

DOI: 10.23932/2542-0240-2019-12-3-6-29

Towards a Neo-bipolar Model of the World Order: Scouting Game in Africa

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FUNDING: this article was written under the 2019 Program for Fundamental Studies of the Presidium of the Russian Academy of Sciences No. 22 "Analysis and Projections for New Global Challenges in Russia", Sub-Program "Africa in the New Global Reality: Challenges and Opportunities for Russia."

ABSTRACT. *The article lays out a hypothesis that the global order slides into a new bipolarity in the context of the escalating geo-economic and geopolitical confrontation between the two poles that currently dominate the world - the United States and China. The neo-bipolar construction cannot yet be regarded as an established new world order, but the general movement of the world economy and international relations in this direction is obvious. The neo-bipolar confrontation manifests itself with varying intensity in different regions of the world. The author argues that at present, the peripheral regions which are strategically important for the prospects of competition are becoming an important testing ground for relatively "safe" elaboration of methods and tactics of geo-economic rivalry and a mutual exchange of systemic attacks. Today, Africa has become practically the leading theater of the new bipolar confrontation. The article analyzes the economic, military and strategic aspects of the rivalry between*

the United States and China on the African continent. It provides a comparative analysis of the new African strategies of the two superpowers adopted at the end of 2018. The author suggests that in the context of the emerging global bipolarity, the strategies of the USA and China represent antagonistic programs based on fundamentally different initial messages. In the case of the US strategy, this is to deter by denial the spread of the competitor's influence using tough policies, including forceful (while not necessarily military) confrontational actions. While China seeks to neutralize the opposition of the United States and its allies to Beijing's expansion on the continent and to win the freedom of interaction with any partners in Africa causing minimal direct confrontation possible. Therefore, despite the seemingly "peripheral" importance of the confrontation on the continent, for the establishment of a neo-bipolar world order, the proclamation of the new US regional geopolitical strategy, which focuses on the containment of

China in the name of protecting democracy and independence, can serve not only for Africa, but for the whole planet the same milestone signal as Churchill's Fulton speech for the final advent of bipolarity in the post-war world.

KEY WORDS: *new bipolarity, neo-bipolar World Order, world economy, theory of international relations, international political science, geostrategic rivalry, Africa, USA, China*

By the end of the second decade of the 21st century, the thorny path of evolution of the world order that was expected lead the monopolar system to a polycentric destination, unexpectedly reached a point of bifurcation. From then on, transformation processes in the global economy can equally continue towards a multipolar world or head towards a new bipolarity.¹

The first option is prompted by the continuous progressive expansion (notwithstanding the teething problems of growth) of the influence of large and populous countries, like China, India, Russia, Brazil, Mexico, Indonesia, etc. in the global economy and politics – against the backdrop of a visible weakening of the positions of the conventional developed countries of the “West”, the principal beneficiaries of the existing world order, led by the US. The likelihood of the second alternative is a logical function of the velocity and the intensity of first option in its mature phase, when it assumes the form of acute confrontation of the two most powerful leaders among the multiple centres of global importance.

Structure of the New Bipolarity

The total share of developed countries of North America, Western Europe, Japan, Australia and New Zealand in the world's GDP at present is fluctuating between 43% and 45%, depending on the structure of global prices for raw commodities and activities in the global financial markets. The shares of the US and China make up 24% and 15%, respectively, by the current exchange rate, and 15% and 18% by the purchasing power parity (PPP) [IMF WEO 2019]. OECD estimates that by 2030, the PRC's share will grow to 27% (calculated using the 2010 USD exchange rate). Should the current trends continue, the US share may fall to 15–17% and even lower [Guillemette, Turner 2018, p. 8].

China, however, despite the objective and artificial hindrances, is gradually taking over the position of a leading global economy. Not only did that country's GDP outdo that of the US by PPP. The shares of the US and China in global exports are approximately identical (around 11%), but UNCTAD and the World Bank have placed the PRC some 0.5% ahead since 2017. Today, China outperforms the US in real production and global real commodities export. The critical threshold has been crossed in a sphere that is quintessential to assess the quality of a region's economic growth, namely, innovations. In 2017, 43.6% patent applications in the world were filed in China alone, mainly by Chinese residents, followed, with a considerable gap, by the US (19.2%), Japan (10.1%), South Korea (6.5%) and the EU's European Patent Office (5.3%) [WIPO IP 2018, p. 11]. In some science and technological development sectors (for instance, large-

¹ For the sake of objectivity, we must admit that the possibility of preservation or “return” to “revised” mono-polarity in the form of America-centric world order supported by the harsh dictate of the US in its relations with allies and by the force of military threat with respect to other competing centers, equally exists. But, in our opinion, the chances of long-term and sustained continuation of that specific world order are far from high.

scale industrial production and international commercialization of goods for 5G networks, mining and road heading technologies, high-speed mainline locomotive engineering), China is already outperforming the US.

This reallocation of the economic balance of forces in the world has unsurprisingly resulted in increased protectionism, tariff wars and the use by the “retaliating” party of sanctions and embargoes in the competitive struggle. Here, despite former practice and the established stereotypes, it is Beijing, rather than Washington, that champions liberal approaches in international economic relations (and, in doing that, often finds sympathy with some of Washington’s European allies), while the White House’s real policy, despite its rhetoric on the protection of freedom and justice, is increasingly moving towards protectionism and fits of economic aggression. A bipolar disorder in the sphere of ideology and foreign economic policy is obvious.

Economic competition between the two countries has transformed into geo-economic rivalry, as it inevitably demands and receives a special dimension. It translates into geographic expansion and projection of the economic potency of each of the nations to the periphery. Acting in line with its vision of its national interests and future, each of the two poles of the emerging world order aspires to get a hold of the greatest possible resource potential of the planet and global markets. They aim to secure reinforcement, or, better still, growth of their global positions in the future.

Although they offer different substantiations for their strategies (the US generally relying on the fight for “democratic and liberal rule-based world or-

der”, while the PRC proceeds from the aspiration towards establishing universal *win-win* relations),² both poles are consistently fighting for leading and/or dominant economic and political positions in various regions and the world as a whole, greater than those occupied by other nations.

In these conditions, the US-China opposition, into which the White House is trying to pull the cautiously hesitant “united” Europe, is accruing a new quality. *The “anti-Chinese line” is increasingly turning into the organizing principle of the American economic, political, military and strategic policy not only in the bilateral Washington – Beijing relations, but in the entire world.* More signs are appearing signaling that the as yet looming outlines of future neo-bipolarity may be burdened, apart from economic and ideological strife, by civilizational conflict.

Geo-Economic “Game of Thrones”

So, the geo-economic “game of thrones” has begun. Not only the two global economic leaders, the US and the PRC, are involved in it, but, often against their will, other states are, too, even though they might well have wanted to remain neutral in this fight. The theater of this economic war is the entire world. Here, individual strategically valuable flank regions such as Africa, from the standpoint of prospects of struggle, become an important (or, today, all but leading) testing ground for the relatively safe practice of methods and tactics of geo-economic rivalry and mutual exchange of systemic strikes.

1 The *win-win* concept implies a guaranteed win for all parties involved.

We call them systemic since, unlike with many other regions, the two poles have elaborated complex strategies to implement such methods and tactics on the Dark Continent, affecting not just separate sectors or areas (economic, political, ideological, military, cultural), but all of them taken together, with all their interconnections and synergetic value.

To put it briefly, Africa is important for both poles and has become the arena for intensified rivalry for three reasons:

- a) due to its unique resources;
- b) owing to its new geo-strategic importance (it is simultaneously the natural barrier/bridge between the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific zones of the US's strategic interests and the Southern entrance to Europe within the "One Belt, One Road" project); and, finally,
- c) since it is a powerful instrument of global political maneuvering and broadcasting one's own decisions to the global community (votes of the 55 countries of the continent are an important factor for international support on the diplomatic arena and the global public opinion).

Moreover, for both China and the US the "African underbelly" is one of the last arguments remaining in favor of the "global leverage" of the Old World; the paradigms of economic relations with former colonies, moreover, remain a not insignificant source of the middle class's well-being.

Why, though, has Africa become one of the first geo-economic theaters of war between the two hegemons of the forthcoming world order? We will start from a scarcely comforting reminder that from the historical viewpoint, aggravation of the confrontation in Africa between the two contenders for world leadership is all but a routine of the last half a century. Both World Wars and the end of the Cold War were preceded by violent clashes of the superpowers' interests and their proxy wars in Africa.

Of course, the situation today, just as all those related to the past, has its specifics. The current ones are connected with the growth, from the late 20th and especially the 21st centuries, of the global geo-economic importance of the African region. The causes for its rising relevance for the global economy and balance of powers were discussed in sufficient detail in a number of earlier works [Fituni 1989; Fituni 2012; Fituni 2017; Abramova, Fituni 2017; Abramova, Fituni 2018; Abramova, Fituni 2016]. Summarized, they boil down to the following.

1. Since the beginning of the century, one can observe a historically unprecedented lengthy period of real economic growth on the continent. From 2001 to date, despite at times material fluctuations, the average annual GDP growth (about 4.5%) exceeds the same average for the world, which at the very least purely mathematically should mean that the economic retard of the continent is, however slowly, decreasing, and a major portion of the population is becoming more prosperous.

2. Africa is one of the few regions with a still relatively understudied and underexploited natural resource potential, which, importantly, remains accessible to external players. Globalization and the scientific and technological progress have created conditions necessary for a fuller fulfilment of that potential and its integration into the existing value chains. This requires not only technical and economic conditions (first and foremost, infrastructure), but also the relevant social and political constructs ensuring an interest of the African countries and Africans themselves (or at least the elites) in participating in the already ongoing processes of formation of the new world order on the terms proposed.

3. A vital factor for the growth is the demographic processes creating the opportunity for facilitating the continent's development via the so-called demo-

graphic dividend. This will be achieved by virtue of:

- a) growth of Africa's population and the associated increase of the share of Africans in the overall population of the globe, which will, according to the UN forecasts, account for over 40% of the global population by 2099 [World Population Prospects 2019];
- b) predominance of young people in the population;
- c) "improvement of the quality" of labor resources (expansion of the share of educated population and qualified workers of various levels).

4. The ongoing processes are expected to result in changes in the social structure. First of all, this implies urbanization and the accelerated (as compared to other strata) growth of the middle class. In turn, that will affect the scale and structure of the forming effecting demand, and, as these processes intensify, the global production and trade. According to the calculations of the Hoover University (USA), by 2050 the richest 10% of the Africans (about 250 million people) will ensure a fivefold rise in demand for consumer goods and services as compared to the present day.³ The possibilities that opens will force the global businesses to adapt their market strategies, nature of production and marketing accordingly.

An increase of middle class will inevitably have a certain and, most likely, tangible effect on the ideological and intellectual development of the society, and, with adjustments from without, if necessary – on the formation of the structure of moral stances and values corresponding to the design of the architects (hegemons) of the new world order. *Neo-bipolarity invariably goes together with social constructivism and engineering in the areas of dom-*

ination and projection of the might of the superpowers.

5. The foregoing warrants the conclusion on the growth of the comparative geo-strategic and geopolitical importance of Africa on the global scale. Consequently, the continent requires greater attention, which means that the political actors involved and the powers claiming the role of leaders in the new world order should elaborate certain *strategies* that would include systems of stimuli and sanctions (the "stick and the carrot") for African partners – both state and non-state actors, including individuals.

Both potential leaders of the future bipolar world order have had such strategies with respect to Africa for a while. These are regularly updated to follow changes in the perception of national interests. This evidences that attention to the continent and the understanding of its potential and importance have not appeared today, but have been in place for a long time, quite literally being "strategic" in nature.

Mutual Dependence on Raw Commodities

As will be shown below, dominance in Africa turned out to be a vital precondition for creating the foundation for future domination and leadership in the three components of the emerging new world order: economic, military and strategic, and ideological (intellectual).

In economic terms, both countries today, albeit to different extents, depend on the guaranteed supplies of African raw resources. Africa's share in China's gross import of raw commodities according to statistical data in open sources is at least 15% [China Statistical Yearbook 2018].

³ Goldstone J.A. (2019) Africa 2050: Demographic Truth and Consequences // Hoover Institution, January 14, 2019 // <https://www.hoover.org/research/africa-2050-demographic-truth-and-consequences>, last accessed on August 31, 2019.

Alternative calculations of the Center for Global and Strategic Studies of the Institute for African Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, run while taking account of the cross-checks based on the “reverse” statistics of exports of African countries and the results of mathematical modelling, suggest that the actual figure is likely closer to 23%.⁴ This falls somewhat higher than the available Western estimates (< 20%) (see, in particular, [Gamache, Hammer, Jones 2013; U.S. Geological Surveys 2015–2019; Brown *et al.* 2019]). Moreover, by some indicators (mostly for some metallic ores and their concentrates) this figure stands twice or thrice higher.

The US's share of imports of raw commodities from African countries in the total imports is almost twice as low. But taking account of the higher-processed products of African origin imported from European and Asian countries would yield a much larger figure. Thus, for instance, what arrives to the US as part of large-scale imports of some types of strategic metals from Belgium, Austria, France, and China is none other than processed raw stock procured/mined by those countries in Africa. Principal income, of course, stays in the direct exporter state, but from the standpoint of America's dependence on Africa's mineral base discussed here this is of no consequence.

By some types of raw mineral materials, both superpowers are heavily dependent on supplies directly from Africa. Thus, for instance, according to open press, 70% of imports of raw cobalt to the US are from the Dark Continent. Seven African states act as Washington's sup-

pliers of “critical minerals” (an American term), that is, mineral non-fuel stock. These are South Africa, the DRC, Rwanda, Guinea, Mozambique, Morocco, and Gabon. It is from these countries that the US imports more than a half of its annual imports of some types of strategic materials, both relatively common ones, such as aluminum, manganese and phosphate stock, and the less common platinum, diamonds, to the deficit ores of rubidium, indium, coltan, wolfram, rhodium, ruthenium, etc. An important source of rare ores is Burundi, but that country, unlike those listed above, accounts for less than a half of supplies to the US.

It is known that Niger occupies the 4th place by exports of uranium ores and concentrates, and exports gold. That country is a major trade partner for the US by American standards, but the published US statistics lists imports from Niger (around USD 25 million annually) in a special undisclosed commodity group (*special other*).

Moreover, the US imports from Africa, less material for the US, but still important for the continent are tropical timber, cocoa beans, peanuts and other agricultural products.⁵

Trade Rivalry

US exports to Africa in 2018 amounted to USD 26.1 billion, imports, to USD 38.8 billion. Thus, the deficit of the trade balance exceeded 9 billion, and the trade turnover was slightly less than USD 65 billion [Foreign Trade 2019]. This figure is lower than the Chinese almost times 2.8.

⁴ These discrepancies may be explained both by the existing rules for publishing statistical data by strategic types of raw materials, and by the specifics of reflecting exports to Chinese jurisdictions (including Special Administrative Regions of Hong Kong, Macao, used for re-exports, etc.) in African statistics.

⁵ 2018: U.S. Trade in Goods with Africa // <https://www.census.gov/foreign-trade/balance/c0013.html>, last accessed on March 31, 2019.

The key partners are South Africa (2017 turnover – USD 13 billion), Nigeria (9.3), Egypt (7.5), Morocco, Algeria (4.9 each) and Angola (USD 3.4 billion).⁶

From 2000, 40 African countries enjoy duty-free imports to the US under the AGOA program. In 2015, it was renewed until 2025. The list of countries enjoying benefits under the program is regularly revised. The principally important conditions for receiving those benefits are extending reciprocal favorable terms to the US to ensure its interests (primarily, but not only, economic), adherence to liberal approaches to the economy, democracy and due governance.

For China, African markets take up a large share of the state's sales of Chinese goods and services. Africa supplies the PRC with the mineral and agricultural stock it needs. One fifth of oil exports to China are from Africa. Africa also supplies ores and concentrates of ferrous, non-ferrous and rare metals, tropical timber and other commodities.

In 2018, China-African trade amounted to USD 204.19 billion [China-Africa Cooperation in High-gear, Powering Global Growth 2019]. South Africa also supplies technology-intensive modern machinery products. In 2017, trade turnover with African countries, according to the PRC's official foreign trade statistics, was USD 170.6 billion, including USD 94.7 billion worth of exports, and USD 75.9 billion worth of imports. China's key trade partners on the continent were South Africa (with the turnover of USD 39.2 billion), Angola (23), Nigeria (13.8), Egypt (10.8), Algeria (9), and Morocco (4.7 billion). The first four countries account for more than a half of China's trade with the continent. More-

over, in 2017 China had a trade surplus with Egypt and Nigeria, and a trade deficit with South Africa and Angola [China Statistical Yearbook 2018].

As we can see, the list of priority trade partners in Africa is the same for the US and China. The nomenclature of imports is rather similar as well. But the importance of trade with African states itself is different for the two countries. For the PRC, trade with Africa is a vital precondition and component for sustained economic growth. For the US, trade with Africa does not have the macroeconomic importance as great as it does for China. However, as shown above, Washington has a "critical dependence" on supplies of some types of African raw commodities, without which it would have been unable to materially and technically support the military strength and technological leadership in the world. Apart from the abovementioned cobalt (supplied principally by South Africa and the DRC), these are ores and concentrates of the platinum-group metals (South Africa), niobium, wolfram, tantalum, vanadium (Rwanda), thorium (Namibia), titanium (South Africa, Madagascar, Mozambique), zirconium (South Africa, Senegal) and others.

The bulk of academic and political publications creates an impression that out of the two superpowers, China is in the lead when it comes to interacting with Africa. But it is important here to take note of a number of nuances. Indeed, China outruns the US or any other individual Western state by trade with the continent's countries. But in the aggregate, the Western countries' trade turnover and investments in the continent surpass China's.

⁶ Africa // The Office of the United States Trade Representative // <https://ustr.gov/countries-regions/africa>, last accessed on August 31, 2019.

Components of Strategies: Investments and Debt

The US remains the leading country by accumulated direct foreign investments into Africa with USD 54 billion of investments as at January 1, 2018. Over 600 American companies have invested into South Africa alone [Schneidman, Wiegert 2018]. Rather considerable investments are also made under various aid programs.

China's investment efforts on the African continent primarily manifest in funding the creation of 3,000 mostly large infrastructure projects and socially significant facilities. From 2000 through 2014, commercial loans to the governments of African countries and public companies amounted to USD 86 billion, that is, the average of about USD 6 billion per year. In 2018, it was once again (as in 2015) announced that China was forming a USD 60-billion fund for cooperation, to be structured as follows: USD 15 billion to be issued as grants, interest-free and preferential loans, USD 20 billion to be extended as credit facilities, USD 10 billion to be used for the needs of the China-Africa Development Fund, and, finally, USD 5 billion to fund the imports of African goods [New Measures of the "Big Eight Actions" 2018].

According to the research of A.G. Herrero and Xu Jianwei [Herrero, Jianwei Xu 2019], real Chinese investments into Africa are considerably lower than the flows generating the foreign debt of the continent's countries. This is especially so in case of project financing. As regards the Chinese foreign direct investments, these are materially behind both the US and the key European countries, primarily former colonial powers. The UK's and France's accumulated foreign direct investments into Africa remain higher than those of the PRC.

We believe that the West's narrative, according to which cooperation with China

is a "debt trap" for Africa is more than anything a propaganda ploy, rather than an analytically established feature characteristic specifically of the Chinese approach to investment. Accrual of debt obligations is the inevitable concomitant of large-scale economic interaction based on business, rather than ideological principles, and the PRC's current scale of such interaction is substantially higher than that of the absolute majority of Western countries and simply materially higher than that of the US.

That such allegations are motivated by propaganda purposes is evidenced by the very structure of African debt. It demonstrates that it is primarily the Western states and not at all the PRC that are responsible for the continent's debt issues. Out of 54 countries of the continent, the PRC is the chief creditor for merely three: the Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, and Zambia – that is, countries with by far not the greatest aggregate foreign debt in Africa. In Africa's total debt, approximately 32% of foreign debt of African countries' governments is with private creditors, mostly from North America and the EU, and 35% – with multilateral international institutions and organizations such as the World Bank and IMF, and only 20% is with China. One cannot deny, however, that it is the leading sovereign creditor of African states [Africa's Growing Debt Crisis 2018].

Nevertheless, Beijing is since recently actively striving to show its willingness to lighten the burden of outstanding debt for separate states. Before the third summit of FOCAC in 2018, in April it wrote off part of the debts of Zimbabwe, then, in August, of Botswana, and in September it reached an agreement on the restructuring of Ethiopia's debt.

Assessing the competition of two superpowers in the economic sphere, one can conclude that until recently the economic cooperation of the poles of the po-

tential bipolarity with Africa's states was proceeding along parallel and scarcely crossing paths, more or less within normal business or resource-related competition, with local victories and failures of the two actors in separate countries.

Back to Geopolitics

After the Trump administration took over in Washington, the geopolitical and geo-economic rivalry in Africa more than intensified. The US pointedly made a bet for challenging Beijing's influence in Africa, formally stipulating that in its strategy for the continent. Between 2018 and 2019, irrefutable evidence appeared to the effect that the two nations' economic rivalry on the continent is increasingly dominated by political, military and strategic considerations.

In the recently published *The Jungle Grows Back: America and Our Imperiled World*, Robert Kagan, one of the founding fathers of the "New American Century" project, characterized the modern age of power politics and competition among nations that resembles the inter-imperial controversies of the past, as follows: "Where once many believed geo-economics had replaced geopolitics, today we see the world returning to a geopolitics much like that of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries" [Kagan 2018]. This opinion is perfectly applicable to the situation unravelling in Africa.

The seemingly sporadic steps that each nation had been making on the continent and that were akin to prospective military and strategic forecasting and planning, have become systemic and regular. For the US, such steps may be said to include the creation and reinforcement of the US African Command (AFRICOM) and enveloping the continent in a net of military and auxiliary bases. For China, it is the activation of a naval base in Djibouti and active

participation in peacekeeping missions. For both powers, it is also increased attention to "priority" partners, perhaps not as important economically, but located in key geo-strategic areas and in the continent's zones that each of the parties finds crucial for its national interests. It well may be that it is precisely this relatively new focus of the rivalry that pushed both states to update their African strategies.

New accents in China's strategy of developing its relations with Africa were outlined during the September 2018 Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in Beijing. It adopted two key documents: the 2018 Beijing Declaration Toward an Even Stronger China-Africa Community and the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation Beijing Action Plan (2019-2021). Taken together, these documents can be viewed as basic provisions of the Chinese medium-term strategy in Africa. An emphasis is made on "eight major initiatives". It seems to us, however, that they cannot be called absolutely new. Rather, they represent the PRC's general strategy in Africa adapted to the conditions of slowing globalization and aggravation of relations with the US.

In the end of December 2018, J. Bolton, Assistant to the US President for Security Affairs, announced the launch of the "New US Africa Strategy". Similarly to China's case discussed above, we cannot say it was a U-turn in the US policy on the African flank of the global rivalry of superpowers. Instead, the document organized the ripening trends towards Washington's increased aggression on the continent and declared certain technological novelties in the regional policy of the White House. One should think that, as in Beijing's case, it is a medium-term policy paper.

In the context of general purport of the administration's efforts to "make America great again", the foundation of relations with Africa is built on the protection of American interests and security in and

around the region, creation of new opportunities for American businesses, which the strategy's authors view as a precondition for the independent and democratic thriving of the continent's states – naturally, fully in line with the American vision of this process and the “ethical standards of American development programs.”

A conceptually new element is the open and widely broadcast identification of these objectives with resisting the influence of China and Russia in the region. When presenting the new strategy, J. Bolton, Assistant to the US President for Security Affairs, explained the essence and goals of the strategy as follows: “Great power competitors, namely China and Russia, are rapidly expanding their financial and political influence across Africa. They are deliberately and aggressively targeting their investments in the region to gain a competitive advantage over the United States” [Bolton 2018].

The “new approach” to Africa effectively boils down to a new *campaign* against the geopolitical rivals of Washington that states, that it is “seeing the disturbing effects of China’s quest to obtain more political, economic, and military power... Such predatory actions are sub-components of broader Chinese strategic initiatives, including “One Belt, One Road”—a plan to develop a series of trade routes leading to and from China with the ultimate goal of advancing Chinese global dominance” [Bolton 2018].

Four Bolton Cells

Having laid the geo-strategic and geo-economic criteria in the foundation of its policy on the continent, the US has distinguished four priority groups of countries relevant for preserving not only *regional*, but *global* US dominance. The first group includes a chain of states found in North and East Africa. This is the most (geo-stra-

tegically) important part of the continent for the current US policy in terms of resources and infrastructure. The North African part of that chain is valuable since it serves as NATO’s border in the Mediterranean Sea; moreover, it is the chief reservoir of the continent’s hydrocarbons at this time. The East African part, and especially the Great Horn of Africa, has gained key importance as a vast strategic foothold for geopolitical influence on the success (and potential control over the implementation) of the Chinese project of the New Silk Road, whose Southern maritime main line can be blocked in the South and North of the Red Sea.

The second priority group does not include zones, but rather separate key countries. These are African states distinguished (depending on their influence) as potential contenders for the role of regional and sub-regional “superpowers”. The latter are also sometimes referred to as the “growth engines”, and sometimes as “sub-regional hegemons.” The leaders of regional (pan-African) level are Nigeria and South Africa. The “sub-regional” leaders are Algeria, the DRC, Senegal, and Ethiopia. Egypt, too, is a key country, but the US traditionally views it in the context of Middle Eastern, rather than African, strategy. The new American strategy ties the above-mentioned leader countries to sub-regional objectives, largely related to the matters of security, combatting terrorism and mobilization of support of the foreign policy initiatives of the US.

The third group of countries is almost exclusively relevant owing to their natural resources that Washington deems important (not only from the standpoint of covering American domestic needs, but also in terms of providing for the needs of allies and manipulation of global markets of strategic raw materials). This, in particular, includes the oil producing countries of the Gulf of Guinea, the countries mentioned above that supply “critical minerals”, and

some other states (e.g., Botswana and Namibia).

The fourth group includes all other African countries, “non-prioritized” by default.

It should be noted that the principle inherent in the approaches to the geopolitical and geo-economic prioritization of African countries implies that the “four-cell structure” of division of African states in itself remains unchanged, but countries can be moved around groups within it depending on the needs of the US policy at the relevant time.

An interesting technological advantage of this approach is a certain automatization of the process of distinguishing more important countries from the rest. If, by default, a country falls into the first two or even three groups at the same time, its priority automatically soars, in some circumstances even surpassing the importance of regional “superpowers”, South Africa and Nigeria. The newest such example can be seen in the significant increase of attention of the US to Algeria and Ethiopia in 2019.

Here, one should not take the four categories literally as some sort of absolute rating of the countries involved. The actual US policy for each of them is based on the specific case or plans. In this sense, the relations with a leader country may sometimes be no less important than the risk of failing to procure strategic raw materials from a “third group” country, etc.

“Deterrence by Denial”

At the heart of the new American strategy of opposing China in Africa lies, using a military expression, a course towards “deterrence by denial.” It means blocking (“denial”, in military language) not only China’s opportunities for further relatively “problem-free” reinforcement of its foothold on the continent, but also Chi-

na’s use of that foothold for increasing Beijing’s global weight and influence, which happened during previous US administrations that failed to accord to the rivalry in the region its due or to simply understand its global implications.

One of the instruments for achieving these goals is a more confident militarization of America’s involvement in the continent’s affairs. The “land-based” equipment of American troops in the region is well underway. The US African Command (AFRICOM) today officially counts 7 thousand military personnel. Furthermore, the US has almost 500 facilities and military logistics points or the so-called civil facilities (that, nonetheless, quarter or employ the US military) in the continent’s territory. The most prominent is Lemonnier, the US Naval Expeditionary Base in Djibouti, dominating the Southern entrance into the Red Sea. According to official data, it permanently accommodates around 4 thousand American servicemen. Formally, it is called the only permanent US military base in the African continent (barring the Chagos Archipelago annexed from Mauritius that hosts the largest aviation base in the Indian Ocean on the Diego Garcia Island, which is estimated to quarter 3 to 4 thousand troops and that plays a key role in projecting American control over all of China’s principal westward maritime transportation routes in the Indian Ocean).

We should separately mention the base in Niger. It is said to be the main base of American drones in West Africa. Its existence had long been hushed up, but in 2017, after the US suffered casualties after facing the local militants, it was made public. It was revealed that military US units had been there since President J. Kennedy [Snow 2017]. According to the official line, the “green berets” are busy training military personnel for Niger. In 2018, according to open media, 800 American troops were located in the country, some

of which are maintaining the American drone base, worth, it is asserted, over USD 110 million [Rempfer 2017]. Formally, the US is not calling that facility its base, since it flies the flag of Niger along with that of the US.⁷

Overall, the US is widely cooperating with African states on training the military elites, and participating in peacekeeping operations. The US is the chief sponsor of the UN peacekeeping missions: in the now closed fiscal year (July 1, 2018 – June 30, 2019) it has supplied almost one third of their USD 6.7 billion budget. J. Bolton announced in December 2018, that the US would no longer support the “unproductive, unsuccessful, and unaccountable U.N. peacekeeping missions.”⁸ China, conversely, speaking in 2019, declared its intention to be more active in the peacekeeping missions in Africa.

The acuteness and difference of the two poles’ visions of the prospects of military rivalry in Africa are illustrated by the words of J. Inhofe, Chairman of the US Senate’s Armed Services Committee. At the hearings on April 2, 2019, held on the occasion of the appointment of General S. Townsend as commander of AFRICOM (US Africa Command), he expressly tied China’s creation of a navy base in Djibouti several kilometers from an analogous, but larger American facility in that country, to the preparation for World War III [Townsend 2019].

The American military and political leaders even now consider rivalry in Africa as an integral part and regional aspect of the global opposition of bipolar nature. Moreover, in the African theater, China and Russia have become a single,

united opposite pole in the eyes of the current American establishment. In domestic debates not intended for an external listener, American politicians and military acknowledge the uniformity of basic goals of the “two poles” in Africa. At the abovementioned Senate hearings, AFRICOM commander, General S. Townsend, according to the transcript, quite literally stated, “...Russia and China on the African continent... are after some of the same things that the United States is concerned with, access and influence. And I think that they are after access and influence to our detriment. ... the return of Russia to the international scene, the rise of China... I think we have to keep... a clear eye that their goals are to our detriment” [Townsend 2019, p. 11, lines 1–10].

Chinese Response

Half a year after the “New US Africa Strategy” was announced, Beijing delivered its public responses at the G-20 Summit. The key points of the updated Chinese policy for Africa were communicated to the world public in a speech and represented an elaboration of the propositions formulated previously in the joint declaration of the September 2018 Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC).

Without referring directly to the provisions of the new US policy, at the meeting with African leaders at the G-20 Summit in Osaka (June 2019), the PRC’s President Xi Jinping noted, however, that “despite the interference of certain powers,

7 US Builds Drone Base in Niger, Crossroads of Extremism Fight (2018) // The Military Times, April 23, 2018 // <https://www.militarytimes.com/unmanned/2018/04/23/us-builds-drone-base-in-niger-crossroads-of-extremism-fight>, last accessed on August 31, 2019.

8 Babb C. (2018) US Rethinking Peacekeeping Role in Africa. December 14, 2018 // <https://www.golos-ameriki.ru/a/us-rethinking-peacekeeping-role-in-africa/4700466.html>, last accessed on August 31, 2019.

the original aspirations of China and Africa for win-win cooperation and common development will stay unchanged and the resolve to jointly build a closer community with a shared future will not waver.”⁹

Beijing’s main focus, though, is on the cooperation in the area of development, which is a qualitatively newer level of interaction than regular economic or diplomatic exchanges, investments and even military cooperation. This is the competitive advantage Beijing’s strategy in Africa has over the American one.

In Osaka, President Xi Jinping voiced three proposals to the African leaders furthering the September FOCAC Summit’s resolutions.

Firstly, to become “pioneers for win-win development” – which, in practical terms, implies connecting the “One Belt, One Road” project with the provisions of the new pan-African long-term development strategy adopted by the African Union (AU), “Agenda 2063”, the UN’s 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the national development strategies of African countries.

Secondly, to follow the road of greater openness and cooperation, creating synergistic effect for the support of Africa’s development. Clearly in opposition to the American strategy, hinged on securing American interests, President Xi Jinping suggested building cooperation with the continent based on the priority of the interests of African states, adding that “any egotistical and self-centered moves benefiting oneself at the expense of others will lose ground and be unpopular” [Xi Puts forward Three-point Proposal on Developing China-Africa Relations 2019]. China, however, is willing to encourage the international community to increase its con-

tribution to Africa’s development, to help African countries tackle global challenges in cooperation with the UN. As part of that proposal, he voiced a new idea on the possible tripartite or multilateral cooperation in Africa, should it be supported by African partners.

Thirdly, Beijing called upon Africa’s states to be the keepers of multilateralism and make a greater contribution into the protection of the international order, to build development based on cultural diversity and inclusivity, to adhere to the principle of extensive consultation in international affairs, as well as joint participation in efforts, shared benefits and democratization of international relations.

A conceptually new element of the Chinese strategy in Africa was the widely broadcast, unequivocal formulation of the PRC’s policy as an enemy of protectionism, unilateral action, harassment and the “clash-of-civilizations mindset”, coupled with an invitation to Africa’s leaders to act together to protect the multilateralism and free trade system, fully account for the legal requirements, the rights and interests of developing countries (especially African), and to actively defend international equality and justice.

President Xi promised that China would speak in support of African countries in the UN and other multilateral structures, in order to facilitate directing greater resources into Africa, including to fund Africa’s own peacekeeping forces.

The latter remark also serves as Beijing’s response to the American strategy of “quiet” military intervention into Africa under the guise of ensuring regional stability and combatting terrorism.

⁹ Xi Puts forward Three-point Proposal on Developing China-Africa Relations (2019) // Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, July 1, 2019 // <https://www.focac.org/eng/ttxsy/t1677043.htm>, last accessed on August 31, 2019.

As to the American “deterrence by denial” policy, China countered it with intensification of involvement in solving the issues of peacekeeping and conflict resolution. On July 15, 2019, Beijing hosted the first China-Africa Peace and Security Forum, attended by the representatives of 50 African countries, including 15 ministers and chiefs of defense, representatives of the African Union (AU) defense departments [Opening of the First China-Africa Peace and Security Forum 2019]. The goal of the Forum was to discuss the topics of new China-Africa relations and cooperation in the areas of peacekeeping and President Xi Jinping's initiative formulated at the Beijing FOCAC Summit the year before.

Although the military involvement of the US and the PRC in Africa is hardly comparable, Beijing has accumulated considerable experience of participation in peacekeeping operations. By mid-2019, the Chinese military had taken part in 16 peacekeeping missions in Africa. The total of 32,000 Chinese troops have at varying times served in the continent's territory as part of those missions. At present, such missions in Africa comprise around 2,000 Chinese troops stationed in the DRC, Mali, Sudan and South Sudan. Active cooperation in the military sphere is being developed with Ethiopia and Côte d'Ivoire.¹⁰

Apart from the economic and military and strategic components, both states are fighting for the minds and souls of Africans. Ideological rivalry today has taken the form of competition in the area of “soft power”. This issue has been rather widely discussed in Russian and foreign studies (see, e.g. [Deych 2017; Urnov 2019; Bailard 2016; Zhang, Wasserman, Mano 2016; Tella 2016] and others).

Conclusions

In the context of the emerging global bipolarity, the strategies of the US and China are antagonistic programs based on diametrically opposed points of reference. The US focuses on resisting proliferation of the rival's influence by drastic, including violent (not necessarily armed) action. For the PRC, the objective is to neutralize the countermeasures taken by the US and its allies to resist Beijing's expansion on the continent and freedom to interact with any partners in Africa, while minimizing direct confrontation.

It remains open to debate whether the ideological clash is a *sine qua non* of full-fledged bipolarity in the world. Ever since Kissinger's “ping-pong diplomacy”, ideological antagonism not only failed to impede peaceful co-existence of Washington and Beijing, but scarcely exacted any toll on their rather close foreign economic symbiosis.

Now that the global economic and political potential of the US and the PRC has evened out, the issue once again becomes relevant. Quite a few Western politicians are asking themselves questions, albeit not decisive, but still important to define the new world order as neo-bipolar. Is China an ideological foe? Is it a sign of neo-bipolarity that the reborn Celestial Empire is challenging the Western ideology by spreading its values and perceptions of this or that political system or approaches to social and economic development issues, throughout the world? Many politicians see this triumphant advance of a political model alternative to the Western one as a threat to the maxim on the absolute superiority of Western values, economic model, ideas of legality and security.

¹⁰ China Remains committed to Promoting Global Peace, Security: Senior Colonel (2019) // Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, July 29, 2019 // https://www.focac.org/eng/zfgx_4/hpaq/t1684033.htm, last accessed on August 31, 2019.

Taken together, all that is viewed as undermining the existing world order. After all, as they are, both mono-polarity and multi-polarity ensure that Western societies can rest assured that they will receive a number of advantages globally that would allow them higher living standards for their population and inner social peace. The new bipolarity will likely further narrow the West's opportunities in these areas even compared to the present day *status quo*.

The last three decades' shift of a non-negligible portion of global resources to the "rising countries" with China in the lead has, for the first time in the post-war period, caused a disruption of the world order where each new generation in the West was better off than the previous one: children had more opportunities than their parents. Academician A.A. Dynkin called this the "destruction of social contract." For a long time, there has been a belief in the West that market reforms will liberalize China's political system. Apparently, that did not happen, and even if it did, it did not happen in the way pictured in the West initially. A well-known Russian international scholar suggests that the liberal universalism that prevailed before the 2008 crisis has exhausted itself, which translated into a painful quest for a new construction of the world order and a new social contract inside the West itself [Dynkin 2019].

The Chinese model not only never transformed as was expected. It turned out to be viable and competitive. It continues to evolve independently, not by way of replicating itself in other states, as is habitual for the West, but through the realization of the liberal principle "*live and let live*". It absorbs and accommodates within itself the potential of other countries that it requires, without focusing on their ideological or political preferences. This omnivory has allowed Beijing not only to win stable econom-

ic ground in Africa, but also suggest to the world an *international relations model alternative to the Western one*, that may work as the divide within the future global bipolarity.

China's current African strategy is an integral part of its global geo-economic project "One Belt, One Road". The African dimension of that mega-project is one of the key ones both in terms of its philosophy and practical implementation. One can say that the victorious march across the globe of the idea of China as one of the two opposing poles of global importance actually began in Africa. The economic achievements of the late 20th century were crucial and became the basis for further growth of the country in the world. But geopolitically, China finally rose in the West's eyes above the level of an Eastern Asian superpower precisely when it managed to project its economic might and political influence on the very remote and rather expansive African region, having considerably confined and narrowed the geopolitical and economic opportunities for rival nations there.

Here, one should recall that in Beijing's eyes, Africa holds value not only for its natural wealth and opportunities for mutual cooperation. It is the Southern main line for the PRC's network of infrastructural and communications clusters creating a unified belt of international economic, social and political cooperation on the *win-win* basis that goes from Asia to Europe via the Southern corridor. It is only logical that Beijing would reserve leadership in its newly created geo-economic area for itself as its creator.

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