
The Securitization of China's Engagement with Africa: EU Energy Security Strategy

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Abstract: *The topic of energy security has become an issue of great concern for many countries over the last few years. As the integration and the globalization of the world economy deepens, the rise of the emerging economies such as China and India and the fear of disruption in global energy supplies has become a challenge that developed countries factor into their national security strategies. Since the advent of the new millennium, China's engagement with Africa and its oil investment on the Continent has been interpreted in some policy circles in the US and EU as a threat to their own national security. The advocates of this view are concerned that China's ties with many resource rich and oil producing countries in Africa could undermine the strategic interests of the EU in the continent. This perception of a threat rather than a challenge is what this paper intends to address. The paper seeks to bring an analytical perspective on these questions and assesses the true nature and rationale of both EU-Africa relations and China's engagement with Africa in trade and economic relations and concludes with some policy perspectives.*

Keywords: *Africa, EU, China, Energy*

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1. Introduction

Defining energy security is taking into account specific needs of different countries around the world. The definitions of energy security range from avoiding disruption of supplies to mitigating economic, environmental, and political consequences of sudden changes in global oil trade. That is,

developed countries such as the US and the EU-28 define energy security simply as ensuring the availability of energy supplies at affordable prices. Whereas, emerging markets such as China, India, Russia and Brazil, and developing countries like Angola and Nigeria interpret the concept differently. China and India interpret energy security as a matter of national security. Since the mid-1990s, China and India have become energy dependent and rely heavily today on oil imports for their industrial and consumer needs. For China this is crucial because securing the supplies of energy resources is part of the tools that it needs to maintain its social and political stability as well as its economic and industrial growth. As for India, securing access to energy resources far from its shores is also a matter of national concern because not doing so can have grave consequences on its economic and industrial development strategies. Russia and Angola on contrary interpret energy security in terms of maintaining high global energy demands. For, what matters for them as energy exporting countries is to secure strong demands at high prices in order to guarantee high revenue incomes and maintain their industrial and economic transformations.

The simplest definition of energy security used by the International Energy Agency (IEA) is to ensure 'the uninterrupted availability of energy sources at an affordable price'. Achieving this goal however requires that countries make efforts internally and externally in order to reduce the risks of supply disruptions and mitigate the shocks that may ensue. Therefore, conceptualizing energy security is addressing the question of what security means in general and what policy objective (s) one wants to achieve as a country. Each country as cited-above interprets energy security in accordance to its national needs and what it considers to be its strategic objectives. The current debate about the energy security dates from the oil crisis of 1973.

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To counter the threats of the embargo or the ‘oil weapons’ used by the Arab countries against the United States and other European countries such as Germany that sided with Israel against the Arabs, the West established policies to mitigate and reduce risks of oil disruption and avoid the long lines of consumers waiting at the gas stations as occurred in the United States. Thus, in order to coordinate their strategic objectives and counter the threats of the supply disruptions, the International Energy Agency (IEA) was established in 1974 as a multilateral forum to act as a policy adviser organization focusing on energy security, economic development, renewable and energy efficiency and energy technology.

The US and today’s EU, have been and still are dependent on oil imports, mainly from the middle eastern region, this energy security or energy independence as many American policy makers prefer to call it, are part of the national discourse and achieving it has become clearly a strategic objective of the West. A few years before Barack Obama became President of the United States, he said the following as regards to the energy security of the United States: “*We need a national commitment to energy security, and to emphasize that commitment, we should install a Director of Energy Security to oversee all of our efforts.*” (Senator Barack Obama, February 28, 2006; Governor’s Ethanol Coalition Washington, DC). Likewise, the EU-28 which is heavily dependent on energy resource imports (oil and gas) and is in actuality the world’s largest importer of oil has clearly defined what it considers its energy security in the framework of its energy policy. For the Union, its energy policy is based on three pillars: they are efficiency, sustainability and security of energy supplies (European Commission (EC) 2008; European Commission (EC) 2006).

The EU energy policy is a shared policy between the Union and the Member States. The supply strategies are incumbent upon each Member State as confirmed by the Treaty of Lisbon. Consequently, this division of power in energy policy between the Union and its Member States makes it difficult for the Union to devise a comprehensive and coherent energy policy as formulated in China under a state centric strategy or other competing nations in energy markets. For instance, Germany gets a third of its natural gas from Russia, and as a result, it defends its own interests directly with Moscow rather than the Union's interests as a whole in energy markets. Nonetheless, the Union has been relatively successful in establishing bilateral and multilateral cooperation aimed at managing its relations with other nations in the energy field. For example, the EU-Russia dialogue launched in 2000 was aimed at providing reliability, security and predictability in energy relations and transparency between the two sides. As regards to the bilateral cooperation for instance, the EU has entered into various agreements with countries such as Brazil, China, South Africa, Russia, the United States, the OPEC, etc. And as for multilateral cooperation in the field of energy, the Union has also been active and participates as a member in international organizations such as the International Energy Agency (IEA), the International Energy Forum (IEF), and the Energy Charter Treaty (ECT).

In general, the challenge that the EU and other major consuming energy resources countries are facing in energy markets, is to secure the availability of those resources. This is because geopolitical factors can weigh in heavily in accessing the resources. According to Yergin (2006), although energy companies will be prospecting in more difficult environments, the major obstacle to the development of new supplies is not geology but what

happens above the ground: namely, international affairs, politics, decision-making by governments, and energy investment and new technological development. That is to say, perennial conflicts in the Middle East or in some parts of the African and Latin American oil producing countries or a spate of conflicts between Russia and Ukraine could easily have grave consequences on the oil and gas markets unless the International Community could immediately turn to alternative sources.

In addition, the global demand for oil and gas, the increase appetite for oil from China and India, the political instability in countries such as Nigeria and Venezuela, the rise of State energy companies in places like China, the increasing terrorist organizations such as Al-Qaida that target critical infrastructures of the developed world and the energy producing countries and the high consistent prices of the oil itself over the past years have created uncertainty in the oil world markets. Thus, it is against this backdrop that the EU has developed its concept of the energy security in order to meet the challenges described-above.

2. EU-Africa Relations

The European Union/Africa relations date back to the period of colonial relationships between many of the former European colonial powers and today's independent African nations. The relationship between the EU-28 and the African countries as we know it today is a product of an evolutionary process with its ups and downs since the time of decolonization to what is known nowadays as the new EU/Africa Partnerships of the new millennium.

This relationship was legally institutionalized through a generation of agreements or conventions known as the

Yaoundé Conventions I & II, the Lomé Conventions I, II, III, IV and Lomébis (an extension of Lomé IV for another five year term) and the current Cotonou Agreements that govern the trade, economic and political relations between the European Union and Africa. Initially, those conventions were conceived to maintain the relationships between the former colonial powers and their colonies in Africa when the colonies in question attained their independence in early '60s. However, with the passage of time and the independence of many of the former British Caribbean and Pacific Islands, coupled with the call for a new international economic order between the North (Industrialized countries) and the greater South (mostly former colonized countries), the EU known then as the European Economic Community's relations with Africa fell under the umbrella of came to be known as the African, Caribbean and Pacific group of states. This new institutional relation between today's European Union and Africa was formalized at the Guyana Convention in 1975 even though the Union's Africa relations are on top of its priorities when dealing with the developing countries.

Today, the European Union-Africa's economic, trade and political relations are governed by the current Cotonou Agreements in force till the year 2020 and the ongoing economic partnership agreements negotiations between the EU and the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries (ACPs). Nevertheless, the new EU-Africa Strategic Partnerships since the new millennium are what really drive the EU-Africa relations, and those partnerships are solely based on what the EU and African countries perceive to be contentious and mutual threats against their long lasting relationships. That is, issues of global magnitudes such as the flow of global migration from the African continent and other developing countries to the European Union member countries, global terrorist connection taking root in the Sahel region, global

drugs exports from Latin America to Europe via Western African region, and the new interests of countries such as China, Malaysia, Japan and India in the African extractive and energy resources.

3. EU-Africa Strategic Partnership

The Joint Africa-EU Strategy (JAES) was a new concept of partnership agreed upon by the European Union and the African Union (AU) in 2007. This new framework of partnership defines the long-term strategic direction of the EU-Africa cooperation on a range of issues as set out in the 2nd Action Plan 2011-2013 which was adopted at the 3rd Africa EU Summit (29-30 November 2010) in Tripoli, Libya. The working document that was adopted to shape the future of the said EU-Africa relations is the so-called Tripoli Declaration. The main objectives of the Joint Africa-EU Strategy are the following: 1) to improve the Africa-EU political partnership; 2) to promote peace, security, democratic governance and human rights, basic freedoms, gender equality; 3) to promote sustainable economic development, industrialization, and regional and continental integration; 4) to ensure the completion of the Millennium Development Goals by all African countries by 2015; 5) to achieve an effective multilateralism; and 6) to develop a people-centred partnership. In addition, the Joint Africa-EU Strategy's 2nd Action Plan sets out eight areas for strategic partnerships between the European Union and the African countries during the years 2011-2013. The said areas for strategic partnerships are the following:

a) Peace and Security; b) Democratic Governance and Human Rights; c) Regional Economic Integration, Trade and

Infrastructure; d) Millennium Development Goals; e) Climate Change; f) Energy; g) Migration, Mobility and Employment; and h) Science, Information Society and Space.

This in a nutshell is the new architectural framework of the EU-Africa relations embedded into the new EU Commission/African Union institutional relationships.

4. What are the interests of EU in Africa?

The interests of the EU in Africa are no different than the interests of the US, Japan or any other group of countries that engage Africa politically or economically. That is, Africa, as mentioned-above is replete of natural and energy resources, and industrialized nations as well as other emerging powers are all competing to secure mineral and energy agreements with the respective African States. Prior to the entry in force of the Maastricht Treaty in 1993, the then European Economic Community (EEC) and its member states' interests with Africa were political, ideological, commercial and economic. The political and ideological interests of the EEC with Africa stemmed from the Cold War logic where the former colonial powers such as France, Belgium and the UK did not want to see their former colonies fall under the Communist sphere of influence led by the former USSR. This logic was the result of the division of the world into the Capitalist US-led camp and the Socialist-USSR sphere of influence. The commercial and economic interests of the EEC, in particular, the interests of France, Belgium and the UK in Africa were to secure access to Africa's raw materials and natural resources and at the same make Africa a captured market for their manufacture and industrialized goods. That is, the strategy is the same strategy that China is employing with Africa nowadays but only charged with historical connotations.

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Since the advent of the EU (the Treaty of Maastricht establishing the European Union in 1992) and the fall of the Berlin Wall however, the interests of the Community in Africa have been to push more democratic values in Africa's institutions and help develop the civil society whereby the rights of African citizens and human rights are respected by their respective governments. This is coupled with the economic reforms and conditionality measures known as the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) that the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank proposed to the African countries in the mid-to late eighties.

The decade of 2000s marked a shift in the interests of the EU in Africa, as external events became the catalyst of changes in the international politics. Africa was not immune to those changes. The event of September 11, the irruption of global terrorist groups such as Al-Qaida, the collapse of many States in Africa due to internal conflicts and civil strife, the emergence of the BRICS (1), the accelerated pace of the economic globalization and global challenges such as the Global Climate Change have all had impacts on the reformulation of the EU and its member States' interests in Africa. However, the security and economic aspects of these changes are what have gained currency over the last decade or so. The EU's interests in Africa today are primarily aimed at (1) securing market access for the European companies in the burgeoning African consumer market; (2) providing Europe with Africa's natural resources; (3) cooperating in security policies against regional and global terrorist networks; (4) assisting African States in fomenting Democracy and Human Rights values; (5) fostering good trade and economic relations against new emerging powers in Africa and (6) partnering with African Union (AU) to

develop strategic partnerships in combatting issues of global nature and common interests.

5. China-Africa Relations

China-Africa relations since the advent of the year 2000 is one of the most discussed, studied, analysed and misunderstood topics there is in International Relations (IR). European governments and recently the US administrations (beginning with the administration of Bush Jr. in the White House), African governments and African citizens as well as the European citizens and the Academia on both sides of the Atlantic are all engaged in trying to discern the true intentions of Chinese in Africa. In addition, the Chinese Academics, government officials and private stakeholders themselves are not immune from this debate.

China's engagement with Africa is nothing new. One may even say that the Chinese have simply returned to Africa. That is, as background information, it is worth mentioning the following. China was already involved in Africa in the decades of 50s and 60s during the Chairman Mao's rule of Communist China. The nature of that relationship back then was purely ideological. That is to say, China assisted many African countries in their fights for independence against the former colonial powers and viewed its relations with them as a gesture of solidarity with peoples that had common experiences with the European Imperialism. From the early '60s when the majority of the African states gained their independence, until the year when the People Republic of China (PRC) was admitted into the United Nations (1971), its engagement with Africa was intensely ideological and political. This ideological engagement with Africa did not abate until sometime in the '80s when China seemed to

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retreat and focus more on its own internal affairs and industrialization drives.

After the disaster of the Tiananmen Square in 1989 during the Deng Xiaoping's rule, and the international condemnation that befell it, China reengaged Africa and increased its political and commercial ties with it. As a result, African leaders stood firm with Beijing during the whole episode after the whole world had condemned it, and Europe and the United States had voted to impose sanctions against the regime in Beijing (2). This in a way took China-Africa relations beyond the mere ideological and political realms and made the Chinese come to terms with the strategic importance of Africa in world politics. Coincidentally, this was the time when many African countries were engaged in structural reforms aimed at liberalizing their economies and doing away with the one-party system that had dominated their political scenes since their independence years. In essence, this new development opened the doors of the African markets to the Chinese State trading companies and thus created this dynamics of trade and economic relations between China and Africa ever since.

The 2000s marked a shift in China-Africa relations where ideology and politics gave way to business and economics. However, that did not mean that China and Africa would no longer cooperate and build alliances when they saw fit in the UN or in Summits addressing global issues like the climate change, for instance. This shift in China-Africa relations coincided with a series of international events that made the Chinese engagement with Africa unnoticed by many observers of the international economic and political relations. Chief among those events were the expansion of economic globalization, China's accession to the WTO in

2001, the War in Afghanistan by the United States (2001), the horrendous event of the September 11, 2001 and the signing of the Cotonou Agreement between the EU and 79 ACP countries (3). Consequently, the event of September 11th made the US and the EU reformulate their policies towards Africa and make security the bedrock of their relations in the region. This new security-development-aid approach has been the policy framework of the EU-Africa and US-Africa relations in the last decade or so. In contrast, while this policy framework was being formulated in Brussels and Washington, China's policy towards Africa was geared towards securing access to Africa's resources and signing trade and economic agreements with any African country that was willing to partner with Beijing.

Therefore, this growing role of China in the last decade or so is what has created the alarms in Africa's traditional partners in Europe and to a certain extent the United States. To that end, this essay attempts to address the following questions and shed lights on whether Chinese engagement with Africa is truly a threat to the EU interests in energy sector in Africa. The questions thus being: what are the interests of China in Africa; what are the interests of the EU in Africa; what are the implications of China's engagement in Africa to the EU, and to what extent does the EU discourse about China's engagement in Africa threaten its own energy interests in the region?

Addressing these above-noted questions will therefore permit us to critically assess the discourse that the EU holds towards China's engagement in Africa and draw conclusions on whether or not China's engagement with Africa is a challenge rather than a threat to the EU as it is widely perceived. The assessment will be based and drawn from relevant EU policy documents that address the issue and

discern facts from conventional wisdom or simply unfounded truths.

6. What are the interests of China in Africa?

China's interests in Africa are not usually pronounced in hard policy statements. Rather, Beijing's discourse on its engagement with Africa is still framed out of China's Five Principles of Peaceful-Co-Existence that it holds as the guiding norms for its bilateral and international relations (4). The said five principles are the following:

- 1.** Mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity
- 2.** Mutual non-aggression
- 3.** Non-interference in each other's internal affairs
- 4.** Equality and mutual benefit
- 5.** And peaceful coexistence

Taking into account these principles, China crafts its foreign policies towards Africa with general themes and opposes the power politics that have marked the international relations over the last few centuries. Thus, after fifty years of their implementation in the Chinese foreign policy strategy, these five principles have been widely accepted by the majority of the developing countries. And as regards to the Chinese interests towards Africa, Professor Shinn says this:

China generally does not discuss its "hard" interests in Africa. Rather, it emphasizes several general themes such as respect for African countries' sovereignty and development policies, support for African development, cooperation with Africa in the United Nations and Multilateral forums, and

learning from each other. China also urges African countries to accept the “one China” principle by recognizing Beijing.

With that view in mind, we pose the questions of what are the interests of China in Africa or better said what drives the engagement of China with Africa and who the main actors in China-Africa relations are. Based on several studies on the topic, it appears that there are four drivers of China-Africa relations⁽⁵⁾. First, China's engagement with Africa lay in extending and consolidating its international diplomatic relations with any African country. The rationale behind this strategy is to allow Beijing to count on a very valuable international support in regional and multilateral organizations such as the United Nations where African countries represent a substantial number of votes in the General Assembly of the UN. Succeeding in counting on those African votes can not only help China's presence in the international system and politics but also allows it to exert influence unforeseen only a quarter of century ago. Second, China thrives to convince all fifty four African states to accept the “one China” policy and deny Taipei (Taiwan) any diplomatic relations whatsoever with African States. As of today, only four countries out of the fifty four African States do not have diplomatic relations with Beijing. The four countries are Burkina Faso, Swaziland, Gambia and Sao Tome and Principe. Third, the Chinese interests in Africa are driven by commercial and economic interests. China sees Africa as a perfect place where it can implement its trade and economic strategies. Africa is a source of abundant natural resources and China needs to have access to its energy resources, oil, gas, and mining riches for its internal industrial strategies and economic growth in order to keep its society stable and prosperous. Fourth, the second prong of the Chinese commercial and economic interests in Africa is that China sees Africa as a market for its manufacturing

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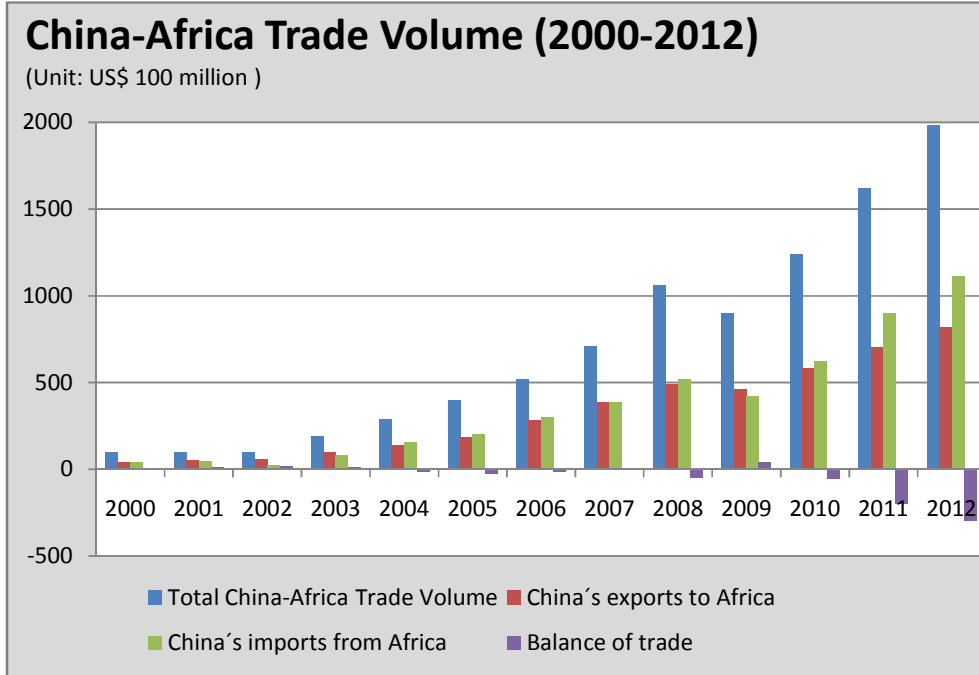
products or an outlet for its private and state companies. Africa is a vast and growing market of close to 1 billion consumers and securing that market for Chinese companies can provide them with needed experiences and catapult them into the global market place. This strategy is dubbed by the Chinese as a “going global strategy”.

In addition to the four drivers mentioned-above, it is worth mentioning that China also engages Africa on the ideological front. That is to say, by promoting economic development in Africa, China seeks to also undo or undermine the Western hegemonic grips on market based economic principles espoused by many African countries. To that end, ever since the demise of the former Soviet Union and the fall of the Berlin Wall which precipitated the end to the Cold War, the United States has become the sole superpower; and thus, the West by extension, has been exercising a global dominance in the world and economic politics. Consequently, China and other emerging nations such as India, Brazil and Russia, to name just the most prominent ones, have incessantly called for reforms of the International economic and financial architecture. This is simply because the emerging nations no longer want to have a lesser say in the administration of global economy and the management of the international politics. They consider that their participation and weight in world affairs have remarkably increased over the recent years and therefore the post-war arrangements no longer reflect the rapport de force of the current world. Hence, for China to engage Africa and develop strategic relations with it, in particular, with the energy rich and producing African countries, is another way of seeking prestige and undermining the Western-based economic and political affairs in those countries. Hence, its strategy with those countries is aimed at creating economic

and commercial opportunities for its corporations and citizens at large.

Furthermore, the main actors in China-Africa relations are mainly the Chinese government and the Chinese corporations. The Chinese Communist Party wields the highest power in the decision making policy of its many state companies, and therefore, sets their policy direction and strategies. Whereas in the West, companies' policies and strategies are a reflection of market mechanism and signals and hence governments have lesser influence in how they plan, operationalize and execute their strategic decisions. In addition, private interests such as small and medium enterprises and individual entrepreneurs are also other actors from China that engage Africa for their personal gains and ambitions. Some of those individuals go to Africa and set up small shops and strike riches without any knowledge of the authorities in Beijing. Their presence in those African countries comes only to the attention of Beijing when they run into some troubles with the local authorities and somehow the news gets its way to the international media organizations. In general, the interests of the multiple Chinese actors are overlapping though it is very difficult to discern where they differ because of the nature of the state centrism that Beijing exercises in Chinese corporate strategic planning.

Graphic 1- China-Africa Trade Volume (2000-2012)



Source: State Council "China Africa Ec. and Trade Coop. 2013"

7. Chinese Engagement with Africa and its Implications for Policy and Interests of the EU-28

China's growing presence in Africa since the mid-1990s has important implications for the EU and its member states in general. China provides African countries with political and economic alternatives against what the EEC/EU has been offering them since the early 1960s. Countries such as Zimbabwe and Sudan, which have poor and tense relations with the EU and the West in general, have become the closest allies of China in the region. China's Africa policy differs from the EU-Africa policies in many respects. That is, China does not engage in conditionality, except for the 'one

China's policy where it aims to deny Taipei political and diplomatic relations with African countries; and tie its aid and loans to the Chinese companies, materials and workers in many instances. Consequently, it ignores the sanctions that the EU imposes on Zimbabwe and Sudan and makes it very difficult for the EU to have a coherent and uniform policy towards Africa. It engages in supplying them with small arms and military equipment and in return they provide it with diplomatic support whenever it needs it in the international forums.

African countries such as Zimbabwe, Sudan, Angola and many others that are constantly accused by the EU, US and a multitude of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) of human rights violations and poor governance records, seek China's support in the UN Security Council where it wields a veto power and exercises it whenever a condemning resolution goes against them. In return, it also seeks the support of the African countries in the UN Human Rights Council to silent accusation of abuses in Tibet, Uighurs autonomous region or against internal political or religious dissenting organizations such as the Falun Gong.

This heightened engagement in Africa by China causes great concerns in many European capitals. Brussels for instance, is clearly worried about how China may displace it as the premier donor of Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) and concurrently overtake it as the largest Africa's trading partner. It critiques its lack of transparency and unreliable data on aid and loans to Africa, and worries that China will thwart its democratic governance and human rights policy efforts in the region. It also views China's unfair trade competition and practices as delegitimizing what it considers good liberal economic policy for Africa; and that which Africans see as 'conditionality-based' policies concocted in IMF and World Bank and enmeshed into EU

policies towards the region. The EU also criticizes China's record in Africa for worker safety and labor practices and for doing nothing to stop the harmful and counterfeit products that Chinese companies export into Africa. It also accuses China of engaging in corruption in its business dealings with shady regimes in Africa and not demanding that its private companies protect Africa's local environment and communities as supposedly do their Western counterparts.

Furthermore, China's investment and commercial engagement in Africa bear implications for the EU and its member states' companies as well. Though the European companies have been in Africa for decades if not centuries before the Chinese got involved in business ventures on the Continent, in recent years however, they have made a considerable inroad in winning large commercial contracts and acquiring ownership in energy and mining sectors.

8. Contrasted Views of China-Africa Oil Ties and EU's Energy Security Strategy

Since the mid-nineties, China has deepened and expanded its commercial and investment activities in Africa. As it continues to grow economically, its demand for oil has grown considerably and that has pushed it to secure its oil security by looking for sources of supply worldwide. This drive for oil security and its interests in Africa's oil has become a subject of international debates. It is thus viewed by many analysts, policymakers, scholars, NGOs and interested general populace as directly threatening the interests of Europe and the West in general. The basis of this debate for many opponents of China-Africa oil ties lies in

projecting them as negative and threatening the Western and EU's energy security with Africa. This negative perception of the Chinese interests in Africa's energy sector has led the EU to formulate its stance in some policy documents as regards to the Chinese model of engagement in Africa. The arguments and criticism levied against the Chinese involvement in Africa's oil sector are usually conceived in the following manner:

First, China's acquisition of Africa's oil wells and production threatens European and Western oil interests in Africa, and as a consequence, that will erode EU's influence in Africa and weaken its historic hegemony in the region. In addition, the proponents of that view argue that China's true interests in Africa's oil are part of its long-term strategy to monopolize future oil prices in global markets. On this point and based on China's oil diplomacy around the globe, Professor Taylor (2006) for instance, inferred that the first priority of Chinese strategists is "the long-term goal of being in charge of oil resources at their source to enable them to manipulate future prices".

Second, the opponents of the heightened Chinese engagement in Africa and China-oil ties in the region resort to negative discourse that can be further from the truth or better said are unsubstantiated with facts. They argue that China's oil quest in Africa is nothing but '**neo-colonialism, exploitation, and a new scramble' for Africa's resources and raw materials**. These charges are clearly exaggerated. However, they seem to resonate with popular opinions and are becoming conventional wisdom whenever China-Africa relations are discussed in public policy arena. Hence, this negative discourse is at the source of the securitization of the Chinese engagement in Africa and is also the basis of texts and official documents that project China's Africa relations

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as a threat rather than a challenge to the interests of the EU and the West in general. Surprisingly enough, these negative charges are publicly uttered by high officials such as former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and former British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw, and many China watchers in the West. For instance, in 2011, Mrs Clinton said “We don’t want to see a new colonialism in Africa” (DoS, 2011); and in 2006, Mr Straw opined that “Most of what China has been doing in Africa today is what we did in Africa 150 years ago” (Stevenson, 2006).

Third, the criticism that the opponents of China-oil ties formulate is that China undermines good governance, environmental standard practices and human rights culture in Africa. And consequently, it props up corrupt and human rights violating regimes such as Zimbabwe, Sudan and Angola in the name of its so-called non-interference principle in other States’ internal affairs (Taylor, 2006). This, according to the adherents of this view also undermines the international regime stitched on the Western-liberal democratic values. This discourse usually is made by NGOs, civil society organizations, analysts and academics on both sides of Atlantic and in some quarters in Africa as well.

Fourth, the opponents of China’s oil ties in Africa also claim that the governmental support that the Chinese oil companies receive does not bode well for Western companies in Africa. Their point here is that China’s oil diplomacy, foreign aid practices and development finance assistance benefit Chinese companies and make it difficult for their Western counterparts to compete on a level playing field in the region. As an example, they point to China’s aid strategy or integrated aid packages that it offers Africa’s oil producing countries as a mechanism for unfair business practices and

lucrative oil deals strategy. This is so because China's international economic relations with the region go counter the OECD corporate governance principles; and for some analysts, that amounts to a grand Africa strategy by China (Taylor, 2006).

By looking at relevant EU policy documents such as the European Security Strategy (2003), Challenges for EU-China Cooperation in Africa authored by Javier Solana (February 2007), the EU, Africa and China: Towards trilateral dialogue and cooperation (COM (2008) 654 final), China's policy and its effects on Africa (European Parliament resolution of 23 April 2008 on China's policy and its effects on Africa (2007/2255(INI)) and European Parliament Report on EU-China relations (2012/2137 (INI)), the official policy discourse on China differs from the charged language referred to above and in general is about seeking for common ground and cooperation in the areas of interests in Africa. Though the EU recognizes the growing importance of China-Africa relations, it simply disapproves of the Chinese model of engagement in the region and sees it as challenge rather than a threat to its energy interests on the Continent. This official view sharply contrasts against what some academics and the media purport China to be for the EU's general interests in Africa. From that end, there are voices within the EU and elsewhere in the West and Africa itself that see China's engagement in the region as a positive development. These voices mainly represent four lines of arguments to rebut the negative view of China's oil ties in Africa.

The first argument of the proponents of positive view of China's quest for Africa's oil is that China's national oil companies (NOCs) help increase the world oil supply and stabilize the overall price of the oil to the consumers worldwide. Erica Downs argues this view by saying that "the

argument that China's NOCs are removing oil from the world market (and thus shrinking supplies and putting upward pressure on prices) by importing their equity oil from Africa and elsewhere is unfounded." She also goes on to say that "China's NOCs are actually expanding rather than contracting the amount of oil available to other consumers through their overseas operations, especially through the development of oil fields that other oil companies are unable or unwilling to invest in."

Second, the proponents of the positive view of China's oil ties in Africa see its engagement in the region as a "win-win" situation for both Africa and China's oil companies. Deborah Brautigam (2009) argues that China's "package" approach and the line of credit that it extends to the African oil-producing countries provides a new source of finance that is badly needed for Africa's infrastructure needs; and therefore, that is positive for African development (6).

Third, the adherents of the positive side of China's oil ties in Africa also discredit the charges that China's oil ties in Africa undermine the Western or EU's democratic efforts and human rights policy initiatives for Africa. And as stated by Erica Downs, China's oil companies are latecomers and relatively small players in Africa; and therefore, their impacts on Western efforts to strengthen democracy, human rights and governance of African countries do not correspond to the facts and figures of their operations (Downs, 2007). Following the same line of arguments, China's oil companies still lack the kind of experiences that International Oil Companies (IOCs) such as Shell enjoy in places like Nigeria. Downs stated that "for example Shell, which entered Nigeria in 1938 and enjoyed a monopoly there until the country's independence in 1960, is still the country's largest producer.

That is to say, opponents of the China-oil ties in Africa should focus their criticism more on the IOCs rather than China's oil companies. Doing so in their view is unjust and not fair (7).

Fourth, the supporters of China's oil companies in Africa refute the assertion that Chinese oil companies receive their government financial assistance because they operate as an extension of their government. They argue that the so-called "going global strategy" responds to nothing but market logic or profit incentives just as is expected of other international oil companies. They also reject the idea that China has "a grand strategy" for its oil companies as claimed by some opponents of the China-oil ties in Africa (8).

9. Facts vs. Conventional Wisdom

In 2009, China overtook the United States and became Africa's largest trading partner.

In September 2013, China reached another milestone by becoming the world's largest net oil importer according to the US Energy Information Administration. This increased import of oil is a direct response to the sustained economic growth that China has experienced over the last two decades. To fuel their economic growth and sustain their industrialization projects, Chinese government look to diversify their sources of oil supply in order to avoid any disruptions that can harm their economic growth strategy. This rationale is what drives Beijing to seek close ties with oil producing countries in Central Asia, Latin America, the Middle-East and Africa as well. Though it is true that in recent years, China's oil ties in Africa has caused great concerns among many energy analysts and academics in the West and Europe in particular, the facts and figures

however, tell a different story. According to the US Energy Information Administration, “The Middle East remains the largest source of China’s crude oil imports, although African countries, particularly Angola, began contributing more to China’s imports in recent years.” In 2011, 51% of China’s oil imports came from the Middle-East, 24% from Africa, 3% from Asia-Pacific region and 22% from other countries (US EIA Revised China Report, 2013). Accordingly, the top 10 sources of China’s imported oil are Saudi Arabia, Angola, Iran, Russia, Oman, Iraq, Sudan, Venezuela, Kazakhstan and Kuwait.

Table1- China’s top oil suppliers in Africa

Country	Year	Trade Quantity (Kg)	Percent	Year	Trade Quantity (Kg)	Percent
Angola	2004	16,207,542,272	55.5%	2012	40,151,983,682	64%
Algeria	2004	676,163,520	0.2%	2012	2,571,944,510	4%
Chad	2004	830,771,968	0.3%	2012	279,871,600	4%
Egypt	2004	1,024,260	0%	2012	771,059,944	1.2%
Gabon	2004	548,264,192	2%	2012	310,376,696	0.5%
Equat. Guinea	2004	3,484,772,608	13%	2012	2,001,291,130	3%
Libya	2004	1,338,451,456	6%	2012	7,306,157,775	11.8%
Nigeria	2004	1,488,952,832	7%	2012	936,529,069	1.5%
Congo, Rep.	2004	4,773,279,232	16%	2012	5,365,464,317	8%
Sudan	2004	N/A	N/A	2012	1,831,416,753	2%
Total	2004	29,349,222,340	100%	2012	61,526,095,476	100%

Source: UN Comtrade, <http://comtrade.un.org>

Likewise, the EU sources of oil imports are as diverse as Chinese government’s. Yet, they are common in their geographical concentration. The EU mainly consumes oil

and natural gas that originate from the former Soviet Union Republics, Russia, Norway, Africa and the Middle East. And according to the European Commission EU energy in figure Statistical Pocketbook 2012, in 2010, 34 percent of EU's oil imports originated from Russia, 13 percent from Norway, 16 percent from Africa and 16 percent from the Middle East as well. In 2011, the top 10 sources of the EU's imported oil are Russia, Norway, Saudi Arabia, Nigeria, Iran, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Iraq, Libya, and Algeria.

Table 2- Top External Energy Suppliers to the EU - 2011

Country	Crude Oil ('000 of tonnes)	Country	Gas (TerajoulesUnit)	Country	Hard coal ('000 of tonnes)
Russia	175,634	Russia	4,101,546	Russia	52,691
Norway	63,687	Norway	3,715,398	Colombia	47,904
Saudi Arabia	41,108	Algeria	1,767,006	United States	36,307
Nigeria	31,075	Qatar	1,485,596	Australia	17,851
Iran	29,495	Nigeria	589,290	South Africa	15,902
Kazakhstan	29,215	Egypt	158,134	Indonesia	10,281
Azerbaijan	24,615	Trinidad and Tobago	140,996	Canada	4,461
Iraq	18,197	Libya	92,597	Ukraine	4,590
Libya	14,223	Yemen	29,662	Norway	1,158
Algeria	13,068	Turkey	27,405	Venezuela	1,094

Source: Eurostat

10. Concluding Remarks and Perspectives

China's meteoric rise in world affairs and its economic success over the last two decades is the most talked and cited success story in recent years. Yet, this success story has also become an intense subject of debate because of China's increased trade and economic activities in Africa. In particular, China's quest for Africa's oil has been argued by some energy experts and international observers as eroding the Western powers in the region and adversely affecting the EU's energy security strategy on the continent. Consequently, some academics and China watchers claim that China is in Africa to exploit its natural resources and that its engagement in the region is concealed in neo-colonialist logic. In addition, they claim that China's largesse in Africa is nothing but a strategy to exploit the region and therefore it should be taxed as a rogue donor and exploiter, to say the least. However, this negative discourse about China's involvement on the continent is not substantiated with hard facts when one pits what is loosely said about China-Africa relations against what the official EU documents actually say on that matter. This contradiction stems from a myth or conventional wisdom that has been created to distort the real nature of China-Africa relations and its true intent in the region. Hence, this article was set to discern those myths from what the official discourse of the EU says about China's engagement on the African continent. The article has attempted to explain why this securitization language of China-Africa relations has come about and where it has originated from. Hence, words such as neo-colonialism, new imperialism, a rogue donor, exploiter, new scramble for Africa's natural resources and 'China is in for itself' could all be avoided if the majority of people that are

interested in China-Africa relations were to analyse its engagement with the region and put it in the current globalized economic context.

It is true that over the recent years, China has had a tremendous impact on the energy markets because of its growing needs for oil. Its thirst for energy and its entry into the global oil trade have been seen by many analysts in the Western capitals as being a threat against the US and the EU's interests in accessing and securing existing and new energy supplies. Likewise, the Chinese analysts and strategists themselves interpret this Western alarmist attitude about their engagement with Africa as a plot to derail their economic and industrial rise. China as mentioned-above is now dependent on foreign oil to meet its consumer and industrial needs and thus, to secure energy supplies for it is tantamount to its national security. Therefore, understanding this dynamics and engaging China to participate in securing the critical infrastructures of the global energy supplies will be more productive than maintaining the negative narrative about its engagement with Africa. That is, engaging it to cooperate and help in bringing stability and economic development in many of those African producing and exporting oil countries will be the way to go considering that it has become a stakeholder just like the West in the global energy markets.

In sum, a different view of China's engagement in Africa could emerge if positive concepts such as cooperation, interdependence, solidarity, globalization with human face and war on poverty were to be used by analysts and China watchers alike. And therefore, the question that ought to be asked is that, will China's engagement with Africa be considered as a threat to the EU or the West in general rather than pure market challenges if oil and other energy

resources and raw materials were not coveted by the traditional and emerging international actors?

11. Endnotes

(1) BRICS is the acronym for an association of five major emerging national economies: Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. The BRICS members are all developing or newly industrialized countries, but they are distinguished by their large, fast-growing economies and significant influence on regional and global affairs.

(2) See Rennack D. E. "China: Economic Sanctions", Report to Congress. Congressional Research Service, February 2006

(3) The Cotonou Agreement is a Treaty signed in June 2000 between the European Union and the African, Caribbean and Pacific group of States (ACPs). The Treaty was signed by the then fifteen EU member states and 79 ACP countries. It entered into force in 2003 and was twice revised in 2005 and 2010.

(4) See China's Initiation of the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-Existence, 2000/11/17, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China available at <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/ziliao/3602/3604/t18053.htm>

(5) See China's Growing Role in Africa: Implications for U.S. Policy, hearing held by Senate Committee on Foreign Relations Subcommittee on African Affairs Dirksen Senate Office Building 1 November 2011 Remarks by David H. Shinn, Adjunct Professor, Elliott School of International Affairs George Washington University

(6) See Brautigam D. in *The Dragon's Gift: The Real Story of China in Africa*

(7) See DOWNS E. S. in *The Fact and Fiction of Sino-African Energy Relations*

(8) See TAYLOR I. in *China's oil diplomacy in Africa*, *International Affairs*, 82 (5), 937-959

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