the medium- to long-term impact of Turkey's presence.

Moreover, domestic challenges coupled with economic problems – which the COVID-19 pandemic has also exacerbated – might eventually raise questions about the sustainability of Turkey's African involvement. Turkey has provided medical supplies to African countries to help get the pandemic under control. Nevertheless, the outbreak could limit its humanitarian aid and peacebuilding endeavours. Efforts to manage the pandemic and its economic repercussions could divert Turkey's attention

away from its Africa strategy and compel Ankara to follow a 'selective' Africa policy, where only several African countries are targeted. This is compounded by Turkey's changing foreign policy priorities in a volatile region. Turkey's troubled relations with many of its neighbours and traditional allies risks distracting its attention away from Africa.⁵⁵

Turkey's increasing involvement in Libya further complicates its Africa policy. Being one of the primary supporters of Libya's Government of National Accord, Turkey is after a quick political solution to the conflict in Libya. On the other hand, Turkey's military engagement also aims to serve its economic interests (i.e. securing new contracts for its construction companies). However, "some experts continue to voice concerns that Libya could soon become a new Syria for Turkey, where it is locked in a costly cycle of conflict and cooperation with Russia."⁵⁶ Turkey is already suffering from its own share of severe economic problems. Its ongoing engagement in the Libyan conflict could potentially deepen its economic crisis and limit its overall engagement in Africa.

1. See Aydin Çeçen, A.; A. Suut Dogruel; and Fatma Dogruel (1994), "[Economic Growth and Structural Change in Turkey 1960-88](#)", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Volume 26, Number 1, pp.37-56.
2. The Baghdad Pact was a military alliance formed in 1955 between Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan and the UK, to maintain peace and security in the Middle East by countering Soviet influence in the region. Turkey's leading role in the formation of the Baghdad Pact was criticised by most of the Arab and Northern African states that perceived the Pact as a vehicle to increase Western influence in the region. This opposition was led mostly by Egypt. Eyrica Tepeciklioğlu, Elem (2016), "[African Studies in Turkey](#)", *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, Volume 13, Number 50, pp.3-19.
3. In December 1965, the United Nations General Assembly Resolution calling on all countries to "respect the sovereignty, unity, independence and territorial integrity of Cyprus" was accepted by 47 votes to 6, with 54 abstentions. Turkey claimed the right of intervention in Cyprus based on the Treaty of Guarantee, while Greece claimed the island's independence. African countries voted in favour of the Resolution. Experts note that the voting behaviour of African countries was related to Turkey's negative reputation in the eyes of many developing countries, especially due to its strong alliance with the US. On the other hand, Makarios III, the then President of the Republic of Cyprus, was a prominent figure in the Non-Aligned Movement. United Nations (1965), "[Resolution No. A/RES/2077\(XX\)](#)". See Belder, Ferit and Samiratou Dipama (2018), "[A Comparative Analysis of China and Turkey's Development Aid Activities in Sub-Saharan Africa](#)" in Emel Parlak Dal (ed.), *Middle Powers in Global Governance: The Rise of Turkey*, Palgrave Macmillan, p.234; Uslu, Nasuh (2003), *The Cyprus Question as an Issue of Turkish Foreign Policy and Turkish American Relations (1959-2003)*, New York: Nova Science Publishers Inc., p.83. See also Bulletin of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1965a), "[Issue 5](#)", pp.38-39, 47; Bulletin of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1965b), "[Issue 15](#)", pp.5-6.
4. Atlı, Altay (2011), "[Businessmen as Diplomats: The Role of Business Associations in Turkey's Foreign Economic Policy](#)", *Insight Turkey*, Volume 13, Number 1, pp.109-128.
5. Kutlay, Mustafa (2011), "[Economy as the 'Practical Hand' of 'New Turkish Foreign Policy': A Political Economy Explanation](#)", *Insight Turkey*, Volume 13, Number 1, pp.67-88.
6. Turkish Presidency, "[President Erdoğan: 'It is absolutely out of the question for us to consume Africa's resources and adopt the modern models of exploitation. We want to walk with Africa as a new world order is being established.'](#)", *Twitter*, 03 March 2018.
7. *Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, "[Turkey's enterprising and humanitarian foreign policy](#)" (accessed 18 September 2020).
8. Çavuşoğlu, Mevlüt, "[Opinion: Africa and Turkey at the threshold of a lasting partnership](#)", *Club of Mozambique*, 25 May 2017.
9. *Turkish Statistical Institute*, "[Foreign Trade Statistics](#)" (accessed 18 September 2020).
10. Ergocun, Gokhan, "[2020 to be Africa year for Turkey, says trade minister](#)", *Anadolu Agency*, 09 December 2019.
11. Foreign Economic Relations Board of Turkey (2016), "[TÜRKİYE-AFRİKA EKONOMİ VE İŞ FORUMU, 2-3 KASIM 2016, İSTANBUL: Sonuç Raporu](#)", Istanbul.
12. *Al Jazeera*, "[Erdogan says Somalia invited Turkey to explore for oil offshore](#)", 21 January 2020.
13. Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (2018), "[Turkish Development Assistance Report](#)", Ankara, p.17.
14. Çavuşoğlu, Mevlüt (2019), "[2020 Yılına Girerken Girişimci ve İnsani Dış Politikamız](#)", Ankara: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, p.117.
15. See Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "[Press Release Regarding Turkey's Aid to Somalia](#)", 16 February 2014.
16. Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (2018), *op.cit.*, p.25.
17. See e.g. Achilles, Kathryn; Onur Sazak; Thomas Wheeler; and Auveen Elizabeth Woods (2015), "[Turkish Aid Agencies in Somalia: Risks and Opportunities for Building Peace](#)", London/Istanbul: Saferworld/Istanbul Policy Center. Besharati, Neissan; Carmel Rawhani; Jason Stearns; and Gizem Sucuoglu (2017), "[South-South Peacebuilding: Lessons and Insights from Turkey and South Africa's Support to Fragile States](#)", Johannesburg: South African Institute of International Affairs. Stearns, Jason and Gizem Sucuoglu (2017), "[South-South Cooperation and Peacebuilding: Turkey's Involvement in Somalia](#)", Johannesburg: South African Institute of International Affairs.
18. The Diyanet pays special attention to *qurban* (i.e. sacrifice) organisations in African countries. Its Qurban by Proxy Program is especially aimed at intensely conflict-ridden African countries that are facing humanitarian crises, including Chad, Sudan, Niger, Mali, the Central African Republic and Burundi.
19. See *Turkish Maarif Foundation*, "[TMF in the world](#)" (accessed 18 September 2020).
20. See *Council of Higher Education*, "[Statistics](#)" (accessed 18 September 2020).
21. I.e. Algeria, Morocco, Egypt, Sudan, Somalia and Tunisia.
22. Çavuşoğlu (2019), *op.cit.*, p.115.

²³. Rossiter, Ash and Brendon J. Cannon (2019), “[Re-examining the ‘Base’: The Political and Security Dimensions of Turkey’s Military Presence in Somalia](#)”, *Insight Turkey*, Volume 21, Number 1, pp.167-188.

²⁴. 200 Turkish soldiers are reportedly deployed at the base. Adam, Mohamed, “[Turkey to open military training base in Somalia](#)”, *Anadolu Agency*, 01 October 2016.

²⁵. Amin, Mohammed, “[‘Suakin: ‘Forgotten’ Sudanese island becomes focus for Red Sea rivalries](#)”, *Middle East Eye*, 19 March 2018; Vertin, Zach (2019), “[Red Sea Rivalries: The Gulf, the Horn, & the New Geopolitics of the Red Sea](#)”, Doha: Brookings Doha Center.

²⁶. I.e. MONUSCO/DRC, UNAMID/Darfur, UNMISS/Sudan. United Nations (2020), “[Summary of Contribution to UN Peacekeeping by Country, Mission and Post: Police, UN Military Experts on Mission, Staff Officers and Troops 31/05/2020](#)”.

²⁷. On the other hand, Turkey’s previously close relations with some Muslim-majority countries have reached a low point in the last few years. For example, Turkey’s relations with Egypt deteriorated after the newly elected Egyptian President, Mohamed Morsi, was ousted from office in a coup d’état in 2013. The overthrow of Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir also raises questions on the future of Sudan-Turkey relations.

²⁸. Turkey’s recent involvement in Libya would reveal otherwise. As will be mentioned later, Libya is in Turkey’s immediate neighbourhood, where its ‘existential’ interests lie. Turkey overtly supported the Tripoli-based Government of National Accord (GNA) against Khalifa Haftar and provided military and logistical support to the former. Moreover, the military cooperation agreement signed between the two countries in 2019 stipulates that Turkey can sell weapons, vehicles and other military equipment to GNA upon the request of Tripoli. Turkey’s involvement in the country is also related to its maritime agenda in the Mediterranean (i.e. accessing energy resources in the Eastern Mediterranean), while economic calculations also motivate its involvement in the Libyan conflict. Many Turkish companies involved in several construction and infrastructure projects in the country since the 1970s gained new contracts before the fall of the Gaddafi regime in 2011. The consequent civil war harmed Turkish operations, as Ankara reportedly faced \$15 billion in unpaid contractual obligations. See Polat, Ferhat, “[The trajectory of Turkey-Libya relations](#)”, *TRT World*, 30 August 2019.

²⁹. See e.g. Idiz, Semih, “[Turkey’s intervention in Libya turns tide to Erdogan’s advantage, for now](#)”, *Al-Monitor*, 15 May 2020.

³⁰. Starting from the late 1990s, the Gülen movement started to settle in sub-Saharan Africa; see Angey, Gabrielle (2018), “[The Gülen Movement](#)

[and the Transfer of a Political Conflict from Turkey to Senegal](#)”, *Politics, Religion & Ideology*, Volume 19, Number, 1, p.53. It soon increased its network in Africa through its civil society organisations, schools and business associations and gradually became an important source of Turkish soft power in the continent. However, a rift between Ankara and the Gülen movement emerged in late 2013. The government came to define the movement as a terrorist organisation and responsible for the failed coup d’état of 15 July 2016.

³¹. See also Eyrcice Tepeciklioğlu, Elem (2019), “Turkey-Africa Relations in 2018: Two Decades after Turkey’s Opening to Africa” in Wilson Center Africa Program (ed.), *Africa: Year in Review 2018*, Washington DC, p.14.

³². Ankara’s security concerns do not dominate its overall Africa strategy, especially regarding south of the Sahara. Despite having significant military capabilities, arms sale is not a determining factor driving Turkey’s involvement in Africa.

³³. In a press statement during his 2013 Africa tour, former US President Barack Obama stated that he does see other emerging countries as competitors to US interests: “I think it’s a good thing that China and India and Turkey and some of these other countries – Brazil – are paying a lot of attention to Africa. This is not a zero-sum game [...] that can potentially help Africa.” Todd Moss, former Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Bureau of African Affairs, also noted that the US is not concerned with what China’s presence in Africa: “The U.S. is not going to build highways and bridges and airports, and that is something Africa needs”. Hanauer, Larry and Lyle J. Morris (2014), *Chinese Engagement in Africa: Drivers, Reactions and Implications for U.S. Policy*, RAND Cooperation, p.102, 124. See also Eyrcice Tepeciklioğlu, Elem (2020), “Turkey-Africa Relations in 2019” in Wilson Center Africa Program (ed.), *Africa: Year in Review 2019*, Washington DC, p.34.

³⁴. Elly Twineyo-Kamugisha (2012, pp.132-133) quoted in Tarrosy, István (2016), “[Indonesian Engagements with Africa and the Revitalised ‘Spirit of Bandung’](#)” in Justin Van der Merwe, Ian Taylor and Alexandra Arkhangelskaya (eds.), *Emerging Powers in Africa: A New Wave in the Relationship?*, Palgrave Macmillan, p.245.

³⁵. E.g. Turkey’s decision to buy Russian S-400 missile systems, coupled with divergent policies towards the Syrian crisis, led to the deterioration of its relations with long-time NATO ally, the US. Turkey’s fragile relations with Russia and Iran originated mostly from disagreements over the future of the Assad regime in Syria.

³⁶. Koseoglu, Sinem, “[Analysis: Turkey is winning in Libya, but challenges remain](#)”, *Al Jazeera*, 04 June 2020.

Eurasia goes to Africa: Summary and conclusions

Ivano di Carlo and Amanda Paul

4

A battle for influence is gripping Africa, and not for the first time. In 1885, European leaders met at the infamous Berlin Conference to divide Africa and draw up borders arbitrarily. Africans were not invited. It happened again during the Cold War mid-20th century, when an ideological head-to-head between the East and West vied to win over the newly independent African states. Today, Africa has once again become the subject of a geopolitical contest. However, this time it is Africans – not external actors – who will decide with whom they will engage.

Today, Africa has once again become the subject of a geopolitical contest. However, this time it is Africans who will decide with whom they will engage.

China, Russia and Turkey all view Africa as an opportunity not to be missed. Besides the huge economic possibilities that Africa represents, all three countries view deeper engagement with the continent as a way to respectively diversify their foreign relations, boost international power ambitions, influence global governance and establish new alliances.

This new surge of interest in Africa is not surprising. While the continent faces serious challenges – not least related to security, governance and climate change, and which have all been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic –, Africa also offers a goldmine of opportunities. It is home to some of the world's fastest-growing economies and an expanding consumer base in need of energy.¹ It has a growing youth population: the ten youngest populations in the world all belong to the continent.² More than half of the global population growth until 2050 is expected to occur in the continent.³ African countries also constitute the largest regional voting bloc in the UN. Finally, the continent has become the fastest urbanising region of the world, as the continent becomes one of the final frontiers of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.⁴

Governments and businesses from around the world are rushing to strengthen diplomatic, strategic and commercial ties with Africa. The three case studies examined in this report – China, Russia and Turkey – all view Africa as an opportunity not to be missed. Besides the huge economic possibilities that Africa represents, all three countries view deeper engagement with the continent as a way to respectively diversify their foreign relations, boost international power ambitions, influence global governance and establish new alliances. However, as our case studies reveal, each country's levels of engagement and resulting influence vary significantly, as does their impact on Europe and the US.

The first part of this chapter summarises the roles and impacts of China's, Russia's and Turkey's policies in Africa in three theatres: trade and investment, security, and soft power and public diplomacy. After also summarising African civil perceptions of the three countries, the second half covers the implications of the latter's growing presence in Africa for both the EU and the US.

Trade and investment

China has become an economic giant in Africa. The continent offers a range of characteristics that are aligned with China's economic needs and strategic objectives. As exemplified in the latter's Belt and Road Initiative, this includes rich sources of raw materials, particularly oil and gas, which are crucial for the Chinese economy and its huge infrastructural needs.

China has been Africa's largest individual trading partner since 2009.⁵ As Chinese President Xi Jinping once pointed out, "Inadequate infrastructure is believed to be the biggest bottleneck to Africa's development."⁶ China is playing a leading role in meeting the continent's needs; it has constructed over 3,000 critical infrastructure projects so far. Beijing has become Africa's single-largest financier for infrastructure projects, handing out loans at a speed and scope not seen since Europe's US-financed, post-war Marshall Plan.⁷

China is engaged in commercial diplomacy, providing huge trade, assistance and investment deals to African countries in exchange for low-cost financing and cheap labour.⁸ While Africa's most significant sources of foreign direct investment are still coming from companies in the US, UK and France, Chinese companies (private and state-owned) are right on their heels.⁹

Although many in Africa view China's investments favourably, Beijing has also faced criticism from some African leaders and civil society over its controversial and often exploitative business practices, lax environmental standards, and failure to promote good governance and human rights. Moreover, China has become the region's largest creditor, accounting for a fifth of African countries' external debt.¹⁰ China is routinely accused of carrying out 'debt-trap diplomacy'.

Turkey lags far behind China in terms of trade and investment with Africa. It is mainly preoccupied with the latter's construction and manufacturing sectors. Turmoil in Syria and its neighbouring region – a previously important export market for Turkish goods – and increasingly strained ties with the EU and US have led Ankara to look for new markets. Africa's market potential is crucial for Turkey, particularly its small and medium-sized enterprises, which have always been the driving force of its export economy.

In addition to signing new trade agreements, a growing number of Turkish companies are financing projects in North Africa,

Beijing has become Africa's single-largest financier for infrastructure projects, handing out loans at a speed and scope not seen since the Marshall Plan.

Africa's market potential is crucial for Turkey, particularly its small and medium-sized enterprises, which have always been the driving force of its export economy.

South Africa, Ethiopia, Sudan and Somalia. Indeed, the Horn of Africa is one of the main regions where Ankara has increased its presence, with Somalia becoming the pivot of Turkish strategy in Africa.¹¹ Case in point, Turkey has built roads, hospitals and schools in Mogadishu. The Somali government has also invited Turkey to explore its waters for oil.

Economic factors are crucial parts of **Russia's** Africa agenda, and drive its global reorientation towards new trade partners and markets overall. This is particularly important for Russian companies that are closed off to Western markets due to sanctions. However, Russia's levels of bilateral trade and foreign investments remain small when compared to China. Moscow does not have the funds to invest in many large-scale infrastructure projects. Nonetheless, Russia is still one of Africa's fastest-growing trade partners in relative terms, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA).

While Russia may not possess an extensive toolkit like other actors, it makes the most of the tools that it does have by skilfully using its niche strengths in the arms, security and energy sectors and by adopting an opportunist approach.

While Russia may not possess an extensive toolkit like other actors, it makes the most of the tools that it does have by skilfully using its niche strengths in the arms, security and energy sectors and by adopting an opportunist approach. For example, conflicts and counterinsurgencies in Africa allow Moscow to sell arms and provide private military contractors (PMCs). Case in point, Russia is the top arms supplier to Africa. Russian military intervention in the Syrian Civil War showcased its military hardware and led to new customers, particularly in SSA. Its share in arms exports to SSA increased from 19% to 28% between 2012 and 2018.¹²

Sustaining energy exports and selling nuclear technology abroad is also crucial for the Russian economy. Russian companies have gained traction in Africa's oil, gas and mining sectors. Moscow's transactional approach – offering loans to countries to build nuclear power plants or selling arms in exchange for mineral mining rights or access to energy reserves – has resulted in some economic and political leverage in the continent.

The security landscape

Beyond arms sales, **Russia** is also an important security partner of several African states. It has signed numerous military agreements to train African soldiers; provided military expertise to counter terrorism and violent extremism; and supplied PMCs, particularly from the Wagner

Group, to support African armies. Concerning military-technical cooperation and defence contracts, Russia is again in a dominant position. In 2019, besides Wagner PMCs backing the Libyan National Army, Russia has sought to upgrade its military relationship with the G5 Sahel, an institutional framework of five SSA countries (i.e. Mali, Niger, Chad, Burkina Faso, Mauritania) combatting the so-called Islamic State and al-Qaeda.

However, Russia's success rate in this sphere is patchy. Unlike Turkey and China, which both have a military presence on the strategically important Red Sea, Russia – according to a recent draft agreement – has started official talks to establish a 'logistical support base' in Sudan. Apart from some points of naval and air access in a few African countries, Moscow is planning to step up its cooperation with others. This may include building new bases.

Similarly, **China** has expanded its security footprint in Africa via low-cost yet capable weapon systems. China is now Africa's third-largest arms supplier, after Russia and the US. Chinese security contractors are active in a growing number of African countries. However, unlike Russian PMCs, they mostly work for Chinese state-owned enterprises to protect Chinese investments.

China has also significantly boosted its participation and financial contribution to UN peacekeeping missions, making it the second-largest contributor.¹³ Key signs of China wanting to increase its security footprint further include the establishment of its first-ever overseas military logistics base in Djibouti in 2017. Between 2008 and 2018, the Chinese Navy deployed 26,000 personnel to the region and undertook a variety of maritime security operations.¹⁴ China has since maintained a continuous naval anti-piracy presence in the Horn of Africa.

The creation of the China–Africa Defense and Security Forum in 2018 also represents the continent's strategic importance to Beijing. The Forum convened senior military officers and officials from 49 African states and the African Union (AU) to Beijing for discussions on African regional security and military cooperation.

Turkey's military engagement in Africa remains limited, besides its presence in the Horn of Africa and Libya. In 2017, Turkey established its biggest overseas military presence in Mogadishu. However, rather than establish a fully fledged military base, it opened a military academy to increase the Somali Armed Forces' capacity to fight al-Shabaab.

China has significantly boosted its participation and financial contribution to UN peacekeeping missions, making it the second-largest contributor.

In the same year, Sudan agreed to lease the strategically located Suakin Island on the Red Sea to Turkey. Ankara plans to renovate the Ottoman-era port and turn it into a tourism hub. However, some regional actors, including Saudi Arabia and Egypt, view it as a sign of Turkey's growing military ambitions in the region, as it follows the establishment of a Turkish military base in Qatar.

Furthermore, Ankara's involvement in the Libyan conflict is driven by potential economic and geostrategic opportunities and is part of its new, more assertive foreign policy in its immediate neighbourhood.

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As of 2017, China surpassed the US in attracting anglophone African students.

Soft power and public diplomacy

Soft power is used by China, Russia and Turkey to boost their respective political influence. They have all strengthened their diplomatic presence in Africa. The subsequent pages will examine several areas where all three countries have employed soft power.

EDUCATION AND CULTURE

Education is an arena where people-to-people ties with the African continent have been strengthened. All three countries have increased opportunities for African scholars to enrol in their universities.

China has made education a key pillar of its engagement with Africa. As of 2017, China surpassed the US in attracting anglophone African students, with some 60,000 now studying in the country.¹⁵ African students are attracted to China's affordable tuition and generous scholarships.

Chinese cultural and/or educational organisations have also been active throughout Africa. The development of some 70 Confucius Institutes in over 40 African countries, teaching Mandarin and Chinese culture – in 2012, there was only 1 –, supports Beijing's long-term strategy of upholding young Africans' positive attitudes towards China.¹⁶ With Chinese migration to Africa spanning as far back as the 17th century, Beijing has also been able to draw on the estimated

one million-strong Chinese diaspora to promote people-to-people ties.

Over 17,000 African students are studying in **Russian** universities, many having received scholarships at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels.¹⁷ The Kremlin aims to increase the number of African students by 12% annually, to reach and surpass the Soviet-era outcomes by 2024 or 2025. Russian military facilities also offer scholarships to African peacekeepers, which has helped strengthen military-to-military ties.¹⁸ Russia hopes that today's students will be tomorrow's leaders, as was the case during the Cold War.¹⁹

In terms of cultural organisations, Russia's Russkiy Mir Foundation is active in several African countries. While Russian-led cultural initiatives are increasing across the continent, they remain a secondary priority. As in other parts of the world, Russia prefers to cultivate direct relationships with African elites rather than engage with the population at large.

In the academic year of 2018, some 21,556 African students received undergraduate and graduate education in **Turkey**. Scholarships were offered by the latter's Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet), as part of its religious diplomacy outreach. As of April 2020, the Turkish Maarif Foundation (TMV) has 144 schools in 24 African countries. The TMV was established in 2016 to take over the administration of overseas schools linked to the Gülen movement, an organisation accused by Ankara of carrying out the July 2016 coup d'état attempt. The Yunus Emre Institute also has a strong presence in Africa, mainly in Muslim-majority countries. Institutions like the Turkish International Cooperation and Coordination Agency has also advanced Turkey's image in African countries, as has Turkish Airlines which, until the COVID-19 pandemic, flew to 41 countries.

Sunni Islam faith links Turkey with SSA, as Turkey is a member of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation alongside 22 SSA countries. The Diyanet aims to strengthen ties with Africa's Muslim population through its aid campaigns, especially during the religious months of Ramadan and Eid al-Adha. It also builds and repairs mosques in some countries, organises summits that convene African religious leaders, educates African preachers and translates the Koran into local languages.²⁰

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Turkey's Diyanet aims to strengthen ties with Africa's Muslim population through its aid campaigns.

MEDIA

Media is an important tool of influence. China, Russia and Turkey have all intensified their media presence in Africa, expanding cooperation with local actors and increasing broadcasting in local languages.

China, Russia and Turkey are all increasingly using their respective media platforms to spread disinformation and anti-colonial and anti-Western propaganda in Africa.

The fact that China, Russia and Turkey have never subjugated Africa politically nor economically, and do not face the historic burden of the Atlantic slave trade is regularly underlined.

China, Russia and Turkey actively seek African states' UN votes for specific initiatives, which usually occurs in the form of *quid pro quos* on matters of mutual importance.

Turkey's state-run Anadolu Agency and national broadcaster TRT World are present in Africa. In early 2020, the latter added Swahili to its roster of broadcasting languages, which already consisted of Africa's widely spoken languages of English and French. As in other parts of the world, Turkish soap operas have proved popular in Africa, particularly North Africa, and have helped create a positive image of Turkey.

China has also worked to boost its image in Africa and better communicate through media cooperation. This includes the Chinese Communist Party organising four annual forums with the representatives of African state-owned and private media agencies, to discuss the global media environment and state of African media. Furthermore, the Xinhua News Agency established an African regional bureau in Nairobi in 2018.²¹

Russia's RT and Sputnik news agencies are also highly active in Africa, with ongoing efforts to expand outreach. In May 2019, Sputnik entered a partnership agreement with the Democratic Republic of the Congo's national broadcaster, Radio-Télévision nationale congolaise.

According to our case studies, China, Russia and Turkey are all increasingly using their respective media platforms to spread disinformation and anti-colonial and -Western propaganda, including anti-EU narratives, in Africa. The most recent examples are related to the EU's overall handling of the COVID-19 pandemic.²²

NON-INTERFERENCE AND NEW WORLD NARRATIVES

All three countries tout their respective policies of non-interference in the domestic affairs of African states as a primary method of distinguishing themselves from the West. The fact that these countries have never subjugated Africa politically nor economically, and do not face the historic burden of the Atlantic slave trade is also regularly underlined. The role that the Soviet Union played in supporting the struggles for independence of many African nations has also not been forgotten, and has been most useful for the Kremlin today.

Russia, more than China and Turkey, has engaged in disinformation efforts to influence African domestic politics, including providing electoral assistance to its ‘friends’ via cyberattacks and trolling to manipulate public opinion. Nevertheless, Russian efforts to influence African elections have been largely unsuccessful. They also undermine its own narrative of non-interference.

The narrative of all three countries – that they are seeking to establish an alternative world order – is also welcomed at a time when African countries are reassessing their role in the current international system.

REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL MULTILATERAL INSTITUTIONS

All three countries actively seek African states’ UN votes for specific initiatives, which usually occurs in the form of *quid pro quos* on matters of mutual importance. For instance, **Russia** opposed France’s intervention in Cote d’Ivoire in 2011, while several African countries opposed a UN resolution condemning the annexation of Crimea in 2014. Russia has also used its observer status in the AU to advocate for African peacekeeping solutions to local problems, rather than Western-led missions. Russia has used the BRICS alliance to strengthen relations with Africa, particularly following South Africa’s induction in 2010, which Moscow supported strongly.²³

China has also used its BRICS membership to strengthen engagement. Furthermore, it has deepened its role in the development finance landscape via ‘alternative’ institutions, such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. China places much importance on its cooperation with the AU – Beijing even funded the construction of its Addis Ababa headquarters. The AU also has a representative office in Beijing. China, more than Russia or Turkey, has engaged with African subnational governance to deepen its influence with local governments in Africa. For example, the China–Africa Local

Government Cooperation mentors hundreds of African local government administrators every year. This includes training on local government management in China.

Turkey places importance on its cooperation with the AU, too. The Turkish Foreign Economic Relations Council’s establishment of business councils with 19 SSA countries strengthened the economic partnership between Africa and Turkey.

HUMANITARIAN AND DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE

Humanitarian and development assistance, such as its robust support during the COVID-19 outbreak, is a central part of **China’s** Africa strategy. China complemented their respective aid with on-the-ground aid workers who cooperate with African governments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

Russian humanitarian and development assistance is mostly aid-in-kind. The Kremlin views debt relief as development assistance and constantly reminds African leaders of Russia’s generosity in writing off the billions of debts accrued during the Soviet era. Nevertheless, Russia remains a dwarf in this field when compared to other actors.

Widespread humanitarian assistance and development aid have been at the heart of **Turkey’s** Africa outreach. Turkey’s overall development assistance for Africa has increased substantially in the last few years, ranking second after the US in 2017. However, in terms of development aid as a percentage of their gross national income, Turkey (0.75%) outranked the US (0.03%).²⁴ During the COVID-19 outbreak, Turkey sent medical supplies to various African countries (i.e. South Africa, Libya, Chad, Niger, Somalia) to assist their fight against the pandemic. Similarly to China, it also sent on-the-ground aid workers to support African governments and NGOs.

Local perceptions

For African leaders, the growing group of external actors on their doorstep, eager to do business, means more choices and bargaining power. The fact that China, Russia and Turkey avoid linking their respective aid to democracy and human rights promotion, unlike the EU and US, is also largely welcomed by the local elites.

China has won the hearts and minds of many ordinary Africans because it has lifted about 800 million of its citizens out of poverty in just four decades.

The Russian narrative that Moscow and Africa have many shared interests in a changing world, and that African nations can rely on the Kremlin as a partner to balance their ties with other actors has helped deepen its engagement with some African countries.

In particular, African governments and communities have broadly praised **China** for its role in both investment and aid, as well as its political engagement. Some pushbacks from political elites and civil society have arisen, but they are primarily focused on China's economic and not political influence, and on malign business practices and environmental damages. China also faces the natural barriers of language and culture, being a relatively new partner of African countries. Pockets of discrimination exist on both sides, as demonstrated by the treatment of African residents in Guangzhou who were evicted from their homes and turned away from hotels during the COVID-19 pandemic.²⁵

Broadly speaking, China is broadly viewed as aiding the interests of the continent by contributing to job creation, skills development and the transfer of new technologies. Furthermore, many Africans have reservations about Western criticism of China–Africa cooperation. For example, at the 7th Forum on China–Africa Cooperation in 2018, South African President Cyril Ramaphosa stated that Africa “refutes the view that a new colonialism is taking hold in Africa as our detractors would have us believe.”²⁶ China has won the hearts and minds of many ordinary Africans because, according to the World Bank, it has lifted about 800 million of its citizens out of poverty in just four decades.²⁷ Case in point, China is cited as the second-most attractive development model in an Afrobarometer survey, after the US.²⁸

Russia's renewed interest in the continent is also broadly welcomed by many African elites, not least due to the former's flexible approach. The Russian narrative that Moscow and Africa have many shared interests in a changing world, and that African nations can rely on the Kremlin as a partner to balance their ties with the West and other actors like China has helped deepen its engagement with some African countries. Promoting transactional relationships, rather than the Western method of making aid conditional on democracy and human rights promotion, has also been a winning formula.

Still, from an economic point of view, Russia is seen as just another (rather small) actor in the region. While Moscow actively responds to the sectorial niches of African countries, it certainly cannot undertake any significant economic investment that is on par with the other global actors. Furthermore, because Russia has prioritised engagement with Africa's political elites rather than everyday citizens, and contributed very little in terms of humanitarian aid compared to other countries, it is much less visible on the general African collective radar than the other global partners.

Development assistance is a crucial part of many African countries' economies, and so assistance projects impact local public opinion greatly.²⁹ For example, when compared to China and Turkey, which both carried out prolific COVID-19 diplomacy, Russia provided very little support beyond promoting slogans that 'it was looking into what it could do'. Finally, Russia is also not viewed as an attractive development model for the continent. Moreover, African citizen's demand for democracy – a growing trend across the continent – risks eroding Russian engagement further, as most of Moscow's African partners are authoritarian leaders.

Turkey's visibility on the continent has been enhanced significantly thanks to its soft power outreach, not least its humanitarian and development assistance and religious diplomacy. As is the case with China and Russia, the fact that Ankara does not impose any conditionality when providing aid is appealing to Africa. Turkish aid workers have also helped shape positive attitudes towards Turkey, as they have enhanced people-to-people contacts and successfully promoted Ankara's narrative of having a purely humanitarian agenda.

Turkey's extensive network of schools and cultural centre has strengthened ties at different levels of African society and helped shape positive perceptions of Turkey, especially in countries that receive significant Turkish aid (e.g. former Ottoman territories).³⁰ Nonetheless, areas of tension also remain. For example, Ankara's demand that African countries close down schools affiliated with the Gülen movement generated concerns that Turkey is interfering in their internal affairs, and thus contradicting its own non-interference policy. Turkey's increasing references to religion in its relations with African countries also risks hindering its relations with non-Muslim ones.

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Implications for the EU and the US

Although Europe has traditionally been Africa's largest investor, China's expanding economic footprint is now challenging this status.

Africa's shifting demographics and growing influence on the world stage means that it will be integral in addressing some of the world's difficult problems, including climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Without a doubt, China's extensive engagement with Africa represents the biggest challenge for both the EU and US. Unlike Turkey and Russia, China has engaged with the entire continent, using a broad set of instruments to strengthen its ties with all parts of African society; from political and business leaders to the grassroots and youth. Russia's and Turkey's engagement have been more modest. While Russia has focused mostly on African states with which it has historical ties or where strongmen rule, Turkey is particularly involved in the Muslim countries in SSA.

Moscow's and Ankara's respective economic engagement with African countries are still too limited to have a major impact on European and American interests. Moreover, this is unlikely to change anytime soon, due to their troubled domestic economic situations, which have been further negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Meanwhile, the Chinese situation is very different. With a diverse toolbox at its disposal – increasing trade, investment, loans and infrastructure aid –, China has emerged as a major foreign power for and welcome partner of many African countries looking to emulate its rapid development themselves. Although Europe has traditionally been Africa's largest investor, China's expanding economic footprint is now challenging this status. In fact, China's economic presence seems set only to expand as its economy makes a decent comeback from the COVID-19 pandemic.⁵¹

A key concern is China's contribution to Africa's unsustainable debt burden. According to the Kiel Institute for the World Economy, China has lent more to Africa than the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and the Paris Club combined.⁵² Furthermore, according to some experts, "Chinese soft loans have enabled many African governments to avoid pressure from global institutions such as the IMF and World Bank to meet Western norms of accountability and conditionality related to political and economic reforms, such as the infamous structural adjustment that does not always serve the interest of Africans".⁵³

The no-strings-attached policies of all three countries, along with their policies of non-interference in African domestic affairs as a primary way to distinguish themselves from the

West, are also problematic for the EU and US. Such a values-free approach almost always ends up buttressing corrupt governments. This challenges EU and US engagement with African countries, which has, in turn, become a battleground for development models and ideologies that promote different domestic and international ways of governance.

While Turkey's more assertive foreign policy, including its involvement in the Libya conflict, is a concern to its transatlantic allies, it is Russia's growing security footprint in Africa – not least its arms sales and mercenaries – that is most worrying. For example, Russian arms sales to and military cooperation with the Central African Republic, along with the Wagner Group's PMCs deployed to support its forces, undermine the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy civilian advisory mission based there.³⁴ Furthermore, increased insecurity and instability in the continent's conflict zones could result in more migration flows to Europe, which the EU is trying to prevent.

China, Russia and Turkey have skilfully exploited security vacuums left by both the EU and US in Africa. As an example, the involvement of Russia and Turkey in Libya have opened their way for economic and geopolitical gains. Furthermore, Russia's growing presence in North Africa (i.e. close ties with Egypt, including joint naval exercises; the Libyan conflict; growing influence in Morocco and Algeria) should

not be overlooked. US Marine Corps General Thomas D. Waldhauser testified in February 2019 before the US Senate that Moscow is seeking economic and military contracts with African partners and access to North Africa's Mediterranean coast.³⁵ Russia becoming a more significant Mediterranean player could undermine NATO's southern flank and reduce the US' ability to manoeuvre militarily. It would follow a pattern that is observable in the Caspian and Black Seas, where Russia has boosted its military presence since annexing Crimea in 2014.

China's increasing security footprint should also not be overlooked. While conceived as a tool to protect Chinese interests on the continent, its growing security presence and cooperation with different African counterparts must be monitored closely. This includes China's (and, to a lesser extent, Turkey's) growing military presence in the Horn of Africa, where maritime routes strategically important to the EU are located.

China's, Russia's and Turkey's growing use of soft power, particularly in the media and information sphere, is another concern for Africa's Western partners. Broadcasting is a robust method of all three countries to influence policy debates, counter negative narratives and spread disinformation, including anti-Western propaganda, across Africa. This often drowns out EU and US messaging and must be addressed more robustly.

What should the EU and the US be doing?

Multipolarism, or global powers' increasing competition for influence, is becoming the new norm across Africa. EU and US policies should adapt to the new realities, taking the growing economic, political and security-

related impacts of Africa's foreign influences on board to make multipolarity work alongside multilateralism. Africa's shifting demographics and growing influence on the world stage means that it will be integral

in addressing some of the world's difficult problems, including climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic. It is therefore in both the EU's and US' interests to not only enhance cooperation with Africa but also harness its youth. They hold the potential to be a great impetus for Africa's development – provided that appropriate investments are made in its health and human capital.

Both Western partners should also work more closely with other countries and Africa-based organisations to say no to unregulated and unhealthy competition in Africa, for the benefit of the continent. Europeans have so far been reticent about engaging in a constructive dialogue with China, Japan and other countries on Africa's connectivity and other fields of cooperation.

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic threatens to destabilise African economies and political systems, and insecurity is on the rise in the Sahel and SSA regions, in part due to the expansion of ISIS and al-Qaeda cells. Now more than ever is the time for the EU and US to double down on their engagement with Africa and set the stage for stronger partnerships. Short-sighted national interests should be put aside, harmful competition decreased and constructive cooperation increased to ensure that Africa meets its development goals.

As such, the EU and US have a common interest to double down on their engagement with Africa and set the stage for stronger partnerships. While the AU welcomes the strengthening of its ties with the EU and US, it also repeatedly stresses that the cooperation must fit within its own strategy for the continent. Namely, 'finding African solutions to African problems', be they armed conflicts, political violence or climate shocks.

Today, relations with Africa are high on **the EU's** agenda. The continent has been placed at the centre of the European Commission's geopolitical work programme. This renewed interest should be understood as an attempt

to catch up with the continent's ongoing transformative processes and changing power dynamics.

In fact, 2020 has been labelled a pivotal year for EU–Africa relations.³⁶ Commission President Ursula von der Leyen made Africa her first port of call overseas in her new capacity. High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell has visited the continent twice this year. In March 2020, the Commission and European External Action Service laid out the principles for a renewed and comprehensive EU strategy with Africa. Finally, the June 2020 Foreign Affairs Council conclusions on Africa “underline that a prosperous, peaceful and resilient Africa is an essential EU foreign policy objective.”³⁷ A sixth AU–EU Summit was due to take place in October 2020 but was cancelled due to the pandemic. All of this points to the EU's new sense of urgency towards Africa.

On the other side of the Atlantic, although the Trump Administration's Africa strategy was promising, engagement with the continent was hardly a priority of **the US**. That which has been achieved has been primarily focused on the continent's security landscape and combating the spread of extremist groups, along with countering China's influence. Furthermore, several of Washington's recent decisions have damaged US–Africa ties: travel bans; proposed budget cuts; derogatory statements made by senior officials, including President Trump; and, most recently, police violence and the Black Lives Matter movement.

With the election of Joe Biden, a change of dynamics in the US' approach to Africa seems likely. His victory opens the door to restoring trust and revitalising relations with the continent. Despite the last four Trump years, African populations still hold a remarkably high opinion of the US. The Pew Research Center has consistently found the US' image in SSA to be positive since it began polling in 2002. In the nine nations surveyed, over

70% find the US to be a favourable development model.³⁸ President-elect Biden is highly likely to adopt policies that would restore the cooperative links that prevailed under his former Commander in Chief, Barack Obama; for example, the resumption of US support for multilateral issues. This would include the Green Climate Fund, which targets developing countries seriously affected by climate change. The US and China were lead funders of this initiative, showing that the two countries are capable of cooperating.

Against this background, the following pages put forward a set of recommendations that should be adopted by the EU and the US, to strengthen their respective engagements with the African continent.

Recommendations for the EU

COORDINATE AFRICA'S DEBT RELIEF: A CANCELLATION, NOT A STANDSTILL

The consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic have placed enormous economic pressure on Africa. This is particularly the case for SSA, which is seeing its first recession in 25 years and an estimated 29 million being pushed into poverty.³⁹ The G20's Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI), launched in April 2020, is a positive step to resolving the region's economic crisis, as it will free up its resources to respond to the crisis effectively. Nevertheless, it will only postpone debt service obligations and provide insufficient breathing space. Furthermore, the DSSI does not apply to the private sector nor middle-income countries, which have also been severely affected by the crisis. Simply freezing debt payments is not enough to stop developing countries from facing a major financial crisis, as the pandemic is not going to be a mere sudden, short-lived shock.

In order to avoid another 'lost decade' like 1980's Latin America, the EU, its member states, and other international stakeholders and actors should push for substantive debt cancellation for African countries.⁴⁰ The other actors should include China, the IMF and the World Bank. Indeed, in June 2020, China offered to cancel its interest-free loans to Africa.⁴¹ Moreover, it has already signalled support for the G20 proposal to extend further debt relief to poor countries.

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Debt relief, whether full or partial, will surely not help fight the root causes of African countries' debt accumulation. Nevertheless, it will free up regional government resources, thereby allowing them to be used to tackle the most urgent challenges. By taking the lead and engaging international organisations and large-scale public and private creditors in financial assistance for Africa, the EU could prove its commitment to both multilateralism and the transparent and sustainable development of Africa.

SUPPORT AFRICAN ECONOMIC INTEGRATION

According to the World Economic Forum, the need for greater African economic integration is urgent. At 18%, Africa currently has the lowest percentage of intraregional trade in the world.⁴² A borderless African single market would accelerate growth and allow the continent to be more competitive in global trade and across global value chains. It would also allow Africa's industries to develop across borders, creating economies of scale for investors as they look at wider integrated markets, with more links established at different levels across Africa and between the EU and Africa. Hence, the EU should encourage reciprocal and intra-African investments.

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The African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA), signed on 21 March 2018, is an important step in this direction. Unlike Africa's other external actors, the EU is uniquely placed to share its experience on regional economic integration. The long-term outcome of increased economic integration in Africa could lead to the AfCFTA becoming a constitutive element of a comprehensive, continent-to-continent free trade agreement. Moreover, from an EU perspective, the AfCFTA is also crucial to putting Africa on a trajectory to becoming a fellow upholder of multilateralism. Therefore, support for the successful implementation of AfCFTA should be an EU priority.

SUPPORT AFRICA'S ROLE IN GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

In recent years, the stability of the international political, economic and security order has gradually weakened, and unprecedented transformations are now taking place at a relentless pace. The global power dynamic is experiencing a reordering process: China's rise and assertiveness, the US' largely unilateral approach, and Russia's attempt to regain its old global power status are just a few of the main challenges to today's international order.

All this affects not only the credibility and legitimacy of multilateral organisations but also Africa, which does not want to and must not be relegated to a marginal player anymore. Countries like China and Russia have understood this well: they have been courting African countries with promises to support issues of importance for African nations at leading international organisations (e.g. UN), or flaunts of the benefits of alternative, non-Western models of development. Turkey is also aware of Africa's rising profile. Together with African countries, it hopes to reform international organisations, especially the UN, to reflect the shifting balance of global power.

The EU, therefore, must step up and strengthen its bilateral cooperation with Africa in international fora, and amplify the continent's presence and voices in key international organisations. As highlighted in the conclusions of the EU ministers of foreign affairs meeting of June 2020, the EU and Africa could have a greater impact on the global agenda if they work together. To this end, the EU and its African partners should further intensify cooperation and coordination on its shared interests and agenda within multilateral fora.

However, the Union cannot achieve this alone. A substantial level of agreement must first be found among its own member states, and then with like-minded international partners, such as the UK and US. This should also include promoting an open, rules-based multilateral trading system, notably through a reform of the World Trade Organization (something African leaders have long called for), collaborating on security-related and climate change issues, and meeting the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

FORGE ALLIANCES WITH LIKE-MINDED COUNTRIES, AND FOSTER SELECTIVE ENGAGEMENT WITH CHINA, RUSSIA AND TURKEY

Although it manifests in different ways, the presence of China, Russia and Turkey in Africa impacts the EU's (and US') relations and priorities with Africa. It is essential to counter third countries' malign activities which could drive a wedge between the EU and Africa (e.g. disinformation, exacerbating conflicts). However, it is also equally important to engage with like-minded countries whose policies are aligned with those of the EU whenever possible.

Trilateral cooperation, which is still high on the European agenda, should be explored further. For example, the US, Japan and India are countries with which the EU could

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feasibly establish cooperation. Notably, the latter two share a cooperation platform and an enhanced bilateral dialogue to balance out China's presence in Africa. Trilateral or even quadrilateral cooperation would ensure maritime security, advance the international rules-based order, and foster economic and trade multilateralism. Following a recent meeting between High Representative Borrell and US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, the latter declared that the US accepted the former's proposal to create a new EU-US dialogue on China.

However, while the EU has many avenues for cooperation, trilateral and multilateral cooperation risk being a mere diplomatic exercise because of divergent interests, expectations and approaches. The EU should demonstrate a pragmatic approach by engaging China, Russia and Turkey on niche issues where collaboration would benefit Africa. In doing so, the EU can mitigate negative effects by involving as many African actors/stakeholders, international organisations and third countries as possible on topics where progress is attainable (e.g. health collaboration, infrastructure projects, energy security, counterterrorism operations, disarmament, climate change).

Trilateral cooperation, which is still high on the European agenda, should be explored further. For example, the US, Japan and India are countries with which the EU could feasibly establish economic and political cooperation.

WORK WITH AFRICAN GOVERNMENTS AND THE AFRICAN UNION TO ESTABLISH A SUSTAINABLE EU-AFRICA CLIMATE PARTNERSHIP

African countries are on the frontline of the global climate emergency. The continent represents only around 2% of the world's cumulative energy-related carbon dioxide emissions and yet is disproportionately exposed to the adverse effects of climate change.⁴³ In alignment with the SDGs, the EU should continue to encourage Africa to base its development on a green transition, through adequate technical, financial and capacity-building support. For example, the European Commission's Joint Research Centre has been working closely with African partners, helping them address their vulnerability to climate change and harness the potential of sustainable energy resources (i.e. solar, hydro, wind power).⁴⁴

With an average of ten hours of sunlight per day for most of the year, and plenty of hydrogen, wind and hydro resources, Africa has all the tools to engage with the green revolution.⁴⁵ Africa also represents a significant economic investment opportunity for EU companies with expertise in sustainable energy. In this context, the European Green Deal represents an important starting point, as it is not only concerned with making the EU a global leader on climate change but

also lays the foundation for a new path of growth, towards post-COVID-19 recovery. Indeed, the rivalry between the great powers over climate change (e.g. conflict over water resources, fossil fuels) gives the EU a unique opportunity to become a global and strategic player on this issue.⁴⁶

For instance, agriculture – which is particularly vulnerable to climate change – provides employment for 60% of Africa’s working population.⁴⁷ Therefore, agriculture and sustainable food systems should be a priority for the EU, as it remains a crucial agricultural trade partner of the continent and shocks in demand would hit African producers negatively. The EU should demonstrate to African states that its Green Deal will not impose new barriers on African exports, and instead will lead to growth and job creation.

By setting ambitious goals and establishing an integrated approach together, both continents can boost their international partnership on climate change and expand collaboration on energy transitions and circular economy. They can also reduce the root causes of food and water scarcity, which often lead to conflicts and migration. Furthermore, as recommended by the European Centre for Development Policy Management, the European Investment Bank “should leverage more private finance towards innovative technologies and approaches that provide access to reliable, affordable and sustainable energy for more than half of the Africans currently underserved”.⁴⁸

INNOVATION, TECHNOLOGY AND DIGITALISATION: SHAPE EUROPE’S AND AFRICA’S DIGITAL FUTURES BY SETTING STANDARDS

In October 2019, the AU adopted a 2020-30 digital transformation strategy. Internet access in Africa has grown from 2.1% in 2005 to 24.4% in 2018.⁴⁹ Although this is only a small example of the continent’s digital transformation, its potential for technological development and digital innovation is enormous. The COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted the potential of digital technologies in mitigating its economic impact in Africa.

While collaboration between the EU and Africa already exists in this field, many challenges may arise due to their different trajectories of technological development. Indeed, new technologies can be used by governments (i.e. African countries, or their foreign partners) to suppress basic civil freedoms and/or control the Internet, and therefore pose a threat to the democratic tenure of many African countries

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The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the potential of digital technologies in mitigating its economic impact in Africa.

Building strong relationships with Africa's youth is of utmost importance, as they will be tomorrow's decision-makers.

(i.e. spread of disinformation and extremist propaganda, violation of citizens' privacy). The Chinese government and companies have made aggressive inroads into Africa to increase their influence in the latter's digital market, while also competing to set international digital standards (i.e. International Telecommunication Union, International Organization for Standardization). In comparison, Russia and Turkey have limited engagement in Africa's digital sector, as they use it for political reasons rather than commercial.

Regulatory frameworks are essential for shaping the development of the global digital economy. Together with African countries, the EU should scale up its efforts in this battlefield. Indeed, Russia's disinformation activities and China's attempt to transform the international and local standard-setting landscapes for artificial intelligence, 5G, health, energy and more are part of the geopolitical competition for political influence. Given the EU's own progress in the digital economy field, it is well-positioned to help Africa's growing digital market by promoting a "human-centric digital transformation" that accounts for the heterogeneity of the continent and its local dimensions.⁵⁰ As such, the Union should help African countries harmonise their regulatory frameworks, build digital infrastructure and share its expertise (on i.e. the General Data Protection Regulation 2016/679). It should also support the Smart Africa Initiative, which aims to create an African digital single market.

INVEST IN AFRICA'S PEOPLES, EDUCATION AND SKILLS

With China, Russia and Turkey seeking to expand their influence in Africa through various means, the EU must also engage in a wider conversation with a variety of African stakeholders, including local and regional authorities, business leaders, civil society, women's groups, young professionals and students. Broadening the EU–Africa conversation is the only way to achieve and ensure mutual understanding. Europeans must understand the different ways in which Africa is changing and transforming if it is to formulate new policies based on the latter's reality. By doing so, the EU could and should continue to attract and invest in Africa's peoples.

Building strong relationships with the continent's youth is of utmost importance, as they will be tomorrow's decision-makers. The EU should increase efforts to embrace African youths by offering more scholarships and educational

exchanges, increasing investments in traditional education, and teaching the skills needed to run digitalised economies. Entrepreneurship skills must be prioritised. However, given that the COVID-19 crisis may negatively impact student exchanges in the short to medium term, the EU should also consider alternative methods of long-distance engagement and learning.

Whether it be in the digital or the more traditional sectors, the EU should continue to invest in human capital development. It should increase hands-on training programmes that enable Africans to gain relevant professional and social skills, and ultimately create additional employment opportunities in the continent.

The EU should continue to work with African and international organisations (e.g. Spotlight Initiative) to promote gender equality and women's right by empowering and supporting grassroots organisations in Africa. Enhancing the capacity to periodically monitor the implementation and results of EU policies in the continent is also important. Many African countries have already significantly increased the proportion of women represented in politics. According to the UN, women hold close to a third of parliamentary seats in 11 African countries, with Rwanda often flagged as the poster child for gender equality.⁵¹ Nonetheless, while some progress has been made, much remains to be done, particularly as the COVID-19 crisis has further exacerbated gender inequalities.

COMBATING DISINFORMATION

China, Russia and Turkey have all carried out successful (dis)information campaigns across Africa; the EU could learn from some of their approaches. Knowledge of the European project and its policies is quite uneven across Africa. In Kenya, for instance, the role played by the EU in peacekeeping and,

to a lesser extent, democracy promotion is made prominent. By contrast, there is little or almost no knowledge about EU activities in the rest of the continent. This is in part due to the EU's poor communication, and in another part to Africa's other global partners' disinformation efforts, including the three countries subject to our case studies.

As mentioned earlier, the EU has provided significant financial aid to help Africa beat the COVID-19 pandemic. For SSA alone, the EU has provided over €8 billion, along with over 1.5 million test kits to the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention. However, such was the level of disinformation that the EU's actions received little attention compared to that of the other actors. As noted by High Representative Borrell, "There is a global battle of narratives going on in which timing is a crucial factor."⁵²

New efforts to tackle disinformation must be made to ensure the effective communication of EU policies and programmes to Africa. However, as the EU knows from experience, eradicating disinformation is far from easy, even within one's own borders. Together with African countries, the EU should raise the general African public's awareness of the risk of disinformation by increasing digital literacy and establishing joint mechanisms of control with African governments and tech companies. Attention must be paid to the risk of overregulating digital platforms, as this can, in turn, repress the freedom of speech and ultimately encourage authoritarian regimes to enforce other types of censorship.

BOOST HEALTH COOPERATION

The COVID-19 crisis is an opportunity to test the EU's commitment to upholding an equal health partnership with Africa. This was barely mentioned in the Joint Communication on the new EU strategy with Africa, as they were only published in March 2020 during the early stages of the pandemic.⁵³ As such, the conclusions of the June 2020 meeting

The European Commission's COVID-19 attack plan focuses strongly on Africa. The fact that the EU recognises that Africa has recent experiences in dealing with pandemics and acknowledges the mutual benefits of knowledge sharing on global health is a welcome step.

of European foreign affairs ministers on Africa were very ambitious. They include a commitment to strengthening the continent's health systems, preparedness and response capacities; promoting the African pharmaceutical and medical industry; and cooperating on research and innovation in respect to endemic infectious diseases.⁵⁴

Notwithstanding the EU's limited mandate on health, the European Commission's attack plan against the pandemic focuses strongly on Africa. The fact that the EU recognises that Africa has recent experiences in dealing with pandemics and acknowledges the mutual benefits of knowledge sharing on global health is a welcome step that is aligned with the partnership approach outlined in the former's Africa Strategy.

African states often do not receive new vaccines in a timely fashion. According to French politician Najat Vallaud-Belkacem, "there is a real fear that 'vaccine nationalism', coupled with a race for profits, could cut access for the most vulnerable and poor people, especially in developing countries".⁵⁵ The EU should therefore take the lead in ensuring that once a COVID-19 vaccine is available, Africa has timely access to it. This entails that the vaccine is transported to the continent's populations effectively, and stocks are supplied sufficiently. Africa must be able to secure what will be a strategic asset, not just for the health of their populations but also their economies.⁵⁶

Recommendations for the US

While many of the above recommendations can also apply to the US – such as fighting against disinformation, supporting global governance and enhancing soft power –, there are also other areas where (changes in) US policy specifically could enhance its image and programmes across Africa.

PRESERVE US INFLUENCE IN AFRICA

Western global leadership is in retreat, China is growing bolder in its quest to consolidate its position as a superpower, and Russia is expanding its influence any way that it can. It is becoming increasingly important for the US to preserve and ultimately increase its influence in places where it already

has established roots, such as Africa. However, many analysts have argued that in the overall battle for influence over Africa, the US is losing.⁵⁷ This is mostly explained by the US' undiplomatic language, many vacant ambassadorial posts, disappointing number of official visits, and talk of drawing down its forces.

The US should not overlook the continent, as Africa will be key in shaping future world events. Washington should communicate its intentions towards Africa clearly, by articulating a comprehensive and bipartisan long-term vision for US–Africa policy. It should be noted that the US' most recent strategy on Africa is, in practice, more of a policy on China. To this end, once the COVID-19 pandemic allows it, Washington should revive the United States–Africa Leaders Summit, as a first step towards revitalising ties and setting a new agenda. This could become a regular event in bilateral relations, as is already the case with Russia, China, Turkey and the EU.

NEVER FORGET THE SOFT POWER DIMENSION

Over the last years, the favourable image of the US has steadily declined in many parts of world. As a consequence, the soft power that the US has held over many African countries for a considerable time has diminished, and risks being outpaced by China. The US should therefore try to reverse this trend, as soft power is also an essential element of leadership. A well-designed public diplomacy, complemented with programmes that foster educational exchange, is of extreme importance to limit the ongoing reputational erosion that the US is facing in Africa, especially as it now predominantly focuses on hard power security issues.

For instance, given the huge increase of African students studying in China, Turkey and Russia, the Trump Administration's new plan to restrict students from numerous African countries from American educational opportunities is a gift to these three countries. This plan, contained in the US Department of Homeland Security proposal, would see student visas only remain valid for two years, instead of the usual four. This means that students would not be able to obtain diploma that take a minimum of four years. This would be a tragic development, not least because the US is a very popular education destination for African students. This decision should be overturned, as embracing Africa's youth is a crucial component of deepening US–Africa ties.⁵⁸ In fact, the US should make education more attractive to potential African students; for example, by increasing scholarships

In the overall battle for influence over Africa, the US is losing.

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which cover living costs, or facilitating the possibility to study at top-ranked universities.

REINFORCE SECURITY AND COUNTERTERRORISM EFFORTS

The appointment of Peter Pham as the first-ever US Special Envoy for the Sahel Region of Africa in March 2020 reflects growing concerns over the region's security situation. With terrorist attacks having increased by 250% over the last two years in the region,⁵⁹ the US Africa Command must stay put. US logistics support and troop presence are also essential for its European allies, such as France. Hence, the idea of a troop drawdown – which former US Secretary of Defense Mark Esper proposed as part of Washington's global troop shift – should be forgotten. As stated by US Senators Lindsey Graham and Chris Coons, “withdrawal from the continent would also certainly embolden both Russia and China”. Sustaining US forces in Africa “serves as a check” against rivals expanding their influence on the continent.⁶⁰ Equally vital is the US military's counterterrorism support, not least in the form of training and military equipment, to the G5 Sahel, a 5,000-strong multinational force established by Niger, Mali, Chad, Burkina Faso and Mauritania.

The US must continue its holistic approach to countering terrorism. This should include ongoing efforts to help build the capacity of African militaries.

Africans nations no longer have to put all their eggs into one or two baskets, as they have many different baskets to choose from – this gives them greater bargaining power.

Furthermore, the US must continue its holistic approach to countering terrorism. This should include ongoing efforts to help build the capacity of African militaries, along with programmes aimed at good governance, such as security sector reform, to eradicate corruption. However, it is also crucial to boost support for programmes on preventing radicalisation and violent extremism in the first place. This is even more important since the onset of the COVID-19 crisis, as groomers will surely target those in vulnerable regions and situations. The US must have buy-in from local actors, officials and civil society in all of these areas.

Efforts to strengthen counterterrorism and security cooperation with African countries facing security-related challenges – which are likely to be targeted by Russia and China – should also be pursued to boost regional security and cooperation further. In this regard, Esper's visit to Algeria on 1 October 2020 should be viewed positively. Following the ouster of long-time strongman leader Abdelaziz Bouteflika, a close ally of Russia, in 2019, Russia lost a major arms sales importer. The new Algerian leadership's readiness to boost cooperation (i.e. security-related, counterterrorism) with the US is welcomed.

TONE DOWN THE CHINA-BASHING

When former US National Security Adviser John Bolton presented Washington's new strategy on Africa in 2018, much of his speech was actually dedicated to China. The US' narrative over China's role in Africa – the latter's use of bribes, opaque agreements and debt to hold African states captive to its wishes and demands –⁶¹ risks undermining the former's own reputation and opportunities on the continent. In contrast, China is very popular in many African countries, especially among youths.⁶²

Furthermore, many African leaders are already aware of Beijing's shortcomings and are taking their own measures to counter them. For example, the African Development Bank cancelled several Chinese projects due to fraudulent practices. Moreover, as outlined in a recent Chatham House paper, recipient countries often court Chinese investment projects actively.⁶³

Washington's current approach comes across as patronising and leaves the impression that it views Africa as an arena of great power rivalry. It reduces the chances of the US working with China to deal with urgent, common problems. Washington should have robust diplomatic, commercial and security strategies to increase US investment and challenge Chinese influence in Africa. For example, the US should invest more in the continent's private sector, too, which would be welcomed by the new generation

of dynamic African entrepreneurs. US venture capitalists could do more to fund the innovative start-up culture that is sprouting up all over Africa. Additionally, as a group of distinguished US experts states, "the United States must coordinate with allies and partners not only to deter and compete with China when needed but also to incentivize Beijing to cooperate in addressing shared concerns such as global warming and current and future pandemics".⁶⁴

The face of Africa is changing rapidly. China, Russia and Turkey, among others, are rapidly deepening their economic, political and security engagement across the continent respectively. While the EU and US remain important partners of African nations, the days when they dominated the continent are long gone. Africans nations no longer have to put all their eggs into one or two baskets, as they have many different baskets to choose from – this gives them greater bargaining power.

Hence, the EU and US must adapt their policies and approaches to the new reality that is unfolding in Africa. Efforts aimed solely at countering China – or any other actor, for that matter – are insufficient and could even be counterproductive in the greater scheme of world politics. What is required from both Western powers now is, as outlined in our recommendations, that they find collective solutions that do not set back global developments, and bring a 'win-win-win' for all.

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Africa is a dynamic and diverse continent going through fundamental economic, political and security changes. While the EU and the US remain important partners for Africa, they are no longer the only game in town. New – and not so new – actors have recognised Africa’s potential and are trying to use it to their advantage.

China, Russia and Turkey in particular, whose presence have been broadly welcomed by African nations, have all been steadily expanding their political and economic clout in the continent over the past few years. Hence, the EU and the US must adapt their policies and approaches to the new reality that is unfolding in Africa.

To better understand their objectives, the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung’s EU Office in Brussels and the European Policy Centre set out to conduct an in-depth analysis of the three countries’ ties with Africa. The results of this research project, entitled “Eurasia goes to Africa”, are collected in this book.

The authors take a closer look at China’s, Russia’s and Turkey’s economic and political interests in the continent; their involvement in the security landscape; the effectiveness of their soft power tools, including in education, media, religion, and humanitarian and development aid; and how Africans judge their growing presence.

Any new Africa policy from the EU and the US should take into account the growing influence of China, Russia and Turkey in the continent and aim to even the scales. To succeed, they must develop a new narrative on Africa and finally recognise it as a genuinely equal partner on the global stage.