

**Forum:** Special Political And Decolonisation Committee

**Topic:** The Issue Of Chinese Neo-Colonialism In Africa

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### **Introduction and Overview**

Sino-African relations have increased tremendously over the last few decades in terms of diplomatic ties, financial investment and even military support. In 2008, China overtook the United States as the number one trading partner with Africa, most notably Angola (China's largest oil supplier), Nigeria and Benin. Unconditional and low-rate credit lines (rates at 1.5% over 15 years to 20 years) have taken the place of the more restricted and conditional Western loans and since 2000, more than \$10bn in debt owed by African nations to the PRC has been cancelled. Furthermore, in 2015 Chinese President Xi Jinping pledged \$60 billion over a three-year deal in loans and assistance to the African continent and China continues to dominate trade in the region.

While some see this as simple “win-win development”, with many African leaders accepting the Chinese “gifts” to fund much needed infrastructure, many countries fear that China is slowly fostering African dependence, representing an almost hegemony of the region and that this is a cleverly masked attempt by China to extend its sphere of influence. They fear that these “gifts” of large investment will not be mutually beneficial for the African People, and that it will bury the continent in an extremely large amount of debt, allowing the Chinese Government to maintain high leverage in the area (As in Pakistan or Sri Lanka), which they can use for their own personal benefit, (such as the Chinese naval base in Djibouti). Many liken this policy to the US's Marshall plan, where financial aid was given to the countries of eastern Europe to increase their influence in the region and prevent the spread of soviet communism.

This sphere of influence can be seen in the close diplomatic and political ties Africa enjoys with China. For example, the support of African Nations was crucial in the PRC joining the UN, taking over the seat of the ROC on Taiwan. Today only one African member state (Swaziland) still retains relations with Taipei. Furthermore, worries over the nature of democracy in Africa have surfaced, given the increased influence of undemocratic China, and the fear that as a country that has been reported to be rife with human rights violations and governmental intimidations, that they will prop up and support similar regimes, possibly via electoral interference. This represents control softer than that of direct military control, yet nonetheless can still be seen as indirect political and economic control. Also, given the fact that the UN views democracy as a “universal and indivisible core value and principle of the United Nations”, It might be in the best interest of it to ensure that China doesn't bully nations out of democracy.

### **Definition Of Key Terms**

#### **Neo-Colonialism**

Neo-colonialism is a term first coined by Kwame Nkrumah in the context of African countries undergoing decolonization in the 1960s. Neo-colonialism is also discussed in the works of thinkers such as Jean-Paul Sartre (*Colonialism and Neo-colonialism*, 1964) and Noam Chomsky (*The Washington Connection and Third World Fascism*, 1979) and is defined as “the practice of using capitalism, globalization and cultural imperialism to influence a developing country in lieu of direct military control (imperialism) or indirect political control (hegemony).”

## **Hegemony**

Hegemony is defined as the political, economic, or military predominance or control of one state over others.

## **Hard Power Vs Soft Power**

Hard power is defined as the use of military and/or economic means to influence the behaviour of other political bodies. In the case of Chinese Neo-colonialism in Africa it could be argued that China's financial investment represents a means of political control ensuring co-operation with their own interests.

Soft power by contrast is the ability to shape the preferences of others through appeal and attraction, a defining feature of soft power is that it is non-coercive; the currency of soft power is culture, political values, and foreign policies. Therefore, it is arguable as well that China is merely attracting and co-operating with African nations, rather than coercing them.

## **Belt and Road Project**

China's Belt and Road Initiative is a huge, \$1trln infrastructure project to better connect China and Chinese goods with the rest of the world. It is meant to be a 21st-century "silk road", made up of a "belt" of overland corridors (including roads, bridges and railways) and a maritime "road" of shipping lanes.

For example, in Tanzania, the small fishing village of Bagamoyo is set to become Africa's Largest port in a \$10bn Chinese development.

Many are suspicious of China's infrastructure projects and see them as a potential bid for world domination, others simply see them as a means to support Chinese companies at home.

## **Predatory Lending**

Predatory lending is any lending practice that imposes unfair or abusive loan terms on a borrower. It is also any practice that convinces a borrower to accept unfair terms through deceptive, coercive, exploitative or unscrupulous actions for a loan that a borrower doesn't need, doesn't want or can't afford. Many fear that Chinese investment and low interest rates are a trap, designed to entice African nations with the prospect of infrastructure and development while in reality being a predatory lending scheme designed to increase dependence.

## **Timeline of events**

1226- Chao Jukua, commissioner of foreign trade at Quanzhou in the Fujian province of China, completes his *Chu-fan-chih (Description of Barbarous Peoples)* which discusses Zanzibar (*Ts'ong-pa*) and Somalia (*Pi-P'a-Lu*)

1415 – Trade begins: Chinese explorer and admiral Zheng He reaches the eastern coast of Africa and sends the first of two giraffes as gifts to the Chinese Yongle Emperor

1958-64 – China signs the first Bi-lateral trade agreements with Algeria, Egypt, Somalia, Guinea, Morocco and Sudan. During 1963-64, Zhou Enlai (The premier at the time) made a ten country tour of Africa. This was reflective of Chinese policy at the time which "began to cultivate ties and offer ... economic, technical and military support to African countries and liberation

movements in an effort to encourage wars of national liberation and revolution as part of an international united front against both superpowers"

Late 1960's – China, in support of the “African Independence movement” begins to give aid to newly independent African Nations.

1971 – The PRC joins the UN, owing much to the support of African Nations

1970-75 – China helps finance and build the 1,860km TAZARA railway which links Zambia and Tanzania.

1977- \$150 million worth of Military supplies have been sold to African nations since 1955, due to the fact that China was keen to help African liberation movements during the cold war.

1978- China overtakes the United States as the largest giver of aid to African Nations

1980- The Sino-African trade volume hits \$1bn

2000- The first Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) is held in Beijing and is the first collective dialogue between the PRC and African nations.

Sino-African trade volume hits \$10bn

2004- China Deploys 1,500 military personnel (under the banner of the UN) to Liberia and the Democratic Republic of Congo for peacekeeping purposes.

2007- China is accused of supplying Zimbabwe with Jet fighters and other military equipment, and denies them heavily.

2008- China Criticised for its supportive relationship with the Government of Sudan, which is accused of mass killings in Darfur and threatens to Veto UN actions made against Sudan.

(China is Sudan's Largest Trading Partner)

China overtakes the US as Africa's largest trading partner

2011 China Sends Infantry troops, arguably describable as “combat forces” to counter terrorism and weigh in on local conflicts

2015, FOCAC meets in Johannesburg, President Xi Jinping Pledges to give over \$60bn over three years in assisted loans and assistance as well as stating that “China strongly believes Africa belongs to the African people and African problems should be handled by the African people”

2017- China Sets up its first overseas military base at Djibouti

2018 – More African nations attend the September summit of the FOCAC than the similarly timed UN general assembly meeting

### **Relevant UN bodies and Major parties and their views**

**FOCAC** – Forum on China-Africa Cooperation

An official Forum between China and all African nations (that don't recognise Taiwan)

**UNDP**- United Nations Development Programme

A UN organisation pledged to create sustainable development and Democratic Governance among many other development goals.

**UNDEF** – United Nations Democracy Fund

A UN fund that supports, helps design, manages, mentors and generates projects that contribute to strengthening Democracy.

**UNDPA**- United Nations Department of Political Affairs

A UN department that monitors and assesses global political developments with an eye to detecting potential crises before they erupt and devising effective responses. The Department also coordinates UN electoral assistance activities and provides staff support to the UN Security Council and two standing committees established by the General Assembly: on the rights of the Palestinian people and decolonization.

**OHCHR**- The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

UN office mandated to promote and protect human rights for all. Since Governments have the primary responsibility to protect human rights, the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) provides assistance to governments such as expertise and technical trainings in the areas of administration of justice, legislative reform, and electoral process, to help implement international human rights standards on the ground.

## UN

The UN recognises **democracy** as one of its core values, and therefore fears over the nature of Democracy in Africa are being stirred up by China's developments. China has long been an enabler of undemocratic African regimes, such as illicit sale of military weapons and threats to block any UN resolutions directed towards Sudan on the basis of self-interest in the Sudanese oil industries. The UN therefore is becoming increasingly concerned with the large leverage that China is able to exert in Africa, given its history of blocking democracy as well as violating human rights. One has to look no further than the way China has "Dealt with" Tibet and the repeated blockings of UN resolutions in condemning China on violations of Tibetan's rights have been actively supported by African states which effectively enabled the deflection of sanctions, all of which indicate causes of concern for the UN if they wish to uphold true national sovereignty, democracy and human rights.

## China

Despite accusations that China is pulling the puppet strings in Africa to drive out the west and create a new "Chinese Continent". China maintains that Africa is simply a natural partner with a shared future and that the "China-in-Africa" policy is merely a mutually beneficial business venture. For example, when providing economic aid to many African nations, China has been found to help them build their own economic development frameworks. A report in 2017 shows that Chinese projects in Africa have created several million jobs and, on average, 89 per cent of their employees were African. Meanwhile, more than 60 per cent of Chinese enterprises have provided skills training and over 30 per cent have conducted technology transfers to the local market. President Xi Jinping has stated that his measures will certainly provide Africans with more training and job opportunities, open up greater space for their economic development and further enhance security exchanges between two sides.

In response to their increased Military presence, China states that “The Chinese military has contributed to training African military personnel, deepening military-related technological cooperation and helping African countries enhance their capacity-building in national defence and peacekeeping to safeguard their own security and regional peace.”

China Further accuses the United States of “measuring other’s corn by their own bushel” and states that accusations of neo-colonialism are merely ploys by the west to limit their own growth in the wake of fears that the West are afraid of “losing their colonial backyard”.

## **USA**

The United States has become increasingly concerned with the growth of China as a potential threat to their world economic domination. Africa represents a worrying “first domino” of Chinese economic superiority and therefore the US is keen to limit the almost monopoly that China holds over the African Continent. Furthermore, the US sees these Chinese developments as a means to expand their sphere of influence in the globalisation race of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Former US secretary of state Rex Tillerson has stated that the growing economic aid that China offers African countries to support their development is a predatory loan practice designed to give China leverage over the continent for its own power agenda.

However, it would be remiss to say that the United States is against Chinese neo-colonialism purely on monetary and power political grounds. The US has always thought of itself as being the major democratic power in the world and therefore is naturally concerned about the nature of democracy and freedoms in Africa, which it sees as being threatened by the increasing Chinese influence in Africa.

### **Previous attempts to resolve the issue**

While there have been no direct attempts by international bodies to address specifically the increasingly close ties that China and Africa share, a 1961 statement on neo-colonialism by the all African peoples’ conference in Cairo, violently condemned neo-colonial practices and set out a resolution to solve the issue. It includes phrases such as “[This] conference reaffirms its determination to continue to mobilize popular mass opinion to denounce enemies of true independence and agents of neo-colonialism camouflaged in all possible forms.” and that one of the ways in which neo-colonialism manifests itself in through “direct monetary dependence, as in those emergent independent states whose finances remain directly controlled by colonial powers.”

<https://www.pambazuka.org/global-south/africa-all-african-peoples-conference-statement-neocolonialism>

### **Possible solutions**

#### **Monitor trade deals on the international scale**

One method of determining whether or not a country’s sovereignty is at risk from economic dependence is to monitor more closely all of the trade deals, aid and loans that Chia is giving African Countries. By doing so it would be much easier to eliminate predatory loaning practices and ensure that dependence on China is not fostered.

#### **Allow activity to continue unhindered**

Many people take no issue with China’s trade habits with the countries of Africa, and see measures such as monitoring trade and imposing international tariffs as needless red tape that will only get in the way of trade but also development in less developed member states.

### **Limiting trade**

One, very strong, method of preventing Chinese Neo-Colonialism in Africa is by imposing larger tariffs on Chinese goods, and while the UN does not have the direct ability to dictate this, it can heavily recommend such action be taken. Doing this would limit the trade between African countries and China, which would almost certainly prevent economic dependence, however would also limit the mutual growth and development that the countries have enjoyed thus far.

### **Questions to consider**

#### **Is this truly neo-colonialism?**

It could be argued that China, like its European predecessors, plans on exerting control and draining the continent dry for its own benefit, whereas it could also be argued that the “China in Africa” policy is merely a facet of mutual trade and growth designed to benefit both parties. If Chinese involvement truly is an example of neo-colonialism, why?, is this a bad thing? And what can the UN do to prevent this?

#### **Are human rights, electoral sovereignty and democracy at risk?**

Fears that China will use their undeniable influence in Africa to prop up governments (potentially illegally) that disregard human rights and democracy have begun to rise in the west. Is this legitimate cause for concern, or does China wish to keep the relationship purely Economic rather than political. If it is the case that human rights, electoral sovereignty and democracy are at risk, how can the UN ensure that they are not infringed upon?

#### **Does China’s policy towards African states represent hard power or soft power?**

Is the economic pressure simply for mutual prosperity and growth or is there a darker facet behind it? If so, is this being done through coercion or attraction?, does it matter which is being done?

#### **Is China’s growing military presence in Africa a cause for concern?**

The accusations in 2007 that China was supplying Zimbabwe with jet fighters was never officially confirmed, however it does potentially demonstrate China’s willingness to interfere with political affairs via military means. Furthermore, does China’s first overseas base at Djibouti represent a bid for military status and control in the region? To what extent should the nations of Africa fear for their rights being infringed upon by military means?

### **Conclusion**

Ultimately, the crux of any decision making of the UN comes down to whether or not China’s involvement in Africa represents true neo-colonialism and whether or not this is important. There are strong arguments on both sides, with many claiming that this is simply mutually beneficial trade and growth, citing the huge increase in the development of infrastructure in countries, such as Tanzania or Djibouti. Others however fear that the intentions are not purely on the basis of mutual growth, but rather a willingness of China to increase its sphere of influence and transform Africa in to their own Chinese continent. Furthermore, there is the argument that Neo-colonialism is not inherently a bad thing, citing the willingness that many

countries had to welcoming US involvement in Eastern Europe after the second world war and the improvement of living standards that accompanied the almost hegemony of the US. While preparing for this conference, it is vital to consider your country's stance on these two crucial issues, from which all other important points, such as the nature of democracy and human rights, as well as possible solutions will stem.

## **REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING**

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