

Is Africa Changing Its Strategic Plan Against China's Belt and Road Initiative Because of Covid-19 Pandemic?

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Abstract

The unprecedented Covid-19 global pandemic, hit the world at a time many did not expect with impact not just on health of countries but also on the economy. Efforts to manage the impact of Covid-19 have led to stronger ties with some countries and strain on others. The study investigated the African Relations with China post Covid-19 owing to the growing concerns on Africa's change of attitude due to the impact of covid-19 and health and economy. Using secondary data, the article assessed the ongoing relations between China and Africa, attitude of African governments to the Belt Road Initiative (BRI) and western perspectives on the BRI in Africa. Findings revealed that there are growing concerns on racist tendencies of China on Africans; while African governments try to maintain diplomatic relations with China, citizens have reservations. It also revealed that Africa and China relations may likely continue however there is a need to look inwards Post Covid-19 to diversify the economy. Findings also revealed that joint partnership with the West will stand a better chance for countries to benefit. Drawing from the findings it was recommended that, Chinese experts and policymakers should work to address African, American (and indeed, global) concerns about the standards and inclusiveness of BRI and be transparent in their dealings. The study also recommends that countries should remain open-minded and flexible about BRI and engage with it where it serves their interests rather than viewing the entire initiative through the often simplistic lens of geopolitical competition post Covid-19.

Keywords: Belt and Road Initiative (BRI); Post Covid-19; Sino-Africa Relations; US.

Introduction

Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) sometimes referred to as the New Silk Road comprises of infrastructure projects launched 2013 by President Xi Jinping. The project stretches from East Asia to Europe and Africa significantly expanding China's economic and political influence. Africa reveals a nuanced reality of how the initiative functions in the developing world, where infrastructure financing is desperately needed, and political externalities are of secondary concern to the receiving states. The BRI is often critiqued as so-called "debt trap diplomacy [1]. Critics point that China provides infrastructure funding to developing economies under loan terms, only to strategically leverage the recipient country's indebtedness to China for economic, military, or political favor. China's BRI is one of the few major policy issues that saw bipartisan support in the geo-political landscape of 2018. Although the west will benefit when they join forces with China, wide criticism has ignored positive aspects of the BRI missing opportunities to work constructively with China to accomplish shared goals in the developing world.

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a multi-billion-dollar infrastructure investment platform, has positive economic implications for developing countries and the United States, but is consistently backlashed by political and national security concerns. The United States shares the concern of Eurasia that the BRI could be a strategy by PRC to advance regional development, expand its military agenda, its psychological and political influence campaigns and toting the benefits of authoritarianism as well as the use of telecommunications technology to surveil other governments (Yun, 2018). There are speculations that the US may be missing an opportunity to support the development of African states and to find an area of common ground with China. However, some analysts discount the threat of the BRI as inflated, while others advocate for a U.S. response to counter a rising hegemonic power. The latter see Chinese infrastructure loans and investment as detrimental to U.S. companies' ability to compete and increases states' vulnerability to debt leveraging [2]. The risk is exacerbated by China's partnership with African political and military leaders through visits from top leadership. While US concerns are valid and broadly defended by

U.S.-China policy experts, they overshadow the positive outcomes of the BRI and thwart any opportunity the United States may have to work alongside China to uplift African states [3].

Chinese contributions to many African countries have become a central aspect of their development strategies. Many of China's infrastructure projects in Africa address a desperate need for roads, railways, ports, and energy (Reisberg, 2018). This includes a 2,600 MW hydropower scheme in Nigeria, \$3 billion in telecom equipment to Ethiopia, Sudan, and Ghana, and major railroad projects in Nigeria, Gabon, and Mauritania (Reisberg, 2018). China's diplomatic heft in Africa is attracting more and more attention from the rest of the world. Chinese enterprises and investors are hungry for a share of Africa's ample natural resources, and African politicians and power players are welcoming China as a contrast from Western preaching. But as China profits from increasing trade with Africa, it shoulders responsibility too. For example, the Chinese government established a development fund for middle Africa totaling 36.9 billion RMB (5 billion USD) in 2007 to improve basic infrastructure of energy, transportation, power and telecommunications in Africa. Juma (2008)

The Covid-19 outbreak, have heightened suspicions of critics on the intentions of China regarding the BRI. The impact of Covid-19 has led to increased cases globally, economic crisis, disruptions in world trade and a host of others. Africa is projected to be one of the worst hits due to its poor medical facility and heavy reliance on exports of raw materials as its major source of revenue to which demand has reduced due to travel restrictions and closure of borders to contain spread of Covid-19 in many countries. Also, videos of mistreatment of Africans in Guangzhou hit social media in early April. The videos prompted fury on a large scale; triggering for the first time a large mobilization of African governments and diplomats against the way their nationals were treated in China. Africans equally criticized their government that they were timid in handling the issue. Muchena, noted that African governments apply careful diplomacy in their dealings with China because China is the continent's largest single creditor nation and the business ties of its Belt and Road project [4]. Outraged op-eds in the African media show China's image has been damaged on the continent. Cabestan 2020, pointed that the incident is likely to have a lasting negative impact on Sino-African relations. He added that Covid-19 has exacerbated China's ideological rivalry with the West in Africa and contributed to dividing rather than uniting Africans.

The study is anchored on this background to investigate the relationship between China and Africa post Covid-19 and western perspectives on the BRI in Africa.

Objectives of the Study: The study aims to investigate Sino-Africa relationship post Covid-19 and Western efforts on BRI in Africa. The study is anchored on the following objectives

- To investigate the current stand of Africa on the BRI
- To examine if African countries will have a change in attitudes towards their cooperation with China

- To investigate western countries perspective on the development of China's Belt and Road Initiative in Africa.

Methodology

The study relied substantially on secondary data such as news reports, publications, blog posts, and tweets, to identify existing literature on the subject under study. Interviews were also conducted to obtain data on the subject matter, in order to have an understanding of post Covid-19 Africa and propose policy recommendations to respond to the crisis.

Literature Review

Africa's Involvement in BRI

President Xi Jinping of China first announced his vision of a "Silk Road Economic Belt" also called one "One Belt, One Road" (OBOR) and "Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) during a major address at the Nazarbayev University in the capital city of Astana in Kazakhstan in September 2013. The speech was laden with commitments to mutual trust and common values, emphasizing China's respect for the sovereignty of Central Asian republics and their independent domestic and foreign policies, while promoting rule by consensus and mutual benefit among a diverse array of peoples and cultures (Chatzky and Macbride 2020). The BRI is a strategy that aims to promote economic integration by building transport and energy infrastructure and linkages; it seeks to rebuild the ancient Silk Road trade route with the overall goal of opening global markets, thus creating a trade and investment network involving three continents: Africa, Asia, and Europe to provide development assistance to its poorer regions in effect establishing a modern-day Silk Road in a web of commerce.

Over the past three decades, China has had unrivaled success in lifting some half a billion people out of abject poverty, and has exhibited exemplary prowess in building roads, railways, ports, airports, pipelines, refineries, bridges, tunnels, power stations, urban transit systems, and other infrastructure projects in far flung corners of the world, and in record time.

When talking about BRI, few connect it to Africa yet African countries are part of it. African countries are faced with large infrastructural gap hence the need for its incorporation in the BRI. The strategic location of some countries, such as Kenya, Tanzania, and Somalia (the shore of the Indian Ocean), as well as Egypt and Djibouti (the shore of the Mediterranean Sea), made them early BRI partners because they connect Africa, Asia, and Europe (Githaiga, Burimaso, Bing and Ahmed, 2019).

Although, geographically the BRI has emphasized East Africa and the Horn of Africa, a greater focus on West and Central Africa is expected. China's significant role in the development of trans-continental railway and highway systems in West Africa is also evident, which is in line with the BRI's vision of connectivity. As at September 2019, 40 African countries had signed some sort of agreements on the BRI (Calabrese, 2019). Many countries on the

continent realized that joining the BRI can help them meet urgent infrastructural needs for their development.

The Chinese links in Africa, especially in East Africa, form a system of transport from China's hinterland through China's southern coast, and eventually to Africa. This is essential in the growth of urban centers, the economy, and industries in both China and Africa. China's government financing is the principal creditor of only three countries: Congo-Brazzaville, Djibouti, and Zambia. Overall, 67 percent of African governments' external debt is owed to either the private sector (which may include Chinese companies) or multilateral institutions, while 20 percent is considered Chinese government lending. There is no official figure for total Chinese investment into Africa, but a recent estimate from the China Africa Research Initiative (CARI) at Johns Hopkins University places concessional loan totals at around \$5 billion per year. The study also found that Chinese loans are not a major contributor to debt distress in Africa, identifying only six countries where China, among several other financiers, is contributing to heavy borrowing.

Also, the completion of TAH5 and the gradual growth of a railway networks in Africa have made infrastructure projects more achievable. Improved physical and digital connectivity in Africa is important for promoting African goods and exports, which can thereby help African countries integrate more deeply into global value chains. While claims on China's interests cannot be ignored, China is providing an alternative source of funding at a time when Africa is looking for alternative sources of capital for its development (Githaiga et al). Edinger and Labuschagne pointed that Africa and China's growing bonds is linked to China's role as the key infrastructure financier through the BRI [5]. The relationship between the two can be viewed from the perspective of economic complementarity. The BRI is expected to substantially improve African connectivity, trade growth and job creation (Z et al). More trade both intra-continental and international means more jobs for African economies currently faced with high unemployment rates.

Sino-Africa Relations before Covid-19 pandemic

Since China sent its first medical team to Algeria in 1963, China-Africa cooperation in healthcare has been underway for more than half a century [5]. The relationship further extended to other parts of the continent cutting across trade, aid, security, diplomacy and soft power.

In the early days of economic and business engagement between the two sides – particularly in the late 1990s, when China began to implement its 'going out policy' – there was much more of a one-way flow of people as Chinese went to Africa seeking business and trading opportunities, rather than Africans travelling to China. At that time, the African countries were thrilled to have such an influx of people and money from China. More recently, China has begun to open its doors to foreign nationals in order to do more business together and increase its global influence, as well as to

attract a new pool of talent and skills. China has also granted large numbers of scholarships to developing countries and established a great many training programmes, all of which has resulted in an increased number of foreigners in China. (Basebya 2019) Sino-African relations are a vibrant, two-way dynamic in which both sides adjust to policy initiatives and popular perceptions emanating from the other. Hanauer and Morris, views the relationship between Africa and china as mutually beneficial [6]. China is attracted to Africa for its natural resources and export markets, while African leaders hope Chinese engagement brings economic development. Conversely, RAND (2016) described the relationship as one with mixed reactions: Government officials have been overwhelmingly positive, while other elements of African societies criticize China for what they see as an exploitative, neo-colonial approach.

China's role in Africa is both a long-established diplomatic partner and a new investor in Africa. According to Hanauer and Morris, China has four strategic interests in Africa. First, is access to natural resources, particularly oil and gas [6]. It is estimated that, by 2020, China will import more oil worldwide than the United States. To guarantee future supply, China is heavily investing in the oil sectors in countries such as Sudan, Angola, and Nigeria. Second, investments in Africa because of its huge market for Chinese exported goods. This facilitates China's efforts to restructure its own economy away from labor-intensive industries, especially as labor costs in China increase. Third, China's interest on political legitimacy. The Chinese government believes that strengthening Sino-African relations helps raise China's own international influence. Most African governments express support for Beijing's "One China" policy, a prerequisite for attracting Chinese aid and investment. Finally, China has sought a more constructive role as contributor to stability in the region, partly to mitigate security-related threats to China's economic interests.

African governments in turn look to China to provide political recognition and legitimacy and to contribute to their economic development through aid, investment, infrastructure development, and trade. To some degree, many African leaders hope that China will interact with them in ways that the United States and other Western governments do not — by engaging economically without condescendingly preaching about good governance or by investing in high-risk projects or in remote regions that are not appealing to Western governments or companies. Some Africans aspire to replicate China's rapid economic development and believe that their nations can benefit from China's recent experience in lifting itself out of poverty (Hanauer and Morris 2020).

Relations between China and Africa today are far less thorny than they used to be in the past, when there were often reports of attacks on Chinese nationals by indigenous people in Africa. Such attacks were usually the result of increased demand on resources, mistreatment of local communities, or simply a clash of cultures. Many African countries have also suffered from debt distress as a result of excessive borrowing from China, which some analysts

frame as China's 'debt trap diplomacy'. In addition, there have been several cases of illegal activities by the Chinese in Africa, from game poaching and environmental degradation to poor labour relations and business malpractice. Despite such reports, there have been far more engagement between China and Africa at the governmental level and there has been significant efforts on both sides to improve the situation.

The neocolonial school of thought in Africa is critical of Chinese engagement. Labor unions, civil society groups, and other segments of African societies criticize Chinese enterprises for poor labor conditions, unsustainable environmental practices, and job displacement. Good-governance watchdogs warn that China negotiates unfair deals that take advantage of African governments' relative weaknesses and that foster corruption and wasteful decision-making. In their view, China perpetuates a neo-colonial relationship in which Africa exports raw materials to China in exchange for manufactured goods. In some countries, resentment at Chinese business practices has led to popular protests and violence against Chinese businessmen and migrants. Questions arise as to whether China Accommodated the African Reaction. In response to these concerns, Beijing adjusted its policies to assuage Africans' concerns and put the Sino-African relationship on a more balanced footing. These modifications include a greater emphasis on "sustainability" in the economic and trade relationship; the promotion of Chinese soft power, culture, and people-to-people exchanges; and proactive engagement in the security and stability of conflict-prone areas in Africa. Such adjustments represent an understanding among Chinese elites that China's increasing presence on the continent is producing negative consequences that must be addressed. Beijing's adjustments have the potential to benefit both China and its African partners. Closer cultural ties and aggressive outreach will likely foster broader public support for China; the resulting favorable climate will enable Chinese investments to continue securing natural resources and generating profits while also contributing increasingly to local job creation and economic development.

The year 2018 marked a milestone in China African relations. Chinese president Xi Jinping pledged \$60 billion to the continent in loans, grants, and development financing. Xi announced this during the Forum on China Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) meeting attended by leaders from all African Nations in Beijing. He also announced eight initiatives aimed at improving Sino-Africa relations, including investments in healthcare, education, security, cultural exchanges, and increasing non-resource imports from Africa [7]. Ever since, there has been far more engagement between China and Africa at the governmental level. Both China and Africa are making significant efforts to improve the situation.

China's large market attracted foreign investment which, in turn, helped the country establish a strong manufacturing base. China's economic strategy has focused on expanding export growth in addition to meeting local market needs. African countries are looking

into ways to integrate their economies and boost internal markets. Africa is using all possible diplomatic avenues to press the case for expanded access to international markets. Africa's ability to increase its exports will depend on a combination of access to markets and the ability to attract foreign direct investment.

Africa's capacity to become a major player in the global economy depends largely on its ability to train its population in science, technology, engineering and math. Africa is already focusing new international partnerships around these concerns. China could contribute by joining other nations around the world helping Africa build its scientific and technical competence. This involves creating a new generation of technical and entrepreneurial universities.

Role of the US in BRI

BRI poses an opportunity to bring much-needed development to Eurasia's and rimland Asia's underdeveloped regions, Africa and global trade expansions while also ensuring that China gives priority to being a responsible and transparent stakeholder as its clout grows on the international stage. To do this, the western countries must partner with China (Chatzky and McBride, 2020). The Covid-19 has raised suspicions on China's quest on becoming a world power. However, the assertions may not totally be thrown away as China cannot be totally ignored in the global space considering its growing global influence. Numerous unprecedented developments in the past created a major opportunity for expanding US-China collaboration in advancing sustainable and inclusive growth. The most important of these came in September 2016 on the eve of the G20 summit in Hangzhou, when China and the US, the world's top two greenhouse gas emitters respectively, jointly ratified the UN Paris Agreement on Climate Change. The agreement is the most ambitious international effort ever undertaken to combat the causes and effects of climate change. The wealthy nations pledged some \$100 billion a year to help developing countries grow their economies using clean sources of energy (Chance, 2016).

In a related vein, in October, 2016, 200 nations reached an agreement in Kigali, Rwanda to eliminate the use of HFCs in refrigerators and air conditioning units in the year ahead, 10 since the chemicals have made an outsized contribution to global warming. Here, too, the leadership of the U.S. and China was indispensable in bringing other countries in the developing and industrialized parts of the world into compliance. Clearly, international environmental considerations that overlap with international development considerations present a valuable space for the US and China to cooperate and chart a future that is equitable and sustainable. This shows that both countries can work together to achieve the BRI despite their reservations for each other. Chance (2016) holds that BRI is largely regarded among American experts to be a seriously pursued initiative with the potential to significantly impact the economic and political future of Eurasia. However, the overall response to BRI has been ambivalent, with Americans expressing frequent concerns about standards, the adequacy of Chinese devel-

opment practices, and the erosion of Western development norms (Chance, 2016). The BRI is sometimes viewed as a deliberate attempt to economically marginalize the United States, to create a Eurasian sphere of influence, or as a pretext for expanding China's overseas military presence.

There seem to be divergent opinions on the role of the west in the achievement of BRI. The US being a super power has not been ignored by China. CRP has in time past sought partnership with the west on several BRI projects particularly considering the position of the US as the world's power however, some proposed projects have been greeted with criticism and refusal from US policy makers. Cabestan argued that U.S. and Chinese goals in Africa do not necessarily conflict, and the engagement of both economic powers could be advantageous to Africans. While the United States and China may not be strategic rivals in Africa, the two countries could increasingly compete commercially if American businesses become more engaged in African markets.

Before the COVID-19 crisis, US-China relations had entered a particularly mistrustful and combative period. While the mutual antagonism predated the Trump administration – Chinese President Xi Jinping had earlier ushered in a more assertive and ambitious approach to the world and the Obama administration recognised the limits to its engagement with China. Trump took things to a new level and sought to decouple aspects of US economic interdependence with Beijing.

Discussion of Findings

Current status of Sino-Africa Relations

The pandemic has further exposed the continent's dependency underbelly. The pandemic requires global no less creative local actions. Sadly, Africa is at the receiving end of received policy prescriptions, grants and handouts, from the World Health Organization (WHO), EU, United States, China, IMF and World Bank. Of course with familiar sound bites: lock downs, imported masks and ventilators Due to the close cooperation and friendly ties between China and Africa, the interaction between China and African countries during the pandemic has attracted considerable attention [8]. Although Africa is not the epicenter of COVID-19, the continent may be the hardest by the raging pandemic, considering its already struggling economy, fragile healthcare systems and poor medical facilities (UNECA,2020). This means that Africa is in urgent need of large-scale humanitarian assistance.

At the height of China's struggle against the COVID-19 outbreak, Africans, from leaders to ordinary citizens, voiced their support for China and even managed to provide donations. In Wuhan, some African students worked as volunteers, whilst others wrote an open letter praying for China. After the COVID-19 slowed down across China, China provided various forms of aid to help Africa fight the pandemic. This assistance is not only out of humanitarianism, but also because of the friendship between China and Africa. Findings revealed that China and Africa have shared many similar

experiences throughout history and given sympathy and support to each other during times of hardship. The profound friendship between the two has grown stronger and will never be shaken by either rumors or from the instigation of outside forces. Following the cooperation in tackling the pandemic and the aid brought into the continent at a time the US was considering pulling out of donating to WHO, the China-Africa community with a shared future will undoubtedly become even closer.

The controversies which trail the offer of support from China and the uproar over alleged racism against Africans in China in the current fight against the rampaging COVID-19 are clearly unhelpful. What the world needs is unity of purpose against the pandemic. The point cannot be overstated that SINO-Africa relations predated COVID-19 and will certainly outlive it.

Africa-China relation is long dated. It is characterized by cooperation rather than confrontation. Just as Africa and China cooperatively put an end to colonialism, apartheid and contained Ebola, so also the continent and China must unite to contain COVID-19 pandemic [8].

Change in Attitude Post Covid-19

Findings revealed that despite the racist hostilities against Africans, China's influence in Africa is expanding as Beijing races to help the continent from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. African nations largely received support from China. In Ethiopia and Burkina Faso, Chinese doctors have been working as advisers in the fight against the global pandemic. DW correspondents across the continent reported the arrival of containers from China, packed with masks, ventilators, and protective suits [9]. Countries like Cameroon, Rwanda, and Nigeria were beneficiaries of Chinese billionaire Jack Ma's donations. Respondents pointed that the donations were timely for Africa. The support amid the pandemic can, therefore, be seen as a continuation of the partnership and as a sign of goodwill between Africa and China especially given the recent mistreatment of Africans living in China's city of Guangzhou who were subjected to compulsory coronavirus testing and mandatory 14-day quarantine. African governments do not have many options. The crisis has forced the continent to cooperate even more closely with China than before. The global economic crisis has forced Africa to renegotiate its financial debt with China. It is believed that the incident will not damage the political relations between China and Africa as there are very few ructions at the official level. China will continue to increase its influence in Africa as a result of the crisis. The current aid measures convey a clear image of China as an understanding and helpful partner on the continent. Also, because the Chinese economy has suffered a setback due to the coronavirus crisis, the Chinese message to Africa is clear that both countries are in the same boat.

However, Africa has higher hopes than being a source of minerals. The worst that China can do is to continue Africa's mineral and plantation economies. China needs to make serious efforts to help African countries become exporters of finished goods to China and other markets.

Western Relations Post Covid-19

The current global pandemic has created a human catastrophe not seen outside wartime. But rather than being a reason for China and the US to come together, COVID-19 has been an accelerant in their hostilities. American resentment toward China has increased dramatically, stoked by the explicit efforts by the Trump administration to pin the blame for all aspects of the pandemic on the PRC. The US has repeatedly pushed it that they had significant evidence that the pandemic was not just a disaster unleashed by Chinese mismanagement, but had been manufactured in a laboratory in Wuhan. Conversely, elites in Beijing perceive this to be in line with Washington's long-term efforts to contain China's influence and curtail its growth. Beijing's defensiveness in the face of criticism over its handling of the pandemic has led it to adopt a new and more combative diplomatic tone; ranging from absurd conspiracy theories that the virus was an American invention to threats against Australia's call for an independent investigation into the pandemic – including flagging a tariff on barley exports.

It is unlikely that the various initiatives taken in the United States or even in India to make China legally responsible of the pandemic will ever succeed. Nonetheless, they are indicative of a changing mood of many countries both in the North and the South about the world's second superpower [10]. Covid-19 revealed the US economy's high level of dependency upon China, especially for the products needed to fight the virus (surgical masks, PPE), this has given additional push to the US to push further for economic decoupling with China and perhaps question globalization the way it was understood and encouraged before this crisis. The pandemic has also revealed the growth of China in the last three decades and its influence in the state-based multilateral organization, particularly in the UN system and the WHO. This feat has triggered many negative reactions in countries across the world.

Furthermore, one direct consequence of the current pandemic is likely to be a reassessment in many countries of their dependence upon China and not only in terms of medical equipment and pharmaceutical products, but also in general supply chain especially for Africa. Currently, COVID-19 has already revived the debate about decoupling in the US and strengthened the arguments made by Europe and the Global North, favoring de-globalization. Those in the administration and the private sector who had argued for a delinking of the US economy from China are now using the crisis to push harder for that goal. Trump has also flagged a further escalation of the trade dispute between the countries, which had been paused after an interim agreement in January.

Although a full Sino-American economic decoupling is impossible, it will probably speed up. Also, the pandemic has clearly highlighted the risks attached to one-sided dependence and intense connectivity. The relationship between the world's two biggest economies has deteriorated significantly, but not yet irretrievably so. The current crisis will not transform relations between the US

and China in a positive way, but may accelerate the competition between the two. How this rivalry plays out and its implications for the world will depend on a couple of key factors. First, there's the nature of the economic recovery. Who will recover faster and how bad will the damage be? It seems most likely the US will have constrained capacity to project power globally and head off Chinese ambition after the pandemic subsides. The US will likely emerge from the pandemic a slightly diminished power. But China will also be hobbled to some degree and unlikely to be able to simply replace the US in Asia and Africa. Its ambitious infrastructure and political capital-building exercise, the Belt and Road Initiative, is likely to be curtailed to some degree. "it is essential to draw a clear distinction between Chinese activities that threaten U.S. interest and those that are neutral or complimentary

A second factor will be the extent to which each side is able to use the pandemic and its aftermath to build partnerships with countries around the world. This is particularly important as many nations – both rich and poor – will be facing truly dire economic circumstances. Already Trump has questioned the benefits of alliances and strategic partnerships. Chances are that if re-elected, he is likely to continue to damage one of the US's greatest geopolitical assets. China, on the other hand, has sought to build alliance with several countries in the wake of the pandemic and may attempt to use its significant wealth and developmental capacity to strengthen its network of global partners. Although questions remain as to whether the efforts will outweigh a loss of global trust in China due to the pandemic as many countries are equally in support of the West. The global financial crisis of 2007-08 dealt a blow to the finances, confidence and credibility of western powers. COVID-19 is likely to have at least as big an effect. The global recovery will occur in the context of a geopolitical rivalry between two superpowers, it will also be one in which the US is likely to be weaker and China stronger than before.

Conversely, Cabestan 2020 posits that the US is likely to continue to play a leading role in the world, because not only of its sheer economic weight and dynamism but also its numerous alliance systems in spite of Trump. These power attributes will probably continue to offset China's growing influence in the Global South and the UN system, particularly the WHO. Beijing claims that it is striving to build a "community with a shared future for mankind". But COVID-19 has shown on the contrary that large parts of the world do not wish to share the same future as the Chinese communists. In spite of the frictions between the West and China, Trump Administration, the EU and the major European member-states will also play a part in reducing the diplomatic benefit that China can draw from this health crisis. The EU has already pledged \$15 billion to Africa and other developing countries.

Recommendations

From the findings, it is hereby recommended that the United States and China should both envision BRI as a vital instrument for strengthening habits of cooperation. The initiative must be shaped in a way that places it on the cooperative rather than competitive side of the US-China relationship.

Chinese experts and policymakers should work to address African, American (and global) concerns about the standards and inclusiveness of BRI. In addition, countries should remain open-minded and flexible about BRI; engaging with it where it serves their interests rather than viewing the entire initiative through the often simplistic lens of geopolitical competition. The US and China should establish dialogue and collaboration mechanisms focused on exploiting areas of overlapping interests in the BRI domain and to coordinate their different, yet complementary, strengths in development.

Conclusion

In spite of speculations on the risks of a second wave of Covid-19 in China, chances are China is getting out of the pandemic ahead of the rest of the world. Its international image and relationship with major partners have deteriorated rather than improved because of this crisis, which has deepened the emerging Cold War with the US and raising more questions about its leadership abilities in global affairs. However, the Chinese government has been able to use the pandemic to consolidate its relations with some of its partners. Even though most of them, particularly Hungary, Serbia, Thailand and Cambodia in Asia, already entertained close partnerships with China before COVID-19. It can be said that the Chinese government has been able to demonstrate its ability to reach out to many countries of the world. It has also shown its readiness to work with the international community, bilaterally as well as multilaterally, via in particular the WHO and the G20. The BRI was intended to connect various parts of the world. While it faces objections from different countries, in the African context, it has a significant impact as it provides an alternative source of development capital for the continent. For the past two decades, China has been doing business with Africa with the aim of balancing power-relationships between the continents. The role of the initiative in providing development opportunity at the global, regional, and local levels makes the BRI highly acceptable in Africa. If BRI African nations harmonize their development plans to achieve complementarity and compatibility between policies and infrastructure implementation, the benefits would be even more significant.

Chinese enterprises will continue to be a visible part of the African landscape. It is critical for them to cultivate a good image of corporate citizenship and work closely with local communities. If not, they'll attract local resentment. China's presence in Africa needs to go beyond current connections, including support to non-governmental development efforts. Many of the transactions between China and Africa are kept confidential. Promoting greater transparency will help improve the image of Chinese businesses in Africa. China is not only the world's most populous and its largest creditor nation but on track to officially become the world's largest economy, surpassing the United States. Thus, China's standards of behavior and its current and evolving values will continue to have global repercussions, and will exert a major influence on the way China executes BRI in the years ahead. China could support the establishment of training programs in development management

in particular and governance in general. It is particularly important that such programs are implemented as international initiatives involving other countries. The United Kingdom, for example, is expanding its development assistance to Africa and could serve as an important partner in the development of a new generation of technical and managerial institutions on the continent. Africa's development could serve as a source of new international partnerships between the continent, Europe, Japan and the United States and help to improve global relations in general.

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