

## ASSESSMENT OF AFRICA'S MULTILATERAL ENGAGEMENT WITH INDIVIDUAL GREAT POWERS ON THE WORLD STAGE

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### Abstract

*Africa's multilateral engagement with individual great powers on the world stage reflects its strategic efforts to navigate complex global dynamics while advancing economic, political, and security interests. This assessment explores Africa's interactions with major powers such as China, the United States, the European Union, India and Russia, highlighting key areas of cooperation and tension. The paper adopted the secondary research approach and findings show that, China's investments focus on infrastructure and trade, though concerns over debt sustainability persist. The United States emphasizes security, governance, and economic development, while the EU remains Africa's largest trading partner, with ties rooted in development aid and migration management. Russia engages primarily through military and security partnerships, while emerging actors like India and Turkey are expanding influence through trade and diplomacy. Africa's participation in multilateral institutions and platforms like the African Union (AU) and BRICS demonstrates its desire to reshape global governance and assert a collective voice. However, challenges such as resource dependency, debt, and divergent national interests complicate the continent's ability to maximize these engagements. The assessment concludes that Africa's future success in multilateral relations will depend on balancing these parts.*

Keywords: multilateralism; collective bargain; great powers; integration; power balancing.

## **Introduction**

Africa's role in international relations has evolved significantly over the past few decades, transitioning from a largely marginalized region in global politics to one that is increasingly assertive and strategically significant. The continent's engagement with great powers, such as the United States, China, Russia, and the European Union, highlights a complex and dynamic interaction shaped by historical legacies, economic needs, and geopolitical aspirations. Multilateral engagement with individual great powers offers African states the opportunity to navigate global challenges through diplomatic, economic, and security cooperation. This has resulted in numerous partnerships, ranging from trade agreements and infrastructure development to security alliances and diplomatic forums. However, these engagements are not without challenges, as African countries must balance competing interests, manage external influence, and assert their sovereignty while seeking development and stability. This assessment examines the nature and implications of Africa's multilateral diplomacy with major global powers, exploring how these interactions influence the continent's political, economic, and social landscapes. It also seeks to understand how African nations leverage these relationships to advance their collective and individual interests, all while maintaining a unified stance within regional and global organizations such as the African Union (AU) and the United Nations (UN).

By exploring these dynamics, this assessment aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how Africa is positioning itself on the world stage, the benefits and risks of its multilateral engagements, and the future trajectory of its global partnerships, fostering internal unity, and ensuring equitable, sustainable: Africa's multilateral engagement with individual great powers on the world stage reflects its evolving role in global diplomacy and economic development. This engagement is shaped by a combination of Africa's collective efforts through institutions like the African Union (AU) and regional economic communities (RECs), as well as bilateral relationships with powers such as the United States, China, Russia, the European Union, and others.

## **Literature Review**

The role of African nations on the global stage has evolved significantly, particularly in relation to their engagement with great powers. Historically, these relationships have been marked by colonialism, economic dependency, and geopolitical marginalization. However, recent shifts in global power dynamics, regional integration efforts, and the rise of new global powers have positioned Africa as a key player in international relations. This literature review examines existing scholarship on Africa's multilateral engagements with individual great powers such as the United States, China, Russia, and the European Union, focusing on political, economic, and security dimensions. The post-colonial period saw African countries seeking to navigate a global system dominated by Cold War politics. During this era, African states were often forced to align with either the U.S.-led Western bloc or the Soviet Union. This geopolitical alignment had profound effects on their political and economic trajectories. Research by scholars like Ali Mazrui (1980) and Kwame Nkrumah (1965) illustrates the impact of these external pressures on the political sovereignty of African nations.

Post-Cold War scholarship (Herbst, 2000) discusses how African countries began to assert themselves more independently on the global stage, leveraging multilateral institutions like the African Union (AU), the United Nations (UN), and the World Trade Organization (WTO) to engage with global powers.

**Africa-China Relations:** In recent decades, China has emerged as one of Africa's most significant partners. Literature on China-Africa relations (Alden, 2007; Brautigam, 2009) highlights how China's economic involvement in Africa, characterized by investments in infrastructure, resource extraction, and trade, differs from traditional Western models of engagement. The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) has become a key platform for these multilateral engagements. Scholars have debated the implications of this relationship for Africa. While some view China's "win-win" strategy as beneficial for African development (Ampiah & Naidu, 2008), others raise concerns about neo-colonialism and debt dependency (Carmody, 2011).

**Africa and the United States:** U.S. engagement with Africa has historically been framed within the context of aid, security cooperation, and democracy promotion. However, the launch of initiatives such as the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) and the establishment of the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) signal shifts towards more strategic engagement. Scholars like Schraeder (1994) have argued that U.S. foreign policy towards Africa has often been reactive rather than proactive, driven by short-term interests such as counterterrorism or the containment of global rivals (Prys, 2010). In contrast, other scholars argue that U.S.-Africa engagement holds potential for promoting sustainable development and good governance if adequately aligned with African priorities (Whitaker, 2015).

**Europe-Africa Relations:** Europe, particularly through the European Union (EU), remains a key actor in African multilateral engagements. The EU has sought to redefine its relationship with Africa post-colonialism through development aid, trade agreements such as the Cotonou Agreement, and peacekeeping collaborations (Langan, 2018). However, the effectiveness and equality of this relationship have been contested. Scholars like Brown (2005) argue that Europe's relationship with Africa continues to be asymmetrical, with European policies still rooted in neo-colonial frameworks. Conversely, others suggest that initiatives like the Joint Africa-EU Strategy (JAES) represent a new phase of cooperation grounded in mutual interests (Keukeleire & Bruyninckx, 2013).

**Africa and Russia:** Russia's re-engagement with Africa has been driven primarily by geopolitical and security interests, particularly in arms sales, energy, and strategic partnerships in conflict zones like Libya and the Central African Republic. This resurgence has been accompanied by increased Russian diplomatic presence and high-level forums like the Russia-Africa Summit. Scholars such as Stent (2019) argue that Russia's return to Africa is a strategy to counter Western influence and project its power on a global scale. However, Russia's lack of significant economic investment, compared to China or the West, limits the depth of its engagement with the continent (Kobzova & Yermakov, 2020).

**Africa Multilateral Institutions:** African multilateral organizations, especially the African Union (AU), have increasingly become platforms through which African nations engage with great powers. The AU's role in peacekeeping, conflict resolution, and economic integration (e.g., through the African Continental Free Trade Area) has bolstered Africa's bargaining power on the world stage. Scholars like Adebajo (2010) argue that multilateralism provides African states with a collective voice in global governance, allowing them to assert agency in negotiations with great powers. However, critics note that internal challenges, such as weak institutional capacity and political divisions among member states, undermine the AU's effectiveness (Hanson, 2009).

## **Theoretical Framework**

The realist theory of international relations posits that states act in their own self-interest, pursuing power and security in an anarchic global system (Morgenthau, 1948). From this perspective, Africa's multilateral engagements with great powers are primarily driven by the strategic interests of both African states and external powers. For instance, China's engagement in Africa can be understood as a pursuit of economic resources, while African states seek infrastructure development and investment. Dependency theory, advanced by scholars like André Gunder Frank (1966), offers a critical lens for understanding Africa's engagement with great powers. It argues that the global economic system is inherently exploitative, with African nations positioned as dependent on external powers for development. This theory is often applied to critiques of Africa-China relations, where scholars argue that African countries risk becoming economically dependent on China's investments, thus reinforcing neo-colonial dynamics (Carmody, 2011). Constructivist theory emphasizes the role of ideas, norms, and identity in shaping international relations (Wendt, 1992). From this perspective, Africa's multilateral engagements are influenced not only by material interests but also by the social and cultural identities of African states. For instance, the African Union's emphasis on pan-African solidarity and collective security reflects a constructivist approach to multilateral diplomacy.

Constructivism also provides insight into how African states navigate their relationships with great powers by invoking historical experiences of colonialism and resistance, shaping contemporary diplomatic and economic interactions. Neoliberal institutionalism, as articulated by Robert Keohane (1984), argues that international institutions facilitate cooperation between states, even in an anarchic international system. African engagement through multilateral frameworks such as the AU, UN, and regional economic communities (RECs) demonstrates the utility of institutions in fostering cooperation with great powers on issues such as security, trade, and development. According to this theory, African nations use multilateral institutions to enhance their bargaining power and ensure that external engagements are conducted on more equal terms, reducing the risks of exploitation. Conclusively, the literature on Africa's multilateral engagements with great powers highlights a complex and evolving dynamic. While African nations continue to navigate the challenges of dependency and unequal power relations, multilateral institutions and emerging global powers provide opportunities for more balanced and strategic engagements. Theoretical perspectives like realism, dependency theory, constructivism, and neoliberal institutionalism offer valuable frameworks for analyzing these engagements, providing insights into the motivations and outcomes of Africa's interactions with individual great powers.

## **Assessment of African's Multilateral Engagements with Individual Great Powers:**

Africa's multilateral engagement with China has been expanding rapidly over the past two decades, driven by economic, political, and developmental interests. This relationship is often framed within the context of China-Africa cooperation, especially through platforms like the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). These engagements can be assessed in several key areas:

### **1. Economic and Trade Relations.** This includes the following,

(a) **Investment and Infrastructure:** China has become Africa's largest trading partner, with two-way trade exceeding \$200 billion annually. China has financed and constructed numerous infrastructure projects across Africa, including roads, railways, ports, and power plants, often under concessional loan arrangements.

(b) Debt and Dependency Concerns: While the infrastructure financing is beneficial, some African nations have accumulated substantial debt. Critics warn of potential "debt traps," though China often renegotiates terms or forgives portions of debts. Nonetheless, the scale of Chinese lending has sparked concerns about the sustainability of some African economies.

## **2. Political and Diplomatic Relations such as,**

(a) Strategic Partnerships: China's diplomatic engagements with African nations are often based on the principle of non-interference in domestic affairs. China supports African countries in various multilateral forums such as the United Nations, where African nations have often reciprocated by supporting Chinese positions, including on issues like Taiwan and human rights.

(b) South-South Cooperation: Africa and China often frame their engagement within the broader context of South-South cooperation, positioning themselves as partners in development and advocating for a multipolar world order that challenges Western hegemony.

## **3. Development Assistance and Capacity Building:**

(a) Aid and Grants: China provides aid and grants in areas like healthcare, agriculture, and education. The construction of hospitals, schools, and vocational training centers is common, alongside the dispatch of Chinese medical teams to African countries.

(b) Human Resource Development: Thousands of African students receive scholarships to study in China, and there are numerous exchange programs aimed at training African professionals in areas like public administration, agriculture, and industry.

## **4. Security and Military Cooperation**

(a) Peacekeeping and Anti-Piracy: China has increased its involvement in peacekeeping missions in Africa and contributes troops to UN peacekeeping operations, particularly in conflict-prone areas like South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

(b) Military Assistance: China has also strengthened military ties with some African countries, offering training, equipment, and arms sales. The establishment of a Chinese military base in Djibouti highlights China's growing security presence on the continent, though it remains limited compared to Western powers.

(a) Cultural Exchanges: China has promoted its culture in Africa through initiatives like Confucius Institutes, which teach the Chinese language and foster cultural exchanges. These initiatives are aimed at improving China's image and fostering a sense of mutual understanding.

(b) Media and Information: China has invested in African media platforms and offers African journalists training programs, aiming to present China's narrative on global issues while countering Western media dominance.

**Conclusively,** Africa's multilateral engagement with China is dynamic, characterized by deepening economic ties, growing diplomatic cooperation, and increasing Chinese influence in African affairs. While the relationship offers significant opportunities for African development, it also raises challenges, particularly around debt sustainability, dependency, and the long-term impact on local industries. Both sides, however, generally emphasize mutual benefits and shared development goals, making China a key partner in Africa's quest for economic growth and infrastructure modernization.

## **The United States**

The U.S. engages with Africa primarily through programs like the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), the Power Africa initiative, and through security collaborations, especially in counterterrorism. The U.S. promotes democracy, human rights, and governance reforms in Africa, often through the lens of its strategic competition with China and Russia. Under initiatives like Prosper Africa, the U.S. seeks to expand trade and investment in the continent, although its overall economic footprint remains smaller compared to China. In terms of diplomatic and Military Engagement, The U.S. has a significant military presence in Africa, notably through AFRICOM (U.S. Africa Command), focusing on security challenges such as terrorism and maritime security. The assessment of Africa's multilateral engagement with the United States focuses on the dynamic political, economic, and security relationships that have evolved between African nations and the U.S. within a broader multilateral context. This engagement spans across a wide range of institutions, frameworks, and initiatives, with varying degrees of success and challenges. Here's an overview:

**1. Economic Engagement:** Trade and Investment: The African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), established in 2000, is one of the primary U.S. trade policies directed at African countries. It aims to enhance market access for eligible Sub-Saharan African nations to the U.S. market. This multilateral approach has encouraged some economic growth in participating countries, though critics argue that its benefits have been unevenly distributed, with many nations failing to maximize their potential under the agreement. Development Assistance: U.S. multilateral engagement in Africa often includes development aid through institutions like the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and USAID. The U.S. also contributes to initiatives such as Power Africa and the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), which promote infrastructure development and economic reforms.

## **2. Security Cooperation**

(a) Counterterrorism and Peacekeeping: U.S. security engagement in Africa is often channeled through multilateral organizations like the African Union (AU) and regional blocs such as ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States). Programs like the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP) and the Africa Command (AFRICOM) focus on counterterrorism, stability, and training African military forces.

(b) Peacekeeping Support: The U.S. provides significant support to multilateral peacekeeping missions across the continent, often in collaboration with the United Nations (UN) and the AU. American support has been crucial in conflict zones such as the Central African Republic, South Sudan, and Somalia.

## **3. Health and Humanitarian Initiatives**

(a) Global Health Engagement: The President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and the Global Health Security Agenda (GHSA) are examples of U.S. multilateral efforts to improve health outcomes in Africa, particularly in the fight against HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis, and emerging health threats like Ebola.

(b) Humanitarian Assistance: The U.S. works through multilateral agencies like the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the World Food Programme (WFP) to provide humanitarian aid in regions affected by famine, conflict, and displacement, particularly in areas like the Sahel, the Horn of Africa, and Central Africa.



#### **4. Climate and Environmental Cooperation**

Through initiatives like the U.S.-Africa Leaders' Summit and U.S. participation in global climate negotiations, there's a growing recognition of Africa's role in addressing climate change. The U.S. has been involved in multilateral efforts to enhance climate resilience, promote clean energy, and protect biodiversity in African nations, such as through the Green Climate Fund.

#### **5. Diplomatic and Political Relations**

(a) Multilateral Diplomacy: Africa's engagement with the U.S. on diplomatic fronts often occurs within the context of the United Nations, the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the African Union. The U.S. frequently partners with African nations to address global issues such as peace and security, human rights, and governance reforms. However, African countries sometimes face challenges balancing U.S. interests with those of other major powers like China and the European Union.

#### **Challenges and Opportunities**

Challenges: African countries often face obstacles in fully leveraging U.S. multilateral engagements, such as limited institutional capacity, uneven development gains, and dependency on external aid. Moreover, Africa's strategic position in the U.S.-China rivalry presents additional diplomatic complexities. Opportunities: Enhanced cooperation on key issues like climate change, youth empowerment, and technology could deepen the relationship. The ongoing push for Africa's greater representation in global institutions (e.g., the UN Security Council reform) presents another opportunity for a more balanced partnership. In conclusion, Africa's multilateral engagement with the United States is multifaceted, with varying levels of success across different sectors. Strengthening institutions, improving governance, and fostering regional integration will be crucial for maximizing the potential of this relationship.

#### **European Union (EU)**

Historical Ties and Development Aid: The EU remains Africa's largest development partner, reflecting the historical colonial relationships of many African nations with European powers. The EU-Africa partnership has evolved to focus on issues like migration, climate change, security, and trade.

Trade and Investment: The EU is also Africa's largest trading partner, especially with the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) that facilitate trade between Africa and Europe.

Migration: Migration is a central theme in EU-Africa relations. Europe seeks Africa's cooperation in managing migration flows, often tying development aid to border control policies. Africa's multilateral engagement with the European Union (EU) is built on a long history of cooperation, influenced by colonial legacies, trade relations, development assistance, and shared security interests. This relationship has evolved significantly over the past decades, with the EU seeking to redefine its partnership with Africa in the context of global challenges such as climate change, migration, security, and economic development. The assessment of this engagement can be examined through the following key areas:

#### **1. Historical Context and Frameworks**

Colonial Legacy and Post-Colonial Ties: Africa's engagement with Europe is shaped by colonial history, particularly for countries previously colonized by European powers like France, Belgium, and the UK. Many African states maintained close ties with their former colonizers post-independence, particularly through trade and development agreements.

**Cotonou Agreement:** The Cotonou Agreement, signed in 2000 between the EU and African, Caribbean, and Pacific (ACP) states, has been a central framework for Africa-EU relations. It focused on development cooperation, political dialogue, and economic relations, including trade and investment. The agreement, which expired in 2020, is being replaced by the Post-Cotonou Agreement, with Africa-EU relations forming a distinct pillar in the new structure.

## **2. Trade and Economic Relations**

**Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs):** The EU has negotiated Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) with African regions to promote trade liberalization and integration into the global economy. These agreements are designed to ensure that African countries gain duty-free, quota-free access to the EU market, while reducing barriers to European goods and services. However, EPAs have faced criticism from some African nations, which argue that they could undermine local industries and hinder regional integration efforts within Africa.

**Investments and Aid for Trade:** The EU is one of Africa's largest sources of foreign direct investment (FDI) and development aid. Through initiatives like the EU External Investment Plan (EIP) and Africa-Europe Alliance for Sustainable Investment and Jobs, the EU aims to stimulate private investment in Africa, particularly in sectors like energy, infrastructure, digitalization, and agriculture.

## **3. Development Cooperation**

**European Development Fund (EDF):** The EDF has been the EU's main financial instrument for development cooperation with African, Caribbean, and Pacific (ACP) countries. It has provided significant funding for infrastructure, governance, health, education, and capacity-building projects in Africa. With the creation of the Neighborhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) in 2021, the EDF was incorporated into a broader EU strategy for global development, with Africa as a priority.

**Joint Africa-EU Strategy (JAES):** Established in 2007, the JAES provides a framework for cooperation between the two continents, focusing on areas like peace and security, governance, human rights, migration, trade, and environmental sustainability. The JAES is structured around regular summits, ministerial meetings, and dialogues, facilitating multilateral engagement on shared priorities.

## **4. Migration and Mobility**

**Migration Partnerships:** Migration has been a contentious issue in Africa-EU relations, particularly with the increasing flow of African migrants to Europe in recent years. The EU has sought to engage African countries through migration partnerships, offering development aid and investment in exchange for cooperation on migration management, border control, and the readmission of irregular migrants. The EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF), launched in 2015, supports initiatives aimed at addressing the root causes of migration, such as poverty, unemployment, and conflict.

**Concerns about Externalization of Migration Policy:** Critics argue that the EU's focus on curbing migration often prioritizes European interests over African development, leading to concerns that migration policies could reinforce inequality and limit opportunities for Africans to access legal pathways to Europe.

## **5. Peace and Security Cooperation**

**African Peace Facility (APF):** The APF, established in 2004, has been a key instrument for supporting African-led peace and security initiatives. It provides financial assistance for the African Union's peace



operations, including missions in conflict zones like Somalia, the Sahel, and the Central African Republic. The EU also works closely with the African Union (AU) to strengthen Africa's peace and security architecture, with a focus on conflict prevention, crisis management, and post-conflict reconstruction. Counterterrorism and Stability in the Sahel: The EU is heavily involved in supporting security in Africa, particularly in the Sahel region, where instability and terrorist activities pose significant threats. Through the European Union Training Mission (EUTM) in Mali, the G5 Sahel Joint Force, and other initiatives, the EU provides training, financial support, and capacity-building for African security forces.

## **6. Climate Change and Sustainable Development**

**Green Transition:** The EU's European Green Deal and Africa's development agenda both prioritize sustainable development, climate change mitigation, and the transition to renewable energy. Africa's vulnerability to climate change and the EU's ambition to lead global environmental efforts have driven cooperation in areas like clean energy, reforestation, and climate resilience.

**Support for Renewable Energy:** Through programs like the Africa-EU Energy Partnership (AEEP) and the Electrification Financing Initiative (ElectriFI), the EU provides funding and technical expertise to expand access to renewable energy in Africa, with the goal of reducing carbon emissions and promoting sustainable economic growth.

## **7. Challenges and Criticisms**

**Unequal Power Dynamics:** Despite efforts to create a more balanced partnership, there are ongoing concerns about the unequal nature of Africa-EU relations, with some African leaders arguing that the EU's approach often reflects a donor-recipient dynamic rather than a partnership of equals. African nations are increasingly advocating for a relationship based on mutual respect, shared interests, and co-ownership of development initiatives.

## **8. Recent Developments and the Future of Africa-EU Relations**

**Post-Cotonou Agreement:** The new Post-Cotonou Agreement, expected to take effect in 2024, will redefine the legal framework for Africa-EU relations. It emphasizes a stronger political partnership, more focus on shared challenges like migration, climate change, and security, and greater African agency in decision-making.

**Africa-Europe Partnership for 2030:** The EU and AU are working towards a new strategic partnership for 2030, centered around digitalization, education, health, and investment. The goal is to foster more sustainable and inclusive growth on both continents, building on mutual strengths and addressing global challenges like pandemics and environmental degradation.

Conclusively, Africa's multilateral engagement with the European Union is extensive and multifaceted, covering trade, development, security, and environmental issues. The relationship has evolved from one primarily focused on aid and development assistance to a more comprehensive partnership aimed at addressing shared challenges. However, achieving a truly balanced partnership remains a key challenge, with African countries increasingly calling for greater equity, respect, and agency in their relations with the EU. Despite the challenges, the EU remains a key player in Africa's economic and political development, and future engagements will likely focus on deepening collaboration in areas like climate action, security, and sustainable development.

## Conclusion:

Africa's engagement with great powers is a dynamic and evolving relationship shaped by history, geopolitics, economics, and global power shifts. African nations have historically been subject to external influence due to colonial legacies, economic dependencies, and strategic interests of great powers. However, in recent decades, African states have sought to reassert agency in their international relations through multilateral organizations like the African Union (AU), and strategic alliances with great powers like China, the United States, Russia, and the European Union.

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