



Two Chinese women running business of banners pose with a support banner for Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump at Yiwu International Trade Centre on November 10, 2016 in Jinhua, Zhejiang Province of China. Getty Images/VCG

AMERICA'S NEW CONTAINMENT STRATEGY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR CHINA-AFRICA PARTNERSHIP FOR DEVELOPMENT¹

PROFESSOR PETER KAGWANJA²

As President Xi and his American counterpart, Donald Trump, meeting gets underway on the sidelines of the G20 Summit in Osaka Japan on June 28-29, 2019. The resumption of negotiations on tariff to end the recent lose-lose trade wars between the two superpowers should top the agenda. Realistically, the talks are unlikely to reverse America's policy to contain China's growing influence.

- 1 Keynote Speech by Professor Peter Kagwanja During the Annual Meeting of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (Cass) Forum, International Symposium on "China's Development and Opportunities for the World", Beijing, June 23-24, 2019.
- 2 President & Chief Executive of Africa Policy Institute; Adviser to the Government of Kenya; & Visiting Scholar at the Institute of Diplomacy & International Studies at the University of Nairobi, Kenya.

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), rightly praised as "one of the most ambitious development projects in human history" is currently moving cooperation on development a world scale to a whole new level. But in the second decade of the twenty-first century peaceful development is also facing a real and determined threat from resurgent geo-politics of the Cold War era and wave of anti-globalization posed by populism, isolationism and protectionism. These forces are converging in a refurbished Containment policy used to contain the Soviet Union during the Cold War, now being incrementally used by Washington to curb China's expanding economic footprint and influence.

AFRICA AND THE IMPACT OF THE NEW

Last year, China marked forty years since its reform and opening up from the late 1978. This year, 2019, is also the 70th anniversary of "New China", born in 1949. It is tempting to scholars and policy actors to narrow down the impact of China's development on the world to either the post-1949 or post-1978 periods. However, a panoramic view of China's development reveals that it has impacted the world over five distinct historic phases. First, the establishment of the old Silk Road over 5000 years ago connected civilizations in Asia, Africa and Europe, enriching populations from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean and the Pacific. It is the re-imagination of this golden era of 'collaboration of civilizations' marked by peaceful people-to-people interactions and win-win transactions that has inspired, and is actually propelling China's 21st century Silk Road.

Second, the humiliation that followed the violent conquest and occupation of non-Western world in Africa, Asia and Latin America from the 15th century is rightly characterized by the British scholar, Eric Hobsbawm, in his trilogy of world history as "the age of extremes". The memory of humiliation, loss of territory and sovereignty, the devastation arising from two world wars, violent wars of

liberation, massive displacement of populations and mass poverty largely informs China's idea of peaceful development and building a community of shared destiny for humanity.

Third, and linked to above, is the Cold War era (1945-1989), marked by upheavals, revolutions and wars. New China, itself born in this revolutionary era, supported anti-colonial liberation movements in Africa as elsewhere. And despite its own poverty, China funded grand infrastructural project such as the Tanzam Railway in Tanzania and Zambia in the 1970s. On its part, Africa supported New China to regain its seat in the United Nations Security Council. The China model that followed the Reform and Opening up, the turn to the market within the context of its civilization and culture or "socialism with Chinese characteristics", and retention of a strong party system based on the principle of 'democratic centralism' as the basis of stability and long-term planning and implementation of its vision of development continue to inspire the emerging world.

Fourth, the quarter century following the Cold War (1989-2014) has been rightly described as "the most peaceful in the modern era" in which humanity has made giant strides in development.

Brazing the tail, China rode on the peace to become the world's second largest economy. It also pulled over 740 million of its population from poverty, the largest ever rescue from the jaws of poverty in human history. China used the peace to lay the foundation for what its policy pundits describe as "a bid to enhance regional connectivity and embrace a brighter future". In 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping unveiled to the world the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as the basis of a powerful system of economic interdependence.

Paradoxically, China has effectively become the leader of globalization. Intellectually, the initiative is a rejection of Hobbesian scenarios of a world caught up in Samuel Huntington's

“Clash of Civilizations’, the “Thucydides Trap” of Kaplan’s “Coming Anarchy. Instead, BRI is an audacious assertion of the principle of economic interdependence on a global scale based on the idea of an imagined “Community of Shared Destiny for Mankind” in a prosperous and globalized world. It is charting a new form of globalization, inclusive of all nations and civilizations.

China’s trillion-dollar global economic framework has become one of the main arteries of the world economy, improving connectivity, promoting financial integration, policy coordination, unimpeded trade, and and fostering people-to-people bonds on a transcontinental scale. By September 2018, when China hosted the second Belt and Road Forum in Beijing, over 150 countries and international Organizations and nearly two-thirds of the world’s population were involved in the infrastructure and investments under the Initiative. Based on its recent studies, the World Bank has concluded that transport projects under the BRI are substantially improving trade, foreign investment, industrialization, technology transfer and living conditions for citizens in participating countries. When completed, the Bank states, “BRI transport projects will reduce “travel times along economic corridors by 12%, increase trade between 2.7% and 9.7%, increase income by up to 3.4% and lift 7.6 million people from extreme poverty”.

Further, BRI is transforming the environment as an integral part of establishing an “ecological civilization” where development secures rather than undermine our physical environment.

FRONTIER FOR GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

The creation of the Forum for China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2000 marked a turning-point in Africa’s development. FOCAC is part of the narrative of Africa’s transformation from a “hopeless Continent”, to borrow cover heading of the *Economist* Magazine in 2000), to a “hopeful”

Africa rising as a new frontier of growth and development.

Since 2009, China has overtaken America and Europe as Africa’s trading partner and source of development assistance. Since 2000, China has committed a colossal \$143 billion to fund Africa’s development priorities. This includes \$23 billion in the 2000-2014 period, \$60 billion in 2015 and another \$60 billion in 2018, the largest-ever flow of external funding to the continent—which is so far way larger than the US Marshall Plan aid to Europe.

Notably, over 70% of China’s development assistance to Africa is going to legacy projects of opening up the continent through infrastructure. Kenya’s 470 kilometer Mombasa-Nairobi Standard Gauge Railway, the country’s biggest infrastructure project since independence, is one of the showpieces of the BRI success. Completed in June 2017 and valued at \$3.2 billion, Kenya’s rail line has reduced the journey from 12 hours on the old railway to 4.5 hours. It has boosted the country’s GDP by 1.5%, created 46,000 jobs for locals and trained 1,600 railway professionals. Nigeria’s first-ever standard gauge railway from Abuja to Kaduna was completed in July, 2016, connecting cities and economic hubs.

In 2018, the Summit of Forum for China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) aligned the Belt and Road Initiative with Africa’s development blueprints, mainly the development strategies of African countries, African Agenda 2063 and the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Under the refurbished framework, China is supporting Africa’s eight development priorities: industrial promotion, infrastructure connectivity, trade facilitation, green development, capacity building, healthcare, people-to-people exchange, and peace and security.

SUPERPOWER TUSSELES

Since 2014, history has changed course. The rise of China as a superpower and the resurgence of Russia has witnessed the brutal return of Cold War geopolitics.

America has adopted policies that seem to indicate a systematic return to a refurbished containment strategy used during the Cold War to contain the Soviet Union.

In his brand new book, *The Rise and Fall of Peace on Earth* (2019), Michael Mandelbaum, Professor of American Foreign Policy at John Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies contends that a new containment strategy “offers the best chance to defend American interests in the twenty-first century.” He proposes an upgraded version of containment as a triple containment policy for the twenty-first century that primarily targets rising China, but also Russia and Iran as threats to America’s geopolitical interests globally.

The new containment policy is squarely responsible for the trade wars between China and the United States. This was not unexpected. On the campaign trail in 2016, Trump vowed that when elected he would label China a “currency manipulator” and to respond to what he called China’s “theft of American trade secrets” and technology and “unfair subsidy behavior”. He would levy a 45% tariff on the Chinese exports.

Upon his election in 2016, Donald Trump stormed into the world stage as the new face of resurgent

populism, isolationism and anti-globalization trends (including tariffs, protectionism and anti-migration policies), which also gave rise to the ‘Brexit movement’ in Britain.

Efforts to resort to the containment policy to limit China’s military, political and economic influence is eroding the gains made in development.

Because of China’s expanding footprint in development, peace and security and humanitarian assistance in Africa, the continent is become a theatre of superpower rivalry as part of the new containment strategy towards China. In the wake of the March 2018 FOCAC Summit in Beijing, the continent witnessed an unprecedented Sino-phobia articulated mainly on digital platforms and targeting China’s role in Africa. China is falsely characterized as a neo-colonial power or as setting up a giant “debt trap” for the recipient of its development support.

In conclusion, China should stay the course in crusading for peaceful development. War can only undermine the gains made in development and return humanity to poverty.

Governments participating in the BRI as well as think tanks need to invest in empirical research to provide data to enabled policymakers, media and the publics make evidence-based assessments, maximize on the gains relating to the Belt and Road Initiative and counter the Containment strategy. Peace is the only safe pathway to sustainable development and prosperity.

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NHIF Parking Tower 5th Floor, Ragati Road
P. O. Box 34791 - 00100, Nairobi, Kenya

