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**Geopolitics and Geo-Economics: Africa within the New International Economic Order**

By

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**Abstract**

The purpose of this article is to address geo-politics and how they affect geo-economics. It will address how global forces have impacted on a new international economic order. The aim is to demonstrate that the geo-political rivalries between the West and East are unleashing new realities on the global economic space. This article addresses the issue of Africa's place in the new global geopolitics, paying attention to various rivalries being played out on world stage. It underlines the arrival on the international scene of new powers such as BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) and its impact on world governance. The second part is devoted to the impact of the diversification of Africa's partners on the development of the continent, especially the role of China in massive investment on the continent. The focus on infrastructure improvement is visible but it is coming with its attendant attributes. There is a sense in which the West has been alarmed with China's presence in Africa and the question of human rights record at home. There is also comparative analysis by African stakeholders who see that China's investment portfolio appears more impressive compared to Western investment that is not as visible. What are the dynamics emerging in the new geo-political dynamics? How are they shaping economic realities in Africa? What role is Africa playing in the new political and economic realities? These are the questions that this article engages with. Findings reveal that geo-politics and geo-economics are connected, and Africa must be careful in choosing its development partners. The study recommends that there is need for African countries to begin to look inward in order to avoid exploitation. They need to invest in human resources in order to harness their full potential.

**Key words:** Africa, geo-politics, new international economic order, geo-economics, BRICS

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### **Introduction**

There is no doubt that these recent years have witnessed a switch of the center of gravity of world economic growth over to Asia. Indeed, with the rise on the international stage of new powers, from the South, world growth and governance have entirely been affected. This new situation and many others primarily related to the Arab Spring, the powerful upswing of Jihadist movements, Russia's annexation of Crimea... etc., provide extensive information on the return of geopolitics which stands out from an "overall world" picture. In fact, the term geopolitics seems to be a fast-growing phenomenon after having been downplayed following the World War II. Relevantly points out that "hitherto, the introduction of new 'players' and new rules distorts rather than modifies the 'puzzle' of geopolitics." Moreover, economic globalization which brings forth new global stakeholders (multinationals... etc) in no way marks the abolition of geopolitics, but rather its complexity. Hence multinationals, alongside States, for example spark off the game of rivalry for power over space. Multinationals do so in order "To meet their shareholding demands, companies use territorial strategies which are now facilitated by globalization technologies" (Rodrik, 2021, p.58)

The radical changes on the international stage (Rodrik, 2021), basically characterized by the upsurge of economics and the diversification of international problems including the classical school of international relations which stands short of instruments for intelligible understanding, have led many researchers to put forward the idea of the importance of a new research field known as international political economy.

The emergence on the world economic and political stage of new powers is the perfect illustration of this new world geopolitics (Rodrik, 2021) that is taking shape. It is worth nothing that these new powers are newcomers to the club of developed countries, having distinguished themselves in their revenue development policies imposed by international institutions (Rodrik 2008) - seen as power transmission belts of the "old industrialized countries." Indeed, the rise of new powers significantly contrasts significantly with the decline of traditional powers. Thus countries such as France, the United Kingdom, the United States, Japan and Germany seem to be losing ground in the process of innovation and wealth creation as compared to the new powers.

The current global economic situation is the result of major disruptions. The main ones include: the remarkable rise of emerging countries, the fragmentation of production in various stages set indifferent countries based on the competitive advantage of each country, transfer of industrial activities from developed countries to emerging countries, the aging of the population in Western countries and the trend of increased scarcity of savings worldwide due to the low risk propensity in the old industrialized countries and massive investment in emerging countries as regards social safety nets and domestic demand.

There have been great rivalries between old and new powers from both a political and economic standpoints. In fact, some countries are moving from the status of "emerging powers" to that of "established powers" thus seriously questioning world geopolitics and geo-economics. Countries such as Russia, Iran, Turkey, and China are increasingly challenging the international political order inherited from the end of World War II the Second World

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War (Coris M. et Rallet A, 2008). From a geo-economic angle, China, through its impact on world exports, the competitiveness of its businesses and its strategic investments as well as its growing number of initiatives either with the creation of institutions it wants and / or would like to be alternatives to some of the existing global institutions, looks set to profoundly change the global geo-economy. Hence the increased competition between new and old powers which are quite pronounced in certain geographical areas. That is why African geopolitics is of interest to both the new and old powers (Echikoundi, Hafid, 2019). While the former consider it for economic and political break into the continent, the latter considers it for redeployment which requires new strategies that are mainly based on economics.

This scramble for Africa is largely due to the key stakes involved notably: security, population size, natural, and mining and energy resources. These are important needs to be met. Being this new world situation, the main question raised within the framework of this article relates to the impact of this new world situation on the development of the African continent. Is Africa in a better position to benefit from it? Or will Africa suffer it?

### **I- Africa: strategic natural and human resources**

Scramble for strategic resources has remained important among major world powers. All the world powers are interested in securing supplies in natural resources which remain important in their foreign policies, and their desire to remain ahead. Therefore, Africa, a continent endowed with energy, mining and natural resources, with a population that would be 2 billion in 2050, has become the focus and key player of these powers (Badie, 2013). This must raise concerns on the continent.

On the other hand, the political and economic reforms undertaken in recent years by many African countries have resulted, mainly from the 1990s, in remarkable economic performances materialized by a steady and sustained economic growth around 5%. Among the ten countries recording the most robust growth worldwide, six of them have achieved a growth rate of over 7%, including Nigeria (7.5%) and Cote d'Ivoire (8.5%). This is remarkable by all means.

Indeed, the growth momentum is mainly due to a number of external and internal factors. Regarding external factors, it should well be noted that one of the factors responsible for this growth is the increase in prices of commodities and the diversification of trading partners. This is widely perceived in that the African continent has become in recent years not only a huge pool of raw materials for the rest of the world but also a major business stakeholder for both traditional partners and new powers.

Today, Africa has almost a third of the world's mineral reserves, including 81% of manganese, 68% chromium, 55% platinum, 44% vanadium and 40% of gold. For petroleum products, the continent only holds 13% of proven reserves but its mining and production costs are very competitive. Alongside the three oil giants of Africa namely Nigeria, Angola and Libya, other countries are also well placed such as Sudan, Chad and Equatorial Guinea.

As concerns internal factors, the increase in domestic demand due to the increase in massive investment in infrastructure, the importance of financial markets (the case of South Africa, Morocco, Kenya ... etc.) and the emergence of a middle class of 400 million inhabitants, with an urbanization rate of the population around 40% against 28% in 1980, which is now not only a source of demand for manufactured goods but also a source of savings and investment.

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Similarly, in the face of criticism from the civil society and the exploitation of poverty situations by extremist groups, the trend in Africa is the improvement of political and economic governance as well as upgrading of human conditions. However, despite some progress, the situation in Africa is dominated by weak institutions, the heavy weight of poverty and insecurity coupled with “bad governance” that is ravaging some countries of the continent.

From this point of view, if the interactions between Africa and the traditional powers earned support from the main vectors of cooperation such as trade, foreign direct investment and official development assistance, it is the same case for the new powers. The crucial question is whether the new relationships between Africa and emerging countries continue to fall within the traditional framework of partnership based on the exploitation of natural resources and slow integration of Africa in the global economy? In other words, are the new powers, in their capacity as new African development partners, willing to promote Africa’s reintegration within the world economy through its rise to power in the global value chain?

## **II- Africa and the new powers**

The key stakes between traditional partners and Africa were based on the principle of North-South cooperation concretized by the exporting of commodities and the importing of manufactured goods as well as compliance with some terms and conditions in the name of “good governance”. Yet, the arrival on the international stage of new powers from the South, especially in an ever-changing world, has changed the balance of power and hence the forms of partnership. Thus, the issue of South-South cooperation was raised been very present these recent years. As the name implies, it takes place between countries belonging to the category of what is commonly called “developing countries”. It allows a block of countries to exchange among themselves and set up mechanisms to valorize collective resources, to make use of their complementary nature and to process resources on site, as well as share expertise and experience.

In reality, this South-South cooperation has been existing since 1956 at the Bandung Conference, grouping countries of the South wishing to politically assert themselves in front of developed countries, but it is only in recent years that it started spreading to economic, technical and technological aspects. Some countries from the South that are part of the block of the emerging powers, like China, India, Brazil, Turkey, Russia and Malaysia, play a fundamental role in this new form of partnership which encompasses the concept of South-South cooperation based on a “win-win” principle.

Among the salient features of this new form of partnership is the emphasis laid on the strengthening of infrastructure and production capacities, official development assistance void of political terms and conditions. Moreover, from an institutional point of view, South-South cooperation is manifested through the signing of a series of bilateral and trilateral (three countries from the South) agreements. Some emerging countries like China and Turkey have established dialogue arenas in the form of forums with other countries of the South and mainly with Africa. Thus, we refer to the China-Africa forum initiated since 1998. This annual forum allows China to present the main lines of cooperation with the countries of the continent.

### **II-1- The dynamics of trade between the emerging countries and Africa**

There has been growth in trade in Africa. In 1995, the value of trade between the new powers and Africa was negligible in that it was limited to \$ 6.5 billion but since 1999, we

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observe an upsurge in African exports. This reveals that there was more engagement with the outside world.

If we take a close look at the evolution of African exports to emerging countries, during the years 2000-2013 we note that exports have increased from \$ 11.5 billion to \$ 169 billion, resulting in a 1369% evolution. This indicates more involvement with new powers and shows tremendous amount of growth and engagement with countries such as China.

China ranks first in the new trade arrangements because its imports from Africa increased from almost \$ 5.01 billion in 2000 to almost \$ 93 billion in 2013, meaning an evolution to the tune of 1760%. It is the same for India, Turkey, Brazil and Russia, with evolutions to the tune of 1445%, 723%, 714% and 554% respectively. This reveals the stakes of the new business cooperation between Africa and the new powers. By and large, China has become the second largest destination for African exports. In this regard, it has overshadowed the old powers as a traditional partner of Africa.

In spite of the dynamic nature of trade relations between Africa and the new powers, the nature of products exported by countries of the continent reveal an extension of the traditional method (export of raw materials). This is widely seen in the domination of commodities in African exports (89% of total exports) to the new powers. This is particularly true in the case of China and India. On the contrary, Africa's exports to Brazil, Russia, Malaysia and Turkey include a significant amount of intermediate technology and advanced technology products. In this way, the strategies of the new powers in Africa have distinct characteristic features and stand out, with the exception of China, from the practice of the traditional powers.

## **II-2- Financial relations between Africa and the new powers**

From a geostrategic point of view, the new powers, having invested heavily in their internal development, are competing with the States and the business community of the West on the traditional hunting ground, which is Africa. First of all, their strategy to penetrate this continent was through Official Development Assistance. This assistance is highly appreciated by African countries because it is rarely subject to terms and conditions. Secondly, the new powers are increasingly investing in Africa.

In this perspective, China's investment in Africa is continuously growing with the aim to ensure access of China to the raw materials needed for its development. India is no exception to this trend, although Indian investments in Africa seem to be of another dimension. FDI of emerging countries in Africa which initially focused on the commodity and infrastructure sectors are gradually extending to other sectors such as telecommunications, construction and agriculture.

Until 2002, FDI flows from emerging economies to Africa were low compared to those of developed countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States. However, in recent years, Africa has received increasingly growing FDI, notably from China, Brazil, Russia and Turkey. Taking advantage of globalization, companies from Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) have emerged as world leaders, especially in Africa. The foreign direct investment of these companies reached \$ 147 billion in 2008, about 9% of the overall investments worldwide, against less than 1% a decade ago. These investments were previously centered on raw materials but are now increasingly moving towards infrastructure, telecommunications, retail and banking.

Brazil is no exception to this increase in FDI by new powers in Africa. In fact, Brazilian public and private companies are investing in the mining sector and other sectors



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like telecommunications, urban transport, the timber industry, agriculture, livestock and infrastructure.

Similarly, Turkey is gaining momentum in FDI flows to African countries. Hence, the share of this region in Turkey's exports more than tripled (3% in 2003 and 10% in 2010). Investments by Turkish groups in Africa specifically target infrastructure, such as dams in Angola, real estate constructions in Equatorial Guinea and roads in Sudan. Most contracts are "paid" by barter, with oil, gold, and other commodities.

On the whole, the new powers have become the real drivers of investment on the African continent. If in the case of China, these investments are highly concentrated in the natural resources sector, we note diversification of the investments in the case of other countries (India, Brazil, Turkey, Malaysia, South Korea ... etc.). This presents a new opportunity for the countries of the continent in the sense that sector diversification of FDI from emerging powers can lead to technology transfer. Hence the importance to bring up the idea of a new rewarding partnership framework for Africa provided the latter knows how to develop a strategy for these powers.

### **II-3-Official Development Assistance: a new vector of partnership**

The growing interest of these powers for Africa because of its natural and human resources and an important market to conquer enables the African continent to meet the diversification of partners and the proliferation of sources of funding. This new situation gives new leeway to African States in that the assistance granted is not subject to any terms and conditions. This is stark contrast with the logic of the old powers that placed conditioned all forms of financial, economic, cultural and political cooperation with elements relating to respect for democracy and the principles of "good governance". It is clear that this new development strategy is multidimensional as it offers a greater range of monetary and non-monetary assistance programs which include grants and loans for infrastructure and growth sectors, training and technical assistance and the establishment of specialized economic zones with the aim of transforming raw materials locally.

### **III- The Redeployment of Traditional Partners in Africa**

Since the last two decades, we are seeing profound economic and geopolitical changes marked by a change in the traditional power relations and the emergence of new growth poles in the South. The rapid breakthrough of emerging countries, the global economic crisis that traditional powers suffered as well as technological revolution have placed the African continent at the epicenter of this new world order.

Despite these changes, Africa has never ceased to be at the heart of the concerns of Europe, which has always given it special importance. From 1957, the Rome Treaty provided a European Development Fund (EDF), which allowed the provision of technical and financial assistance to African countries with which the European States had maintained colonial relations, namely Belgium, France, Portugal, the United Kingdom and Germany. Other agreements plus trade and financial agreements (Yaoundé, Lomé and Cotonou) were signed in order to establish relations on a strategic partnership.

Aware of these economic and political changes, European States have realized the new world geography with the powerful rise of some African countries which have joined the club of emerging nations. So, these European States cannot use force to impose themselves on territories that would be exclusive domains.

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It should be recalled that the last ten years have seen a definite change in the European Union's African policy as evidenced by the 4<sup>th</sup> summit that took place in April 2014 and whose main purpose was to develop a strategic partnership between the two continents. It is in this perspective that the EU has set up a prospective approach of setting, in the short term, interests considered immediate such as economic and social development, ecological concerns and the security policy. Added to this, in the long term, are three other types of indirect supranational interests, which include strengthening the EU foreign policy, developing a strategic and balanced partnership with the United States and creating effective multilateral structures to regulate the overall framework of the economy and to develop new partners.

### **III-1- A Commercial and Financial Cooperation in Full Definition**

From an economic point of view, despite the emergence of new players with the rise of South-South cooperation and the growing presence of BRIC that highlight their very advantageous concessional loans without terms and conditions related to good governance and respect for human rights, the EU remains a relatively privileged partner of the African countries because of a colonial past and a cultural and linguistic proximity (North Africa, Central Africa and West). However, a strong divergence of interests is necessary in that the EU remains highly concentrated the traditional logic of importing natural resources and raw materials and exporting manufactured goods, while African countries, notably emerging countries, are calling for more pragmatic funding and partnerships based on the "Win-Win" principle and technology transfer in order to revolutionize their industries and move from extrovert growth to inclusive growth that involves a significant boosting of the domestic market and which absorbs huge labor force.

In addition to the divergence of interests between the two continents, it should be noted emphatically that even within the EU, interests do vary, as evidenced by the Franco-German example. Indeed, France pays greater interest to economic issues in particular in the field of oil (Angola, Nigeria and the Gulf of Guinea) and security policy (Mali, Central Africa Republic... etc), while its German neighbor opts instead for environmental concerns. Moreover, the two countries do not favor the same areas given that France is heavily concentrated in Central and West Africa while Germany focuses more particularly in the Anglophone countries in Southern and East Africa.

Another major issue constituting an undeniable component of the EU's new Africa policy is that of migration. It must be recognized that the majority of EU countries are experiencing a sharp decline in their populations and alarming levels of an increasingly ageing population which contrasts greatly with the African continent that is full of demographic vitality and considerable youth rates (Africa should have nearly 2 billion and Europe a little over 600 million).

Concerning security policy as a central element of the EU's repositioning in Africa, Philippe Hugon deplores the fact that "the EU has no real security policy, because its security policy is only a reflection of national policies" he says.

Indeed, the recent conflicts that have rocked the continent (Mali, Libya, Central Africa Republic... etc) reflect the EU's difficulties in making its voice heard and to react promptly in times of crisis. Only France could play a leading role in exposing its military and historical power that binds it to the continent.

Regarding long-term or supranational interests, the African continent is not only a key player in global geopolitics (many African countries have become members of multilateral

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organizations) but also and above all a substantial ground for improving the effectiveness of the EU's foreign and security policy. To this end, one can think of the Cotonou Agreement, the EU's Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) and the EU Strategy for Africa. This is all true that the United States has paid little attention to this region and especially on security matters.

In conclusion, the new EU Strategy for Africa, on one hand, has made significant progress on all fronts that would nevertheless have been even more promising if Member States had explicitly defined their interests.

On the other hand, it is left to the leaders of the EU countries to understand the sensitive nature and cultural specificities of the African population. In the words of Joseph Nye "for these external powers, the major stake for Africa is the *soft power*, that is, the ability to be accepted or even desired by African States".

Considering African imports from traditional powers like France, Germany, Japan, the United States and the United Kingdom, we note that during the 1995-2013 period, these exports, despite their decline between 2009 and 2010, following the global crisis that generated a drop in demand from Africa by traditional powers, there was a rising trend. The United States was the largest trading partner in relation to exports from countries of the continent recording \$ 96 billion in 2013. All in all, African exports are mainly oriented towards the former colonial powers. Moreover, the growing interest of the United States for Africa is widely perceived in the evolution of trade. It is the same for other countries and mainly France. Thus, if between 1995 and 1998 the trend was on a decline for traditional powers in African exports, recent years suggests a strong return of these powers in Africa's foreign trade. This is what can be described as the "redeployment" of traditional powers in Africa.

For African imports from traditional powers, France comes first with a contribution of \$ 39 billion in imports by countries of the continent, in 2011. The United States ranks second with a contribution of \$ 33 billion, respectively, followed by Germany, the United Kingdom and Japan. Exports of traditional powers experienced a remarkable and steady evolution that has only intensified in recent years. It is expected that these exports increase more in the context of the crisis that is rocking the Western economies. Indeed, countries such as France, the UK and the US are working to set up new economic strategies (improving competitiveness, currency depreciation, exploring new markets, support to businesses ... etc.) to improve their exports to the African continent. Hence the increased competition that there may be between old and new powers on access to African markets because of their high consumption potential.

Furthermore, though the share of traditional powers in Africa's foreign trade has continuously improved since 1995, except for the United States, it thereby reflects the importance of trade relations between these countries and their former colonies, and consequently, the need to reflect over the nature of these trade activities. This is with a view to better reflect the impact of trade relations between the two blocks on the rise within the value chain of African exports.

Considering the nature of the main African products exported to traditional powers, there is the domination of commodities, which cover about 84% of total African exports. In other words, trade between Africa and the traditional powers are largely based on energy, mining and natural resources and thus on products with low added value. Everything seems to indicate that trade relations between Africa and the old powers were confined to a



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specialization based on the exploitation of natural resources. Hence the low share of products manufactured with high-tech and top skills which result in the transfer of technology.

### **III-2-Financial Relations (FDI)**

In terms of FDI, the presence of traditional powers, though on a decline, still remains dominant. These countries still hold 90% of the stock and are responsible for 72% of FDI flows in Africa. The United Kingdom, the United States and France still held 56% of total FDI stock in Africa over the 2003-2007 period. However, with the emergence of new powers in Africa, a phase of competition has arrived and challenged the traditional areas of influence of traditional powers. This is first of all reflected by the return of the United States to the African stage with a new economic strategy whose main purpose is securing energy supplies (25% of US imports from Africa by 2015) and through the deployment of large French groups in Portuguese-speaking and English-speaking areas.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This article has attempted to show the structural changes affecting the world economy. They are marked by the emergence of new powers whose contribution to global growth continues to increase. There is a new global situation which resonates in Africa and which gives rise to the diversification of its development partners. It is clear that whether they are new or old powers, they have a strategy for Africa, the main question being whether Africa has a strategy to better take advantage of this diversification of partners.

The article makes some recommendations. There is need for Africa to adopt a continental strategy beyond Agenda 2063. There is need for the countries of the continent to develop a new Africa story telling based on pan-African development. There is need to re-negotiate in unison within international bodies in order to get maximum benefits from economies of scale. There is need of strengthening of national governance systems in order to be more accountable and transparent and avoid wastage and corruption. There is need for African countries to invest in human capital and to fight against inequalities among genders.

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