

O A S I S

2026
Enero-junio

OBSERVATORIO DE ANÁLISIS DE LOS SISTEMAS INTERNACIONALES

DOSSIER:
ÁFRICA EN ASCENSO:
LAS NUEVAS DINÁMICAS DE PODER
EN UN MUNDO EN TRANSFORMACIÓN

AFRICA ON THE RISE: NEW POWER
DYNAMICS IN A CHANGING WORLD

ÁFRICA EM ASCENSÃO: AS NOVAS
DINÂMICAS DE PODER EM UM MUNDO
EM TRANSFORMAÇÃO

N.º 43

Escuela de Relaciones Internacionales
Facultad de Finanzas, Gobierno y Relaciones Internacionales
Universidad Externado de Colombia

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OASIS está indexada en el catálogo Sistema Regional de Información en Línea para Revistas Científicas de América Latina, el Caribe, España y Portugal (LATINDEX), el Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), y en las bases de datos del International Bibliography of Social Sciences (IBSS), Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI), Cengage Learning, Citas Latinoamericanas en Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades (CLASE), Fuente Académica EBSCO, Dialnet, Social Science Research Network (SSRN), Red Iberoamericana de Innovación y Conocimiento Científico (REDIB), el Registro Escandinavo de Publicaciones Científicas y el Open Journal System (OJS).

ISSN 1657-7558
E-ISSN 2346-2132

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Edición: enero-junio de 2026
Diagramación: Álvaro Rodríguez
Impresión y encuadernación: Digiprint Editores S.A.S.
Tiraje de 1 a 1000 ejemplares

Impreso en Colombia
Printed in Colombia

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DOSSIER: ÁFRICA EN ASCENSO: LAS NUEVAS DINÁMICAS DE PODER EN UN MUNDO EN TRANSFORMACIÓN . I. INTRODUCCIÓN. II. GOBERNANZA CONTINENTAL Y MULTILATERALISMO AFRICANO. III. POTENCIAS REGIONALES Y PROYECCIÓN AFRICANA. IV. NUEVAS ALIANZAS, ACTORES EMERGENTES Y PERSPECTIVAS REGIONALES. V. RESEÑA.

Africa on the rise: New power dynamics in a changing world*

In the early decades of the twenty-first century, the international system has entered a period of profound transformation. The once-dominant paradigms of Western hegemony, neoliberal governance, and unipolar power are being recalibrated by a complex and fluid constellation of actors, interests, and ideas. Among the regions redefining this global order, Africa occupies an increasingly strategic position. Long framed as a marginal space of extraction, dependency, and humanitarian concern, the continent is now repositioning itself as a driver of transformation—a space where alternative models of cooperation, sovereignty, and development are being tested and articulated. The expression “Africa on the rise” may evoke an air of triumphalism or economic boosterism, but beneath its surface lies a more fundamental truth: Africa is becoming a central arena for the negotiation of the twenty-first century’s new dynamics of power.

The expression “Africa on the rise” should be understood not as a trium-

phant or uniform ascent but as a gradual repositioning within the international hierarchy—material, institutional, normative, and epistemic—driven by processes of continental integration, diversification of partnerships, and renewed forms of agency. Also, the idea of “new dynamics of power” points to a world moving away from unipolar dominance, and towards negotiated interdependence, where influence is increasingly exercised through networks, norms, and narratives rather than pure material strength. This framing acknowledges that these processes occur unevenly across the continent, marked by simultaneous progress and regression, and by a persistent disconnect between Africa’s growing global visibility and the material depth of its political influence.

Yet, this repositioning is far from homogeneous or uncontested. While some regions and sectors show clear signs of transformation, others face democratic reversals, governance crises, and renewed security fragilities. In

* DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18601/16577558.n43.01>

parts of West and Central Africa, military takeovers and shrinking civic spaces illustrate the fragility of institutional gains, while structural inequalities and external dependencies continue to constrain continental ambitions. These contradictions remind us that Africa's "rise" is not a linear trajectory, but a complex negotiation between aspiration, capacity, and constraint.

FROM THE MARGINS TO THE CENTRE

For centuries, Africa's global image was constructed from the outside. Colonial cartographies reduced the continent to a place of resources and labour, while the Cold War reinforced its role as a periphery for proxy competition. Even after decolonisation, global narratives tended to portray African States as aid-dependent, fragile, or perpetually in need of external guidance. Yet, these representations cast a shadow over the intellectual and political tradition of African agency. From the Casablanca and Monrovia blocs of the 1960s to the foundational vision of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in 1963, African leaders sought to reclaim the continent's future through collective self-reliance and continental solidarity.

The transformation of the OAU into the African Union (AU) in 2002 marked a decisive moment in this trajectory. It represented not merely an institutional upgrade, but a normative shift: from a doctrine of non-interference to one of non-indifference, from political independence to the pursuit of structural

and epistemic sovereignty. The AU's vision of "an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens" re-centred Africans as subjects rather than objects of history. In this sense, Africa's rise is not a sudden phenomenon of the twenty-first century; it is the unfolding of a long and unfinished project of self-definition within a system that has rarely been neutral to African aspirations.

Beneath this narrative of institutional renewal lies a more complex reality. The transformation of continental structures has often advanced faster in discourse than in practice, constrained by uneven capacities, domestic resistance, and tensions between national sovereignty and collective authority. The shift from non-interference to non-indifference remains an ambitious yet fragile experiment in continental governance.

STRUCTURAL TRANSFORMATION AND CONTINENTAL INTEGRATION

Over the past two decades, African economies have recorded some of the world's fastest growth rates, averaging around 4.3 percent annually between 2000 and 2019, according to World Bank data. This performance has been driven by the expansion of telecommunications, services, renewable energy, and intra-African trade. Yet growth has decelerated in many countries, affected by commodity-price shocks, the COVID-19 pandemic and mounting debt pressures, as shown in studies by

Brookings and McKinsey. Within the framework of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and the African Union's Agenda 2063, African leaders envision a single market of more than 1.4 billion people. By 2025, forty-seven State Parties had ratified the AfCFTA, according to the African Union, giving rise to an area representing a combined GDP of approximately US \$3.4 trillion. Nevertheless, intra-African trade still accounts for less than 20 per cent of the continent's total commerce, a reminder of how far integration must still advance, and of how closely Africa's economic transformation is linked to the wider reconfiguration of global power.

While economic indicators alone cannot capture the depth of these transformations, they signal the emergence of a continental consciousness that transcends national borders. The logic of regional integration is no longer limited to economic convenience; it has become a tool of political assertion. The AU and the Regional Economic Communities (RECs)—ECOWAS, SADC, EAC, IGAD, COMESA, and others—constitute overlapping layers of governance through which Africa exercises agency in global forums. The continent's collective participation in the G20, the expansion of African membership within BRICS, and the negotiation of common positions on climate change, migration, and digital governance show how integration works as both protection and leverage—it protects Africa from the inequalities of global capitalism and

helps push African priorities onto the world stage.

MULTIPOLARITY AND THE RECONFIGURATION OF POWER

The re-emergence of multipolarity has further opened the strategic space for Africa to operate. As the unipolar moment of the post-Cold War era recedes, the continent is courted by an expanding array of partners, old and new, North and South. China, Russia, India, Türkiye, Brazil, Indonesia, South Korea and the Gulf states have joined the European Union and the United States as major interlocutors in Africa's economic and political affairs. This diversification has undoubtedly created new opportunities but also revived familiar patterns of dependence, sometimes bordering on new forms of neo-colonialism. The continent's growing engagement with emerging powers often involves infrastructure-for-resource agreements, questionable debt arrangements, and technology transfers conditioned by strategic leverage. Analysts from the African Development Bank and UNCTAD have noted that, while South-South cooperation broadens Africa's diplomatic room for manoeuvre, it can simultaneously reproduce asymmetries reminiscent of earlier dependency structures.

This phenomenon has revived debates about the "agency of the South." Agency, in this context, does not imply dominance or independence in the traditional sense; rather, it denotes the

ability to negotiate, resist and re-imagine the rules of engagement. African agency shows itself in quiet but meaningful ways, in how countries negotiate together in multilateral spaces, set conditions for accepting foreign investment, and build their own peace and security systems. The African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), with its emphasis on subsidiarity and complementarity between the AU and the Regional Economic Communities, exemplifies how continental institutions can lead in conflict management while collaborating with the United Nations and regional partners. Recent experiences illustrate both the potential and the limits of this strategic hybridity. Chinese and Turkish infrastructure investments have enhanced connectivity yet deepened fiscal exposure; Russian and Gulf security partnerships have provided alternative training and equipment but raised concerns about transparency and accountability. These cases show that diversification does not automatically guarantee autonomy but rather demands regulatory strength, policy coherence and continental oversight to avoid substituting one form of dependency for another.

Such practices mark a shift from the historical paradigm of dependency to a more complex, negotiated interdependence—one in which Africa is simultaneously a site of contestation and a generator of global norms.

KNOWLEDGE, REPRESENTATION AND THE POLITICS OF NARRATIVES

A crucial dimension of Africa's transformation concerns the politics of knowledge. The persistence of Eurocentric epistemologies has long constrained how Africa is studied and understood. Mainstream international relations theory has often relegated the continent to a passive role, framing it as a recipient rather than a producer of theory. In recent years, however, African scholars have challenged this hierarchy by articulating distinctly African frameworks of analysis—rooted in indigenous philosophies such as Ubuntu, the ethic of interdependence and communal humanity. From this perspective, the global order is not a winner-takes-all competition but a network of mutual responsibilities.

This intellectual re-centring forms part of what Achille Mbembe describes as the “decolonisation of the world.” To think Africa as a source of knowledge is to contest the historical division between centre and periphery. The contributions emerging from African universities, think tanks, and regional organisations are increasingly shaping debates on peacebuilding, migration governance, and sustainable development. Moreover, the rise of African diplomacy in digital and cultural spheres—through the creative industries, sports diplomacy, and

the diaspora—expands the terrain on which the continent exercises soft power.

The notion of “Africa rising” therefore cannot be reduced to economic growth or geopolitical positioning; it must also be read as a cognitive and symbolic reassertion of Africa’s place in the world. This intellectual re-centring also speaks directly to the purpose of this special issue. The articles assembled in OASIS 43 reflect this ongoing effort to decolonise knowledge production by foregrounding African and Global South perspectives as legitimate sources of theory and critique. They do not merely describe Africa’s transformation but interpret it from within its own epistemic traditions, demonstrating how African thought, in conversation with Latin American and Asian experiences, contributes to a more plural and inclusive understanding of world politics.

CHALLENGES AND CONTRADICTIONS

Acknowledging Africa’s rise does not mean overlooking its contradictions. The continent remains marked by profound social inequalities, governance crises and recurrent conflicts that test the reach and adaptability of its institutions. The persistence of deep-rooted structural challenges—fragile state capacity, uneven economic diversification and democratic

backsliding—continues to limit the realisation of continental visions such as the Agenda 2063. Recent developments in parts of West and Central Africa have exposed how fragile institutional progress remains, reminding us that political transitions and civic participation are still vulnerable to reversal.

Simultaneously, the effects of climate change, external debt vulnerabilities and global supply-chain disruptions further constrain national and regional development agendas. The so-called “return” of great-power competition on the continent has re-introduced forms of strategic dependency, often masked as partnership. Infrastructure projects tied to extractive industries, non-transparent loan conditions and unequal value chains can replicate the very hierarchies that African integration seeks to dismantle. For this reason, the continent’s engagement with external actors demands critical vigilance: the real measure of African agency lies in the ability to translate collective aspirations into coherent policies that serve the people rather than external interests.

THE GLOBAL SOUTH AND THE SPIRIT OF SOLIDARITY

Africa’s rise cannot be understood in isolation from the broader reawakening of the Global South. Across Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East, States are reclaiming historical projects

of South–South cooperation and demanding reforms in global governance. The expansion of the BRICS to include Egypt and Ethiopia, and the admission of the African Union as a permanent member of the G20, symbolise this collective momentum. These developments represent not merely diplomatic victories but milestones in the quest for a more inclusive and plural world order.

For Africa, the notion of South–South cooperation carries both pragmatic and normative significance. It evokes the solidarity that animated the Bandung Conference (1955) and the Non-Aligned Movement, while adapting it to contemporary realities of trade, finance, and technology. By deepening links with emerging powers and other developing regions, African States seek to diversify their partnerships and reduce vulnerability to Western conditionalities. At the same time, this cooperation offers a laboratory for experimenting with post-Western models of modernity—ones grounded in mutual respect, policy autonomy, and shared development goals. Whether this new South–South axis can overcome its own asymmetries remains an open question, yet its symbolic power is undeniable as it re-imagines global governance from the perspective of those historically excluded from it.

THE DEMOGRAPHIC AND URBAN FUTURES OF POWER

Another dimension of Africa's transformation lies in its demographic

dynamism. With the world's youngest population and an expanding middle class, the continent is projected to host around 2.5 billion people—nearly one quarter of humanity—by 2050, according to estimates from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. This demographic weight, often framed as a potential dividend, is not automatically an advantage; it depends on the continent's ability to expand opportunities for education, employment and civic participation. Without such expansion, the same youth bulge that promises innovation could become a source of frustration and instability. Yet Africa's young generations are already redefining politics and citizenship through creativity, entrepreneurship, and digital activism. From fintech ecosystems in Lagos and Nairobi to artistic movements in Johannesburg and Accra, the continent's cities are becoming laboratories of a new cosmopolitanism that connects local struggles to global debates.

Urbanisation, once viewed as a symptom of underdevelopment, now constitutes a vector of political and economic energy. Research from UN-Habitat notes that Africa's urban population is expected to surpass 50 percent by 2040, with megacities such as Lagos, Kinshasa and Cairo leading continental growth. Yet this rapid pace of expansion also strains infrastructure, housing, and governance systems, exposing inequalities and environmental risks. African cities have become not only engines of growth but also arenas

where the future of democracy, sustainability and identity is being negotiated. Their networks of knowledge, technology and culture link the continent to the rest of the Global South in tangible ways. This urban turn complements the institutional and diplomatic processes described earlier, showing that Africa's agency is not confined to elite diplomacy but grounded as well in everyday practices of adaptation, innovation, and resistance.

RETHINKING POWER: LESSONS FROM AFRICA

Africa's contemporary trajectory offers not only a story of emergence but also a lens through which to reconsider how power operates in the twenty-first century. The continent's experience shows that influence can be exercised through cooperation as much as competition, through persuasion rather than coercion. African diplomacy increasingly relies on building coalitions, mediating conflicts, and shaping global debates through collective voice. At the same time, the continent's internal diversity and governance challenges remind us that moral authority and practical capacity do not always advance together.

This tension is central to Africa's contribution to global thought. The African philosophy of Ubuntu—"I am because we are"—encapsulates an ethic of interdependence that contrasts with the zero-sum logic of traditional geopolitics. Within international relations, Ubuntu suggests that security and

prosperity are shared endeavours, not individual possessions. Applying this ethic globally calls for a re-humanisation of diplomacy: one that privileges solidarity over confrontation and recognises mutual vulnerability as a foundation for cooperation. Africa's history of navigating diversity, resilience and adaptation thus provides not only a regional perspective but also a set of lessons on how power can be reimagined to serve humanity as a whole.

AFRICA'S FUTURE AND THE FUTURE OF THE WORLD

The idea of an "Africa on the rise" is more than a figure of speech; it reflects an ongoing re-alignment of global power in which the continent increasingly asserts its relevance. From Addis Ababa to Johannesburg, from Lagos to Nairobi, from Cairo to Dakar, new forms of leadership and knowledge production are emerging that challenge the epistemic hierarchies of the past. Africa's engagement with the rest of the world—through the African Union, the Regional Economic Communities, the BRICS and the G20—signals a growing determination to shape rather than simply follow the trajectory of global change. Yet this aspiration will depend on the continent's ability to translate its collective visions into coherent policies and to reconcile its diversity with shared purpose.

Africa's rise must therefore remain grounded in critical self-reflection. The task is not merely to join existing

structures of power but to transform them; not to imitate the paths of others but to chart its own. As the contributions to this special issue demonstrate, African agency manifests across multiple dimensions—economic, diplomatic, cultural, and intellectual—each revealing both progress and paradox. Together, they depict a continent in motion: dynamic, heterogeneous, and indispensable to understanding the world in transformation. The future of Africa and the future of the world are inseparable, for the questions being negotiated on the continent about justice, sustainability, and coexistence are the very questions that will define humanity's collective future.

STRUCTURE OF THE SPECIAL ISSUE

The assembly of this special issue followed a broad and open call that invited contributions from across Africa and the Global South. The resulting dossier brings together diverse voices that collectively interrogate the evolving role of the continent in a transforming world system. The selected works engage both empirically and theoretically with the multiple dimensions of Africa's rise, its challenges, and its redefinition as a global actor.

This issue begins with an introductory article by Adela Beatriz Escobar Cristiani and María del Rayo Ventura Navarrete from Mexico, which frames the debate on Africa's quest for agency in a transforming world. It sets the conceptual tone for the three thematic

sections and concluding review that together examine Africa's agency, governance, and international projection, as follows:

I. Continental Governance and African Multilateralism

This section examines the institutions and strategies that underpin Africa's growing presence in multilateral arenas. It explores how the African Union (AU) and the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) act as vehicles for continental cohesion and as interlocutors in the reconfiguration of global governance.

Lisa Kwaleyela, Yvonne Malambo Kabombwe and Nelly Mwale from Zambia start this section with the article "The African Union in International Peacebuilding: Towards an African (Ubuntu) Agenda for Peace in the Korean Peninsula." Their work expands the discussion by applying the African principle of Ubuntu to global peacebuilding, showing how African philosophical traditions can offer valuable insights for universal approaches to conflict resolution.

Following this, Emmanuel Amoah-Darkwah and Juliana Abena Appiah from Ghana present their article "The African Union in the G20: Navigating Interest in a Declining Multilateral System." The piece examines the AU's accession to the G20 as a landmark achievement in Africa's integration into global decision-making and analyses the broader implications of this

membership for both the continent and the evolving multilateral order.

The section concludes with “African Union Strategies towards Extracontinental Trade Cooperation: Prospects for Symmetric Future Partnerships” by Frederick Boamah from Ghana. This article explores Africa’s evolving approach to economic diplomacy, highlighting how initiatives such as the AfCFTA aim to foster fairer and more balanced partnerships with extra-continental actors while strengthening the continent’s collective bargaining power in global trade.

II. Regional Powers and Africa’s Global Projection

The second section highlights Africa’s regional leaders and their pursuit of international visibility. It brings together analyses of South Africa, Ethiopia, and China–Africa relations, underscoring the intersections between domestic policy, regional leadership, and global diplomacy.

The section opens with “Assimilação, Representação e Seletividade: as estratégias de inserção internacional da África do Sul em 30 anos de pós-apartheid” by Anselmo Otavio from Brazil. This article provides a detailed examination of South Africa’s foreign policy across successive political administrations, analysing how the country balances continental expectations with its broader global ambitions and navigates its dual identity as both an African leader and a global actor.

The next contribution, “Sudáfrica: potencia regional e inserción internacional. Un análisis de su presencia en los BRICS y la denuncia contra Israel” by Adriana Franco Silva and Lilia Nayely Montoya Leal from Mexico, examines South Africa’s role within the BRICS framework and its positioning as both a regional economic power and a political leader in the Global South. The article analyses how South Africa’s foreign policy articulates regional influence with global aspirations, reflecting its search for strategic autonomy in an evolving international order.

Following this, “Sudáfrica, la voz del Sur en el tema palestino (1994–2024)” by Mariana Casanova Roque from Cuba and Marta Tawil Kuri from Mexico analyses South Africa’s sustained diplomatic advocacy for the Palestinian cause and its significance for South–South solidarity and post-apartheid identity politics. The article situates this foreign policy stance within South Africa’s broader moral and historical commitment to decolonisation and global justice.

In “Etiopía y la asociación estratégica con China: entre la geopolítica y la cooperación en el siglo XXI,” Carla Morasso from Argentina examines Ethiopia’s strategic partnership with China as an example of pragmatic diplomacy that mirrors Africa’s broader diversification of alliances. The article analyses how this bilateral relationship combines geopolitical calculation with developmental cooperation, positioning

Ethiopia as a key actor in Africa's engagement with emerging powers.

The section concludes with “Política externa no contexto africano: um estudo exploratório da cooperação internacional para o desenvolvimento da China na África” by Júlio Sani Lopes from Guinea-Bissau. This article investigates the patterns, motivations, and consequences of China's development cooperation across the African continent, emphasising how these interactions reshape traditional North–South hierarchies and contribute to the construction of new models of South–South partnership.

III. New Alliances, Emerging Actors, and Regional Perspectives

The final thematic section explores the continent's widening web of relationships with extra-continental partners and its own regional sub-systems. The articles presented here analyse Africa's engagement in global diplomacy, its evolving security partnerships, and the conceptual frameworks that underpin regional integration.

The section begins with “Africa and the Cooperation Forums with Extra-continental Countries” by Peter Joilah Lambon from Ghana. This article examines the institutional frameworks—such as FOCAC, TICAD, and the EU–AU partnerships—that structure Africa's external engagements and diplomatic outreach. It highlights how these cooperation forums have evolved into strategic platforms for articulating

African priorities, negotiating equitable partnerships, and redefining the continent's role within the shifting landscape of global governance.

Next, “Beyond Guns for Hire: Rethinking African Agency through Security Cooperation with SADAT” by John Ruszkowski from the United States, Isabella Ece Yazıcı from Türkiye, and Floris Gast from the Netherlands examines Africa's expanding security cooperation with Türkiye through non-traditional channels. The article highlights how such partnerships are reshaping the continent's approach to defence and diplomacy, revealing new forms of agency within Africa's evolving security landscape.

The following article, “África entre potências: o papel da União Africana nas relações com Estados Unidos e China,” by Juliana Ribeiro Lobato and Kiara Costa from Brazil, analyses how the African Union navigates the geopolitical tensions between the United States and China, positioning itself as both an interlocutor and an autonomous actor. The authors argue that the AU's diplomatic balancing between these major powers reflects a broader strategy of asserting African agency and promoting a multipolar world order grounded in dialogue and reciprocity.

In “La anatomía del Magreb: retos y oportunidades para su posicionamiento en el sistema internacional,” Gabriela Andrea Ruiz Casseres from Colombia analyses the Maghreb as a critical interface between Africa, Europe, and the Middle East. The article explores

the region's political fragmentation alongside its potential for integration, offering insights into how North Africa can strengthen its strategic positioning within the broader continental and global dynamics.

Finally, the section concludes with "The [I]Liberal Overton Window of the Rules-based International Order and its Counter-Policiescapes in African Regionalism: Patterns of Fusion, Fission and Diffusion" by Nene-Lomotey Kuditchar from Ghana. This article offers a theoretical reflection on how African regionalism interacts with the evolving paradigms of the global liberal order, analysing the continent's responses to shifting norms, competing models of governance, and the diffusion of alternative regional practices.

Book Review

The issue concludes with a review essay by Mariann Tánčzos from Hungary titled "Counterterrorism in Africa – New Approaches to Old Problems," which discusses the edited volume *Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism in Modern Sub-Saharan Africa* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2024), edited by János Besenyő, M. B. Khanyile, and Dávid Vogel.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The fourteen articles and the review included in OASIS 43 collectively portray a continent in motion—complex, diverse, and indispensable to understanding global transformations. This dossier

emerges as a project from the Global South about the Global South, bringing together voices that interrogate and reinterpret Africa's evolving place in the international system. Conceived and coordinated from Colombia and Latin America, it represents an effort to understand another essential region of the Global South—Africa—as a geopolitical, economic, and intellectual actor in this changing world. Far from reproducing external narratives, the issue amplifies perspectives grounded in shared histories of postcolonial struggle, developmental experimentation, and epistemic resistance. It affirms that Africa's rise is neither accidental nor uniform; it is the outcome of sustained political innovation, institutional creativity, and intellectual production that challenge the inherited hierarchies of global power. By presenting this collection, OASIS seeks to contribute to an ongoing dialogue between Africa, Latin America, and the wider Global South—one that reimagines the world from the South outward and advances the pursuit of a fairer, more inclusive international order.

Jerónimo Delgado-Caicedo, PhD
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Guest Editor

This publication is the result of the commitment and collaborative effort of

many individuals. I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to the leadership of the Universidad Externado de Colombia, whose trust and support have been fundamental to the success of this project, particularly our President, Hernando Parra, and our Dean, Gonzalo Ordóñez, of the School of Finance, Government and International Relations. This edition would not have been possible without the valuable contributions of Adriana León, our editorial assistant; María José Díaz Granados M., who ensured the highest editorial standards; and Manuela Alejandra Ramírez, Sara Navarro, and Miguel Ángel Arturo, editorial assistants for OASIS. My deepest gratitude to each of you.

As Editor-in-Chief of Revista OASIS, it is both an honour and a privilege to express my sincere appreciation to Professor Guilherme Ziebell de Oliveira (Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul in Porto Alegre, Brazil), guest editor of this special issue. His intellectual leadership, scholarly rigour, and inclusive guidance have profoundly shaped

the vision, coherence, and analytical depth of this edition, fostering a dialogue that situates Africa at the centre of contemporary debates on power and global transformation. I would also like to warmly thank all the authors who submitted their manuscripts and engaged actively in the debates on Africa's evolving role in the international system. Their contributions, originating from Brazil, Mexico, Cuba, Argentina, Guinea-Bissau, Ghana, the United States, Türkiye, the Netherlands, Colombia, Zambia, and Hungary, underscore the truly international character of this issue and its commitment to plural and decolonial perspectives. OASIS 43 stands as a testament to this collective effort: a space where critical reflection, intellectual diversity, and South-South academic collaboration converge to illuminate Africa's centrality in the reconfiguration of global power.

Jerónimo Delgado-Caicedo, PhD
Editor in Chief

INTRODUCCIÓN

África en un mundo en transformación: buscando agencia para romper paradigmas

Adela Beatriz Escobar Cristiani*
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RESUMEN

El presente artículo analiza las distintas formas en que África ha tratado de insertarse en términos más ventajosos en un escenario internacional que se encuentra en una importante transformación. Tradicionalmente, la forma como suele entenderse el papel de África a nivel internacional ha estado influida por una perspectiva reduccionista, que no reconoce la diversidad del continente y que enfatiza los desafíos que este

enfrenta, incluyendo enfermedades, guerras, hambruna, pobreza, diferencias culturales y dependencia respecto de los principales organismos internacionales y los países más ricos. Sin embargo, África se ha resistido a aceptar dichas representaciones como la única forma de definirse. En su conjunto, ha buscado crear vías alternas que favorezcan su empoderamiento, tratando de maximizar su capacidad de agencia en diversos escenarios.

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Recibido: 8 de julio de 2025 / Modificado: 16 de julio de 2025 / Aceptado: 18 de julio de 2025

Para citar este artículo:

Escobar Cristiani, A. B. y Ventura Navarrete, M. D. (2025). África en un mundo en transformación: buscando agencia para romper paradigmas. *Oasis*, 43, 13-39.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18601/16577558.n43.02>

El artículo analiza distintas formas en que África ha buscado posicionarse como un actor internacional de mayor peso y con una capacidad de agencia más consolidada. El análisis incluye iniciativas regionales construidas a través de la Unión Africana, la multiplicación de contactos con distintos actores externos, la presencia en foros internacionales, así como algunos ejemplos de rompimiento con el discurso tradicional de las potencias. Asimismo, se realiza un balance de los retos y las oportunidades que estas opciones implican para el continente y su capacidad de incidir en los asuntos que marcarán su propio porvenir.

Palabras clave: África; UA; capacidad de agencia; empoderamiento.

Africa in a changing World: Looking for agency to break paradigms

ABSTRACT

This article analyzes how Africa has sought to insert itself more advantageously into an international arena undergoing significant transformation. Traditionally, how Africa's role at the international level is often understood has been influenced by a reductionist perspective that fails to recognize the continent's diversity and emphasizes the challenges it faces, including disease, war, famine, poverty, cultural differences, and dependence on

major international organizations and wealthier countries. However, Africa has resisted accepting such representations as the only way to define itself. It has sought to create alternative paths that favor its empowerment, seeking to maximize its agency in different scenarios.

This article analyzes various ways in which Africa has sought to position itself as a more influential international actor with a more consolidated agency capacity. The analysis includes regional initiatives built through the African Union, the multiplication of contacts with various external actors, its presence in international forums, as well as some examples of breaking with the traditional discourse of the powers. Likewise, an assessment is made of the challenges and opportunities that these different options pose for the continent and its capacity to influence the issues that will shape its future.

Key words: Africa; UA; agency; empowerment.

INTRODUCCIÓN

De acuerdo con De Buitrago y Resende (2019, p. 180), en cierto sentido las relaciones internacionales “pueden entenderse como el continuo proceso de construir relaciones entre el yo y el otro”. La forma de interpretar estos conceptos, el yo y el otro, es lo que Hall (1997) denomina “sistema de representación”, es decir, “modos de organizar, agrupar, arreglar y clasificar conceptos, y de establecer relaciones complejas

entre ellos” utilizando “principios de semejanza y diferencia” (p. 17). Como indica Hall (1997), las representaciones mentales que hacemos de cosas visibles e invisibles (la muerte, la vida y la amistad) se nutren de manera individual y colectiva, ya que somos miembros de un grupo que comparte la misma cultura y un lenguaje común. Es decir, si bien cada individuo tiene una comprensión única del mundo, como sociedad “interpretamos el mundo, o le damos sentido, aproximadamente de la misma manera” (p. 18). Así, podemos expresar sentimientos y comunicar pensamientos a otras personas dentro de un marco de referencia que pueden entender.

Las representaciones que se realizan del yo y del otro moldean nuestro sentido común y nuestra forma de percibir lugares y cosas tanto lejanas como familiares (De Buitrago y Resende, 2019, p. 179). Esto sucede en relación con la forma en que percibimos lo que sucede en la vida cotidiana, pero también respecto de la forma como organizamos nuestro conocimiento de la vida económica, política y social de una comunidad, incluso cuando no tenemos un contacto directo con ella. Este proceso se percibe con claridad cuando se piensa en el continente africano.

De acuerdo con van Wyk (2015, p. 109), la posición de África “en las relaciones internacionales tiene varios componentes, concretamente la identidad [...] y el contexto (estructura)”. Por tanto, para entender el papel que África ha jugado en la escena internacional, es

necesario comprender los elementos que han ido dando forma a las percepciones sobre África (lo que van Wyk denomina interpretación y representación). Al mismo tiempo, es indispensable entender las estructuras en las cuales el continente se encuentra inserto, que delimitan su acción y constituyen la base de las formas de concebirlo.

Históricamente, nuestra forma de entender al continente africano ha estado marcada por una serie de estereotipos que distorsionan las percepciones populares e incluso académicas sobre el continente, ocultando su complejidad, la capacidad de agencia de sus actores y sus dinámicas propias. Hall (1997) considera que los estereotipos ofrecen una visión simplificada de las características reconocidas de un individuo o un grupo subordinado o excluido, por parte de aquellos que tienen el poder. A causa de este poder de representación, los actores dominantes son capaces de producir elementos que definen a los sujetos subalternos a partir de discursos, conocimientos, prácticas (colonialismo) e instituciones (gobierno colonial). De esta manera, se consolida una desigual distribución del poder entre el poderoso y el otro, aquel que se encuentra fuera del ámbito del yo colonizador.

De manera extendida, el continente africano suele ser visto como una región monolítica, ignorando su amplia diversidad. Igualmente, se le considera una región sin historia o detenida en el tiempo, un territorio salvaje o exótico. En el discurso tradicional de las

relaciones internacionales, África aparece como un elemento marginal que raramente se integra en las teorías más dominantes y, cuando aparece, lo hace como ejemplo de las desviaciones de la norma, al ser considerado un espacio de atraso, pobreza, violencia o enfermedad, así como un receptor pasivo de dinámicas provenientes del exterior. En los medios, el discurso sobre África ignora sistemáticamente los desarrollos positivos en el continente, y no suelen reportarse avances en áreas como la educación, la salud o la tecnología; finalmente, las sociedades africanas se ven a través de lentes occidentales, lo que lleva a malentendidos y representaciones incorrectas (Wilke *et al.*, 2024, p. 9).

PODER Y ESTEREOTIPOS: LA CONSTRUCCIÓN DE LA MIRADA SOBRE ÁFRICA

La visión estereotipada de África en las relaciones internacionales solo puede entenderse en el marco de la distribución del poder en la escena mundial. Este proceso no es nuevo: al contrario, ha ido de la mano con la construcción de Occidente como actor dominante de la escena mundial, en un largo arco que inicia con la construcción de los primeros imperios coloniales europeos. Dunn (2001, p. 4) sostiene que presentar a África como la contraparte atrasada del mundo occidental funciona como justificación discursiva de una estructura de poder dominada por Occidente: África ha funcionado como “un espejo en el cual Occidente se define a sí

mismo” (Dunn, 2001, p. 3): el otro salvaje y atrasado es el elemento que permite subrayar los logros de lo que Dunn denomina “el mítico Yo occidental”.

En esta perspectiva dominada por Occidente, África ha sido concebida como un ente pasivo, problemático, anómalo en distintos sentidos y, en gran medida, marginal para la dinámica internacional. En el campo de las relaciones internacionales, África suele considerarse como un actor prácticamente ausente (Kabunda, 2019). Cuando aparece, es en el marco de fenómenos como los conflictos armados, las hambrunas, las migraciones masivas o las crisis políticas.

En el plano económico, los países africanos son normalmente presentados como sitios por excelencia de la pobreza y la crisis permanente, en una concepción que se refuerza visualmente con apoyo en elementos como fotografías de niños desnutridos y con el vientre inflamado, así como adultos rodeados de moscas o enfermos en camas improvisadas esperando la muerte (Mahadeo y McKinney, 2007, Cruz, 2020). Este tipo de elementos aparecen con frecuencia en los medios internacionales, pues las imágenes son una forma de “crear mundos, lugares y patrones” y, por tanto, tienen “fuerza y poder” (Hungerford *et al.*, 2020, p. 4), al generar un impacto emocional importante. Por este motivo, a través de las imágenes se puede enfocar más fácilmente la atención de la audiencia.

Desde el punto de vista cultural, el estereotipo dominante es el que

considera que la modernidad no ha podido echar raíces en el continente. Por ejemplo, existe el imaginario de que todos los africanos viven en chozas de adobe con techo de paja, o que habitan lado a lado con animales salvajes como leones o leopardos (africa.com, s. f.), o de que no utilizan tecnología (Mahadeo y McKinney, 2007). Estas ideas se reafirman a través de imágenes, por ejemplo, las que se encuentran en revistas de viajes, que se concentran casi exclusivamente en lo exótico.

Desde el punto de vista político, la característica fundamental que se atribuye al continente es la “desviación de la perspectiva estatocéntrica” (Falle, 2014). África se ha convertido en ejemplo por antonomasia de caos y mal funcionamiento de la vida institucional. El continente se considera ejemplo por excelencia de conceptos como corrupción, Estado fallido, dictadura, conflicto o guerras tribales. Estas concepciones se refuerzan con imágenes de refugiados, de niños soldados o de las fuerzas armadas. Wilke et al. (2024, p. 3) señalan que el énfasis en los aspectos negativos es más pronunciado comparado con el que se da en la cobertura mediática en países no africanos con niveles similares de riesgo político, lo cual genera un sesgo en contra de los países africanos.

Frente a este escenario de pobreza, conflicto y atraso dibujado para África, los actores occidentales, incluyendo a las agencias internacionales, los organismos financieros internacionales, organizaciones no gubernamentales

(ONG), e incluso actores individuales, se presentan a sí mismos como los encargados de guiar al continente hacia un futuro más prometedor a través de la ayuda internacional y el otorgamiento de préstamos. De esta forma, se fortalece la idea del yo occidental mitificado que se señalaba en las páginas anteriores frente a un África pasiva.

Pero lejos de esta imagen optimista sobre el papel de Occidente, los estereotipos sobre el continente africano tienen diversos costos. Por una parte, Mahadeo y McKinney (2007) señalan que, en los casos de corrupción y saqueo de los recursos africanos por parte de las élites, los fondos malversados suelen terminar en bancos occidentales, de manera que, aunque Occidente es crítico de la corrupción cuando ocurre en África, al mismo tiempo forma parte de la reproducción del problema. Por otro lado, Wilke et al. (2024, p. 22) calculan, de manera conservadora, que debido a los estereotipos negativos, África pierde una cantidad que puede ascender a 400 y 4,2 mil millones de dólares debido a la desviación de flujos financieros a causa de la imagen negativa generada por los estereotipos. Pero, más allá del efecto estrictamente financiero, las imágenes estereotipadas refuerzan la desigual distribución de poder a nivel internacional. De hecho, esa ha sido una de sus funciones a lo largo de los siglos.

Al estar ligada directamente al tema del equilibrio de poder, la visión estereotipada de África está lejos de ser un fenómeno nuevo. Hall (1997)

identifica, ya en el siglo XVI, representaciones de África realizadas por Occidente sobre la base de la diferencia racial. Mudimbe (1988) subraya que la representación del otro por parte de los europeos se llevó a cabo por medio de las teorías de la expansión colonial y los discursos del primitivismo, que promovieron una historia basada en dicotomías específicas como la que enfrenta el conjunto civilización/cristiandad contra la idea de primitivismo/paganismo. Dichas construcciones ideológicas no fueron gratuitas, sino que ofrecieron la justificación para conquistar un continente representado como primitivo y caótico.

El proceso comienza con el contacto entre los comerciantes europeos y África occidental en el contexto del tráfico de personas esclavizadas. A partir de este periodo, los africanos fueron representados como nacidos para servir al amo occidental e incapaces de refinarse. En una etapa posterior, con el establecimiento formal de regímenes coloniales en el territorio africano, la región se consolida en el imaginario occidental como una tierra fetiche, habitada por caníbales y brujos (McClintok, 1995, p. 41). De nueva cuenta, como señala Edward Said (1979), el sujeto colonizado se representa como un ente salvaje caracterizado por la decadencia y la crueldad, mientras que Occidente y su proceso de colonización simbolizan la civilización.

Adicionalmente, en esta relación asimétrica, los colonizadores europeos van sustituyendo las memorias locales

de las comunidades africanas, a través de mecanismos como el renombramiento de lugares y personas, la implantación de las lenguas de las potencias coloniales y el establecimiento de una estructura educativa de corte occidental (wa Thiong'o, 2009). De esta manera, la memoria del colonizador busca sustituir progresivamente la memoria del colonizado. Las imágenes juegan un papel fundamental en la recreación del sujeto colonizado. En este periodo se popularizan postales con imágenes "de la vida diaria" del continente, que presentan "una realidad fija de una vida diaria y una cultura africana que no cambian", reproduciendo así la visión racializada del continente (Hungerford *et al.*, 2022). Otro tanto ocurre con las postales y los carteles elaborados en la misma época para publicitar los zoológicos humanos destinados a llevar a Occidente muestras vivas de culturas no occidentales, siempre desde el prisma del exotismo (Musée Quai Branly, 2011).

Aun después de la independencia formal de los países africanos, la manera en que las potencias continúan representando al continente no se ha modificado en sus bases. Como se explicó previamente, en la representación moderna de África se conjugan las visiones desde la academia y los medios de comunicación, para generar una narrativa que, en última instancia, tiene la misión de reproducir estructuras existentes. Los estereotipos que describen a África como un continente salvaje e incivilizado se enmascaran

ahora con nuevas formas de expresión que, sin embargo, conservan la misma idea subyacente. La pobreza, la guerra, la hambruna, la corrupción y los golpes de Estado, entre otros, constituyen los parámetros supuestamente nuevos utilizados para definir al continente en su conjunto. Todos ellos coinciden en que explican a la región desde una misma óptica: la falta de esperanza. En opinión de Mahadeo y McKinney (2007), las narrativas e imágenes predominantes refuerzan la desigual distribución de poder entre el yo civilizado occidental y el otro africano sumido en la barbarie, en un esquema que ha podido mantenerse a lo largo de los siglos porque el equilibrio de poder sigue favoreciendo al mundo occidental por encima de África.

Ante este desequilibrio de poder que ha caracterizado a las relaciones internacionales, y la consecuente interpretación negativa que se le ha dado a África en el discurso dominante, el continente ha realizado distintos esfuerzos para desplegar su agencia de forma que lleve a una interpretación más positiva de su papel y que permita una inserción más justa en el sistema internacional. Kasera *et al.* (2025) explican que la construcción de agencia en el caso de África es un fenómeno multimodal que se muestra en distintos ámbitos, desde lo material hasta lo simbólico e identitario. Para estos autores, existen cinco modalidades principales de agencia: la primera es la instrumental, que se refiere a las tácticas a corto plazo que adoptan los actores africanos

para obtener beneficios o evitar daños por parte de diversas instituciones o Estados. La segunda es la estratégica, que se pone en juego en el largo plazo, tomando en cuenta intereses colectivos y con una visión hacia el futuro. En la tercera forma de agencia, la epistémica, académicos, instituciones, actores políticos, entre otros, buscan desafiar el conocimiento dominante y construir marcos teóricos propios. La cuarta modalidad es la simbólica, que abarca la actuación y proyección de la identidad, la soberanía y la resistencia por parte del continente en cumbres mundiales, operaciones de paz e incluso en negociaciones medioambientales a nivel global. Finalmente, la quinta modalidad en que se pone en juego la agencia es la informada históricamente, por medio de la cual se hace un puente entre el presente y hechos pasados como el colonialismo, la Guerra Fría y el ajuste estructural. La agencia se ejerce dentro de limitaciones heredadas de dependencias, instituciones o residuos ideológicos.

La pregunta que se plantea, entonces, es cómo puede el continente desplegar su agencia y superar los estereotipos que han pesado sobre él durante siglos. Sarr (2016, p. 12) sostiene que “las sociedades se instituyen primeramente en sus imaginarios” y evolucionan “porque se proyectan en el futuro, piensan las condiciones de su perennidad, transmiten para ello un capital intelectual y simbólico a las generaciones siguientes”.

A continuación, se examinarán algunas de las formas concretas en que África está buscando deshacerse de la pesada carga de los estereotipos, crear nuevos imaginarios, proyectarse hacia el futuro en términos distintos y posicionarse de una mejor manera en el escenario internacional actual.

UNA NUEVA MIRADA: RE-CONSTRUYENDO LA REPRESENTACIÓN VISUAL DE ÁFRICA

Como se señaló, una parte integral de la construcción de los estereotipos negativos que han limitado la comprensión del continente africano ha sido el manejo de la imagen. Desde las postales de culturas nativas y los carteles para publicitar los zoológicos humanos populares en el siglo XIX, hasta las fotografías de refugiados, niños soldados y niños hambrientos diseminadas en los medios contemporáneos, Occidente ha utilizado una serie de recursos visuales para fortalecer los estereotipos sobre África y maximizar su impacto en el imaginario popular. Por esta razón, la deconstrucción de los estereotipos negativos requiere ir acompañada de un replanteamiento del tipo de imágenes sobre el continente que circulan en los medios y que nutren la representación negativa sobre el continente.

En las últimas décadas, ha emergido una nueva generación de fotógrafos y fotógrafas de origen africano que se han dado a la tarea de generar nuevos puntos de vista que contrarresten las narrativas estereotipadas sobre el

continente y se alejen de la constante repetición de las ideas de desastre, violencia y pobreza que han sido tan populares en los medios (Hungerford et al., 2022). Así, estas nuevas propuestas buscan distanciarse de las representaciones desde la mirada neocolonial, para dar lugar a una perspectiva más centrada en el África real con sus múltiples identidades y sus ricas expresiones culturales contemporáneas, muchas veces ignoradas por los discursos mediáticos occidentales.

Cuando se busca crear este nuevo tipo de representaciones, es fundamental la mirada desde los actores locales. Para Jayawardane (2018), “un fotógrafo local casi con certeza podrá producir narrativas más matizadas de lo que puede lograr un fotógrafo recién llegado que tiene poco o ningún conocimiento de una situación dada”. Por ello, resulta de fundamental importancia la difusión del trabajo de figuras como Zanele Muholi (Sudáfrica), Omar Victor Diop (Senegal) o Ruth Ossai (Nigeria), quienes utilizan la fotografía no solo como una forma de expresión artística, sino sobre todo como herramienta para transmitir un mensaje político y social.

Zanele Muholi, por ejemplo, se describe como activista visual más que como artista. A través de la fotografía, Muholi busca presentar historias relacionadas con cuestiones de raza, género y sexualidad, y celebrar especialmente las vidas de la comunidad LGBTI de su país (School of Feminism, s. f.). Por su parte, Diop utiliza el

autorretrato como un medio para capturar la diversidad de estilos de vida en las sociedades africanas modernas y reflexionar sobre la historia africana y global, ubicándose a sí mismo como protagonista, incluso en escenarios que le estarían vedados en la perspectiva tradicional (Casa África, s. f.; Stone, 2024). A su vez, Ossai es una fotógrafa conocida por trabajar a partir de retratos que celebran la identidad africana, particularmente nigeriana. A diferencia de la visión voyerista de la fotografía occidental tradicional (Coeval, s. f.), donde “el otro subalternizado es un objeto decorativo” (Cruz, 2020), Ossai privilegia la construcción de narrativas en forma colaborativa con las personas retratadas.

A través de su trabajo, este tipo de artistas se apropia de la fotografía y el manejo de la imagen, para despojarlos del carácter de herramienta de control y vigilancia característica de los proyectos coloniales (y neocoloniales) y convertirla en un medio para la construcción de narrativas desde perspectivas propias (Cruz, 2020), celebrando la belleza, la resistencia y la complejidad del ser africano en la realidad contemporánea.

Así, la fotografía africana contemporánea se convierte en una herramienta de empoderamiento y cuestionamiento que desafía los estereotipos impuestos por Occidente y busca generar nuevas formas de entender el continente.

No obstante, es importante reconocer que la mirada estereotipada

todavía es muy prevalente, y que puede presentarse incluso entre fotógrafos y fotógrafas de origen africano, pues muchos de ellos pueden sentir la presión de la corriente dominante para producir imágenes estereotipadas, en cierta medida caricaturizadas y fáciles de leer (Jayawardane, 2018).

¿NUEVAS FORMAS DE LIDERAZGO PARA ÁFRICA?

Otra forma de replantear el papel de África en el escenario global ha sido la construcción de nuevos discursos donde se cuestiona el papel dominante de Occidente y la interpretación negativa de la realidad africana. En las páginas siguientes se revisarán dos propuestas que han llamado la atención en los últimos tiempos, y que provienen de dos vertientes diferentes, incluso encontradas, pero que coinciden en distintos elementos. Se trata de los planteamientos de Ibrahim Traoré en Burkina Faso y de Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, presidenta de Namibia.

Traoré llega al poder a través de un golpe de Estado. Los golpes de Estado no son un fenómeno nuevo en África (Manboah-Rockson *et al.*, 2024), lo cual se puede explicar por la combinación de múltiples factores, entre los cuales se cuentan el nacimiento del Estado africano como producto del estado colonial, con el consecuente recurso a la violencia (Mafeje, 2002); la continuación del legado colonial en las estructuras posindependientes a causa de las ambiciones de poder por parte de

las élites africanas (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012) y de grupos militares; la continua intervención de las antiguas potencias coloniales en la vida política y económica de los países independientes (Shivji, 2021); el impacto de la Guerra Fría y la utilización de África como un escenario para canalizar la confrontación entre los Estados Unidos de Norteamérica y la Unión Soviética, así como la introducción de políticas de desarrollo impuestas desde el exterior sin considerar los intereses de los pueblos africanos (Shivji, 2021).

Los golpes de Estado han traído consigo consecuencias negativas como el debilitamiento de la vida institucional, el incremento de la inestabilidad política y, en muchas ocasiones, la violación de los derechos humanos. Sin embargo, no todos los gobiernos emanados de golpes de Estado han sido rechazados por la población. Un ejemplo reciente de golpe militar que ha generado polémica y no admite una lectura fácil es el de Burkina Faso, donde el gobierno de Ibrahim Traoré ha sido ampliamente criticado por distintos sectores, pero al mismo tiempo ha marcado nuevas pautas sobre lo que muchos africanos esperan de sus líderes.

El golpe de Estado que llevó al poder a Traoré se ubica en lo que Manboah-Rockson *et al.* (2024) describen como un nuevo capítulo en los golpes de Estado, que se insertan ahora en el contexto de una nueva lucha por los recursos del continente (incluyendo oro, diamantes, bauxita y otros minerales valiosos, así como petróleo) por

parte de las potencias occidentales como Francia, Gran Bretaña y Estados Unidos, pero también de China y actores provenientes de Rusia como el grupo Wagner. En este escenario, los militares han argumentado que su actuación política está motivada por la pobreza de su población, la corrupción de los líderes, la malversación de recursos económicos y el descontento social. Adicionalmente, para el caso de la zona del Sahel, se argumenta el fracaso de contener la insurgencia islamista.

Este último factor aparece como un argumento fundamental en el caso de Burkina Faso. En enero de 2022, cuando el presidente Roch Marc Christian Kaboré fue depuesto por un grupo de militares liderados por Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba, una de las principales justificaciones fue el fracaso del gobierno civil en los esfuerzos para contener la violencia jihadista, que había dejado fuera del control estatal a amplias zonas del territorio burkinés y causado grandes pérdidas para la población. Ante la situación, se consideró posible que un líder militar pudiera tener mejores resultados en la lucha contra los movimientos islamistas, por lo que una parte importante de la población expresó su apoyo al golpe.

Sin embargo, la situación cambió cuando el régimen militar se mostró poco efectivo en la tarea de mejorar la seguridad. Fue así como el 30 de septiembre del mismo 2022, otro grupo de militares, liderados esta vez por Ibrahim Traoré, derrocó a Damiba en un segundo golpe de Estado. Con apenas

34 años al momento de subir al poder, Traoré se convirtió rápidamente en un líder ampliamente conocido y controvertido. Ha sido muy criticado por distintos sectores, pero al mismo tiempo ha alcanzado una gran popularidad en su propio país y en otras partes de África y del mundo, con lo cual ha pasado de ser “un oscuro oficial militar a un ícono antioccidental en el continente” (Adeoye, 2025).

Luego de su ascenso al poder, distintos medios internacionales plantearon la posibilidad de que existiera una conexión rusa relacionada con su ascenso (Ortiz, 2022). De acuerdo con la Global Initiative Against Transnational Crime (2025, p. 29), poco después del golpe, el líder del entonces grupo llamado Wagner, Yevgeny Prigozhin declaró que “Traoré era un hijo digno y valiente de su patria”. Asimismo, en julio de 2023, Traoré se reunió con el líder ruso Vladimir Putin en el marco de la cumbre Rusia-África realizada en San Petersburgo. A partir de octubre y noviembre de 2023, comenzó a llegar personal ruso de seguridad a la zona. En ese mismo año se creó la Iniciativa Africana, una organización mediática no gubernamental de corte panafricana dedicada, de acuerdo con Global Initiative Against Transnational Crime (2025, p. 31), a realizar propaganda de las acciones rusas en África y difundir teorías diseñadas para mermar la confianza de la región en Occidente. Traoré estuvo también presente en Moscú para la conmemoración del 80 aniversario de la victoria soviética sobre la

Alemania nazi en la Segunda Guerra Mundial. Algunas fuentes sostienen que los rusos se encuentran en el círculo cercano de Traoré, pero evitan ser demasiado visibles (Roger, 2024).

Este acercamiento a Rusia se ha desarrollado de manera paralela a otro fenómeno: el creciente descontento con la presencia francesa. Ahmed (2025) ubica el origen de la participación de Francia en los asuntos africanos en la historia colonial. Una vez que las antiguas colonias alcanzaron la independencia, la presencia militar de la antigua metrópoli continuó, justificada con el objetivo oficial de garantizar la estabilidad de los nuevos países. Durante mucho tiempo, distintos países africanos aceptaron este orden de cosas, pero en los años recientes ha ocurrido un cambio importante, que se puede observar de manera particular en la región del Sahel.

Esta zona presenta problemas de inseguridad como resultado de la pobreza, la inestabilidad política y los flujos migratorios. La situación se complica en el caso de Burkina Faso, así como de Níger y Mali, debido a la existencia de importantes recursos naturales como oro, uranio y petróleo respectivamente. Todo ello ha alimentado el establecimiento de grupos yihadistas como Boko Haram (Salvia, 2025). Como respuesta, en 2017 se creó un grupo que buscaba atender las cuestiones de seguridad: el llamado G5 Sahel, conformado por Malí, Burkina Faso, Chad, Mauritania y Níger. Este grupo recibió el aval del Consejo de Paz y Seguridad

de la Unión Africana y del Consejo de Seguridad de las Naciones Unidas. Igualmente, obtuvo un fuerte apoyo de Francia (Arbuniés y Barba, 2022). Sin embargo, no se logró desactivar a los grupos terroristas.

Ante la falta de efectividad de iniciativas como el G5 Sahel, muchos ciudadanos de Mali, Níger y Burkina Faso desarrollaron la percepción de que la presencia francesa no había podido contener la violencia jihadista. Peor aún, se ha propagado el argumento de que la presencia francesa en la región, lejos de ayudar a la población local, ha fomentado la dependencia respecto de la antigua metrópoli (Pruscini, 2024), y ha comprometido la soberanía africana (Ahmed, 2025). Por esta razón, diversos sectores comenzaron a demandar la salida de las tropas francesas. El gobierno de Traoré recogió esta demanda y la vinculó con su interés en formar nuevas alianzas que permitan a su país alejarse de la influencia de la antigua metrópoli. La búsqueda de nuevos aliados no solo ha ocurrido a nivel bilateral como en el caso de Rusia, sino también a nivel subregional. El ejemplo más claro ha sido la creación de la Alianza de los Estados del Sahel (AES) en 2023, que vincula a Burkina Faso, Níger y Mali. La iniciativa surgió originalmente con el propósito de promover la defensa mutua en caso de una intervención de la Comunidad Económica de Estados de África Occidental (Cedeao), organismo que condenó fuertemente los golpes de Estado en los tres países que conforman la AES. La AES busca fomentar

igualmente la cooperación política y económica, así como la lucha contra el terrorismo y el combate a los grupos yihadistas (Ahmed, 2025; Klomegah, 2024).

La efectividad que pueda tener la AES se relacionará con el grado en que los planes para fomentar la estabilidad económica y para controlar las actividades extremistas en la zona resulten efectivos. Irrum y Humza (2025) señalan que los países que integran la AES pueden aprovechar sus capacidades de inteligencia para recopilar y analizar información que les permita detectar amenazas tempranas; igualmente, deben invertir en activos aéreos para garantizar la seguridad en las zonas más aisladas. Al mismo tiempo, consideran que para ello puede resultar fundamental el apoyo de Rusia o de China, pero esto puede también comprometer la soberanía de los integrantes de la Alianza.

De acuerdo con Ahmed (2025), para evitar una posible dependencia respecto de estos países, la AES debe construir instituciones incluyentes, impulsar la cooperación regional y atacar el tema de la inseguridad desde las raíces que la generan. A pesar de la importancia que tendría crear un ambiente interno más incluyente, Traoré ha sido acusado por algunos sectores de hacer justo lo contrario: promover el culto a la personalidad (Adeoye, 2025), ser un manipulador o incluso un megalómano (Roger, 2024). Asimismo, su gobierno ha sido señalado por imponer restricciones a la prensa, a la sociedad civil y a sus

opponentes políticos, y por promover la conscripción forzada de los opositores (Adeoye, 2025; Roger, 2024).

A pesar de estas acusaciones, Traoré representa para muchos un símbolo de cambio y un ejemplo de las nuevas formas en que África se puede relacionar con el mundo. Aikins (2025) considera que parte de la popularidad de Traoré se fundamenta en gestos como el haber declarado sus propiedades al llegar al poder, o mantener su sueldo de capitán en vez de recibir uno como presidente, así como en una serie de medidas que ha emprendido con el objetivo declarado de mejorar la situación del país y fortalecer sus capacidades frente a las potencias internacionales. Entre esas medidas se cuentan la nacionalización de las minas y la implantación de una agenda de industrialización para el país. Por su parte, Adeoye (2025) señala que la popularidad de Traoré más allá de las fronteras de su país se ha extendido debido a su capacidad para canalizar la frustración de una población africana “harta de la violencia rampante, los sistemas democráticos disfuncionales y la interferencia occidental”. En este contexto, el discurso de Traoré en favor de la autosuficiencia y en contra del imperialismo le ha ganado numerosos simpatizantes (Adeoye, 2025).

El apoyo a Traoré se ha hecho patente de manera repetida a través de expresiones de simpatía en redes sociales y en algunos medios, así como de mítines y manifestaciones en distintos momentos. A finales de abril, miles de

burkineses se reunieron en Uagadugu, capital del país, para expresar su apoyo al gobierno, luego de que las autoridades declararan que habían desactivado un intento de golpe de Estado en contra de Traoré (Africanews, 2025). También se han presentado diversas muestras populares de simpatía hacia Traoré fuera de Burkina Faso. Así, en mayo de 2025, en Ghana se realizó una manifestación para mostrar el apoyo al líder burkinés y el rechazo a la intervención occidental en África. Mítines con el mismo fin han ocurrido en Londres, Inglaterra (Chothia, 2025) e incluso en Montego Bay, Jamaica.

Es todavía pronto para hacer un balance bien sustentado del gobierno de Traoré, pues aún faltan elementos para entender este proceso. Aikins (2025) indica que no existe mucha claridad en torno de cada una de las acciones que el líder burkinés está realizando. Existe mucha información sobre las diferentes obras emprendidas por Traoré que se difunde a través de Tik Tok y Youtube o de otras redes sociales, pero es difícil saber el alcance real de estas acciones en el terreno. Igualmente, se ha señalado que en las redes sociales ha proliferado información falsa o manipulada, así como muestras de apoyo creadas por inteligencia artificial (Bojang, 2025).

Por otro lado, es importante recordar el hecho de que el gobierno de Traoré es de transición, y en principio deberá dejar el poder en 2029. Será importante que el presidente de Burkina Faso respete la fecha de término

del gobierno de transición para evitar la imagen de un líder africano a perpetuidad en la presidencia, aunque todavía es temprano para saber cómo se conducirá cuando llegue el plazo límite para entregar el poder. Por otra parte, Aikins (2025) enfatiza que Traoré debe garantizar la continuidad de la lucha contra la corrupción después de su mandato, incluyendo que las nuevas industrias e instancias gubernamentales para la promoción del desarrollo no caigan en una dinámica de manejos inadecuados. Este punto es crucial puesto que se debe evitar que dichas industrias se conviertan en un elefante blanco que la élite política pueda dejar en el olvido o saquear a placer.

Asimismo, es importante considerar que, incluso si en el largo plazo Traoré se consolida de manera definitiva como una figura de liderazgo en África, es necesario que no se le vea como la única voz que expresa las aspiraciones del continente. Asimismo, es preciso que emerjan otras figuras de liderazgo que ofrezcan esperanza a la región. Como observa en *The Long Form Podcast*. (2025), se requiere que existan varias voces en África para generar un movimiento amplio, ya que existe un peligro latente si las demandas para reposicionar al continente se centran en una figura única, pues esta puede ser eliminada como sucedió en otros momentos históricos con personajes como Amílcar Cabral o Thomas Sankara.

En este sentido, otra voz que puede sumarse al movimiento para replantear

la relación de África con el mundo es Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, quien con 72 años se convirtió en marzo de 2025 en la primera mujer en llegar a la presidencia de Namibia. La ahora mandataria formó parte desde su adolescencia de los *Freedom Fighters* con la *South West Africa People's Organisation* (Swapo). Luego de que su país alcanzara la independencia y la Swapo pasara de ser una organización de lucha al partido en el gobierno, ella comenzó a tener diversos cargos en la administración. Fue ministra de Relaciones Internacionales y Cooperación, así como viceprimera ministra. Además, es conocida como una persona íntegra e incorruptible (Fabricius, 2025).

Entre los elementos que permitieron a Nandi-Ndaitwah llegar a la presidencia de Namibia se cuentan sus promesas de diversificar la economía, incrementar la inversión en el sector agrícola para cubrir las necesidades alimentarias a nivel nacional y permitir que los ciudadanos “obtengan máximos beneficios de los recursos naturales del país” (Nyaungwa, 2025). Otra de las propuestas fundamentales del gobierno de Nandi-Ndaitwah es la reducción del desempleo, que se sitúa en 45% y afecta principalmente a los jóvenes. El gobierno planea crear empleos en los sectores agrícola y minero. Para ello, se está impulsando que los minerales deban ser procesados nacionalmente. Asimismo, los yacimientos de petróleo y gas que se han descubierto recientemente se encuentran bajo el control directo de la presidencia (Al

Jazeera English, 2025), y se espera que esta los utilice para contribuir al desarrollo del país. Asimismo, la presidenta ha reconocido la importancia de luchar contra la corrupción. Una acción reciente en este sentido fue la destitución del ministro de Agricultura por estar implicado en un caso de violación y soborno (SABC News, 2025).

Johnson Sirleaf (2024) considera que la elección de Nandi-Ndaitwa no solo representa un punto de inflexión para Namibia, sino que “ha ofrecido un renovado sentido de orgullo y posibilidad para África”, especialmente porque confirma que “las mujeres son tan capaces como los hombres de encabezar un gobierno”, y muestra que los ciudadanos africanos están listos para aceptar el liderazgo de las mujeres. Johnson Sirleaf considera igualmente que, de manera alentadora, el ascenso a la presidencia de Nandi-Ndaitwa no constituye un hecho aislado, sino que “es parte de un movimiento más amplio para empoderar a las mujeres africanas y llevarlas a posiciones influyentes en la política, los negocios y la sociedad civil” (2024).

Sin embargo, Tyitende (2025) afirma que la presidenta de Namibia tiene una tarea difícil pues cuenta con un período de tan solo cinco años para cumplir sus promesas. La tarea se antoja más compleja si se toma en cuenta que Swapo ha permanecido en el poder por más de 30 años, periodo durante el cual no ha podido resolver los problemas de pobreza, desigualdad y desempleo. Pero al igual que en el caso

de Burkina Faso, la llegada al poder de Nandi-Ndaitwa parece augurar un nuevo estilo de liderazgo que puede ser importante para el continente, pues se trata de un modelo que busca centrarse en la transparencia del gobierno, así como en el posicionamiento de la mujer como un elemento positivo en las altas esferas políticas. Los cambios que ha planteado la presidenta namibia demandan estructuras más transparentes para que los beneficios lleguen de forma equitativa a la población. Respecto del compromiso para cerrar la brecha de género, no se ha detenido en el discurso, sino que ha tomado algunas acciones muy concretas, sobre todo en aspectos como la designación de mujeres en el gabinete, así como su participación en la Asamblea Nacional (Koooper, 2025). Todo ello, aunado al historial de la presidenta como luchadora social, estos planteamientos permiten un cierto nivel de optimismo respecto del liderazgo de Nandi-Ndaitwa.

MÁS ALLÁ DEL LIDERAZGO. EJEMPLOS DE AGENCIA AFRICANA EN LA POLÍTICA INTERNACIONAL

Coffie y Tiky (2021) señalan que, en el contexto de las relaciones internacionales, la capacidad de agencia por parte de África implica la habilidad de los actores africanos, tanto estatales como no estatales, de negociar con actores externos para beneficiar al continente. Para ello, se requiere de una participación activa y del ejercicio de

la influencia en diversos ámbitos. Como explican Kasera *et al.* (2025), los espacios donde puede desplegarse la capacidad de agencia incluyen tanto cuestiones materiales como simbólicas. Por su parte, Delgado-Caicedo y Ziebell de Oliveira (2025, p. 123) sostienen que la agencia tiene entre sus elementos el posicionamiento social y las maneras de relacionarse, pues los actores del sistema internacional dependen de las estructuras sociales y la distribución del poder, pero, al mismo tiempo, el sistema internacional es una “zona de constitución mutua”, en donde participan una diversidad de actores, cada uno con procesos históricos y relaciones de poder particulares. Considerando lo anterior, se puede pensar en la importancia de la posición que históricamente ha ocupado África como un elemento que influye en su capacidad de agencia, pero también es necesario considerar que la participación africana en esa zona de constitución mutua permite jugar con distintos elementos que enriquecen sus posibilidades de agencia.

Así, aunque no suele reconocerse su relevancia, históricamente los países africanos han tenido espacios para la agencia. Si bien el propio proceso de descolonización ha sido entendido con frecuencia como subproducto de la configuración internacional de fuerzas luego de la Segunda Guerra Mundial, fue también resultado de la presión de actores africanos, por lo que debe verse en parte como ejemplo de agencia del continente. Otro ejemplo fue la

postura regional contra el *apartheid*, que se convirtió en una pieza importante de la presión internacional que facilitaría la disolución de dicho régimen. Otro caso más de agencia se encuentra en el papel que distintos países africanos jugaron en el Movimiento de Países No Alineados (van Wyk, 2015).

En la actualidad, el continente africano ejerce una parte importante de su agencia internacional por medio de la Unión Africana (UA), la organización panafricana que reúne a todos los países del continente para promover la unidad, la cooperación y el desarrollo a nivel continental. Dicha organización se ha convertido en “la plataforma prioritaria de África para participar internacionalmente”, así como en el “principal organizador, promotor, protector y defensor de los intereses políticos, socioeconómicos y ambientales del continente” (Lala, 2018, p. 9). Este hecho no debe resultar sorprendente dada la capacidad de movilización política que desde los años sesenta y setenta del siglo XX ha tenido el pensamiento panafricanista, al recoger las aspiraciones compartidas y los retos comunes de los países africanos (Treviño y Negrete, 2019).

El movimiento panafricanista emergió como una fuerza importante en el contexto de la lucha por las independencias en el continente, y fue la base de la creación de la Organización para la Unidad Africana (OUA), primer organismo que buscó la unidad de los países africanos luego de las independencias. Después de un largo proceso

de aprendizaje que llevó a la transformación de la OUA en la UA en los inicios del siglo XXI, esta organización ha buscado activamente convertirse en un agente de estabilidad a nivel regional, pues desde creación planteó entre sus principios promover la unidad y solidaridad entre los pueblos africanos, defender la soberanía, la integridad territorial y la independencia de sus Estados miembros, promover la paz y la seguridad en el continente y crear las condiciones que permitan a África jugar el rol que le pertenece en la economía mundial y en las negociaciones internacionales (UA, 2000, art. 3).

En síntesis, la visión de la UA es alcanzar “un África integrada, próspera y pacífica, conducida por sus propios ciudadanos y que represente una fuerza dinámica en la arena global” (UA, s. f.). La propia UA señala que la visión que se plantea es la de un África vanguardista, que solamente podrá lograrse con la acción simultánea en distintos frentes y un compromiso de largo plazo (UA, s. f.). En primera instancia podría parecer un planteamiento sencillo, pero se trata en realidad de una propuesta con la cual se busca establecer de manera categórica la relevancia del continente a nivel global. De acuerdo con Moffat (2022), la UA ha favorecido el desarrollo de África como un bloque regional, “solo superado en su desarrollo institucional por la UE”, en un proceso que a su vez “ha fortalecido de manera significativa la agencia internacional de África”. La importancia de este hecho se hace más evidente cuando se compara con

el discurso tradicional sobre el papel de África en las relaciones internacionales. Como indica Lala (2018, p. 7), “África está tomando gradualmente su asiento en la mesa y está renegociando su lugar en el sistema global”. Se trata de una propuesta de transformación radical del equilibrio de fuerzas a nivel internacional.

Una de las propuestas centrales que la UA ha lanzado para lograr sus objetivos y cumplir con la visión que se ha planteado es el documento titulado *Agenda 2063. The Africa we Want* (UA, 2015), marco estratégico que da cuerpo a la propuesta panafricana de promoción conjunta de la autodeterminación y la prosperidad continental. La Agenda se pensó como un plan maestro a través del cual se busca recuperar la visión de la UA y, en el largo plazo, transformar a África en una fuerza global dinámica gestionada por los propios africanos.

El documento retoma las aspiraciones generales de la UA en el sentido de lograr la prosperidad del continente a través del desarrollo sustentable, garantizar la paz y la seguridad, así como la integración económica y la unidad política. Incorpora también entre sus aspiraciones que África desarrolle una fuerte identidad cultural y que como región se oriente a un desarrollo basado en el potencial de los africanos. Para lograrlo, se requiere promover una serie de elementos, incluyendo altos niveles de educación y formación de capital humano, la generación de una economía del conocimiento, el desarrollo de

mayores oportunidades de empleo para los africanos de todo el continente, la transformación de las economías, la modernización del sector agrícola y mayores niveles de industrialización.

Para avanzar en un plan tan ambicioso se han propuesto varios proyectos “insignia”, que constituirían el fundamento de la nueva África que busca consolidar la Agenda 2063. Dichos proyectos insignia son la Red Africana Integrada de Alta Velocidad, el Pasaporte Africano, la African Commodities Strategy, la Universidad Virtual Panafricana y, de manera preeminente, el Área Continental de Libre Comercio (AfCFTA), abierta a la adhesión desde el 21 de marzo de 2018 y vigente desde mayo de 2019, cuando se alcanzó el mínimo de 24 ratificaciones requerido para su entrada en vigor. Tal como se ha planteado, el AfCFTA constituye una de las expresiones más ambiciosas de los ideales del panafricanismo

De nueva cuenta, los planteamientos de la Agenda 2063 podrían parecer un discurso de cierta forma repetitivo, ilusorio o copiado de otras regiones, pero en realidad lo que plantea es una transformación radical de la forma como África se ve a sí misma y cómo quiere ser vista en la escena internacional. Es verdad que, como plantean Thusi *et al.* (2024), existen diversos obstáculos que dificultan el cabal cumplimiento de la Agenda; entre ellos se puede señalar la falta de infraestructura de transporte y logística adecuada en la región, las presiones impuestas por la deuda externa que pesa sobre el continente o

los niveles de corrupción que enfrentan muchos países africanos. Sin embargo, estos no deben impedir reconocer el valor de una iniciativa que representa la voluntad de los países africanos para buscar un cambio profundo en el equilibrio de poder a nivel internacional, dejando de ser actores pasivos para convertirse en actores centrales de su propio desarrollo.

De acuerdo con Jaensch (2021), otro ámbito de agencia de los países africanos puede ser la actuación en misiones de paz y seguridad dentro de la región. La Arquitectura de Paz y Seguridad diseñada por la UA, y que enmarca el trabajo de las misiones de paz africanas, se desarrolló como una respuesta de los países del continente a la incapacidad del sistema internacional y de la OUA para enfrentar acertadamente los graves conflictos que asolaron al continente en la década de los noventa, incluyendo la guerra en Sierra Leona, la crisis en Somalia y el genocidio en Rwanda. Un ejemplo de misión de paz a cargo de la UA es el de la African Union Mission in Somalia (Amisom). Autorizada en 2007 por el organismo panafricano con el fin de apoyar al gobierno somalí para estabilizar la zona, más tarde obtuvo el respaldo de las Naciones Unidas. Amisom se convirtió en la misión más grande de la UA, pues antes ser transformada en la African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) en abril de 2022, la Amisom había alcanzado un récord de más de 18 mil efectivos (Tadesse, 2023).

Es importante señalar que algunos autores han afirmado que en realidad la participación de los países africanos en la Amisom fue posible porque estos vieron en la misión una oportunidad de situarse como aliados del Norte global en la lucha contra el terrorismo, en el contexto de la preocupación de países como Estados Unidos e Inglaterra por la posibilidad de que las actividades islamistas en Somalia generaran repercusiones más allá de África (Jaensch, 2021). Si bien esto es en parte cierto, la importancia de la Amisom también es una muestra de la centralidad que la UA ha otorgado a las operaciones de mantenimiento de la paz, reflejando el interés específico de los países africanos porque el tema del islamismo no se extendiera a otras partes del continente. En un sentido diferente, la no participación de algunos países en la Amisom también fue una muestra de agencia. Al respecto, Jaensch (2021) utiliza como ejemplo el caso de Tanzania, que decidió no integrarse a esta fuerza de paz y fundamentó su decisión en los principios de coexistencia pacífica y tolerancia religiosa, fundamentales en el caso tanzano dada la compleja relación entre el Estado tanzano y las comunidades musulmanas del país. En cambio, Tanzania prefirió ofrecer apoyo diplomático a Somalia por medio del International Contact Group on Somalia (ICGS), a través del cual Tanzania envió 300 toneladas de maíz a Somalia y promovió una solución pacífica para los conflictos en el Cuerno de África.

Otro ámbito en el que la UA ha buscado desplegar la capacidad de agencia africana ha sido el humanitario. Históricamente, el continente africano ha tenido iniciativas muy relevantes en lo que a la acción humanitaria se refiere. Un ejemplo claro de ello fue, en su momento, la promulgación de la Convención de la OUA sobre la protección y asistencia a los refugiados en África de 1969. En 2016, la Asamblea General de la UA buscó avanzar más en el terreno humanitario con el establecimiento de “una Agencia Humanitaria Africana que debe estar sostenida en los mecanismos regionales y nacionales y financiada con recursos africanos” (Negm, 2022). El lanzamiento de la agencia ha avanzado de manera lenta: en 2022 se completó la versión final de los estatutos (Hagos, 2023) y en 2024 se otorgó a Uganda la sede de la Agencia (Apo-feed, 2024). Así, este organismo se ha convertido en uno de los pilares que sostienen la idea de que la UA debe buscar soluciones africanas para los problemas africanos.

En suma, la UA ha sido un actor de gran relevancia a través del cual se ha buscado desplegar la agencia de África en distintos frentes. A través de su acción, los países africanos actúan en distintos ámbitos, desde la seguridad hasta el comercio, con el fin de atacar las complejas problemáticas del continente, promover el desarrollo de las economías africanas y favorecer una presencia más activa y mejor reconocida en el escenario internacional. La UA ha enfrentado limitaciones

significativas. Se ha criticado, por ejemplo, que este organismo no haya mostrado un liderazgo fuerte en las crisis que ha atravesado el continente (Bakwesegha, 2025). En el caso de Somalia, por ejemplo, la presencia de las fuerzas de la Unión Africana no logró consolidar la paz ni terminar con la presencia del Al Shabaab. Asimismo, otras iniciativas como la de la Agencia Humanitaria Africana se desarrollan con demasiada lentitud para atender los asuntos urgentes que enfrenta la región. Sin embargo, también es necesario reconocer que el organismo panafricano ha promovido importantes avances en lo que toca a la agencia del continente.

Otro de los campos donde África ha buscado ejercer su agencia internacional es el ambiental. En este aspecto, un primer intento relacionado con el tema del cambio climático no resultó muy exitoso, pues el continente africano inició su participación de manera tardía en comparación con América Latina y los pequeños Estados insulares en desarrollo, y no consiguió su objetivo. De acuerdo con Chan (2021), en el marco de la Convención Marco de las Naciones Unidas sobre el Cambio Climático (CMNUCC), el Grupo Africano de Negociadores (AGN - African Group of Negotiators) ha tenido dificultad en el reconocimiento de la vulnerabilidad de los países africanos. Dicho reconocimiento implicaría ser capaz de persuadir exitosamente a otros Estados para asegurar un trato diferenciado, así como la asignación de recursos

financieros para ayudar a los países africanos a adaptarse al cambio climático. Sin embargo, en el tema de la desertificación, los países africanos negociaron a través del G77 en la Cumbre de la Tierra de Río de 1992. En esta área, la participación africana fue más exitosa, ya que África fue incluido en el nombre del tratado de 1994: Convención de las Naciones Unidas para la Lucha contra la Desertificación en los Países Afectados por Sequía Grave o Desertificación, en particular en África (Chan, 2021). De esta manera, se reconoció el impacto que la desertificación tiene en el continente.

CONCLUSIONES

Las representaciones negativas de África que han existido a través de la historia muestran que, a lo largo del proceso histórico, el color de la piel ha sido utilizado para clasificar a los africanos como inferiores e incivilizados. Esta visión ha funcionado como justificación discursiva de la explotación colonial y neocolonial del continente. En una reproducción de la idea colonial, en pleno siglo XXI se sigue imaginando el continente africano como una zona incapaz de producir resultados positivos para sus pobladores, o bien que los mismos africanos sean capaces de dar aportaciones relevantes para el resto del mundo.

Frente a este panorama, África ha realizado numerosos esfuerzos para transformar la imagen negativa y promover una participación más igualitaria

en las relaciones internacionales. África está buscando romper con los estereotipos que la clasifican como una zona caracterizada por la barbarie, la guerra, la corrupción y la rapiña de sus líderes, así como por la pasividad de su población, elementos todos que la convertirían en una zona dependiente de la ayuda internacional.

Al estudiar las distintas formas en que África ha buscado transformar su papel en el sistema internacional y ejercer su capacidad de agencia en este ámbito, es posible encontrar elementos tanto positivos como negativos que moldean los intentos de reposicionamiento por parte del continente. Este hecho, en sí mismo, representa una interesante muestra que hace posible comprender que la realidad de África no es una sola, ya que cada uno de sus países mantiene una dinámica única permeada por la actuación de su población, las principales fuerzas políticas y económicas de cada país, la sociedad civil, así como por factores externos.

La diversidad de la región ha ido adquiriendo cada vez mayor reconocimiento debido a la acción de los propios africanos en distintos frentes. Uno de ellos ha sido la conformación de nuevas formas de mirar a África, ya no desde una posición de poder y superioridad, sino desde bases críticas que buscan reafirmar la relevancia de la región en la escena internacional.

Asimismo, estudiar las características de los líderes africanos actuales permite observar que existen parámetros positivos que pueden ser copiados

por otros líderes de la zona para desarrollar paulatinamente a sus países. En este sentido, la declaración patrimonial antes de asumir el poder, la limitación de la percepción salarial adecuada a su cargo, el combate a la corrupción, el anteponer los intereses de la población a los intereses de grupo y el fomentar la creciente participación de las mujeres pueden convertirse en banderas de las nuevas generaciones africanas. No solo se requiere de la fuerza de la juventud, también se necesita de la combinación de la experiencia positiva de líderes maduros para transmitir sus conocimientos a las nuevas generaciones, pero dicha sabiduría debe ser utilizada en favor de la población africana, ya que existe un clamor de cambio y justicia ante democracias débiles.

Igualmente, es crucial seguir de cerca la actuación de las fuerzas internacionales en África, como Rusia por medio de grupos mercenarios. En el caso de Burkina Faso, será importante conocer hasta qué punto su presencia puede repercutir en la vida de la población e influir en la manera en que el nuevo gobierno ejerce su agencia. Incluso, sería necesario dar seguimiento a las nuevas formas de presencia rusas como la Iniciativa Africana en Burkina o la actuación de milicias rusas bajo la figura de African Corps más allá de Burkina Faso.

En síntesis, el análisis de la agencia internacional de África confirma que el estudio del continente es complicado debido a las dinámicas de cada país africano y a la complejidad del

escenario regional en su conjunto. Explicar la realidad africana a través de estereotipos solo muestra reduccionismo y desconocimiento de la complejidad del continente. Por ello, es fundamental comenzar a considerar la agencia de los africanos como un factor para entender la transformación del continente en los últimos años.

El presente artículo representa un esfuerzo por entender la realidad africana desde una perspectiva que entiende a África como un participante puede desplegar muestras de capacidad de agencia en distintos momentos y desde diferentes perspectivas. Probablemente, una de las limitaciones del enfoque aquí utilizado se relaciona con que varios acontecimientos todavía son demasiado cercanos como para permitir una reflexión de lo que sucederá en el largo plazo. Si bien parece que el intento por transformar de manera crítica la mirada respecto del continente es cada vez más fuerte desde el punto de vista del discurso artístico, e incluso del discurso político, será importante dar seguimiento a cuestiones como los desarrollos políticos en Burkina Faso y en Namibia, el desenvolvimiento de los países africanos en el marco del AfCFTA o el funcionamiento de las misiones de paz auspiciadas por la UA en la región. Solo a través del seguimiento puntual será posible hacer un balance de largo plazo sobre la efectividad o no de los intentos de desplegar su agencia por parte de los actores africanos.

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**GOVERNANZA CONTINENTAL Y
MULTILATERALISMO AFRICANO**

**CONTINENTAL GOVERNANCE AND
AFRICAN MULTILATERALISM**

**GOVERNANÇA CONTINENTAL E
MULTILATERALISMO AFRICANO**

The African Union in International Peacebuilding: Towards an African (*Ubuntu*) Agenda for Peace in the Korean Peninsula

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ABSTRACT

Since its inception in 2002, the African Union (AU) endeavours to strengthen its role in enhancing peace and security in Africa. Through its renewed commitments to Agenda 2063, the institution ties these aspirations of building African solutions to African problems to seeking greater experience and legitimacy for the AU at a global level. This article explores the

challenges and opportunities for the participation of the AU in international peacebuilding efforts, analytically anchoring its argument on the concept of *Ubuntu* in peace-making as a prism for the engagement of the AU in long-standing conflicts such as the Korean Peninsula conflict. The findings of this study revealed that the AU has limited resources, capacity and expertise as an institution but argues that despite these challenges, the AU can

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Received: June 16th, 2025 / Modified: October 1th, 2025 / Accepted: October 21th de 2025

To cite this article:

Kwaleyela, L., Kabombwe, Y., Mwale, N. The African Union in International Peacebuilding: Towards an African (*Ubuntu*) Agenda for Peace in the Korean Peninsula, *Oasis*, 43, 43-70.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18601/16577558.n43.03>

re-align its aspirations to enhance opportunities for greater engagement in international peacebuilding. Beyond the scholarly contribution to peacebuilding, the article could inform an African-led agenda for peacebuilding processes over the Korean Peninsula as the AU enhances its role in international peace and security.

Keywords: African Union; Korean Peninsula; Peacebuilding; *Ubuntu*; Challenges; Opportunities.

La Unión Africana en la construcción de la Paz Internacional: hacia una Agenda Africana (*Ubuntu*) para la paz en la península de Corea

RESUMEN

Desde su creación en 2002, la Unión Africana (UA) se ha esforzado por fortalecer su papel en la promoción de la paz y la seguridad en África. A través de su renovado compromiso con la Agenda 2063, la institución vincula estas aspiraciones de construir soluciones africanas a los problemas africanos con la búsqueda de una mayor experiencia y legitimidad para la UA a nivel global. Este artículo explora los desafíos y las oportunidades para la participación de la UA en los esfuerzos internacionales de consolidación de la paz, anclando analíticamente su argumento en el concepto de *Ubuntu* en la construcción

de paz como un prisma para el compromiso de la UA en conflictos de larga duración, como el de la península coreana. Los hallazgos de este estudio revelan que la UA tiene recursos, capacidad y experiencia limitados como institución, pero sostienen que, a pesar de estos desafíos, puede reorientar sus aspiraciones para ampliar las oportunidades de una mayor participación en la construcción de la paz internacional. Más allá de su contribución académica a la consolidación de la paz, el artículo podría servir de base para una agenda africana de procesos de paz en la península coreana, en la medida en que la UA refuerza su papel en la paz y la seguridad internacionales.

Palabras clave: Unión Africana; península coreana; construcción de paz; *Ubuntu*; desafíos; oportunidades.

INTRODUCTION

In this article, the following twofold research question is explored: what are the challenges and opportunities for the African Union's participation in international peacebuilding efforts, and how can *Ubuntu* be used as a resource in peace-making for the AU's engagement in long-standing conflicts such as the Korean Peninsula conflict? The research question is driven by the observable problem characterised by the ongoing state of the Korean conflict, which requires the intervention of other international institutions, such as the African Union (AU), to contribute towards peacebuilding in international

geopolitics. The AU as an institution has been a subject of extensive scholarly research in the last two decades, whereas emerging and shifting dynamics of conflict within the region and globally continue to test the efficacy of its functions in international peacebuilding efforts (Murithi, 2017; Pinto, 2022; Kwaleyela, 2023). The establishment of the AU set the pace for a new and reformed African approach to enhancing continental peace and security, leading to a new African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) (Murithi, 2017). The Constitutive Act of the AU affirms the significance of member states' commitment to promoting democratic principles and institutions, popular participation, and good governance. It is generally understood that Africa must re-write its history and complement the efforts of other international actors in consolidating world peace and security (AU, 2002; Kwaleyela, 2023). By the 2010s, the AU had amassed extensive experience in peace support missions in Africa leading to a multidimensional approach to peacebuilding at continental level (Murithi, 2017; Pinto, 2022). Despite these instrumental gains, it is clear that the AU's role in continental peacebuilding did not translate into legitimacy of the institution in similar

peace support efforts at international level.

At the same time, while reaffirming its commitments to Agenda 2063, the AU continues to face many obstacles in developing context-specific strategies for continental peace and development¹. Relatedly, long-standing dissonance over political ideologies at the international level remains a key factor in driving intractable conflicts in international relations, thus revealing the continued absence of international institutions such as the AU in mitigating these tensions. This article finds the Korean Peninsula as one of the most studied and documented conflicts, which continues to exert significant geopolitical influence in global relations (Jung, 2024). The conflict over the Korean Peninsula remains a major cause of unease amongst nation-states that influence this region and its resultant significance in the United Nations (UN).

Simultaneously, the conflict points to the limits of dominant liberal approaches to peacebuilding that underscore contemporary motivations guiding international actors in these efforts. Consequently, the objective of this article is to analyse the position and relevance of the AU in international peacebuilding affirming that the

1 The African Union Commission, working closely with the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) Coordinating Agency (NPCA) and supported by the African Development Bank (AfDB), and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), put in place a continental agenda for the next 50 years. The AU rededicated itself to the continent's development and pledged their commitment to make progress by adopting Agenda 2063 in 2013.

institution's renewed agenda for Africa is tied to its legitimacy at a global level. In doing so, the article utilises the Korean conflict as a prism of assessment to particularly address the limits and institutional challenges impeding the AU's participation in international peacebuilding. Emerging from this, the article outlines an African agenda for peace using an analytical lens framed within the African doctrine of *Ubuntu* as an opportunity for the engagement of the AU in international peacebuilding. It concludes with an analysis of the findings from the literature review arguing that seeking legitimacy for the AU in international peacebuilding is pertinent to affirming Africa's renewed and shifting position in global power structures.

THE POLITICS OF THE KOREAN CONFLICT

At the end of the Second World War (WWII), ideological divisions led to new forms of conflict amongst the world's superpowers, leading to a long period of the Cold War that lasted from 1947 until the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 (National Archives, 2021). Tensions between the United States (US) and the Soviet Union led to the transformation of international conflict. After the devastating armed conflict seen during WWII, the Cold War emerged. This period saw increasingly polarised

factions that persist within the UN today. Emerging from this, the conflict led to a north-south divide, building two separate Korean nation-states, as a culmination of the tensions between the West and the East allies of the US and the Soviet Union².

In 1948, the US and the Soviet Union divided the Korean territory for administrative purposes, following the defeat and expulsion of Japanese forces from the territory at the end of WWII (National Archives, 2016). By the early 1950s, conflict in the Korean Peninsula became the first major proxy war leading to persistent tensions between the capitalist-driven US and its allies, on one hand, and the communist Soviet Union and its allies on the other. Given the divisive nature of the proxy war, the current state of relations between the two Koreas remains fragile, driven in part by US and Russian tensions. This is despite the UN's attempts to officially end the protracted conflict.

Existing literature has extensively documented the state of the Korean Peninsula conflict. You and Hahn (2018) note that the two Koreas have maintained a costly rivalry for several decades through military contestation. The experiences of the two nation-states remain problematically influenced by the geopolitical tensions amongst global superpowers particularly Japan, China, Russia and the US. Although both

2 During its existence, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) or simply, the Soviet Union was comprised of Russia and 14 surrounding countries in the Baltic states of Eastern Europe to the Pacific Ocean, including the majority of northern Asia and portions of Central Asia.

nations continue to suggest that peace is the desired outcome, Lee (2018) argues that the calls for peace are idealistic and inadequately pursued by the concerned parties. While divisions between the two countries have led to the recognition of the importance of peace in the region, these discussions are fundamentally limited and politically influenced by external actors. Peace talks between the two countries focus on the unification and reduction of military tensions, despite underplaying the broader tenets of peace to strive towards the need to respect cultural diversity and divergent socio-political ideologies (Jung, 2024).

A discourse encouraging a consciousness of separation was being fostered between North Korea and South Korea to influence the national identities and relationships of the two countries. For example, Kim Jong Un declared the “Two Hostile States” doctrine during the 9th Plenary Session of the 8th Central Committee of the Workers’ Party of Korea (WPK) in December 2023, and the narrative was reiterated in his New Year’s policy speech at the Supreme People’s Assembly in January 2024 in North Korea” (Ildo, 2024, p. 1). Thus, “the relationship between the two states is no longer one of kinship and homogeneity, but rather that of two hostile nations, two belligerents at war” (Jung, 2024, p. 450).

Despite the two countries signing the South-North Basic Agreement in 1991, North Korea’s “Our State First” doctrine became a strong ethnic sentiment that dominantly influences its policy towards South Korea (Ildo, 2024). These sentiments maintain an antagonistic and conflictual agenda that negatively influences strategies for sustainable peace in the Korean Peninsula and effectively abrogate the South-North Agreement³. Ildo (2024) further points out that the adoption of the “Two Hostile States” doctrine could have been attributed to North Korea’s confidence in the advancement of nuclear weapons. It may also result from diplomatic relations with Russia or the growing economic competition between North Korea and South Korea. North Korea has also decided to cut links with the Republic of South Korea by reorganising its foreign policy towards the US and its allies in the Korean conflict as well as by introducing new official terms that label South Korea as ‘puppets of the West’ on all state media. Furthermore, in October 2024, North Korea agreed to cut off inter-Korean rail and road connections and criticised South Korea’s military expansion (Dwijayani & Maksum, 2023).

North Korea states that the “Two Hostile States” doctrine was designed to assert its international foreign policy (Jung, 2024). On the other hand, Ildo

3 The South-North Basic Agreement is an agreement that both Korean States signed in 1991 to promote peace, cooperation, non-aggression, and peaceful exchanges.

(2024) argues that the policy was introduced so that North Korea could gain a legal ground for expanding its military power while controlling its surroundings in line with its national interests. North Korea also aims at countering the alliance between the US and South Korea and at pushing for some provocation on the territories in the Yellow Sea by drawing the attention of the United States (Ildo, 2024). While You and Hahn (2018) argue that the rivalry between North and South Korea are due to the extreme belligerent attitude and insecurity of the North, the interests of the US, China and Russia have been considered as a persistent contributing factor to the Korean Peninsula Conflict.

North Korea continues to shift its economic policies arguing that economic cooperation between the two Korean states is no longer seen as viable or advantageous for the country (Ildo, 2024). As the country remains a pariah state on the international front, North Korea is increasingly isolated as it has opted for self-reliance as the only viable means for the country's economic growth (Kim, 2023). Relatedly, scholars argue that there is need for international actors to understand the nature of North Korea's policy shift and to consider both Kim Jong Un's words and actions (Ki-Bum, 2025). Kim (2024) asserts that a policy of cracking down on the influx of South Korean media and culture into North Korea is part of the state's attempts to delineate from South Korea. Ildo (2024, p. 4) further argues that the policy "serves

as a justification for intensifying judicial control over cultural inflows, as the regime remains wary of the potential destabilisation such influences could pose to its stability". In this regard, a cultural war was declared against South Korean culture (Dwijayani & Maksum, 2023). Thus, there were deliberate policies designed to prevent the cultural influence of South Korea in North Korea in that distributing foreign media in the country was considered a grave crime (Kim, 2024).

With such profound ideological divisions between the two nation-states, international efforts to resolve hostilities in the Korean Peninsula remain fragmented due to the shifting dynamics of this conflict. For the UN, for instance, the difficulties of achieving sustainable peace whilst maintaining neutrality in complex conflicts has been a key operational conundrum faced by the organisation. The UN was forced to waive its neutrality during the armed hostilities in the Korean Peninsula in the early 1950s, given the advancement of North Korea towards South Korean territory (National Archives, 2021). The influence of domino theory politics that drove the US interaction with the Soviet Union in the proxy war institutionalised the idea that for some form of peace to be built in the Korean Peninsula, North Korea should be policed and micro-managed to suit the international relations that built world peace after WWII (Kwaleyela, 2023). Following the armistice signed between the US and North Korea in July 1953, the

agreement restored the sovereignty of South Korea, leading to the temporal cessation of open hostilities in the Korean Peninsula (National Archives, 2021). However, hostilities between the two states continue to suggest that efforts to broker peace must be continually sustained and revisited.

In the same vein, this article finds that the foregoing state of the Korean conflict provides a litmus test for other international institutions, such as the AU, to play a role in long-standing conflicts that largely influence international geopolitics. The AU with its long history of peacekeeping missions in regional and civil wars has renewed its focus through Agenda 2063 towards multidimensional peacebuilding endeavours. With this aspiration, the mandate to create a peaceful and unified Africa is inherently tied to the AU's need for recognition, legitimacy and experience at a global level. For this reason, the article adopts a theoretical lens derived from the African concept of *Ubuntu* to argue that new forms of interaction in peace negotiations between the two Korean states can benefit from the historical role of the AU as a neutral ally in international relations. Conceptually, peacebuilding in its traditional form is understood to include mechanisms to rebuild war-affected communities and the normalisation of relationships between people who were once in conflict with each other (Keating & Knight, 2004).

Institutions such as the AU and UN have expanded the focus of

peacebuilding in the last two decades, tying their aspirations to a multidimensional approach to build peace that can be maintained over a long period of time with the underlying causes of the original conflict having been addressed. In this paper, peacebuilding is conceptualised as mediated peace that is built through a neutral party or peace agreement with help from various international and local players (International Peace Institute, 2009; Cockell, 2000). Despite this, long-standing conflicts in geopolitically sensitive global regions point to the limits of these approaches whilst revealing the need to expand such initiatives to include measures designed from a multidisciplinary range of expertise. In this regard, regional institutions such as the AU seek to build capacity for African states to contribute to global peace support operations under the UN. The AU, through the Peace and Security Council (PSC), is continually enhancing its operations by establishing stronger ties with the UN and the EU. This approach ensures that it develops a more prominent and effective role in international peace and security.

UBUNTU AS AN ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK FOR PEACEBUILDING

The *Ubuntu* philosophy is a key principle within African approaches to peacebuilding, which the AU adopts in many of its policy documents (AU, 2018a). Kurtz (2022) notes that *Ubuntu* as a concept emphasises the need

for peace processes to preserve and encourage stable relationships between conflicting parties. Consequently, this article adopted the philosophy of *Ubuntu* as a lens to assess how the AU can potentially play a role in peacebuilding at an international level, as the institution aims to legitimise its peacebuilding agenda. *Ubuntu* can be described as the capacity in an African culture to express compassion, reciprocity, dignity, humanity and mutuality in the interests of building and maintaining communities with justice and mutual care (Tutu, 1999). It was spearheaded by anti-apartheid leaders such as Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu, and Thabo Mbeki, amongst others (Bolden, 2014). Murithi (2006) argues that a fundamental aspect of African ideals in peacebuilding is historically linked to traditional societies where dialogue, reconciliation and strengthening the rule of law have been key to building peace in Africa. It was used as a framework for peace and reconciliation for the South Africa Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) to find a solution for the injustices committed during apartheid (Tutu, 1999). It is similar to other philosophies such as *Jen* by the Chinese, *Loob* (Filipinos) and *Ob-schina* for the Russians (Bolden, 2014). Contrary to the dominant liberal views of peace, *Ubuntu* is centred on holistic and encompassing ideals of human relations rather than on the prevailing modern Western paradigms that promote elitism (Akinola & Uzodike, 2017).

UBUNTU CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Ubuntu is linked to the indigenous forms of conflict resolution in African societies that existed before the continent's colonial era. Prior to the assimilation of European culture in African societies, traditional conflict resolution mechanisms existed amongst traditional societies and continue to inform much of contemporary Africa's approaches to peacebuilding (Zartman, 2000). Murithi (2006) asserts that *Ubuntu* places a high value on communal life and maintaining positive relations within societies as a task in which attempts at peace-making are collectively designed. Consensus building is central to the philosophy's approach to building peace. This approach calls upon the respect for the regulation and management of relationships between parties to a conflict. Below is a conceptual framework for *Ubuntu* for peacebuilding process.

Ubuntu followed a five-stage process for conflict resolution, the first stage was fact finding by the council of elders (Murithi, 2006). Arthur *et al.* (2015) pointed out that the storytelling method was effective during the truth and reconciliation process in South Africa on the crimes that were committed against Africans during Apartheid. The second step was that the perpetrator was asked to seek mercy from the victim (Murithi, 2006). Joint problem solving between the perpetrators and the victims involved granting reparations to the victims and amnesty to

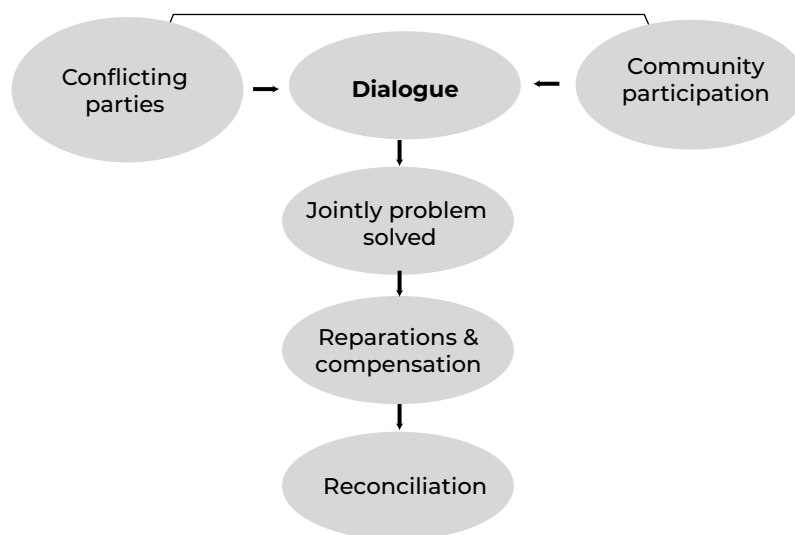


FIGURE 1. PROCESS OF PEACEBUILDING.

the offenders (Arthur *et al.*, 2015). The third step involved the victim granting forgiveness, the fourth step dealt with compensations and reparations, and the fifth step encouraged reconciliation (Murithi, 2006). The peacebuilding process needed the participation of both parties, for example, during the South African TRC process, opportunities were given to all parties involved (Arthur *et al.*, 2015).

Many scholars affirm that *Ubuntu* is one of the core values in peacebuilding in Sub-Saharan Africa and, as a philosophy, it emphasises the importance of humanity and community life (Arthur *et al.*, 2015; Murithi, 2006; Swanson, 2008). Simply, the term *Ubuntu* is derived from an African expression, '*Umntu ngu muntu ngabantu*', which in English means 'A person is a person through other persons', or 'I am

because we are; we are because I am' (Ramose, 1999; Goduka, 2000). The philosophy emphasises the importance of cooperation between communities and nation-states as a strategy for cordial national and foreign relations, rather than competition that could lead to grave instability within any community (Masina, 2000). Murithi (2006) also asserted that, indigenous conflict resolution focuses on the principles of love, empathy, sharing, caring, forgiveness and cooperation as forms of negotiation and mediation in peace-making.

Despite the cultural diversity of the African continent, African societies possess a diverse set of indigenous peacebuilding processes that have been practiced for centuries (Arthur *et al.*, 2015). These peacebuilding processes are designed to promote healing and reconciliation between

conflicting parties. They use both spiritual and physical methods that are central to relationships within societies (Okrah, 2003). In olden times, this implied that a person or a community needed to be reconciled with their ancestors, spirits, and gods as well as with their fellow man. The process of reconciliation required symbols of atonement. For example, the exchange of gifts between the conflicting parties such as fowls, goats, and cows for celebrating (McGinty, 2008). The celebrations aimed to promote peace, unity, and community mobilisation (Arthur *et al.*, 2015). Thus, the peacebuilding process concerned the active involvement of all conflicting parties to allow equal participation from all sides in the recommended process (Brock-Utne, 2001). It was based on simple, flexible, participatory approaches, and relevant and local methods (Brock Utne, 2001). Similarly, Ndumbe (2001) noted that African peacebuilding processes focused on reintegrating the

aggrieved parties into society to promote community development.

The concept of *Ubuntu* draws from this historical ideation of building peace in African societies and follows a prescribed process of conflict resolution institutionalised within the AU peacebuilding agenda. The African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) is modelled along the dictates of *Ubuntu* to include a framework designed to address conflict prevention, management, and resolution in the continent⁴. Murithi (2006) argues that building peace in African societies has not always been straightforward, and the stages required to implement peace-making processes are prone to resistance from conflicting parties. Whilst the concept of *Ubuntu* essentialises joint problem-solving as central to establishing peaceful engagement between those deemed as perpetrators and victims in a conflict, this was done by giving reparations to victims and amnesty to the offenders as was the case with the TRC in South Africa and similar to transitional justice in the

4 The main pillar of the APSA is the Peace and Security Council (PSC), which is supported, in the discharge of its mandate, by various structures, namely: the Commission, the Panel of the Wise, the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS), the African Standby Force (ASF) and the Peace Fund. The relationship between the African Union (AU), which has the primary responsibility for promoting peace, security and stability in Africa, and the Regional Economic Communities/Regional Mechanisms for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution (RECs/RMs) is a key APSA component (African Union Peace and Security Department, 2012).

5 In opting for mass justice, Rwanda chose local, community-based justice over other post-conflict reconciliation mechanisms such as amnesties or truth commissions. In consultation with its foreign donors, the government made the *gacaca* courts its primary legal mechanism to generate a truthful record of who did what, to whom, during the 1994 genocide (Thomson, 2015).

Gacaca courts of Rwanda after the 1994 genocide⁵. Arthur *et al.* (2015) affirm that building mutual understanding between conflicting parties was central to designing appropriate mechanisms for engagement during conflict resolution. The guiding principle of *Ubuntu* is thus based on the notion that parties need to be reconciled to rebuild and maintain social trust and social cohesion, with a view to preventing a culture of vendetta or retribution from developing and escalating between parties (Murithi, 2006; Arthur *et al.*, 2015).

One of the limitations of *Ubuntu* philosophy as a peacebuilding framework is that it is culturally specific (Omodan, 2022). This is because every culture has its own social norms and conventions that may not be applicable to other cultures. Liu *et al.* (2022) have noted that cultural norms are unwritten codes of conduct for all human cultures that vary from one culture to another. Bolden (2014) noted that interdependence and collectivism might be difficult to extend to other cultures because *Ubuntu*, for Bolden (2014), was used during the precolonial period by ethnic groups for loyalty and survival purposes by supporting and working together for the group to thrive. *Ubuntu* might not work due to other factors in the post-colonial period such as urbanisation and modernity. Thus, it was successful because it was based on group identity and family relations. Bolden (2014) noted that extending it to other cultural groups might not be

practical due to differences of ideologies and beliefs.

Arising from this, this article argues that the popular discourse of separation and ambitions of power, economic sanctions, development of nuclear weapons, and curtailing of the influx of culture from South Korea by North Korea remains problematic for peacebuilding efforts. Based on the principles of *Ubuntu*, the article affirms that building legitimacy for the AU in international peacebuilding is dependent on creating and designing mechanisms for which the institution can be usefully engaged in negotiating peace in such conflicts. The AU could use the principles of dialogue, consensus building, equal participation, high value on life and communal life, and maintaining a positive spirit in framing an agenda for peace. Thus conceptually, *Ubuntu* is utilised in this article to make meaning of the opportunities at the disposal of the AU in participating in peace-making that can facilitate peacebuilding in the Korean Peninsula.

METHODOLOGY

The methodological positioning of this article is a critical multi-faceted literature review of the AU from various scholarly perspectives. This includes a look at scholarly literature on the functions of the AU and its peace and security architecture, assessing documents about institutions of the AU, and evaluating the performance of the AU in line with other international

institutions, such as the EU and the UN. Reviewing reports from a diverse set of sources enabled well-rounded cross-referencing to ascertain how the existing frameworks adopted under the AU need to be re-aligned to suit the changing and complex dynamics that influence existing conflicts in Africa and other international conflicts that affect the African continent. The example of the Korean Peninsula conflict offers a comparative basis for the comprehensive study of the challenges that continue to impede the AU's prescribed functions in continental and international peacebuilding.

Thus, the article is informed by insights from a study which employed a qualitative approach and a historical study design. Qualitative research is understood as a type of research that explores and provides deeper insights into real-world problems. The study used a historical study design to analyse the contribution that the African Union can make towards the Korean conflict. The purpose of a historical study is to draw conclusions about the present and the future, based on research conducted in the past (University of Missouri-St. Louis, 2021). As guided by Lundy (2008), a historical research design is a process of inquiry that involves identifying research questions, gathering and evaluating evidence, and constructing plausible explanations for past events. The study drew from documents in the form of journals, books, and newspapers. The sources of data thus included both primary

(such as newspapers, archival materials and policy papers) and secondary (such as journal articles and books). This is because a historical research design utilises historical sources, such as documents and oral histories, to investigate past events and develop an understanding of human behaviour over time. Accordingly, the article utilised diverse databases including JSTOR, Scopus, google scholar and the AU website to identify data relating to the focus of the study. The key words and phrases which were used in the search revolved around the challenges and opportunities in the functions of the AU and its peace and security architecture, *Ubuntu* and peacebuilding, and the potentials for *Ubuntu* as a tool for AU's peacebuilding initiatives. The initial search was complimented by a follow up of the relevant sources which emerged.

In line with the historical research design, the data were thematically analysed using the general framework suggested by Barker *et al.* (2002). This involved a search for common themes that transcended the data alongside an interpretation of the themes. This included the generation and application of codes to the data, and the identification, analysis, and report of patterns (themes) while paying attention to chronology, and the historical context, and the principles of the philosophy of *Ubuntu*. Importantly, the guidelines on quality control formulated for handling documentary sources by Scott (1990) such as authenticity, credibility,

representativeness, and meaning were adhered to, and the findings are presented according to the key themes which emerged in the study.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The results of the literature review conducted in this study indicate that, as an institution, the AU has historically been riddled with challenges that impede its effective participation in peacebuilding efforts at both continental and global levels. Despite this drawback, it is also clear that the AU's absence from global peacebuilding efforts continues to negatively influence the outcome of peacebuilding efforts in Africa. These findings thematically relate to how the AU as an institution has successfully contributed to peace missions across Africa, showing its potential capacity in peace support operations. Second, this assesses the challenges that affect the AU and how these challenges conversely present opportunities for the engagement of the AU in peacebuilding over the Korean Peninsula. As a strategy for greater African presence in global power structures, the article finds that the historical position of African states as neutral allies, of both North and South Korea, presents an opportunity for the engagement of the AU in peacebuilding efforts in that region.

SUCSESSES OF THE AU IN AFRICA

With the inception of the AU in 2001, member states recognised that to

increase prospects for socio-economic development in the continent, enhancing collective peace and security were fundamental to the duties of the institution (Murithi, 2006). Through the establishment of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), the AU initiated peace support operations through peacekeeping missions to support member states experiencing ongoing instability from conflicts. The institution gained considerable agency with peace-making missions in Burundi, Comoros, Sudan, and Somalia, leading to the cessation of violent conflict and paving the way for peaceful settlement of disputes in those cases. Mathews (2018) notes that the AU has been instrumental to intervention in violent conflict in at least 28 different conflicts in Africa. Other scholars describe how through institutional mechanisms for conflict prevention and management, AU operations have been fundamental to continental peace support missions (Hampton, 2014; Allen, 2023). Relatedly, the establishment of APSA has been instrumental to the functions of the Peace and Security Council (PSC) and the African Standby Force (ASF) as AU institutions leading peace-making and peace support operations in fragile member states.

Kohnert (2023) notes that the African Union Mission in Burundi (AMIB) was the first AU-mandated armed peace operation when its deployment was authorised in 2003, before the inauguration of the AU's Peace and Security Council. The AU deployed a

peacekeeping mission to Burundi during the country's civil war in the early 2000s, following an important peace agreement signed in Arusha, Tanzania⁶. Allen (2023) shows how the AU partnered with the UN in mediating and negotiating a peace agreement during the crisis in Darfur in 2004 leading to a brokered peace that enforced and monitored ceasefires. Similarly, through the African Standby Force (ASF) in a subsequent African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), the AU set out a complex agenda to actively engage in peace talks to enhance stability and security in Somalia, including supporting the establishment of transitional governments. AMISOM operations in Somalia, since 2007, have been key to supporting the Somali government in efforts to reduce the regional influence and threat of extremist groups such as Al-Shabaab militants (Mathews, 2018). In addressing the continent's security challenges, the vision of 'African solutions to African problems' was instrumental and gained considerable mileage in AU-led peace operations as evidenced by the number of such operations since 2000. Allen (2023) argues that despite the precarious position of its member states in critical global

issues, the AU's peace agenda in Africa is an indication of collective will to address the problematic and historical drivers of violent conflict. Appendix is an extract from Allen (2023) and details the AU-led operations in Africa since 2000.

Despite the resurgence of military coups in Africa over the past decade, the AU has shown growing willingness to intervene in member states in recognition of grave circumstances of war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity. Through diplomatic ties to the UN, the AU increased its peace support operations to implement a diverse set of multidimensional UN peacekeeping operations - such as MINUSCA - which was mandated to protect civilians and support transition processes in the Central African Republic⁷. Scholars affirm that despite the complex institutional challenges affecting the AU's performance in Africa, the institution through its partnership with the UN has gained experience in global peace support operations (Hampton, 2014; Kohnert, 2023). By 2015, African states increased their contributions of personnel to UN peacekeeping deployments, leading to enhanced prospects for regional security and strengthened

6 The Arusha Peace Agreement of 2000 aimed to end Burundi's civil war by institutionalising power-sharing between ethnic groups and establishing democratic institutions. Among its key provisions was power sharing in government and the military, protection of minority rights, electoral reforms, and measures for justice, reconciliation, and the resettlement of refugees.

7 The UN Security Council authorised the deployment of a multidimensional United Nations peacekeeping operation, MINUSCA, in 2014 aimed at the protection of civilians through support for humanitarian assistance, promotion, and protection of human rights in the Central African Republic.

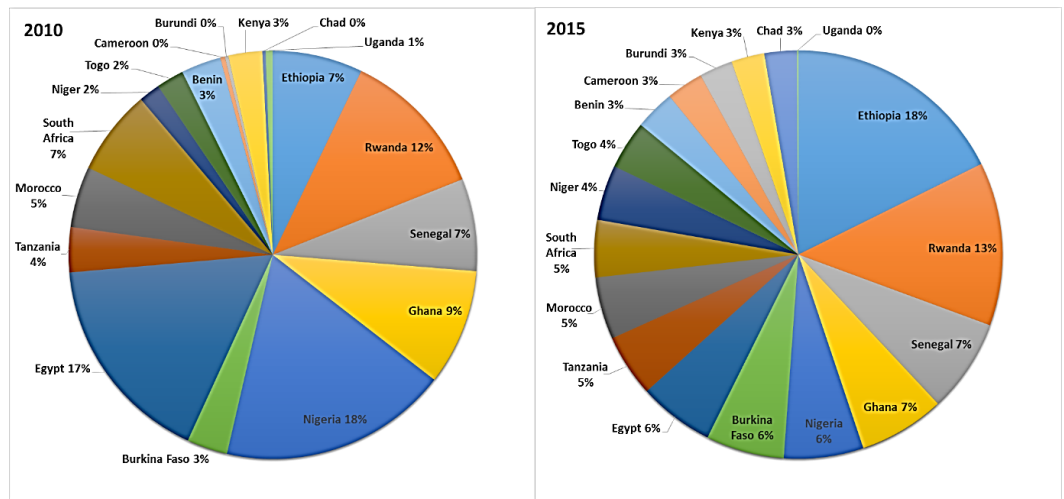


FIGURE 2. TOP AFRICAN CONTRIBUTORS TO UN PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS, 2010 AND 2015 (UNITED NATIONS DEPARTMENT OF PEACEKEEPING OPERATION)

diplomatic ties with the international community.

Partnerships between the AU and the UN in the last two decades have been fundamental to asserting the role of the AU in international peacebuilding. Mitigating complex, sometimes intractable conflicts in Africa has enabled the AU to contribute to the UN's long history of peace support operations in global regions. Allen (2023) shows that although the AU cannot stand alone in its peace support operations, the organisation and its member states have the potential to institutionalise achievements and address shortcomings in the current regional security architecture. More importantly, AU-led missions –such as AMISOM and AMIB–across Africa have shown that there is significant progress for the AU to gain greater mileage in international peacebuilding

efforts though institutional challenges continue to impede its operations.

CHALLENGES AFFECTING THE AFRICAN UNION

The study revealed that while the AU aspires to lead Africa into the future through the ideals of African renaissance and Pan-Africanism towards an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, major challenges abound which have a bearing on the organisation's efforts to foster peacebuilding locally and internationally. These challenges are founded on three inter-related aspects that historically affected the OAU and now the AU, as Africa's lead institution. They relate to recurring conflicts in a continent comprising poor and/or developing countries with limited

financial capacity to fund the AU's activities in continental and international programmes that could usefully grant the AU relevant experience and participation at a global level.

Persisting Conflicts on the Continent

Moffat (2022) identifies challenges relating to continued acts of unconstitutional changes of government. In this regard, Moffat has argued that the AU has been accused of being slow to act on the actions of coup makers (as was the case in Togo in 2005, Mauritania in 2005 and 2007, Mali in 2012, and Central African Republic in 2013, among other countries) pointing to inadequate measures of addressing unconstitutional changes of governments. The persisting challenges on the continent reflect the interconnectedness of African states and the challenges the AU faces in regulating continental problems. While the philosophy of *Ubuntu* emphasises that the well-being of one state directly affects the well-being of others, promoting a sense of solidarity, mutual responsibility, and respect for all member states has been an insurmountable task (Ajitoni, 2024). Despite the AU's strides towards continental peace and security, the persistent conflict within African states is a key drawback to the institution's aspirations and performance. Renewed hostilities in the Eastern region of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in 2025 show the problematic nature, and history of protracted conflicts in Africa, while failures of the AU in Libya (2011-2012) still

affirm the limits of the AU in continental peacebuilding.

Funding

The funding challenges persist as the AU remains dependent on external funding for its operations. Moffat (2022) cites an example of the 2022 AU commission budget of US\$650 million (US\$176 million for operations, US\$195 million for programmes and US\$279 million for peace support), of which 66% was to come from international partners, 31% from member states, and 3% from the administrative and maintenance funds. This demonstrates the challenge of the AU to realise its goal of self-financing its budget. Apuuli (2020) has also shown that the major challenges facing the AU include funding and logistical inadequacies. Apuuli (2019) further notes that since the 1960s, financing African integration projects including peacekeeping and peace support has been problematic as the African integration agenda has been characterised by a low commitment of AU members to finance the organisation's budget and the heavy reliance on external sources. With persistent conflicts in Africa's poor countries, the vast majority of finances is directed towards peace support operations while limiting funding for development projects. While these financial limitations have a bearing on the AU's capacity to participate in international peacebuilding, evidently the greater impact is on

the inability for the institution to solve African problems first.

Logistical (In)Capacities

Further, the failure to build national logistics capabilities by armies in Africa, reflects the reality that most African states relied upon foreign intervention to protect their sovereignty and external security during two or three post-independence decades (Apuuli, 2020). This is further worsened by the continued outbreaks of violence which has meant that AU's peace support and peacekeeping institutions, and initiatives are always under pressure. For example, by the 1990s, it was clear that the OAU could not enhance the prospects for continental security following protracted conflicts in Angola, Sierra Leone, and the Rwandan genocide in 1994. Scholars assert that, as an institution, the OAU faced many operational limitations leading to a prolonged weakness in averting many of the armed conflicts within the continent (Murithi, 2017). Key to the OAU's failure in continental peacebuilding was the institution's mandate to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of each of its member states, leading to a marked limitation in its ability to participate in sustainable peace agreements in Africa's fragile states. Apuuli (2020) rightly remarks that as one conflict is managed, others break out leading to the AU always acting as a fire-fighting institution.

The challenges of funding and logistical (in)capacities related to peacebuilding can be understood in relation to the context in which the AU operates. For example, Chigora (2008) notes that the continent grapples with socio-economic challenges characterised by high rates of poverty, unemployment, disease, and inequality, including high population growth, which exerts pressure on the already inadequate national infrastructure and resources. The internal dynamics also manifest at the global context in which the continent's state of being poverty stricken creates a dependence relationship with developed and emerging economies. Importantly, Africa's declining historical economic importance as a raw material supplier has also reduced its leverage in global trade and investment. As such, the poor economic performance and political instability in many African states has not been favourable for private investment, hence perpetuating a cycle of indebtedness.

The challenges cited above continue to negatively affect the AU's position in international affairs. While African states continue to uphold the AU's principle of non-alignment and maintain a neutral and non-aligned stance in global affairs, this article finds that the AU is under-recognised and under-utilised in global peace support operations. Despite Africa's long-standing position as a neutral mediator, its leaders are minimally engaged to proactively participate in mediating international conflicts—a situation that

is highly influenced by the many challenges impeding the functions of the AU at continental and global levels. The foregoing challenges of the AU in peacebuilding demonstrate that the AU's role in promoting peacebuilding in the Korean Peninsula would be compromised by grave institutional limitations. This entails that the operations of the AU in peacebuilding need to exploit the inherent resources in the African philosophy of *Ubuntu* to formulate an agenda for peacebuilding that can be assimilated within prevailing efforts to build peace in geopolitically sensitive global regions. Concerted efforts in international peacebuilding require the participation of continental institutions such as the AU to engage in building relationships of trust and willingness to negotiate a sustainable peace in the Korean Peninsula. Enhanced partnerships between the UN and AU could strengthen diplomatic efforts, as the AU's historically neutral stance towards the conflict could effectively be more appealing in negotiations, particularly to an increasingly isolated and often conflictual North Korea.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR AFRICAN UNION ENGAGEMENT

Despite the myriad of challenges alluded to above, this article finds that

creating routes for which the AU can gain legitimacy in international peacebuilding efforts would rightly grant more relevant experience for the institution to act decisively in Africa's conflicts. Based on this premise, this section explores the potential participation of the AU in international peacebuilding while strengthening the institution's role in continental peace efforts. The article argues that despite existing diplomatic approaches and sanctions against North Korea as an aggressor, these strategies require long-term neutral mediation to the conflict in line with article 33 of the UN charter⁸. The findings herein affirm that the historical position of many member states of the AU, as neutral and non-aligned state(s) within the UN, is an opportunity for greater engagement for an African-led agenda for peace in the Korean Peninsula. Peacebuilding scholars assert that addressing imbalanced power dynamics in relations between conflicting parties is important to mediating the underlying drivers of contentions, thus paving the way for continued negotiations (Kwaleyela, 2023; Keating & Knight, 2004; Murithi, 2006). While all protracted conflicts are complex, negotiated truces can pave the way for sustainable peace when conflicting parties willingly engage with one another. Despite the 1953 armistice over

8 Article 33 of the UN charter stipulates that 'The parties to any dispute, the continuance of which is likely to endanger the maintenance of international peace and security, shall, first of all, seek a solution by negotiation, enquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement, resort to regional agencies or arrangements, or other peaceful means of their own choice' (United Nations, n. d.).

the Korean Peninsula, South Korea remains non-signatory while North Korea withdrew from the agreement in 2013⁹. This means that opportunities for future hostilities loom large over the region, while institutions such as the AU, this article argues, must strengthen strategies to engage in international conflicts that affect the African region's strides towards continental stability and development.

The article argues that African leaders need to reposition themselves to implement the continent's foreign policy by building closer ties with the UN. Existing UN efforts need to be consolidated with those of other international actors, including the AU, so that negotiated agreements not only end armed hostilities but also build a consolidated long-term peace globally (Kwaleyela, 2023). In order to increase the AU's legitimacy in international peacebuilding, its neutral stance in international conflicts must be tied to and strike a balance between the UN's responsibility to act and protect in response to crises, such as it was seen in Libya (2011)¹⁰. The AU has no notable role in international conflict outside

Africa, and it is clearly an invisible collection of African states that are yet to be granted their due responsibility in global peacebuilding. Consequently, the section below outlines the proposed pathways in which the AU could contribute to peacebuilding efforts in the Korean Peninsula.

Historically, links between African states and the two Korean nation-states have been cordial and non-aggressive through continued diplomatic and development ties. The friendship and economic partnerships that have been established between the AU and the two Korean states, over the years, pose an opportunity for the continent's agenda for peace in the Korean Peninsula. Jung (2024) notes that the AU has opportunities to promote peacebuilding in the Korean Peninsula due to the diplomatic relations that both South and North Korea developed with Africa since the Cold War. For instance, in 2009, an AU declaration in Sirte (Libya) reaffirmed the partnership and commitment to dialogue and economic cooperation between Africa and the Republic of South Korea (Zondi, 2017). This commitment was reinforced by a

9 On July 27, 1953, military commanders from the United States (representing the United Nations Command), the Korean People's Army, and Chinese People's Volunteer Army signed the Korean Armistice Agreement, ending roughly three years of fighting of the 1950-1953 Korean War. Despite this armistice, The Korean Peninsula remains in a state of war (United Nations Command, n. d.).

10 Following the AU's failure to act decisively during a crisis in Libya 2011, the UN Security Council resolution 1973 was instituted in March 2011 following sustained war crimes and crimes against humanity faced by the Libyan civilians. This event has been cited as one of the AU's failures in conflict mediation, leading to the institution's lack of legitimacy in both continental and international peace support operations.

visit from H.E. Park Geun-Hye, President of the Republic of Korea to the African Union Headquarters, on 27th May 2016, to share Korea's experiences and knowledge to build a collaborative partnership for shared growth and prosperity (AU, 2016). Through cordial relations, the AU could strengthen existing international efforts in dialogue as a key principle and an alternative paradigm drawing on *Ubuntu* to encourage a mediated attempt at peace between the Korean states.

However, while South Korea continues to pursue diplomatic ties to the African continent, North Korea remains evasive to any influence from the international community. The African Union (AU) reports that it holds important agreements with South Korea in partnerships to promote industrialisation and capacity building in Africa's manufacturing sector (AU, 2024). The African-Korean summit was held in 2023 in the Republic of Korea, in collaboration with the African Development Bank Groups (MoEF, 2023). Despite the AU and South Korea committing to identify trade and investment opportunities through the Korean-Africa Economic Cooperation Conference (AU, 2016), this does little to improve Africa's position with North Korea. Only through similar engagements with North Korea can the AU propose an Africa-led agenda for peace between the two countries. Thus, Murithi (2006) argues that *Ubuntu* approaches to peace-making and peacebuilding are diplomatically beneficial in AU-UN partnerships and in the

AU's role as a neutral ally to the two Korean states. The AU Commissioner for Peace and Security, H.E. Ambassador Smaïl Chergui, urged both South and North Korea to work progressively towards the promotion of dialogue, building confidence, normalising economic and diplomatic ties for the benefit of all Korean people (AU, 2018b).

The article also finds that the AU's commitment to peacebuilding is tied to Agenda 2063, as it seeks to maintain peace at a continental and global level (Birhan, 2024). The institution continues to offer its full support for the declaration of peace and prosperity and calls for the unification of the nations of Korea (Kwaleyela, 2023). In 2018, the AU chairperson, Moussa Faki Mahamat, supported the declaration of the Panmunjeom Declaration for Peace, Prosperity and Unification of the Korean Peninsula (AU, 2018b). It was a peaceful settlement of disputes through dialogue and a tremendous contribution to global peace. This declaration was tied to efforts to build on the inter-Korean Summit outcome; to take forward the objective of a nuclear weapon-free, peaceful and prosperous Korean Peninsula (AU, 2018a). This strategy resonated with the AU's *Ubuntu* principle to promote a collective agenda and assignment to encourage the participation of the two Korean states in crafting improved political relations.

Zondi (2017, p. 123) notes that the AU's peace interventions are based on multi-disciplinary approaches which enables it to have "capacities to

anticipate, de-escalate, secure, monitor and support post-conflict development” in continental crises. However, this article finds that the inability of the AU to practice these interventions at a global level might not yield the institution’s aspiration for international peace and security. As a result, the AU’s attempts to assimilate and engage in global power structures is dependent on its ability to enhance coordination with the UN and maintain its position as neutral diplomat and ally in peace bargaining processes. The AU could participate in the peacebuilding process in the Korean Peninsula conflict by working with the cooperative partners, such as the North-South cooperation and higher education institutions (Birhan, 2024). This resonates with the African peacebuilding practice emanating from *Ubuntu* that is based on the idea that peace is a collective responsibility requiring the participation of a diverse set of actors to build institutions to sustain it (Kagoro, 2021). As stressed by Ajitoni (2024), *Ubuntu* is anchored on collective responsibility and cooperation and underscores the importance of working together for the common good, whether in familial, social, or economic contexts. The resolution of conflicts through dialogue and understanding, aiming to restore broken relationships between the two Korean states continues to be central to an envisioned role for the AU in building peace in the Korean Peninsula.

Birhan (2024) affirms that key to the AU’s operations at continental

and international level would be to strengthen evidence-based research on peace operations, particularly relating to conflict resolution, peace-making, and peacebuilding. While the AU continues to strengthen ties with international organisations, such as the UN, Khadiagala (2021) argues that it would be important for the institution to seek peer learning frameworks for peacebuilding at a global level. With continued global efforts to resolve protracted conflicts, such as in the Korean Peninsula, the AU requires greater experience through partnerships with the UN. Kwaleyela (2023) notes that the lack of a peace agreement between the two Korean states requires concerted efforts and partnerships to build a relationship of trust with the concerned states in the UN. The AU can use the partnerships that promote the exchange of visits and information between the peacekeeping operations centre in South Korea and the AU’s Peace and Security Council (PSC) Korean African Foundation, (KAF, 2018). During the Fourth African - Korean forum the AU and Korea agreed to support the African Union to consolidate the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), and peacebuilding activities in Africa and in the globe (AU, 2016). For instance, the Korea African Foundation (KAF) aims to serve as a platform for collaboration between the private and public sectors and strengthen exchange and cooperation between African countries (KAF, 2018). The cultural

exchange programmes could be used to promote dialogue between the AU and South Korea as they strive to engage with North Korea in peacebuilding efforts.

CONCLUSION

While the AU continues to gain experience in peace support operations in African states, institutional challenges continue to limit its efficacy in such endeavours. This article finds that gaining greater recognition and legitimacy at a global level would facilitate the AU's experience in handling African problems. For this reason, continued efforts within Africa are inherently tied to the experience that the institution can gain at a global level. Stronger links and collaborations with the UN to enhance the effectiveness of peacekeeping and conflict resolution efforts is fundamental to the global engagement of the AU in peacebuilding. As the UN Security Council recognises the AU's role in international peace and security, encouraging partnerships to strengthen regional responses to Africa's conflicts is tied to the institutional participation of the AU in peacebuilding for other global regions.

This article finds that through renewed commitments; the AU is expanding its role in international peace and security but has yet to gain legitimacy as it continues to grapple with persistent and recurring conflicts within the continent. Relatedly, conflict in the African region continues to

demand high financial resourcing from an institution comprised of poor and/or developing countries that cannot meet the demand to finance largescale peace operations. Additionally, logistical (in)capacities suggest that the AU's history of overdependence on external financing and intervention in African problems continues to impede strides towards the recognition of its member states in global power structures. The AU's role in international peace and security outside the continent remains delicate, despite its commitment to proactive engagement and regional solutions, due to these challenges.

Conversely, the article also argues that despite the challenges affecting the AU, the current approaches to continental peacebuilding are built on principles that are fundamental to peacebuilding efforts. The concept of *Ubuntu* emphasises the centrality of mediation, peaceful negotiation and alternative means to dispute resolution in complex and protracted conflicts. This article affirms that institutions, such as the AU, are relevant actors in international partnerships in continued efforts to maintain international peace and security. Specifically, the article posits that though the AU holds little to no direct role in many global efforts for conflict resolution i.e. in the Korean Peninsula, the institution reiterates through diplomatic channels that it unreservedly supports the calls for peace between the two Korean states. Thus, diplomatic ties through economic development between South Korea

and the AU is a desirable outcome for the maintained neutrality of the AU and its member states. On the other hand, North Korea remains closely aligned with some AU member states, providing economic and military cooperation, even though the international community remains wary of these relationships. However, it is clear that these ties between AU members states and the two Korean states maintain Africa's position as a neutral ally in international affairs and grants its lead institution an opportunity to participate in building peace in the Korean Peninsula. With Africa on the rise, the AU must work to assert its role as Africa's lead institution, whilst enhancing partnerships that grant it experience in peacebuilding efforts across global regions.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research on the AU and peacebuilding can focus on exploring the AU's role in other international conflicts to provide a comparative analysis of the role of the AU in international peacebuilding. This is because the current study has demonstrated an account of the AU's peacebuilding initiatives in a single example of international conflict. Further, future research can focus on examining the impact of global geopolitical shifts on the AU's peacebuilding efforts. This is significant as the operations of the AU are closely linked to the wider contextual realities of peacebuilding. Finally, given the AU's challenges, future research can also explore

the innovative financing models for the AU's peacebuilding initiatives to promote sustainability.

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APPENDIX. AU-LED OPERATIONS IN AFRICA SINCE 2000 (ALLEN, 2023)

AFRICAN-LED PEACE OPERATIONS SINCE 2000				
Mission	Countries	Year(s)	Authorized Personnel	Authorizing Entities
ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG)	Liberia/Sierra Leone	1990–2000	7,000	ECOWAS
OAU's Joint Monitoring Commission (OAU JMC) to the Democratic Republic of the Congo	DRC	1999–2000	43	OAU
OAU/AU Liaison Mission in Ethiopia-Eritrea (OLMEE/AULMEE)	Ethiopia-Eritrea	2000–2008	43	OAU/AU
OAU Observer Mission in the Comoros (OMIC 2)	Comoros	2000–2001	14	OAU
OAU Observer Mission in the Comoros (OMIC 3)	Comoros	2001–2002	39	OAU
CEN-SAD Force	CAR	2001–2002	300	CEN-SAD
ECCAS Central African Multinational Force (FOMUC)	CAR	2002–2008	380	ECCAS
ECOWAS Mission in Liberia (ECOMIL)	Liberia	2003	3,600	UN, ECOWAS
ECOWAS Mission in Côte d'Ivoire (ECOMICI)	Côte d'Ivoire	2003	1,500	UN, ECOWAS
AU Mission in Burundi (AMIB)	Burundi	2003–4	3,250	AU
AU Mission in Sudan (AMIS I)	Sudan	2004–2005	4,400	AU
AU Mission in Sudan (AMIS II)	Sudan	2005–2007	7,700	AU
AU Observer Mission in the Comoros (MIOC)	Comoros	2004	41	AU
AU Mission for Support to the Elections in the Comoros (AMISEC)	Comoros	2006	1,260	AU
Operation Democracy in the Comoros	Comoros	2008	1,800	AU
AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM)	Somalia	2007–22	22,000	AU
AU Electoral and Security Assistance Mission in the Comoros (MAES)	Comoros	2007–8	356	AU
ECCAS Peace Consolidation Mission in the Central African Republic (MICOPAX)	CAR	2008–2013	2,000	ECCAS
AU-UN Hybrid Mission in Darfur (UNAMID)	Sudan	2008–21	21,600	AU, UN
AU Regional Coordination Initiative for Elimination of the Lord's Resistance Army (RCI-LRA)	CAR, DRC, South Sudan, Uganda	2011–2018	5,000	AU
ECOWAS Mission in Guinea-Bissau (ECOMIB)	Guinea-Bissau	2012–2020	629	ECOWAS
African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA)	Mali	2012–13	9,620	AU, UN
African-led International Support Mission in the Central African Republic (MISCA)	CAR	2013–14	5,700	AU, UN
AU Support to the Ebola Outbreak in West Africa (ASEOWA) Mission	Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone	2014–2015	800	AU
AU Human Rights Observers and Military Experts Mission in Burundi	Burundi	2015–2021	200	AU
Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF)	Cameroon, Chad, Niger, Nigeria	2015–	10,000	AU
ECOWAS Intervention in The Gambia (ECOMIG)	The Gambia	2017–	8,000	ECOWAS
G5 Sahel Joint Force	Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger	2017–	5,600	AU
Accra Initiative	Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Niger, and Togo	2017–	10,000	Accra Initiative
AU Technical Support Team to The Gambia (AUTSTG)	The Gambia	2017–2021	8	AU
SADC Prevention Mission to Lesotho (SAPMIL)	Lesotho	2018	269	SADC
AU Support to the Ebola Outbreak in the DRC (ASEDCO) Mission	DRC	2019	850	AU
AU Military Observer Mission to the Central African Republic (MOUACA)	CAR	2020–	34	AU
SADC Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM)	Mozambique	2021–	2,000	SADC
AU Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS)	Somalia	2022–	22,000	AU
EAC Intervention in the DRC	DRC	2022–	12,000	EAC
ECOWAS Stabilization Support Mission in Guinea-Bissau (SSMGB)	Guinea-Bissau	2022–	630	ECOWAS
AU Monitoring, Verification and Compliance Mission (AU-MVCM)	Ethiopia	2022–	10	AU

The African Union in the G20: Navigating Interest in a Declining Multilateral System

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ABSTRACT

The Presidency of the Republic of South Africa will, for the first time, host the G20 Johannesburg Summit in November 2025 under the theme 'Solidarity, Equality, Sustainability'. This crucial meeting comes after the African Union (AU) was accepted as a full member of the G20 in 2023. Before the African Union joined, the G20 represented 85% and 75% of the world's GDP and trade respectively as well as two-thirds of the world's population. The African Union, with 55 states, has a GDP size of US\$ 3.4 trillion and a population of 1.3 billion. South Africa has highlighted four critical issues to be discussed at

the summit, which include, strengthening disaster resilience and response, ensuring debt sustainability for low-income countries, mobilising finance for a just energy transition, and harnessing critical minerals for inclusive growth and sustainable development. Although the G20 is an informal deliberative forum without international legal representation, will South Africa and the African Union succeed in championing these themes in a fast-changing geopolitical system with multilateralism under threat? Using a thematic analysis, this paper discusses the broad themes presented by the South African G20 presidency. It explores how the African Union can influence change in

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Received: June 16th 2025 / Modified: September 24th 2025 / Accepted: September 30th 2025

To cite this article:

Amoah-Darkwah, E. y Abena Appiah, J. (2025). The African Union in the G20: Navigating Interest in a Declining Multilateral System. *Oasis*, 43, 71-92.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18601/16577558.n43.04>

the international financial architecture through the Systemic Hub Model of the G20 Governance, which conceptualises the G20 as the central coordinating forum linking other multilateral institutions and diffusing global policy norms. This inclusion marks a pivotal moment for Africa's voice in global economic governance. It is essential to evaluate how this new membership can be leveraged to address systemic inequalities and promote sustainable development across the continent.

Keywords: African Union; South Africa; multilateralism; debt sustainability; energy transition; critical minerals disaster response.

La Unión Africana en el G20: navegando los intereses en un sistema multilateral en declive

RESUMEN

La Presidencia de la República de Sudáfrica acogió por primera vez la Cumbre del G20 en Johannesburgo en noviembre de 2025 bajo el lema “Solidaridad, Igualdad, Sostenibilidad”. Esta reunión crucial tiene lugar después de que la Unión Africana (UA) fuera aceptada como miembro pleno del G20 en 2023. Antes de su incorporación, el G20 representaba el 85 y el 75% del producto interno bruto (PIB) y del comercio mundial, respectivamente, así como dos tercios de la población global. La

Unión Africana, con 55 Estados miembros, cuenta con un PIB de 3,4 billones de dólares estadounidenses y una población de 1.300 millones de personas.

Sudáfrica señaló cuatro temas críticos por debatir en la cumbre: el fortalecimiento de la resiliencia y la respuesta ante desastres, la garantía de la sostenibilidad de la deuda en los países de bajos ingresos, la movilización de financiamiento para una transición energética justa y el aprovechamiento de minerales críticos para un crecimiento inclusivo y un desarrollo sostenible. Aunque el G20 es un foro deliberativo informal sin representación jurídica internacional, surge la pregunta de si Sudáfrica y la Unión Africana lograrán impulsar estos temas en un sistema geopolítico en rápida transformación, con el multilateralismo bajo amenaza.

Mediante un análisis temático, este artículo examina los ejes principales planteados por la Presidencia sudafricana del G20. Explora cómo la Unión Africana puede influir en el cambio de la arquitectura financiera internacional a través del Modelo de Centro Sistémico de Gobernanza del G20, que concibe a este grupo como el foro coordinador central que vincula a otras instituciones multilaterales y difunde normas de política global. Esta inclusión marca un momento decisivo para la voz de África en la gobernanza económica mundial. Es esencial evaluar cómo esta nueva membresía puede aprovecharse para abordar las desigualdades sistémicas

y promover el desarrollo sostenible en todo el continente.

Palabras clave: Unión Africana; Sudáfrica; multilateralismo; sostenibilidad de la deuda; transición energética; minerales críticos; respuesta ante desastres.

INTRODUCTION

South Africa will host the G20 Johannesburg Summit on 22-23 November 2025 for the first time on African soil, with the African Union, its regional body, attending as a permanent member for the second year. The stakes are high as South Africa addresses pressing issues that directly affect the African continent. These include strengthening disaster resilience and response, ensuring debt sustainability for low-income countries, mobilising finance for a just energy transition, and harnessing critical minerals for inclusive growth and sustainable development (G20, 2025) reflecting the African Union's position. The achievements of the G20 are well documented, beginning with foiling the Asian turned-global financial crisis that erupted in Thailand in June 1997 and the American 2008-2009 global financial crisis, as well as financial regulatory reforms (Basel III), trade liberalisation and economic cooperation, and global health initiatives (Kyumoto, 2023). This summit presents a unique opportunity for Africa to assert its priorities on a global stage.

The AU handled its first year at the G20 as an observation year but is

poised to pursue global order changes at the multilateral level. In its second year, however, the AU cannot afford to remain a passive participant; it must leverage its collective voice of 55 member states to shape debates on debt sustainability, energy transition, and critical minerals, ensuring Africa is not merely present in the room but actively steering outcomes that affect the continent's future. Its success depends on how the G20 members cooperate on the issues in an era where diplomatic tensions are high, especially between the United States of America (USA) and South Africa. The recent tariff measures imposed by the USA also weakened multilateralism as all G20 members were affected. The AU must navigate these tensions strategically to ensure its agenda is not sidelined.

The G20's hub role in global economic governance since the global financial crisis has had the effect of concentrating and decentralising authority while diffusing new policy practices of global economic governance, as opined by Luckhurst (2019). The G20 has broadened its agenda beyond its initial emphasis on economics and finance to include development, climate change, terrorism, environmental issues, health, and gender equity among others. Unlike formal forms of global governance that are evident in multilateral International Organisations and international law with respect to specific issues which are created by formal treaties, informal global governance refers to forums or summits created

by “an explicitly shared expectation—rather than a formalised agreement” by a specific group of states without any established agency or legal agreement (Vabulas & Snidal, 2013).

Scholars have researched the effectiveness of the G20 since its establishment but there is scant research on how the African Union will achieve continental objectives at the multilateral level through the G20. This paper bridges the gap in the literature by using a thematic analysis to discuss the issues presented by the South African presidency and how the African Union can pursue global order changes, especially in the global financial architecture, energy transition and debt sustainability. This paper also explores the strategic mechanisms available to the AU for influencing G20 outcomes.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a thematic analysis to comprehensively examine the major themes presented by Africa for the Summit. Thematic analysis is a qualitative research method that researchers use to systematically organise and analyse data. It involves the identification of themes through careful reading and re-reading of the data (King, 2004). A rigorous thematic analysis approach can produce insightful and trustworthy findings (Nowell *et al.*, 2017). The major themes of the study are the Systematic Hub Model of G20, debt sustainability, energy transition, critical minerals, and disaster response. This method allows

for a nuanced understanding of Africa’s strategic positioning within the G20.

ANALYSIS OF THE G20 THROUGH THE SYSTEMATIC HUB MODEL

The G20 has become the hub of a network of global governance, connecting other Plurilateral Summit Institutions (PSI) where advanced and emerging countries, from around the world, participate as equals. The G20 began with the world’s major multilateral organisations - the IMF and the World Bank - as members and has added other emerging and developing countries (Kirton, 2013). The African Union has fifty-five (55) member states (including suspended countries) largely made up of developing countries. These countries are faced with the issues tabled by the South African presidency at the upcoming G20 summit. The G20 has served as a multilateral platform to solve global challenges by collaborating with legally established international organisations like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Africa’s foremost regional body- the African Union- is poised to use the G20 as a platform to avert the debt crisis that threatens developing countries across the world of which the majority are in Africa.

The G20 falls under global governance literature in international relations. Global governance is understood as a process of cooperative leadership that brings together national governments, multilateral public agencies,

and civil society to achieve commonly accepted goals. It provides strategic direction and mobilises collective energies to address global challenges. To be effective, such governance must be inclusive, dynamic, and capable of spanning national and sectoral boundaries. It should operate through soft rather than hard power, and it should be more democratic than authoritarian, more openly political than bureaucratic, and more integrated than specialised (Boughton & Bradford, 2007). Yet, the experience of many Global South countries suggests that these ideals have not always been realised in practice. Their voices have often been marginalised within decision-making processes, raising questions about how genuinely inclusive and democratic the G20 has been in addressing development priorities beyond the interests of advanced economies. The uneven uptake of the Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI) during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the slow, heavily criticised implementation of the Common Framework for Debt Treatments, illustrate how Global South priorities risk being delayed or diluted despite formal commitments. For the African Union in particular, continuity and consistency will be imperative to ensure that the policies recommended at the G20 do not remain rhetorical commitments but translate into actionable, implementable outcomes that address structural inequalities and advance long-term development objectives.

Secondly, the old formal multilateral organisations from the 1940s and the informal, plurilateral institutions created since 1975 failed to respond adequately to such shocks. The rising vulnerability of the established powers led to the success of the G20. The failure of the Bretton Woods institutions to adequately curtail the Asian financial crisis in 1997 and the global financial crisis in 2008 made the G20 assume the role of stabilising the international financial system through the establishment of the Financial Stability Board (FSB). The G20 created the FSB in its image to provide the missing international organisation with the need for stronger domestic financial regulations in the wake of the 2008 financial shock (Kirton, 2013a). The G20 has already established a Common Framework for debt treatment, but it has yet to deliver satisfactorily, as critics opine that the process has been slow (AFRODAD, 2023).

Thirdly, G20 members have common characteristics. They converge on their desire for recognition as satisfied top-tier powers and on the domestic principles and practices of economic, social and political openness needed to sustain their position, their acceptance as legitimate members of this top tier and their stability and growth at home (Plattner, 2011). To a greater extent, the G20 enjoys domestic political cohesion, its participants' political capital, control, continuity, financial-economic competence, personal commitment to the G20 forum and popular support for

governing through the G20 (Plattner, 2011).

Luckhurst's (2019) study examines how the G20 became a hub for decentralising authority in global economic governance (Boughton & Bradford, 2007). It indicates the forum's core role in global economic governance since 2008 (Cooper, 2010; Kirton, 2013a; Narlikar, 2017). It is a "hub" in the sense that it directs the activities of other international agencies and actors to diffuse policy norms and practices in global governance (Narlikar, 2017).

Another key conceptual focus of the present analysis is decentralising authority. Luckhurst (2016) focuses on three key aspects of authority in global economic governance and specifically the G20 context. These are strategic, political and cognitive authority, and their effects on the organisation, policies and actors involved in the G20. The emphasis on these aspects of authority does not exhaust all possible forms, for example, one could discuss legal or even "moral" authority; however, focusing on these three dimensions constitutes a useful framework for analysing the G20's importance for global governance (Luckhurst, 2016).

THE LEGITIMACY OR OTHERWISE OF THE G20

The legitimacy of the G20 has been questioned by a myriad of scholars and analysts. These scholars argue on the themes of redundancy, rejection, reinforcement and replacement, and

highlight the forum's tendency to lack continuity or sustained consensus on agreed policies and decisions, which undermines implementation and erodes its credibility as a stable governance mechanism.

Redundant

The first general school in this debate sees the G20 as redundant in the long term, because it is too large and diverse in its membership and too informal in its institutionalisation, or because it has inspired the G7/8, other informal plurilateral bodies, or the Bretton Woods/United Nations organisations to revive and reform to meet the new global governance needs. Assuming a zero-sum global governance competition, this school first finds support in the G20's birth alongside the British-guided, legally entrenched International Monetary and Financial Committee (IMFC) and the German-designed Financial Stability Forum (Kirton, 2016).

A particularly strong, prescriptively oriented strain of the "redundant" school sees the G20 as a great danger to the kind of global economic governance the world needs. A leading G20 abolitionist, Anders Åslund (2009) argued after the 2009 Pittsburgh Summit that the G20 was a threat to the international architecture and had to be stopped. He questioned the legitimacy of an institution that unilaterally named itself the premier economic forum, without clear membership criteria, agreed rules of governance, or

authorisation from excluded powers (Åslund, 2009). In Åslund's view, the G20 breached the principle of national sovereignty by usurping authority over global finance while expecting the 173 excluded countries to accept its decisions. As an alternative, he proposed the International Monetary Fund, which he regarded as possessing universality, a formal legal basis, and the staff capacity to carry out governance functions. Yet, this prescription is not without problems: the IMF itself has long faced criticisms over its skewed voting quotas, conditionality, and perceived bias toward advanced economies, which have undermined its legitimacy in the Global South. Thus, Åslund's argument highlights the G20's weaknesses but also illustrates the broader dilemma of global governance, whether legitimacy should derive from legal universality or from practical inclusiveness and crisis responsiveness.

Rejection

The second general school rejects pre-eminence but accepts the continuation and contribution of the G20 (Beeson & Bell 2009). Such rejectionists, conceding the possibility of positive-sum coexistence and cooperation among international institutions, conclude that although the G20 will endure, it has failed to perform as the primary centre of global economic governance, in part because it contains many of the flaws that have afflicted the G8. Such claims about poor G20 performance

arose soon after its start and came especially from those who shared a hard law, legalisation approach (Abbott *et al.*, 2000).

Other rejectionist scholars also emerged in response to the first G20 summit in Washington. They insisted that the leaders fell well short of their objectives due to a misdiagnosis of the financial crisis, denial of their culpability for it, and failure to deliver what they had promised at prior ministerial meetings (Duncan, 2008; Lander, 2008). After Pittsburgh, rejectionists still doubted the group's performance (Giles, 2009; Donovan, 2009). Some pointed to differing dominant domestic ideas and interests across key members as causes of the summit's failure to agree on key issues (Schirm, 2013). Furthermore, it is difficult for the informal G20 to transform international consensus into domestic law, which significantly constrains the group's capacity for implementation.

Other critics also reject the G20 due to the absence of African representation and the missing poor of the world (Payne, 2010). After the 2009 Pittsburgh Summit, the Senegalese finance minister, Abdoulaye Diop, remarked that the leaders could not "continue to ignore hundreds of millions of Africans" (Agence France Presse, 2009). The ministers of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC)s criticised the G20 for lacking representation from the world's poorest economies, noting that its membership was deliberately limited to the largest advanced and

emerging economies with systemic influence. With the African Union joining the G20 in 2023, as a permanent member, this concern has to some extent been mitigated, as the AU provides an institutional channel for the interests of poorer states to be voiced within the forum.

Reinforcement

The third general school sees G20 governance as a valuable reinforcement of what the G8 and other similar bodies do (Kirton 2005a; Kharas & Lombardi, 2012). It argues that the G20 works well in its distinct domain of serving as a permanent, primary centre of international economic cooperation among its members, especially with the established G7/8 members, the IMF, the World Bank, and other hard law multilateral organisations operating as committed components of the new G20. It does not see, expect, or hope that the G20 will or could serve as the only centre of effective and legitimate global governance, even for its members, let alone the global “G193” as a whole. This school begins with the “distinctive mission” sub-school. It argues that the provision of financial stability, sustained growth, and globalisation that benefits all is the G20’s core mission and the proper standard by which its performance should be judged. Also, this is due to the superior power or performance of the existing or reformed hard law multilateral bodies (Culpeper, 2000).

Replacement

Other scholars have argued for the replacement of the G20, though they nonetheless acknowledge certain successes. Hillman (2010) noted that the G20 had “defied its doubters in reaching consensus on specific approaches to several critical and controversial issues,” even if she saw its ultimate role as serving as a “council of governors” for global economic institutions. Similarly, Russian scholar and G8 sous-sherpa Vadim Lukov (2010a, 2010b) emphasised the G20’s achievements in halting the 2007–09 financial crisis through unprecedented fiscal and monetary stimulus, driving reforms in the International Financial Institutions (IFIs), and initiating dialogue across diverse political and economic systems. These examples illustrate that, despite calls for its replacement, the G20 has at key moments demonstrated tangible effectiveness in crisis management and institutional reform.

The G20 is an informal forum of major economies that seeks to achieve political consensus on significant global issues. In doing so, it claims to exercise *de facto* governance authority over such matters. Virally (1974) notes that states have a *raison-d’être* or a ‘*finalité intégrée*’. This means they aim for the preservation or enhancement of the common good, of national security and prosperity, here as international organisations have an instrumental function or ‘*finalité fonctionnelle*’. States are ends in themselves, while

international organisations are means to (specific) ends (Virally, 1974). The G20 has no foundational treaty and no legal rights or for its members; it lacks formal powers or a substantive legal structure.

The rise of the G20 in the international system can be analysed through post-colonial international relations theory. Post-colonial scholars challenge the centrality accorded to Europe as the historical source and origin of the international order. Post-colonial theories query the universality accorded to moral and legal perspectives which reflect and reproduce the power relations characteristic of the colonial encounter, and which are thus far from being universal. They question the epistemological privilege accorded to an understanding of knowledge which is blind to the constitutive role of knowledge, and not merely representational (Seth, 2011).

ISSUES TABLED BY SOUTH AFRICA'S G20 PRESIDENCY

Ensuring Debt Sustainability for Low-Income Countries

The ballooning public debt and its accompanying interest payment in low-income countries stifle revenue disbursement to critical essential sectors like education and health. This situation is dire in Sub-Saharan Africa, where public debt has tripled since 2010 to about US\$1.14 trillion at the end of 2022, largely as a result of weak debt management systems, significant debt

transparency issues, weak macro-fiscal management, greater reliance on costlier and riskier sources of financing (World Bank, 2023). The median public debt-to-GDP ratio in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) has increased from 32% in 2010 to 63.2% by the end of 2024, while countries at high risk of external debt distress have surged (Pulse, 2025). According to the joint World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) Debt Sustainability Analysis (DSA) published in June 2023, eleven low-income countries were classified as being in debt distress. Of these, seven were located in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), with Ghana and Malawi being the latest economies to have joined the list (Were, 2024).

Empirical research shows that it is highly improbable for a country to run a surplus budget, and therefore the acquisition of public debt becomes inevitable. It follows that the acquisition of public debt is not a problem; nevertheless, building up public debt to unsustainable levels can stifle economic growth (Adom, 2016). Scholars such as Reinhart & Rogoff (2010) have analysed the impact of public debt on GDP growth. They opine that, if the public debt-to-GDP ratio exceeds 90%, it would have a negative impact on the country's economic growth (Reinhart & Rogoff, 2010). Salmon (2021), in a study to assess the impact of public debt on economic growth in developing countries, found that public debt has no causal relationship with GDP in the short-run, but there is unidirectional Granger causality running from public

debt to GDP in the long run (Hilton, 2021).

Developing countries facing this debt crisis are seeking multilateral solutions at the G20. This is not the first-time debt developing countries are seeking debt relief. As compared to the debt crisis of the 1970s and 1980s which was characterised by debt owed to multilateral institutions, the current debt crisis is largely owed to commercial and bilateral lenders (Hilton, 2021). Historically, African countries have called for debt cancellation. The Lagos Plan of Action (1980-2000) endorsed cancellation of all debts contracted by Member States concerned, without any discrimination. Also, Illicit Financial Flows (IFFs) has siphoned billions of dollars from the continent which could have been used for development. According to the African Union and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), the continent is estimated to be losing more than US\$ 50 billion annually in IFFs. This is a conservative estimate because accurate data do not exist for all African countries, and these estimates often exclude some forms of IFFs that by nature are secret and cannot be properly estimated, such as proceeds of bribery and trafficking of drugs, people and firearms (UNECA, 2015).

At the Rio de Janeiro Leaders' Declaration in 2024, the leaders affirmed that,

... we continue to support the Global Sovereign Debt Roundtable (GSDR) to further advance common understanding among

key stakeholders, including the private sector, bilateral and multilateral creditors and debtor countries. We welcome the Africa-led debates on Debt, Development and Infrastructure convened by the Brazilian G20 Presidency in 2024. (G20, 2024)

The GSDR brings together debtor countries and creditors. The objective is to build greater common understanding among key stakeholders on debt sustainability and debt restructuring challenges, and ways to address them. The roundtable is co-chaired by the IMF, World Bank and G20 Presidency (currently South Africa) and comprises official bilateral creditors (both traditional creditors members of the Paris Club and new creditors), private creditors and borrowing countries (World Bank, n.d.).

South Africa has tabled this debt crisis at the 2025 G20 summit and is seeking a multilateral solution. The African Union officially took up its role as a permanent member of the G20, now in its second year of participation, marking a transition from observer status to full involvement in the forum's deliberations and agenda-setting processes. The expectation is that the African Union will be able to present workable proposals with the support of South Africa to avert the debt crisis in developing countries, many of which are members of the African Union. A coordinated AU strategy, supported by empirical data and regional consensus, is crucial for effective advocacy.

The G20 summit promulgated the 'Common Framework for Debt

Treatments in November 2020 which is the main mechanism for coordinating and implementing sovereign debt restructuring. Currently, the seventy-three (73) low-income countries that were eligible for the G20's Debt Service Suspension Initiative set up in 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic can apply for treatment under the Common Framework. In Africa, Ghana, Ethiopia, Chad and Zambia have applied for debt relief through the G20 Common Framework (G20, 2020). The African Union Commission can collaborate with the four SSA countries currently undergoing the Common Framework process to distil their experiences and develop specific proposals aimed at expediting the process and improving debt restructuring outcomes (Tran, 2024).

To further resolve the debt crisis, the G20 Summit host, South Africa, has launched the 'Cost of Capital Commission' where a group of experts will work on options for low-income countries to pay less for their borrowing and address debt sustainability (McNair, n.d.). Some countries in the AU are advocating for partial debt cancellations along the lines of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative launched by the IMF and the World Bank in 1996. These debt cancellations can be discussed in the context of the current AU theme of "Justice for Africans and People of African Descent Through Reparations", as well as in international climate negotiations (i.e., debt-for- climate

swaps) (Eickhoff, 2025). Together, these initiatives underscore that Africa's debt challenge cannot be resolved solely through technical restructuring mechanisms; it requires a broader normative shift that recognises historical injustices, links debt relief to climate justice, and ensures that future financing arrangements are equitable and sustainable. In this context, discussions on mobilising finance for a just energy transition become inseparable from debt negotiations, since both issues determine whether African countries can pursue low-carbon development without deepening fiscal vulnerability.

In addressing the long-term global financial architecture imbalances, the African Union in February 2024 established the Alliance of African Multilateral Financial Institutions (AAMFI). It comprises the African Central Bank, the African Monetary Fund, the African Investment Bank, and the Pan-African Stock Exchange, among others. The objective is to strengthen Africa's financial architecture and position it more strongly within the global financial framework (ACET, 2024). In that same vein, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) has proposed that the IMF's Special Drawing Rights (SDR) policies become less discretionary and more rule-based and analytical while prioritising a long-term approach to balance-of-payments challenges. Also, the UNECA proposes for the IMF to work more assiduously to address structural inequalities in the global financial architecture by giving

greater representation to the problems affecting low- and lower-middle-income countries (UNECA, 2024).

Mobilising Finance for a Just Energy Transition

Countries across the world are shifting from fossil fuel use to cleaner sources of energy in line with the 2015 Paris Climate Change Accord. Fossil fuel production and consumption account for 86% of global carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions, with 37% coming from coal, 29% from oil, and 20% from gas (Boucetta, 2024). The term energy transition refers to a paradigm shift in the energy system from one model to another, often intricate and encompassing more than simply switching from one fuel source to another. Energy transitions evolve gradually over time, defined by technologies, market incentives, policy shifts, and consumer behaviour.

To address the negative effects of climate change, energy transition is an essential transformative process aimed at reducing carbon emissions. This includes shifting from fossil fuels to renewable energy, enhancing energy efficiency, and reducing energy demand by altering consumption patterns (Fattouh *et al.*, 2018).

Crude oil-producing countries are faced with a conundrum of depleting fossil fuels for development and meeting climate goals at the same time. In a study by Nakanwagi, (2021) to analyse how new oil-producing countries- Kenya, Mozambique, Tanzania, and Uganda

will navigate meeting development goals while meeting Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), she recommended firstly the decarbonisation of oil and gas activities. She further recommends intermediate development of natural gas energy and systematic investment in renewables (Nakanwagi, 2021).

Africa is endowed with abundant potential for bioenergy, geothermal, hydropower, ocean, solar and wind energy, resources estimated to be 1,000 times larger than the continent's projected electricity demand in 2040 (IRENA & AfDB, 2022). With 30% of the world's known mineral reserves and 60% of the best solar potential on earth, Africa holds a uniquely strategic position in the global energy transition. These endowments are not only geographically well distributed but also directly aligned with the requirements of a low-carbon future. The continent's mineral wealth including manganese, copper, lithium, cobalt, chromium and platinum, is critical for manufacturing renewable energy technologies such as electric batteries, wind turbines, and solar panels, while its solar potential positions it as a future hub for clean, affordable power generation. Yet, despite this vast potential, Africa continues to attract only a small fraction of global climate finance and suffers from some of the world's lowest rates of energy access, underscoring the urgency of converting resource endowment into tangible development outcomes. Energy transition will be a main driver of

demand for several critical materials, many of which are abundant across the African continent. Notably, lithium, widely used in Electric Vehicle (EV) batteries, is plentiful in countries including the Democratic Republic of Congo (DR Congo), Ghana, Mali, Namibia and Zimbabwe. Together, these nations hold approximately five (5) million tonnes of lithium resources, nearly 30 times more than the global lithium production in 2023 (USGS, 2024). Moreover, the African continent hosts nearly 25% of the world's natural graphite reserves, over 35% of global manganese reserves, 50% of global cobalt reserves and 75% of phosphate rock reserves (USGS, 2024).

Despite the enormous potential for just transition, financing remains a big challenge to achieving climate goals. Financing just transition in Africa has been remarkably low. Africa accounted for only 4.5% (US\$29.5 billion) of global climate finance flows in 2019/2020. Africa requires US\$2.6 trillion-US\$2.8 trillion cumulatively between 2020 and 2030, an average of US\$242.2 billion annually to finance Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the Paris accord (Nakanwagi, 2021).

The African Union remains committed to just transition. In line with that, the Nairobi Declaration stresses the importance of climate-positive growth, green industrialisation and local value creation (African Development Bank, 2023). The declaration also acknowledges that the energy transition will be unique in Africa, as the circumstances in which it will take place are singular.

In Africa, about 570 million people still lack access to electricity, and almost 960 million people lack access to clean cooking (IEA *et al.*, 2023). The energy consumption of the African population remains low, at one-third of the global average. The African Union contends that member countries will pursue their transition paths considering their unique growth needs and resources. The AU must also prioritise capacity building and technology transfer to ensure equitable participation in the energy transition.

HARNESSING CRITICAL MINERALS FOR INCLUSIVE GROWTH AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The demand for critical minerals is at an all-time high as countries across the world and industries are transitioning to cleaner energy sources and low-carbon technologies (Calderon *et al.*, 2024). Critical minerals are types of 'green minerals' with two main defined characteristics: (1) they are essential for the functioning of modern technologies, economies, or national security; and (2) there is a risk that their supply chains could be disrupted (Hine *et al.*, 2023). Thus, not all green metals are classified as critical minerals unless they meet these two criteria. Examples of 'green metals' include cobalt, copper, bauxite, chromium, high-purity iron ore, platinum group metals, lithium, and rare earth metals, among others (Boafo *et al.*, 2024).

Green minerals or metals are vital for decarbonisation and climate goals, especially in the transport and industrial economy sectors. These minerals are necessary for the manufacturing of green or clean energy technologies such as solar panels, wind turbines, electric vehicles, battery storage, hydrogen electrolyzers, and fuel cells (Hammond & Brady, 2022). Africa has a significant stock of these critical minerals. According to the 2023 statistics from the United States Geological Survey (USGS), Congo-Kinshasa, Madagascar, and Morocco have about 50% of global reserves and produce about 70% of cobalt—a critical mineral essential to produce battery storage and electric vehicles (USGS, 2023).

Bauxite is a key mineral used in the production of Solar Photovoltaic (PV) components of which Guinea has about 24% of global reserves and produces about 23% of global production. Platinum Group of Metals (PGM) is key for abating carbon-intensive and root sectors and important for green hydrogen. For PGM, Africa (South Africa - 90% and Zimbabwe - 2%) holds about 92% of global reserves with both countries producing about 82% of platinum globally in 2022. Chromium is considered a key mineral to produce low-carbon technologies such as geothermal, solar, and wind. South Africa holds about 36% of global reserves and accounted for about 44% of global production in 2022 (USGS, 2023).

Africa has been exporting traditional minerals such as gold and diamonds

in their raw form for decades. To change the narrative, the continent has promulgated the Africa Mining Vision (AMV) to develop “a transparent, equitable and optimal exploitation of mineral resources to underpin broad-based sustainable growth and socio-economic development”. Linked to the AMV, the African Union’s Africa Minerals Development Centre (AMDC) has developed the Africa Green Minerals Strategy (AGMS). The overarching objective is to “harness green mineral value-chains for equitable resource-based industrialisation and electrification, creating green technologies and sustainable development to enhance the quality of life of its people” (African Union, 2024).

Strengthening Disaster Resilience and Response

Disasters, both natural and man-made, pose significant threats to the world. Africa faces numerous disasters including droughts, conflicts, population displacement, floods, and famine. Ensuring emergency preparedness and building resilient systems for disaster risk reduction is critical (Olu *et al.*, 2016). The continent’s disaster response has been lacklustre. For instance, the slow and late emergency response to the 2014-2016 West Africa Ebola outbreak crisis in the most affected countries (Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia) caused immense public health and socio-economic havoc. The outbreak led to more than 11,325 deaths and 28,600

cases, as well as intense cross-border travel bans and trade restrictions in these impoverished West African countries (Olu *et al.*, 2016).

Africa is home to several islands and landlocked states that face perennial challenges that need special attention and support to augment domestic resources and capabilities through bilateral and multilateral channels. One such multilateral response is the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015–2030), which was adopted at the Third United Nations World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Sendai-Japan. It presents an opportunity for countries to adopt a concise, focused, forward-looking and action-oriented framework towards disaster risk reduction (United Nations, 2015).

The continent has not been able to adequately respond to disasters because of factors such as the inadequacy of finance and logistics, limited inter-sectorial collaboration and coordination, inadequate surveillance, lack of early detection/reporting, lack of commitment, and weak capabilities (performance, roles and experiences). Also, weak health systems, a lack of personnel at operational levels, inadequate veterinary public health services, poor resources, and the lack of coherent risk assessment and emergency response plans have weakened Africa's resilience and response to disasters. The African Union developed the Africa Risk Reduction for Sustainable

Development in 2004 to contribute to the attainment of sustainable devel-

opment and poverty eradication by facilitating the integration of disaster risk reduction into development. New disasters have emerged, which have been exacerbated by climate change (African Union, 2004). A multilateral approach to risk reduction and disaster response is eminent at the G20. Despite the achievements, the G20 has challenges which include divergent national interests; geopolitical tensions; implementation gaps and accountability (Kyumoto, 2023).

How can the African Union Achieve its Priorities at the G20?

The African Union is the second regional body to join the G20 after the European Union. Lesson drawing from the EU can help Africa achieve its priorities. In international negotiations, arguing and bargaining represent two distinct typologies of decision-making (Risse, 2000; Kotzian, 2007; Susskind, 2008). While presented as distinct, in practice, bargaining and arguing frequently operate in tandem. Bargaining provides the strategic leverage necessary to protect core interests, while arguing creates the normative and cognitive space to build legitimacy and shared understanding. Their combined influence can thus shape outcomes more effectively than either approach alone: bargaining ensures that powerful actors remain engaged, while arguing allows weaker or newer members, such as the African Union, to persuade through evidence

and normative claims. For Africa, this dual strategy offers a meaningful opportunity at the G20. Through bargaining, the AU can push for tangible concessions on debt relief, climate finance, and critical mineral value chains, while through arguing it can reframe the discourse around equity, justice, and historical responsibility. By deliberately balancing these approaches, the AU increases its chances not only of securing immediate policy gains but also of reshaping longer-term norms in global economic governance.

Regarding the discussion of finance at the G20, EU countries seek to maximise their preferences during negotiations on financial regulatory measures, often by using threats. For example, Former French President, Nicolas Sarkozy, publicly threatened to walk out of the G20 meeting if his demands for tighter global financial regulation were not met (Chrisafis *et al.*, 2009). Bargaining dominates the G20 discussions on financial and economic affairs and the EU's diplomatic role in this area should be seen against this background. Indeed, France, Germany, Italy and the UK (henceforth 'EU4') use the EU and their EU membership as a key instrument to weigh on G20 finance outcomes (Debaere, 2015). South Africa is the only G20 member from Africa and might not possess the collective bargaining strength like EU member states marshalled by the European Union. The African Union's approach should be to argue on valid claims-based facts on the four thematic areas

presented by the South African presidency.

In particular, the discussions on development in the G20 context, is characterised by an arguing logic. Since the G20 gathers countries with different levels of development as well as different economic positions and development challenges, it is seen as a platform to exchange experiences and debate on the approaches that truly work. For example, advanced economies such as Germany or Japan may emphasise technological innovation and high-value manufacturing as pathways to growth, while emerging economies like India, Brazil, or South Africa prioritise poverty reduction, infrastructure expansion, and inclusive industrialisation. Similarly, the European Union often stresses fiscal stability and green innovation as development priorities, whereas many Global South members place greater emphasis on access to climate finance, debt relief, and affordable energy to sustain growth. According to Lim (2011, p. 59), the G20 cannot only serve "as the premier forum for international cooperation" but also as a "premier marketplace for development approaches and practical case studies based on the actual experiences of its member countries (Lim, 2011).

The AU must collaborate closely with South Africa to ensure that Africa's key issues are effectively articulated, placed on the G20 agenda, and supported through coalition-building aligned with Africa's objectives. Furthermore, it is crucial for the AU and

South Africa to strengthen mechanisms for monitoring and promoting the full implementation of agreed measures, particularly those designed to support Africa's development programmes and ensure an equitable allocation of international available assistance funds. The Development Working Group of the G20 presents a platform for the Africa Union to champion implementation of the agreed development agenda. Successfully achieving these objectives would not only advance Africa's development but also cement the continent's role as a catalyst for change, helping to drive its broader agenda on the global stage (Lim, 2011). This collaboration should be institutionalised through regular consultations and joint policy frameworks.

CONCLUSION

South Africa's G20 presidency in 2025 places Africa at the centre of global economic governance at a time of profound structural challenges. The four priority issues it has tabled, strengthening disaster resilience and response, ensuring debt sustainability for low-income countries, mobilising finance for a just energy transition, and harnessing critical minerals for inclusive growth, directly reflect the continent's most pressing development needs. Africa's position is reinforced by its endowments, with 30% of the world's mineral reserves and 60% of the best solar potential on earth, the continent holds a uniquely strategic role in shaping the global transition to low-carbon growth.

Yet, this potential remains constrained by limited access to affordable finance, low levels of energy access, and persistent debt distress.

The G20 has historically demonstrated its value as a systemic hub of global governance, most notably in responding to the Asian financial crisis and the 2008–09 global financial crisis, when traditional multilateral institutions fell short. However, its legitimacy continues to be questioned due to its informal structure, exclusionary membership design, and the frequent lack of continuity or follow-through on agreed policies. The African Union's permanent membership presents an opportunity to narrow this gap, but its influence will depend on more than symbolic inclusion. The AU must balance bargaining, to secure concessions on debt and climate finance, with arguing, to shift global norms toward equity, justice, and sustainable development.

The success of Africa's engagement will hinge on continuity, coalition-building, and the ability to link technical policy proposals to broader normative agendas such as reparative justice and climate responsibility. If the AU and South Africa can leverage their role strategically, the 2025 G20 summit may mark not only Africa's deeper integration into global governance but also a redefinition of the G20's relevance in an era of declining multilateralism. Future research should not only examine how the AU's strategies compare with the European Union's experience, but also evaluate how regional blocs can

transform influence into tangible governance outcomes.

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African Union Strategies for Extracontinental Trade Cooperation: Prospects for Symmetric Future Partnerships

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ABSTRACT

The African Union (AU) plays an important role in shaping the continent's economic development by managing its intra - and extracontinental trade relationships. This is premised on the need to integrate Africa's economy into global markets and value chains, serving as a catalyst for building sustainable trade relations. To this end, the AU's comprehensive economic development policies, including the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and Agenda 2063, serve as a blueprint for the AU's vision of Africa's trade cooperation. This paper examines how

the AU implements these blueprints through its strategies to anchor relationships with extracontinental blocs and states. This is crucial because AU member states have concurrent extracontinental trade arrangements and partnerships that could hinder the AU's vision. Using a qualitative framework, this paper analyses AU strategies for extracontinental trade cooperation and symmetric partnerships. Through a critical examination of existing literature and AU member states case studies, the paper argues that the AU must adopt a proactive role in shaping extracontinental trade relationships to ensure that bilateral agreements align with

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Received: June 30th, 2025 / Modified: September 30th, 2025 / Accepted: October 2th, 2025

To cite this article:

Boamah, F. (2025). African Union Strategies for Extracontinental Trade Cooperation: Prospects for Symmetric Future Partnerships. *Oasis*, 43, 93-119.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18601/16577558.n43.05>

both the AfCFTA and Agenda 2063. By doing so, the AU can promote symmetrical trade partnerships and enhance Africa's economic development and prosperity. The paper offers valuable insights into AU's role in redefining trade relations across the continent. It recommends that the AU, through the AfCFTA Secretariat, be involved in member states' trade negotiations to provide continental expertise. Additionally, the AU should establish a team of experts to review and revise member states' trade agreements to align them with the objectives of the AU.

Keywords: Africa Union; China; European Union; United States; Partnerships; Extracontinental; AfCFTA, AGOA

Estrategias de la Unión Africana para la cooperación comercial extracontinental: perspectivas para asociaciones simétricas futuras

RESUMEN

La Unión Africana (UA) desempeña un papel fundamental en la configuración del desarrollo económico del continente, mediante la gestión de sus relaciones comerciales intra y extracontinentales. Esto se basa en la necesidad de integrar la economía africana en los mercados y cadenas de valor

globales, actuando como catalizador para la construcción de relaciones comerciales sostenibles. En este sentido, las políticas de desarrollo económico integral de la UA, incluida el Área de Libre Comercio Continental Africana (AfCFTA, por sus siglas en inglés) y la Agenda 2063, sirven como hoja de ruta para la visión de la UA sobre la cooperación comercial del continente.

Este artículo examina cómo la UA implementa estas directrices a través de sus estrategias para afianzar relaciones con bloques y Estados extracontinentales. Esto es crucial, dado que los Estados miembros de la UA mantienen acuerdos y asociaciones comerciales extracontinentales simultáneos que podrían obstaculizar la visión de la organización. A partir de un enfoque cualitativo, el artículo analiza las estrategias de la UA para la cooperación comercial extracontinental y las asociaciones simétricas.

Mediante un examen crítico de la literatura existente y de estudios de caso de Estados miembros de la UA, se sostiene que la organización debe adoptar un papel proactivo en la configuración de las relaciones comerciales extracontinentales para garantizar que los acuerdos bilaterales se alineen tanto con la AfCFTA como con la Agenda 2063. Al hacerlo, la UA puede promover asociaciones comerciales simétricas y fortalecer el desarrollo y la prosperidad económica de África. El artículo ofrece valiosos aportes sobre el papel de la UA en la redefinición de las relaciones

comerciales en todo el continente. Se recomienda que la UA, a través de la Secretaría de la AfCFTA, participe en las negociaciones comerciales de los Estados miembros para aportar experiencia a nivel continental. Además, la UA debería establecer un equipo de expertos que revise y actualice los acuerdos comerciales de los Estados miembros para alinearlos con los objetivos de la organización.

Palabras clave: Unión Africana; China; Unión Europea; Estados Unidos; asociaciones; extracontinental; AfCFTA; AGOA.

INTRODUCTION

In today's globalized economy, countries must be able to access global markets and value chains to reap the benefits of international trade and investment (Qiang *et al.*, 2021). For African nations, seizing the opportunities presented by this globalized world economy is crucial for achieving global economy integration. Despite the efforts to integrate into the global economy, Africa is still considered to be positioned at the lower end of achieving symmetric integration (Nigusie & Mohammed, 2020). As of 2019, the continent represented only 2.6 percent of world trade. Projections indicate that Africa's share of global trade will remain below three percent in 2024 (UNCTAD, 2018; United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 2024).

Due to its marginal position in the global economy, Africa has developed

various policies and strategies to enhance its economic development through improved trade relationships. Towards this end, the Organization for African Unity (OAU) initiated several programs aimed at achieving sustainable economic growth in Africa, including the 1980 Lagos Plan of Action (LPA) and the Final Act of Lagos. Building on this foundation, the OAU launched initiatives like the LPA and the Final Act of Lagos, which ultimately led to the Abuja Treaty establishing the African Economic Community (AEC) (Shumba, 2023). Although the implementation timelines were not fully met, these efforts were not without success, as they laid the groundwork for current blueprints of the African Union (AU) (Shumba, 2023). These programs sought to address the continent's socio-economic challenges by mobilizing its human resources to promote development.

Additionally, when the AU replaced the OAU in 2002, it included in its mandate the acceleration of socioeconomic integration across the continent, the creation of conditions necessary for Africa to assume its rightful role in the global economy, and the fostering of integration among African economies (African Union, 2002; Article 3(c)(i)(j)). To achieve these goals, the AU also launched various programs to promote sustainable economic growth in Africa. One such program was the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), which was adopted in 2002. The NEPAD was designed to promote sustainable growth and development

by emphasizing trade and investment, thereby enhancing opportunities for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) (Badi-ru, 2016). Despite facing challenges, the NEPAD successfully established global partnerships with both industrialized and developing countries, as well as multilateral organizations (AUDA-NEPAD, 2021).

Building on these initiatives, the AU introduced several broad policy frameworks such as the Africa Mining Vision, Agenda 2063, Boosting Intra-Africa Trade (BIAT), the African Commodities Strategy and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) (African Union, 2025). From these initiatives, Agenda 2063 and the AfCFTA have received the most attention due to their perceived impact. Adopted in 2015, Agenda 2063 outlines a strategic framework for the AU over the next 50 years (African Union, 2025). To achieve Aspiration 1, which envisions “A prosperous Africa, based on inclusive growth and sustainable development,” the AU aims to create a transformed African economy characterized by sustainable and inclusive economic growth, economic diversification, and resilience. The AU also aims to advance in Science, Technology, and Innovations (STI) through manufacturing and value addition (African Union, 2015). The AfCFTA, operationalized in 2021, is one of Agenda 2063’s flagship projects. It is designed to accelerate intra-African trade and enhance Africa’s position in the global market by strengthening its collective voice and policy influence in

international trade negotiations (African Union, 2025).

Despite the positive outlook for implementing the AU’s strategic plans to improve Africa’s competitiveness, these plans must contend with the existing bilateral and multilateral trade commitments of its member states. Trade arrangements, such as the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) and Interim EPAs with the EU, the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) with the United States of America (USA) and the various free trade agreements with China, are designed to provide African countries with preferential market access, aid and investment (European Commission, 2025; Okafor, 2024). However, many of these agreements, which are often promoted for their concessions, tend to produce asymmetric benefits (Krapohl & Huut, 2020). As a result, African countries often encounter significant challenges and imbalances in trade. The varying standards of these trade negotiations with African countries by their external partners undermine the AU’s regional integration and trade cooperation efforts, often yielding asymmetric outcomes (Krapohl & Huut, 2020).

Asymmetrical extracontinental trade arrangements involving AU member states lead to a decrease in intraregional trade. This hinders the AfCFTA and Agenda 2063 visions of the AU (Krapohl & Huut, 2020). Given the asymmetric outcomes produced by these existing relations in the past, the AU’s vision may not be realized without

concrete efforts to align these member states' extracontinental relations with the AU's vision for regional integration and economic development. As AU members have committed to the AfCFTA and Agenda 2063, their economic agreements with other nations must align with the AU's overarching goals of economic integration and growth. Many of these existing trade and investment arrangements predate the AU's comprehensive economic development strategies, so the AU must examine their strategies to align them with its vision.

This paper argues that the AU's ability to achieve its trade objectives relies on aligning the existing bilateral and multilateral agreements of its member states with its broader trade framework. However, the AU currently lacks a clear structure for integrating these arrangements, which creates uncertainty about whether they should coexist, be phased out, or be standardized for compliance. This ambiguity raises questions regarding the AU's ability to enforce its trade policies in the context of extracontinental relationships. This paper explores the AU's approach to enforcing its trade policies in the extracontinental trade relationships of member states, examining how it can ensure alignment with its overall trade goals.

The paper adopts a qualitative research methodology to achieve its objectives. It explores existing literature and case studies regarding trade agreements between AU member

states and key foreign partners and trading blocs. First, it discusses the overarching economic goals outlined in the AU's Agenda 2063 and the AfCFTA. Next, it introduces and explains some theories of regional integration and international trade. Then, it examines the extracontinental trade relationships of AU member states, highlighting the associated challenges and negative outcomes. Finally, the paper explores the proactive steps the AU must take to ensure that the extracontinental trade partnerships of its members contribute to the continent's primary economic goals, thereby facilitating the realization of its strategic visions. Ultimately, the paper offers valuable insights into how the AU can adopt a more proactive stance in redefining its members' trade relationships to foster African economic development and prosperity.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS FOR UNDERSTANDING INTERNATIONAL TRADE AND REGIONAL INTEGRATION

This paper proposes how the AU can align its members' international trade agreements with the AU's regional economic development goals through its objective of fostering economic integration. To this end, this section of the paper provides insight into the theories surrounding regional integration and international trade. Specifically, it seeks to answer the questions of why countries agree to regional integration and why countries engage in international trade.

Theories of integration in international relations seek to explain why countries collaborate to build a more connected and cooperative global community. These theories include federalism, functionalism, neofunctionalism and intergovernmentalism, among others (Suska, 2025). Federalism involves forming a supranational entity in which member states cede part or all of their sovereignty for collective benefits. This aligns with the original aspirations of leaders like Kwame Nkrumah and Muammar Gadhafi, who envisioned a United States of Africa (Woldegiorgis, 2025).

According to functionalism, integration occurs through the phenomenon of “spill-over,” whereby cooperation in one area creates a demand for cooperation in others. This approach trusts member states to unite globally through specialized institutions (Suska, 2025). Neofunctionalism extends this idea, emphasizing the role of non-state actors and social interests in pushing for full political integration, driven by non-state actors and social groups rather than just member states (Woldegiorgis, 2025). Intergovernmentalism, on the other hand, argues that national governments are the primary actors in integration and use regional integration to advance their economic and security interests (Towobola & Bamisaye, 2023).

These theories shed light on why states cooperate through regional organizations, highlighting the complex interplay between economic, security,

and ideological factors that drive such collaboration. The AU is an intergovernmental institution that pursues national interests within an integration framework (Woldegiorgis, 2025). National interests appear to be the main driving force behind integration, cloaked in Pan-Africanism (Woldegiorgis, 2025). Therefore, African integration can be attributed to the role of national leaders seeking gains through integration.

International trade theories provide insights into why countries engage in global commerce. These theories can be broadly categorized into traditional, classical, and modern frameworks (Pineda, 2025). Mercantilism is a traditional and nationalistic approach to trade that emphasizes state regulation and centralization of economic activities. This theory advocates for maximizing exports and minimizing imports, viewing trade as a zero-sum game in which one country's gain is another's loss. The ultimate goal is to achieve a trade surplus, where exports exceed imports (Bharat *et al.*, 2023).

In contrast, classical theories, such as Adam Smith's theory of absolute advantage and David Ricardo's theory of comparative advantage, offer a more nuanced understanding of international trade. Absolute advantage refers to a country's ability to produce goods or services more efficiently and at a lower cost than others using the same resources (Jerzy & Oleksandr, 2022). By specializing in their trade, countries can benefit from increased efficiencies and improved production methods (Pineda,

2025). However, the absolute advantage theory has limitations, as some countries may excel in producing multiple goods. Comparative advantage provides a solution to this. Comparative advantage occurs when a country can produce a product more efficiently than other goods, leading to specialization and trade (Pineda, 2025).

Modern trade theories offer additional perspectives on international trade. The Heckscher-Ohlin theory posits that countries rich in capital, natural resources, or labour will specialize in producing goods that utilize these abundant factors. This could potentially benefit them while harming countries that have scarce resources (Jerzy & Oleksandr, 2022; Pineda, 2025). The Product Life Cycle Theory explains how new products evolve through stages of development, impacting comparative advantage and trade patterns as products mature and production shifts to lower-cost countries (Jerzy & Oleksandr, 2022). Other modern theories, such as the gravity model of trade, the theory of national competitive advantage, and the Country Similarity Theory, further enhance the understanding of global trade dynamics (Pineda, 2025; Jerzy & Oleksandr, 2022). Understanding these frameworks enables governments and businesses to develop informed policies and strategies to navigate the complexities of international trade and promote economic growth and development.

Most African countries individually exhibit a comparative advantage in

exporting primary goods (Yuni, 2023). Increased intra-African trade is based on current comparative advantage patterns. However, Yuni (2023) argues that traditional international trade theories predominantly reflect a Western perspective, often overlooking the African context. To optimize the AfCFTA, Yuni (2023) proposes that African countries collaborate to create comparative advantages among themselves. This would involve strategically allocating limited resources to specific products and expanding markets across national borders, ultimately enhancing regional trade performance.

THE AU'S AGENDA 2063 AND AFCFTA: TOWARDS ECONOMIC SYMMETRIES

The AU aims to foster economic integration and development and alleviate poverty across the continent. To this end, the AU has implemented Agenda 2063 and established the AfCFTA. These strategic frameworks are designed to stimulate socioeconomic transformation by encouraging intra-African trade, fostering economic cooperation among member states, and improving the continent's competitiveness on a global scale (Selelo, 2024; Githui, 2025). The AU intends to strengthen Africa's position in the global market and accelerate sustainable development by facilitating trade and collaboration among member states.

"Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want" inaugurated in 2013 by African heads of state and government, was a response

to the realization that the objectives outlined in the AU's Constitutive Act were still largely unmet (Kapyata, 2021). This Agenda is built around seven aspirations, each with various goals and priorities, and features a 10-year implementation plan (African Union, 2024a). A central vision of Agenda 2063 is for Africa to emerge as a global economic powerhouse characterized by inclusive and sustainable economic and social outcomes (Githui, 2025). To advance economically, the AU envisions "a prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development" (African Union, 2015a). This vision aims to ensure a high standard of living, enhance the quality of life, and promote the well-being of all citizens. The AU seeks to increase productivity, transform African economies, boost their competitiveness, and develop the continent's human and social capital through education and skills training in science and technology (African Union, 2015b). The AU's goal is for its member states to rank among the top countries in terms of quality of life by 2063, with the continent's GDP reflecting its population and natural resources share (African Union, 2015a).

Agenda 2063 highlights that achieving economic development in Africa requires the promotion of industrialization, infrastructure development, human capital development, financing and investment, and greater regional integration (Githui, 2025). Currently, many African nations depend heavily on exporting raw materials and

primary commodities to remain economic viable. In response, the AU aims to transition the continent's economic framework from one dependent on raw material exports to one that prioritizes industrialization, with a focus on manufacturing, technology, and innovation (African Union, 2015a). This shift is intended to position the continent as a competitive player in industrial sectors and drive the growth of its member's economies.

To enhance both internal and external connectivity and trade, Agenda 2063 recognizes that infrastructure is fundamental for economic development (Githui, 2025). Therefore, it proposes improvements and the establishment of transport networks, energy production, and information and communication technologies among countries (African Union, 2015a). These enhancements are designed to facilitate the movement of people, goods, and services, ultimately boosting trade, investment, and productivity.

To ensure the successful implementation of Agenda 2063, the AU has established institutional frameworks and flagship projects. These initiatives focus on key areas such as infrastructure, education, science, technology, and economic integration. Notable projects include the Integrated High-Speed Train Network, the development of an African Commodities Strategy, the implementation of the Grand Inga Dam Project, the Annual African Economic Forum, and the AfCFTA (African Union, 2025). Each AU member state is

expected to adapt and integrate these projects and frameworks into their national policies and development programs to achieve the economic goals outlined in Agenda 2063 (Githui, 2025).

The AfCFTA is a flagship initiative of Agenda 2063. This agreement was established in Rwanda in March 2018 and came into force on May 30th, 2019. However, Actual trading under its regulations began on January 1st, 2021. The AfCFTA is the world's largest free trade area, in terms of both member states and scope (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 2025). The AfCFTA aims to create a unified continental market for goods, services, business opportunities, and investment to transform African economies and position the continent as an emerging powerhouse in the global trade landscape (World Bank, 2020). If successfully implemented, the AfCFTA is projected to increase Africa's income by USD\$459 billion by 2035, while also adding USD\$76 billion to the income of the global market. Furthermore, the agreement is expected to boost the continent's exports by USD\$560 billion, primarily through increased manufacturing rather than relying solely on raw material exports (World Bank, 2020).

The AfCFTA achieves its goals through a series of protocols that encompass tariff concessions, customs cooperation, mutual administrative assistance, and the elimination of technical barriers to trade (Mustapha, 2020). These protocols to the Agreement Establishing the AfCFTA also include

those concerning the procedures for settling disputes among member states regarding their transactions under the Agreement, as well as protocols concerning investment, intellectual property rights, and competition policy (African Union, 2025). Additionally, the AfCFTA utilizes essential instruments to manage its operations, including cooperation on rules of origin, the monitoring and removal of non-tariff barriers, a digital payments system, and a trade observatory dashboard (Mustapha, 2020). However, for these measures and protocols to be effective member states must adopt unified positions in their trade negotiations with external trade partners, in line with the AfCFTA (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 2025).

The AU's Agenda 2063 and the AfCFTA offer a transformative vision for Africa's economic future. By promoting economic integration, encouraging industrialization, and enhancing infrastructure development, the AU aims to position the continent as a competitive player on the global stage. Successfully implementing these initiatives could drive sustainable development, boost trade, and improve the quality of life for African citizens. To achieve these benefits, it is crucial for member states to effectively incorporate the principles of Agenda 2063 and the AfCFTA into their national trade policies. This integration should occur both in their interactions with other African countries and in negotiations with foreign trade partners,

to ensure a cohesive and strategic approach to regional and global trade.

CASE STUDIES OF EXISTING EXTRACONTINENTAL TRADE RELATIONSHIPS OF AU MEMBER STATES

African countries conduct more trade outside the continent than they do among themselves. In 2023, approximately 84 percent of Africa's trade, amounting to US\$1.07 trillion, was with non-African partners (Mauritius Commercial Bank, 2025). Most of Africa's extra-continental trade is with China, the EU, and the US, with a growing amount of trade with India. While African nations do benefit financially from these partnerships, the power dynamics often remain imbalanced, placing African countries at a disadvantage (Luke & MacLeod, 2023).

Collectively, the EU serves as the primary trading partner for African nations and represents their largest export market (Luke & MacLeod, 2023). In 2023, the EU accounted for 26% of Africa's imports and 15% of its exports, resulting in a total trade volume of €467.2 billion (European Council, 2025). Furthermore, the EU was the leading source of foreign direct investment (FDI) in Africa, with an investment stock valued at €238.9 billion (European Council, 2025). Beyond traditional trade and investment, the EU has established financial programs across African nations to support education and human development, promote peace,

security, and conflict prevention, advance digitization, and address climate change challenges (European Commission, 2022).

Initially, the EU established unilateral trade preferences with African countries under the Lomé Convention, which was initiated in 1975. However, this agreement was deemed incompatible with World Trade Organization (WTO) rules due to its discriminatory nature against non-African Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) developing countries (Fasan, 2018). To address this issue, the Cotonou Agreement replaced the Lomé Convention and introduced Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) aimed at fostering reciprocal trade relations. The EU commenced negotiations on EPAs with various African regional blocs, including the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the East African Community (EAC), and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) (Mével *et al.*, 2015). By the end of 2014, negotiations for all regional EPAs were concluded. However, the agreements with the ECOWAS and the EAC are still pending adoption (European Commission, 2020).

In subsequent years, the AU has sought to consolidate individual country agreements into a single continental agreement to promote a unified trade policy and mitigate fragmentation (Krapohl & Huut, 2020). Nevertheless, challenges arise as some countries have not endorsed the EPAs negotiated by their respective blocs. This has led to the signing of Interim Economic

Partnership Agreements (IEPAs) with individual countries, which complicates the AU's efforts. Ghana is a case in point, which entered into an IEPA with the EU in 2016 (EPA Secretariat, 2022). Currently, the European trade framework in Africa delineates a clear division between different African regions, creating policies that segment the continent into separate market access systems for exports to Europe (Luke & MacLeod, 2023). This trade model includes EPAs with 15 countries, the Generalized System of Preferences Plus (GSP+) with Cape Verde, the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) with five countries, and the Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreements, along with Most-Favored Nation (MFN) terms applicable to certain countries within ECOWAS, EAC, and SADC, all aimed at promoting economic integration and cooperation (Luke & MacLeod, 2023; European Commission, 2025; United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2018).

Furthermore, trade arrangements between the US and African countries primarily operate under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). This program offers a nonreciprocal trade preference that allows for duty-free access to the US market for most exports from eligible sub-Saharan African countries. AGOA has contributed to the growth of South Africa's automotive sales in the US, increased Ghana's non-oil exports, and boosted Mozambique's sugar exports (Luke, 2023). In 2024, exports from African

countries under the program totalled USD\$8 billion (Congressional Research Service, 2025). AGOA has been in effect for over twenty years and is set to expire in September 2025 (Bhonsle, 2025). With the proposed tariffs by the Trump Administration, however, there is a likelihood of a suspension of the program (Bhonsle, 2025).

On the other hand, trade relations between Africa and China have significantly increased since 2000, and China is now Africa's second most important trading partner. China has trading partnerships with countries such as South Africa, Nigeria, Egypt, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea, and Ghana (The Africa Report, 2025). In 2023, China accounted for 16% of Africa's imports and 15% of its exports (Luke & MacLeod, 2023). Most of Africa's exports to China consist of iron ore, refined copper, crude oil, and aluminium ore. Meanwhile, China remains the primary source of manufacturing imports for Africa (Oyintarelado, 2024; Luke & MacLeod, 2023).

China is seeking to unilaterally grant all products from developing nations zero-tariff market access (Okafor, 2024). Consequently, China's trade model with African countries offers duty-free, quota-free (DFQF) market access for the least developed countries to export specific goods to China without incurring customs duties or quantitative restrictions (Luke & MacLeod, 2023). In 2024, at the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), China committed to investing USD\$51 billion

in Africa while also eliminating tariffs for 33 African countries (Okafor, 2024). Unlike its previous zero-tariff policy, which primarily applied to low-value, unprocessed commodities, the new zero-tariff policy grants zero tariffs on 100% of products for all 33 countries (NTU-Centre for African Studies, 2025). This policy took effect in December 2024.

A significant aspect of Africa's trade relationship with China is China's substantial role in financing infrastructure development and providing affordable energy to promote industrial growth and competitiveness in African countries (Oyintarelado, 2024; Luke & MacLeod, 2023). This is primarily facilitated through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a multitrillion-dollar international infrastructure and economic development program designed to promote the flow of goods, investment, and people (Potts, 2023). Since its launch in 2013, the BRI has invested hundreds of billions of dollars in constructing bridges, ports, highways, power plants, and telecommunications projects across Asia, Latin America, parts of Europe, and Africa (Gan & McCarthy, 2023). As of 2023, 53 African nations were participating in the BRI, with African countries receiving USD\$21.7 billion in BRI deals that year, including investments in ports, railways, and renewable energy (de Kluvier, 2024). Notably, the BRI financed the construction of Kenya's Standard Gauge Railway and the

expansion of Zimbabwe's Kariba Hydroelectric Power Station (France-Presse, 2024).

In addition to China, many African countries also maintain trade relations with the United Kingdom (UK). These arrangements largely replicate the pre-existing EU trading agreements following the UK's departure from the EU (Luke & MacLeod, 2023). The UK has finalized its version of the EU's EPA with 29 African countries. Additionally, in 2025, the UK's development finance institution, British International Investment, partnered with Ghana International Bank to boost trade in seven African countries by investing USD\$50 million to lend to local businesses in Sierra Leone, Liberia, The Gambia, Benin, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, and Tanzania (Ekanem, 2025). This investment aims to help these countries import essential commodities and equipment, thereby scaling up their operations and increasing trade (Ekanem, 2025).

The extra-continental trade relationships of African countries with partners such as the EU, UK, China, and the US significantly impact their economies, accounting for a substantial portion of Africa's trade. While these relationships offer financial benefits and growth opportunities, they also pose challenges, including imbalanced power dynamics and dependence on external markets.

CHALLENGES ARISING FROM EXTRACONTINENTAL TRADE RELATIONS OF AFRICAN COUNTRIES

While extracontinental trade with the EU, US, UK, and China offers African countries financial advantages, it also comes with challenges. Many of these trade agreements result in asymmetric benefits that put African nations at a disadvantage (Luke & MacLeod, 2023). These arrangements create issues such as imbalanced power dynamics and increased dependence on external markets.

Despite being Africa's largest trading partner, the EU accounts for merely 2.2% of Africa's trade (Luke & MacLeod, 2023). Beyond the significant disparity in trade volume, the EU's trade agreements and policies with Africa also create imbalanced power dynamics (Luke & MacLeod, 2023). The EU's trade arrangements, including the EPAs, the GSP, GSP+, Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreements, and MFN terms, fragment the continent into multiple trade programs with different terms for each country. This piecemeal approach prevents African countries from presenting a united front in trade negotiations, as each country is subject to different terms and conditions. For instance, EPAs are offered to 15 countries, GSP to five countries, and GSP+ to just one country (Luke & MacLeod, 2023; European Commission, 2025; UNCTAD, 2018). The EU's tailored approach to trade agreements, designed to serve its own economic interests, poses a

challenge to African countries and the AU in articulating a cohesive economic vision and negotiating effectively.

Prior to the EPAs, African countries had preferential trade arrangements with the EU, which provided them with unilateral, non-reciprocal market access to EU markets (Third World Economics, 2017, p. 10). Under these arrangements, they received duty-free and quota-free market access to the EU. The EPAs, however, introduced a new paradigm based on reciprocal trade liberalization, requiring African countries to open their domestic markets to EU imports in exchange for EU market access (Krapohl & Huut, 2020). The aim of the EPA negotiations was to promote economic liberalization in Africa and increase access for European companies to African markets. This, however, has had devastating consequences for some African economies. Cheap and subsidized EU products have flooded the market, stifling growth in key sectors such as industry and agriculture (Third World Economics, 2017, p. 10). Evidence from Ghana's implementation of an interim EU deal supports this notion, as Ghana's once-vibrant tomato and poultry sectors are struggling due to an influx of inexpensive imports from EU member states. In 2023 alone, the Netherlands exported USD\$65.7 million worth of poultry meat to Ghana, while Italy regularly dumped tinned tomato paste into the country (Langan, 2024). Overall, EPAs seem to benefit European companies more than African nations

by opening African borders to European production rather than enhancing the economies of African nations.

Similar to the EU, the US is also a major contributor to Africa's international trade and has achieved notable successes. US trade relations with African countries bear similarities to Africa's trade agreements with the EU. Both the US and the EU have established trade divisions that differentiate countries north and south of the Sahara. Specifically, African nations located north of the Sahara are ineligible for the AGOA, meaning that only sub-Saharan African countries can participate in this program (Luke & MacLeod, 2023).

A major concern with AGOA is its unilateral nature, which allows the US to suspend countries that fail to meet its requirements (Congressional Research Service, 2025). This discretionary power has been criticized for prioritizing US geopolitical interests over economic development in Africa (Omiunu, 2023). For instance, in 2023, the US government suspended the Central African Republic, Gabon, Niger, and Uganda from its list of countries eligible for market access under AGOA, citing gross violations of internationally recognized human rights (Omiunu, 2023). According to Omiunu (2023), this action aimed to pressure Uganda to change its stance on LGBTQ rights in order to maintain its access to the US market, rather than to protect fundamental human rights. The US' unilateral power regarding countries that rely heavily on AGOA can significantly disrupt a

nation's economy. Ethiopia experienced this firsthand when it was suspended in 2022 due to a serious human rights crisis stemming from its civil war in the Tigray region (The Reporter(Ethiopia), 2025). The suspension led to the exit of 18 companies, resulting in the loss of over 11,500 jobs and a combined revenue loss of USD\$45 million (The Reporter(Ethiopia), 2025).

The unilateral nature of AGOA makes its future uncertain, since upon expiration, it can only be saved by the intervention of the US Congress. This uncertainty creates a significant challenge for African countries that rely heavily on AGOA, because they have limited control over the program's continuation. AGOA is set to expire on September 30th, 2025, unless the US Congress intervenes (Bhonsle, 2025). Currently, the program's future is uncertain due to President Trump's "America First" agenda and the imposition of new tariffs (Bhonsle, 2025).

Simulations conducted by Britz *et al.* (2025) suggest that AGOA's expiration would significantly harm certain economies, including Madagascar, Botswana, Nigeria, South Africa, and Malawi. The sectors most vulnerable to these effects are projected to be wearing apparel, leather products, and other manufacturing industries. Nevertheless, this development could prompt African nations to reassess their trade policies, prioritizing regional trade and strengthening domestic industries (Bhonsle, 2025; Britz *et al.*, 2025). This

shift also presents an opportunity for African countries to align their trade policies with the AU's objectives and leverage the AfCFTA framework to promote regional collaboration and economic integration (Britz *et al.*, 2025).

Unlike other African trade partners, who often use generalized systems and approaches, China prioritizes bilateral arrangements. China assists African nations in meeting Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) regulations facilitating exports to the Chinese market (Luke & MacLeod, 2023). Despite this structure of bilateral trade, African countries primarily export raw materials, such as fuels, ores, and metals to China. Manufactured goods comprise less than 4% of their exports. In contrast, manufactured products account for 16% of Africa's total imports, primarily from China (Luke & MacLeod, 2023). These bilateral structures have significantly benefited China, while African markets are flooded with Chinese machinery, technology, electronics, textiles, and other manufactured goods, including contaminated and counterfeit items, particularly medicines (Ondja'a & Ebissemietie, 2023). China has done very little to address the issue of contaminated and counterfeit goods reaching African markets. Furthermore, Chinese exports to Africa have placed African producers at a disadvantage, particularly in the textile sector, where local manufacturers struggle to compete with cheaper Chinese imports (Ondja'a & Ebissemietie, 2023).

In addition to China's announcement of a zero-tariff policy at the 2024 FOCAC, there was a USD\$51 million investment in Africa (Okafor, 2024). This investment raises questions about China's true intentions. Instead of focusing on broader economic development or infrastructure projects that could benefit African countries, the investment is specifically aimed at securing access to critical minerals (Whitehouse, 2024). This suggests that China's primary goal may be to facilitate its own access to Africa's natural resources rather than to support African development (Whitehouse, 2024).

This is particularly evident in Zimbabwe, where Chinese firms now control all operational lithium mines in the country (Mapuranga, 2025). China's investment under its 2025 pledge does not appear to prioritize the development of better infrastructure to boost economic growth in African nations. It also does not focus on enhancing mining infrastructure or refining capabilities to add value to African minerals. Rather, the main goal appears to be facilitating the extraction and export of these resources by China (Whitehouse, 2024). While China's investment may offer some short-term benefits, African countries must carefully consider whether these benefits align with their long-term development goals and priorities.

Moreover, China's BRI with African countries has brought constraints on African countries and their economies.

One major concern is debt sustainability, with many African countries experiencing a growing debt burden due to loans from China (Calabrese, 2025). For instance, Kenya owes China more than USD\$8 billion for its Standard Gauge Railway, which cost USD\$5 billion under the BRI with China (France-Presse, 2024). Another concern with the BRI projects is their lax environmental standards and negative social impacts, with issues like deforestation, habitat destruction, water pollution, displacement of local communities, and lack of adequate compensation surrounding them (Shieh *et al.*, 2021). China's primary goal in launching the BRI is not to help African nations bolster their infrastructure for economic growth; rather, it seeks to extend its influence and strengthen its global economic and political presence by establishing connections in as many countries as possible (Wong, 2023). This situation raises concerns about potential economic coercion, where foreign governments might feel pressured to align with China's agenda or risk losing their investments, which would ultimately stifle the economic progress of African nations (Wong, 2023).

The UK's trade relationship with African countries largely mirrors the EU's arrangements, with a notable shift towards financial investments rather than direct trading (Luke & MacLeod, 2023). This relationship, however, poses challenges for African nations. The Stringent sanitary and phytosanitary

(SPS) restrictions imposed on African agricultural products hinder their competitiveness against UK imports (Royal African Society, 2020). Additionally, the UK's push for African countries to sign Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) has led to pressure on these nations to prioritize bilateral deals over regional economic bloc decisions. Countries like Kenya, Ghana, and Cameroon have faced threats of losing preferential access to the UK market if they don't sign Preferential Trade Agreements (PTAs) with the UK, potentially undermining regional integration efforts (Royal African Society, 2020).

Thus, the extracontinental trade relationships of African countries with major trade partners are marked by significant asymmetries, with African nations often receiving disproportionate benefits in the long term (African nation receive more benefits than expected? I suggest changing the word benefits, since benefits means positive results) while their foreign trade partners progress economically. These trade arrangements, often structured to serve the interests of external partners, have led to imbalanced power dynamics, increased dependence on external markets, and stifled economic growth in key sectors. The experiences of African countries under these trade agreements highlight the need for a more equitable and sustainable approach to international trade, one that prioritizes African economic development and integration.

PROMOTING AFRICAN ECONOMIC INTERESTS AND AU STRATEGIES IN EXTRACONTINENTAL TRADE

Given the asymmetries and challenges plaguing Africa's trade relationships with foreign partners, a unified approach is crucial for African countries to safeguard their interests. The AU's Agenda 2063 and the AfCFTA offer a framework for collective action with clearly defined objectives. This section examines proactive measures the AU can take to align extracontinental trade partnerships with the continent's economic goals, ultimately advancing its strategic visions and promoting sustainable development.

A significant issue with the foreign trade deals involving African countries is how these agreements categorize countries on the continent into different divisions, enforcing various trade deals and tariff regimes. This problem is particularly pronounced with the EPAs and the AGOA, which notably exclude Northern African countries. For the AU's economic development objectives under Agenda 2063 and the AfCFTA to be successful, African countries need to present a united front during trade negotiations with foreign partners (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 2025). The current practice of individual African countries incorporating AfCFTA objectives into their national legislation is not enough, as they remain vulnerable to foreign pressure and coercion. To achieve a unified voice in negotiations, the AU must ensure

that AfCFTA Secretariat representatives participate in discussions when African countries engage in foreign trade arrangements.

AU representation is crucial for protecting African economic interests and achieving the continent's development goals. By having AfCFTA representatives at the negotiation table, the AU can ensure that its economic objectives serve as a benchmark during these discussions. This approach helps protect African countries from asymmetric trade deals that favor external partners at the expense of local economies, much like the EU's approach. The EU manages its member countries' trade policies and negotiates agreements on their behalf (European Union, 2025). It recognizes that presenting a unified voice enhances its influence in international trade negotiations, compared to individual member states acting alone (European Union, 2025). With AfCFTA representation, the AU can advocate for a cohesive African stance in trade negotiations and promote more equitable and beneficial agreements for the continent.

The AU has significant potential as a negotiating power on behalf of its 55 members (Cascais, 2023). However, internal contradictions and limitations hinder its effectiveness. Unlike the EU, the AU lacks binding powers, and its organs do not have absolute authority (Staeger & Fagbayibo, 2024). Consequently, member states thus often prioritize their national interests over collective AU goals, which impedes

AU's ability to negotiate effectively on their behalf. States typically adhere to treaty obligations when they align with their interests, rather than out of a sense of obligation, hindering the effective implementation of AU treaties (Edodi & Ahimbisibwe, 2024). Reconciling national and regional interests is challenging and complicated due to the diverse political ideologies and interests of member states (Zanaku, 2022). Consequently, the AU's role as a spokesperson and negotiator for Africa's dealings with external partners is often compromised (Akokpari & Bimha, 2020). The presence of AU representatives from the AfCFTA generally helps balance national and regional interests in negotiations with foreign partners. However, due to organizational limitations that make it difficult for them to challenge authority, these bureaucrats often yield to member state leaders' preferences (Welz, 2019).

Another limitation on the AU's unified negotiation power is its lack of effective instruments of compulsion to enforce unified positions among member states (Akokpari & Bimha, 2020). The AU's intergovernmental nature prioritizes member state sovereignty over supranational authority, preventing it from imposing binding decisions. Unlike the EU, the AU's framework doesn't grant it the power to enforce compliance, as member states prioritize national sovereignty (Staeger & Fagbayibo, 2024). Maluwa (2024) argues that AU legal instruments require amendment to grant it more supranational

authority, which would allow it to better represent its members in external negotiations.

Speaking with one voice, not only protects African interests but also provides countries with the solidarity needed to resist coercion from foreign partners in trade relations. Knowing they have the backing of the entire continent empowers African nations to stand firm in their policies. This collective strength can then be used to negotiate more favourable trade agreements that prioritize African development goals and promote economic integration.

Another benefit of AfCFTA representation in the negotiation processes is ensuring that any trade agreements reached do not jeopardize AU strategies aimed at promoting intra-African trade. This representation enables African countries to negotiate for duty-free and quota-free market access, along with non-reciprocal access to foreign markets for goods and services, for a specified period (Luke & MacLeod, 2023). This differs from the current reciprocal arrangements practised by certain African trading partners, like the EPAs with the EU. Moreover, such a comprehensive trade deal would apply to all African nations not just a select few, as is with AGOA. This shift would enable African countries to focus less on competing against each other for foreign trade and more on seeking trading opportunities within the continent, in line with the goals

of Agenda 2063 and AfCFTA (Luke & MacLeod, 2023).

Furthermore, AfCFTA representation should extend beyond trade agreements to include investment proposals and negotiations with foreign countries. AU representation can ensure that foreign investment initiatives do not solely prioritize oil and mineral extraction, common in projects like China's BRI, but rather emphasize significant investments in agriculture, industry, and manufacturing. This approach is consistent with the AU's objectives outlined in Agenda 2063, which aim to increase agricultural productivity, prioritize industrialization, and promote technology and innovation (African Union, 2015).

As the AU pursues these objectives, it should consider the work of RECs and ensure that their policies and agreements align with the AU's overall goals. AU member states have existing trade agreements with foreign countries that were signed under the auspices of the RECs to which they belong, and these agreements may clash with AU trade policies. To address this, Dawar & Limpimile (2020) suggest integrating and unifying laws and policy frameworks across overlapping memberships to align with the AU's broad agenda. Gumede (2021) proposes a mutually reinforcing relationship between the AfCFTA and REC structures, with the possibility of absorbing REC structures into the AfCFTA. However, this would require significant time and effort to resolve numerous political issues

(Gumede, 2021). Another potential solution is for RECs to gradually give more space to the AfCFTA in negotiations with extra-continental bodies and superpowers (Gumede, 2021). This would enable the AfCFTA to speak with a unified voice, promoting Africa's collective interests more effectively.

In future extra-continental trade negotiations, the AU must be present with the relevant African countries to enforce its objectives and safeguard the interests of its members. However, many member states have already entered into foreign trade agreements without AU representation, leading to arrangements that have often placed them at a disadvantage. The AfCFTA Secretariat needs to harness a team specializing in reviewing and revising the trade arrangements of its member states, gradually transitioning and renegotiating them to ensure compliance with AU objectives and avert disproportionate benefits that would put its members at a disadvantage.

Aligning state-level economic agreements and foreign relations with the AU's economic integration goals is crucial for maximizing collective benefits and ensuring sustainable development. The AfCFTA has shown promise in boosting economic growth and reducing poverty, with intra-African trade growing by 3.2% to USD\$192.2 billion in 2023 (African Union, 2024b). By removing trade barriers, the AfCFTA is expected to increase GDP by up to USD\$3 trillion by 2030 (Ajewumi *et al.*, 2024). Collective action can help countries

tackle economic challenges, promote peace and stability, and drive economic growth and development that benefits all member states (Ajewumi *et al.*, 2024).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Africa's economic development depends on successfully implementing the AU's Agenda 2063 and the AfCFTA. These initiatives aim to increase intra-African trade and economic integration. Many member states, however, have existing bilateral trade agreements with foreign countries that operate outside these frameworks, resulting in asymmetric partnerships that often prioritize external interests over African needs. Despite the financial benefits brought by partnerships with the EU, China, the US, and the UK, these arrangements frequently lead to unequal benefits that put African countries at a disadvantage. To address this issue, this paper proposes that the AU takes proactive measures to align extracontinental trade partnerships with the continent's economic goals. Specifically, the AU should ensure that AfCFTA Secretariat representatives participate in trade negotiations with foreign partners to protect African economic interests and development goals. This unified approach would enable African nations to negotiate more equitable agreements. Furthermore, AfCFTA representation should extend to investment proposals, prioritizing investments that align with AU objectives in sectors such as agriculture, industry,

and manufacturing. The AfCFTA Secretariat should also review and revise existing trade arrangements to ensure they align with AU objectives. This will prevent disproportionate benefits that disadvantage member states and promote a more sustainable and equitable trade framework for Africa. Adopting this approach would strengthen Africa's position in global trade and accelerate its economic development and integration.

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POTENCIAS REGIONALES
Y PROYECCIÓN GLOBAL AFRICANA
REGIONAL POWERS AND AFRICA'S
GLOBAL PROJECTION
POTÊNCIAS REGIONAIS E A
PROJEÇÃO GLOBAL DA ÁFRICA

Assimilação, representação e seletividade: as estratégias de inserção internacional da África do Sul em 30 anos de pós-apartheid

Anselmo Otavio*

RESUMO

O artigo propõe-se a analisar os processos de inserção internacional e regional desenvolvidos pela África do Sul entre 1994 e 2024. Levando em consideração o êxito que o país alcançou em sua política externa, a seguinte questão se apresenta como pertinente, no caso, quais foram as especificidades e escolhas adotadas por cada governo que garantiram a elevação da África do Sul ao posto de importante ator nos cenários regional e internacional? Diante

deste questionamento, espera-se demonstrar que o maior protagonismo da África do Sul nos cenários regional e internacional, em verdade, é o resultado de três estratégias de inserção que são convergentes e, neste artigo, serão conceituadas como inserção internacional pela assimilação, inserção internacional pela representação do regional e inserção internacional pela seletividade. Em termos metodológicos, adotar-se-á uma abordagem qualitativa, de caráter interpretativo, com uso de fontes primárias e secundárias

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Recebido: 27 de novembro de 2024 / Modificado: 30 de julho de 2025 / Aceito: 11 de setembro de 2025

Para citar este artigo:

Otavio, A. (2025). Assimilação, representação e seletividade: as estratégias de inserção internacional da África do Sul em 30 anos de pós-apartheid. *Oasis*, 43, 123-146.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18601/16577558.n43.06>

consideradas relevantes para o desenvolvimento do tema.

Palavras-chave: África do Sul; continente africano; política externa; potências tradicionais; potências emergentes.

Assimilation, representation and selectivity: South Africa's international insertion strategies in 30 years of post-apartheid

ABSTRACT

This paper aims to analyze the processes of international and regional insertion developed by South Africa from 1994 to 2024. Considering the success achieved by the country in its foreign policy, the following question arises as pertinent: what were the specific features and choices adopted by each government that ensured South Africa's rise to the position of an important player in the regional and international arenas? In light of this question, the article seeks to demonstrate that South Africa's greater prominence in regional and international contexts is, in fact, the result of three convergent insertion strategies, which will be conceptualized here as international insertion through assimilation, international insertion through regional representation, and international insertion through selectivity. Methodologically,

the article adopts a qualitative, interpretative approach, using primary and secondary sources considered relevant to the development of the topic.

Keywords: South Africa; Africa; foreign policy; traditional powers; emerging powers.

Asimilación, representación y selectividad: las estrategias de inserción internacional de Sudáfrica en 30 años de pos-apartheid

RESUMEN

El artículo tiene como objetivo analizar los procesos de inserción internacional y regional desarrollados por Sudáfrica entre 1994 y 2024. Teniendo en cuenta los logros alcanzados por el país en su política exterior, surge como relevante la siguiente pregunta: ¿cuáles fueron las especificidades y decisiones adoptadas por cada gobierno que garantizaron la inserción de Sudáfrica como actor importante en la escena regional e internacional? Frente a este interrogante, se espera demostrar que el mayor protagonismo de Sudáfrica en el escenario regional e internacional es resultado de tres estrategias de inserción que son convergentes, que en este artículo se conceptualizan como inserción internacional a través de la

asimilación; inserción internacional a través de la representación regional; e inserción internacional a través de la selectividad. En términos metodológicos, se adoptará un enfoque cualitativo, de carácter interpretativo, utilizando fuentes primarias y secundarias.

Palabras clave: Sudáfrica; África; política exterior; potencias tradicionales; potencias emergentes.

INTRODUÇÃO

Ao chegar à metade de seu mandato, Mandela havia alcançado números impactantes nas inserções internacional e regional, uma vez que a África do Sul chegava a 1996 possuindo 124 missões diplomáticas e sendo admitida ou readmitida em 45 organizações e fóruns internacionais (DIRCO, 1996). Vale lembrar que, durante a vigência do regime de segregação racial (apartheid), representado pelas administrações Malan (1948-1954), Strydom (1954-1958), Verwoerd (1958-1966), Vorster (1966-1978), Botha (1978-1989) e De Klerk (1989-1993), Pretória possuía apenas 30 missões diplomáticas e estava isolada por diversas sanções, seja por iniciativas terceiro-mundistas ou africanas, advindas do Movimento dos Não Alinhados (MNA) e da Organização da Unidade Africana, seja pelo Conselho de Segurança (CS).

Se os números encontrados na metade da administração Mandela (1994-1998) já simbolizavam a ruptura da África do Sul com o ostracismo causado pelo regime racista, ao longo das

administrações sucessoras — Mbeki (1999-2008), Zuma (2009-2018) e Ramaphosa (2018-2024) —, o que se viu foi a ampliação da participação do país em iniciativas de caráter multilateral e no fortalecimento das relações bilaterais com potências tradicionais e emergentes. Diante dessa transformação, o seguinte questionamento se mostra pertinente: quais foram as especificidades e escolhas adotadas por cada governo que garantiram a elevação da África do Sul ao posto de importante ator nos cenários regional e internacional?

No intuito de responder a tal questão, o artigo tem como objetivo principal analisar os processos de inserção internacional e regional desenvolvidos pela África do Sul entre 1994 e 2024. Feito isso, espera-se demonstrar a hipótese de que o fim do isolamento diplomático resultante do apartheid, assim como também o maior protagonismo da África do Sul nos cenários regional e internacional, na verdade, são resultados de três estratégias de inserção que são convergentes e, neste artigo, serão conceituadas como inserção internacional pela assimilação, inserção internacional pela representação do regional e inserção internacional pela seletividade.

Em termos metodológicos, serão adotados a abordagem qualitativa de caráter interpretativo, o uso de fontes primárias e secundárias consideradas relevantes para o desenvolvimento do tema, bem como a estruturação em cinco seções, sendo a primeira a

introdução e a última as considerações finais. Acerca das outras três seções, na primeira, a discussão estará centrada nas principais características da política externa sul-africana durante a administração Mandela, quando a inserção internacional pela assimilação se mostrou estratégica. Na seguinte, o foco será a compreensão da administração Mbeki, cuja política externa foi marcada pela adoção da inserção internacional pela representação do regional. Por fim, a terceira seção tem como objetivo específico analisar as administrações Zuma e Ramaphosa, que passaram a adotar a inserção internacional pela seletividade.

A ADMINISTRAÇÃO MANDELA (1994-1998) E A INSERÇÃO INTERNACIONAL PELA ASSIMILAÇÃO

O término da Guerra Fria caminhou lado a lado com a construção de uma nova ordem internacional, caracterizada pela expansão da democracia liberal e pela difusão do neoliberalismo, ambas defendidas pelas organizações internacionais, pelas potências ocidentais, e vistas como importantes para a prosperidade e a pacificação em âmbito global. Acerca da pacificação, vale destacar a transformação na concepção do que seria uma ameaça à segurança internacional, antes reduzida a um ataque militar convencional ou a uma guerra nuclear, mas que passou a girar em torno da dignidade da pessoa humana. Em outros termos, ameaças que anteriormente eram negligenciadas

— como o narcotráfico, o desequilíbrio ecológico, a migração internacional, o terrorismo, o crime organizado e a pobreza extrema, entre outras que representavam riscos ao bem-estar da humanidade —, passaram a ser englobadas no conceito de segurança.

As transformações no cenário internacional indicadas anteriormente caminharam lado a lado com o fim do regime do apartheid e com a ascensão de Mandela à presidência sul-africana, cuja transformação na política externa da África do Sul já vinha sendo defendida antes mesmo de se tornar presidente, conforme visto em um artigo de sua autoria publicado em 1993, na *Foreign Affairs*. Intitulada *South Africa's Future Foreign Policy*, tal publicação mostrava-se alinhada à nova ordem internacional, uma vez que, para além da defesa do direito internacional e dos processos de pacificação via instrumentos pacíficos, destacava como fundamental o respeito aos direitos humanos nas relações internacionais; considerava a democracia como o único meio para alcançar soluções justas e duradouras aos desafios da humanidade; e relacionava o desenvolvimento à interdependência entre as nações e à cooperação econômica.

Por um lado, a defesa dos pontos anteriores representava um contrapeso ao regime do apartheid, cuja violação dos direitos humanos e restrição à democracia foram simbolizadas pela violência vista em eventos como Sharpeville (1960) e Soweto (1976), pela discriminação de partidos símbolos da

luta contra o racismo — no caso, o Congresso Pan-Africano (PAC) e o Congresso Nacional Africano (CNA) —, e pela adoção de leis como a *Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act* (1949), que proibia o casamento de brancos com pessoas de outras raças; e a *Group Areas Act* (1950), que separava os territórios entre brancos e negros, limitando estes últimos de circular em determinadas áreas (Otavio, 2014). Na economia, além do isolamento fruto de sanções econômicas, o racismo institucionalizado levou grande parte da população negra ao desemprego e à condição de viver abaixo da linha da pobreza, isto é, com menos de US\$ 1,90 por dia (STATSSA, 1998; Otavio, 2021b). Por outro lado, a mudança na política externa defendida por Mandela na *Foreign Affairs* indicava uma nova estratégia de inserção internacional, aqui conceituada como *inserção internacional pela assimilação*.

Por *inserção internacional pela assimilação* entende-se o processo de adequação ou acomodação da política externa da África do Sul aos temas e agendas que ganhavam destaque no pós-Guerra Fria, como meio de garantir maior protagonismo do país no cenário internacional. Em termos teóricos, tal processo de inserção pode ser encontrado no mesmo artigo de Mandela, quando ele indicou que “mesmo que o processo de mudança global esteja longe de ser completo, é fato que todas as nações terão que se reformular para colher quaisquer benefícios nas relações internacionais pós-Guerra Fria” (Mandela, 1993,). Em termos práticos,

a estratégia de assimilação pode ser encontrada ao longo da administração Mandela, quando a contínua defesa dos pontos anteriormente indicados garantiu a Pretória a alcunha de país com forte componente moral (van Wyk, 2002).

Tal alcunha é resultado de dois instrumentos que, em maior ou menor intensidade, também seriam encontrados nas administrações vindouras, quais sejam, a universalidade na política externa e a defesa do multilateralismo. Acerca do primeiro — aqui entendido como o interesse da África do Sul em estabelecer laços diplomáticos com diversos países, independentemente do modelo político e da política externa por eles adotados —, o que se viu foi a busca por fortalecer ou forjar parcerias tanto com países que, em momentos anteriores, mantiveram laços com o regime do apartheid, como os EUA, a Inglaterra, a França e Israel, quanto com países que haviam apoiado o CNA na luta contra o apartheid, em especial o Irã, Cuba e a Líbia (Hammill & Lee, 2001). No que se refere ao multilateralismo, o principal exemplo de sua valorização diz respeito à busca pela admissão e/ou readmissão em organizações e fóruns de âmbito internacional, destacadamente a *Commonwealth*, a Organização das Nações Unidas (ONU), o Movimento dos Países Não Alinhados (NAM) e o G77.

Em tais espaços, a administração Mandela buscou não apenas defender os temas e as agendas que passaram a ser protagonistas no cenário

internacional, mas também exigir que fossem respeitados por seus países-membros. Um primeiro exemplo dessa defesa pode ser visto em seu discurso realizado na Assembleia Geral em 1994, quando expôs que a África do Sul buscava “ajudar a fortalecer as Nações Unidas e, assim, contribuir para o avanço dos propósitos da organização internacional”. Já no final de sua administração, outro exemplo de crítica também pôde ser observado em seu último discurso nas Nações Unidas, no qual Mandela afirmou que “o fracasso em fazer valer a Declaração Universal dos Direitos Humanos encontra-se expresso no hiato entre riqueza e pobreza existente na divisão Norte-Sul”.

Embora a inserção internacional pela assimilação tenha garantido um maior protagonismo da África do Sul no cenário externo, quando analisado o âmbito regional, a administração Mandela não obteve o êxito esperado. Um primeiro exemplo disso atrela-se à Nigéria pós-golpe militar realizado por Sani Abacha em 1993, diante do qual a atuação sul-africana variou entre a não ingerência em assuntos internos e o clamor pelo isolamento internacional de Abuja. Neste caso, embora tenha obtido a suspensão da Nigéria na Commonwealth, Pretória se deparou com a manutenção, por parte de países como os EUA, a França e a Alemanha, da compra de petróleo nigeriano. Logo, além de não conseguir o isolamento, a busca por sanções ao regime de Abacha foi interpretada como unilateral e

autoritária, características que remetiam à política externa desenvolvida durante a vigência do apartheid (van Wyk, 2002; Hamill & Lee, 2001).

Além do caso da Nigéria, outro exemplo a ser destacado refere-se às duas guerras na República Democrática do Congo (RDC). No primeiro conflito, marcado pela atuação da Aliança de Forças Democráticas pela Libertação do Congo (AFDLC) contra o regime de Mobutu Sese Seko (1965-1996), Pretória buscou atuar por meio de solução pacífica entre governo e oposição, cujo resultado foi o exílio de Mobutu no Marrocos. No entanto, já na segunda guerra, resultante da crescente impopularidade da AFDLC e da intervenção de países como Burundi, Ruanda e Uganda, o interesse sul-africano na resolução por meios pacíficos foi solapado pela defesa — destacadamente pela administração Mugabe (1987-2017) no Zimbábue e amplamente apoiada por Namíbia e Angola — de uma intervenção militar sob a égide da SADC (Otavio, 2014).

O hiato existente entre o êxito no cenário internacional e a dificuldade em obter sucesso no contexto regional, na verdade, refletia os limites da inserção internacional pela assimilação. Neste caso, um primeiro exemplo de limite dessa estratégia diz respeito ao equívoco de ignorar a importância de países africanos que, embora economicamente e militarmente se encontrassem distantes da África do Sul, no âmbito político, mantinham-se

influentes no continente. O embate com o Zimbábue no conflito existente na RDC ilustra esse descompasso, pois, mesmo adentrando a década de 1990 como potência militar e a principal economia do continente — cujo Produto Interno Bruto (PIB) equivalia a 20% do PIB continental—, Pretória não conseguiu transformar essas potencialidades em instrumentos para ampliar sua influência na região. Dito de outra forma, mesmo sendo economicamente dependente da África do Sul, o que predominou foi a importância histórica e política de Robert Mugabe, cuja figura simbolizava a luta contra o apartheid e a defesa dos processos de independência no continente africano (Otavio, 2014).

Um segundo exemplo remonta à Nigéria, quando o descompasso entre os interesses da África do Sul e das potências tradicionais se mostrou perceptível, uma vez que a atuação de Pretória em buscar o isolamento de Abuja foi solapada pelos interesses econômicos dessas potências, que colocaram a exploração do petróleo nigeriano acima de pontos como a defesa dos direitos humanos e da democracia. De modo geral, o descaso de tais potências em relação ao continente africano não era novidade. Em 1993, por exemplo, após a morte de soldados norte-americanos em Mogadíscio, na Somália, o governo dos EUA retirou-se da Missão de Paz das Nações Unidas para a Somália (UNOSOM II). Já em 1994, com o advento do genocídio em Ruanda — marcado

pela morte de mais de 1 milhão de ruandeses (aproximadamente 11% da população, sendo três quartos do grupo étnico tutsi) —, houve a diminuição em 90% do contingente enviado para a *United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda* (UNAMIR). Vale destacar a atuação da administração Clinton, que negou a doação de 50 veículos de movimentação tática esperados pelos países africanos interessados em cessar o conflito, considerando o arrendamento desses para as Nações Unidas por US\$ 15 milhões (Mendonça, 2013; Thomson, 2018).

O insucesso visto nos episódios anteriormente indicados demonstrou a necessidade de outra estratégia de inserção internacional, que incluísse em seu escopo a chamada solidariedade africana, isto é, a busca por soluções africanas para os desafios existentes no continente. Em 1999, por exemplo, o indicativo de que tal solidariedade deveria fazer parte da inserção regional mostrou-se presente em um discurso realizado na Finlândia, quando Mandela afirmou: “primeiro e acima de tudo, nós somos parte do continente africano, e os problemas africanos são nossos problemas também” (Mandela, 1999). Porém, foi com o advento da administração Mbeki que houve a criação de uma nova estratégia de inserção internacional, aqui intitulada de inserção internacional pela representação do regional.

MBEKI, O RENASCIMENTO AFRICANO E A INSERÇÃO INTERNACIONAL PELA REPRESENTAÇÃO DO REGIONAL

No artigo *"The Benevolent Empire"*, publicado em 1998, Robert Kagan não apenas destacava a superioridade econômica e militar dos EUA, como também parafraseava Samuel Huntington, indicando a importância do domínio norte-americano como instrumento de preservação da segurança e da prosperidade mundial, visto que "um mundo sem a primazia e a influência dos Estados Unidos seria um lugar mais violento, sem ordem, menos democrático e com baixo crescimento econômico". (Kagan, 1998). Curiosamente, dez anos após a publicação de Kagan (1998), em um artigo intitulado de *"The Future of American Power: How America Can Survive the Rise of the Rest?"*, Zakaria (2008) demonstrava a necessidade de os EUA reverem sua estratégia, uma vez que a conjuntura internacional, marcada pela ascensão de potências emergentes, levava à perda do posto de liderança do sistema internacional. Cronologicamente, a transformação no cenário internacional representada pelas análises dos autores converge com a administração Mbeki (1999-2008), que passou a adotar outra estratégia de inserção internacional para a África do Sul, aqui intitulada como *inserção internacional pela representação do regional*.

Por *inserção internacional pela representação do regional* entende-se a capacidade da África do Sul, por meio

da defesa da solidariedade africana e dos interesses africanos, de manter seu protagonismo no cenário internacional. Neste caso, uma das principais iniciativas que garantiram o êxito dessa nova inserção internacional diz respeito ao Renascimento Africano, ideologia econômica e política voltada para o continente africano, cuja gênese está atrelada a obras como *Regeneration of Africa* de 1906 (Pixley Ka Isaka Seme); *Renascent Africa* de 1968 (Nnamdi Azikiwe) e *Towards the African Renaissance: essays in culture and development, 1946-1960* (Cheikh Anta Diop). Em linhas gerais, defendiam a união dos povos africanos, a luta contra quaisquer formas de dominação decorrentes do colonialismo, o orgulho em ser africano como instrumento de contraposição à visão preconceituosa de inferioridade da raça negra e a necessidade da África buscar a autossuficiência (Otavio, 2021b).

Já na virada do século XX para o século XXI, a visão atualizada do Renascimento Africano foi amplamente detalhada por Thabo Mbeki, antes mesmo de assumir a presidência da África do Sul, representada no discurso *I Am an African* (1996), marcado pela busca de expor a riqueza histórica e geográfica do continente africano, bem como a ideia de pertencimento e união dos povos africanos e, destacadamente, no discurso *The African Renaissance, South Africa and the World*, proferido na Universidade das Nações Unidas em 1998. Esse discurso indicou duas dimensões relevantes

para o renascimento do continente: o resgate do passado africano anterior à colonização europeia e a apresentação ao mundo de uma nova África, caracterizada pelo avanço de eleições democráticas, pela redução de guerras e pela adoção de práticas econômicas que ganhavam relevância no pós-Guerra Fria (Otavio, 2021b).

Soma-se a tais dimensões dois objetivos que, em maior ou menor intensidade, mostrar-se-iam importantes ao longo do século atual, quais sejam: a maior valorização da integração regional, considerada fundamental para a resolução de desafios existentes no continente e símbolo da solidariedade africana; e a busca por romper com as relações paternalistas, simbolizadas pelo padrão doador-receptor, e adotar outro meio de interlocução com os países desenvolvidos, no caso, a chamada responsabilidade mútua. Em linhas gerais, esse meio defendia o compartilhamento de responsabilidades entre países africanos, que deveriam combater a corrupção, atuar na resolução de conflitos e valorizar a democracia, os direitos humanos e o meio ambiente, entre outros pontos característicos do cenário internacional pós-Guerra Fria, enquanto os países desenvolvidos garantiriam aos produtos africanos acesso a seus mercados, realizariam investimentos nos países do continente e auxiliariam em iniciativas voltadas à erradicação da pobreza, à democratização e à pacificação da África (Landberg, 2005).

Na defesa das dimensões e objetivos característicos do Renascimento Africano, Pretória buscou intensificar sua inserção regional, atrelando a solidariedade africana a instrumentos como a defesa do multilateralismo e a universalidade na política externa. Conforme exposto anteriormente, tais instrumentos já haviam sido utilizados na inserção pela assimilação do internacional; contudo, a inovação do governo Mbeki foi adotá-los para romper com o fracasso da África do Sul em sua inserção no continente, visto que o multilateralismo servia para demonstrar o caráter não impositivo da atuação sul-africana, e a universalidade garantia o fortalecimento de laços com outras potências africanas, independentemente do modelo político por elas adotado. De fato, ao longo da administração Mbeki, o país buscou fortalecer ou criar parcerias com países como Argélia, Nigéria, Gana, Moçambique, entre outros considerados estratégicos.

Neste caso, um dos principais reflexos pode ser encontrado na esfera econômica, que, diferentemente do período de vigência do *apartheid* — quando se contabilizavam apenas 179 investimentos no continente, restritos a apenas 14 países —, em 2004 o número de investimentos chegava a 439, distribuídos em 35 países. Em outros termos, enquanto países como Botsuana, Moçambique, Lesoto, Malawi tinham em 2008 a África do Sul como o segundo maior comprador de suas exportações, nesse mesmo ano Suazilândia, Namíbia

e Zimbábue tinham em Pretória seu principal parceiro comercial (Otavio, 2014). Paralelamente às relações bilaterais, a administração Mbeki voltou-se à criação de iniciativas que se tornariam símbolos do Renascimento Africano, como a Nova Parceria para o Desenvolvimento Econômico da África (NEPAD) de 2001, cujo processo de criação contou com o apoio da Nigéria, da Argélia e do Senegal, e à transformação da OUA em União Africana (UA).

Iniciada a partir da Cúpula Extraordinária da OUA, em Sirte, na Líbia, em 1999, a transformação em UA foi marcada pelo protagonismo de três vertentes. A primeira foi simbolizada pelo desejo da Líbia de criar os Estados Unidos da África, isto é, mover o continente para a formação de um Estado federalista. A segunda englobava os interesses da Nigéria, país que defendia a incorporação de pontos do Movimento Kampala, de 1989, em especial a *Conference on Security, Stability, Development, and Cooperation in Africa* (CSSDCA) e o *African Peace Council of Elder Statesmen*, ambos direcionados à manutenção da paz continental e a sua promoção, à prevenção de conflitos e à autossuficiência militar na África. Já a terceira vertente era a sul-africana, favorável à ideia de que a nova organização deveria ser marcada tanto pela criação de regras e normas como, fundamentalmente, pelo comprometimento dos países-membros em acatá-las (Landsberg, 2012a). Vale ressaltar que a convergência entre as

vertentes nigeriana e sul-africana foi predominante no processo de transformação da OUA para a UA, uma vez que os pontos defendidos por ambos se mostraram presentes na estrutura da organização africana.

Se no âmbito multilateral, a criação da NEPAD e a transição da OUA para a UA simbolizavam a solidariedade africana, no cenário bilateral, além da construção de parcerias estratégicas já citadas, outro exemplo que refletia o interesse pela atuação no continente africano pôde ser visto na tentativa de pacificar o Zimbábue via *quiet diplomacy*, isto é, um processo de pacificação caracterizado pelo engajamento dos beligerantes, com o objetivo de levá-los a um acordo negociado (Landsberg, 2005). Embora não tenha alcançado o resultado esperado, visto que a aproximação entre a Inglaterra e o Zimbábue não ocorreu e tampouco houve entendimento entre o partido governista, *Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front* (ZANU-PF), e seu principal opositor, o *Movement for Democratic Change* (MDC), a *quiet diplomacy* representou a priorização do Zimbábue em detrimento dos anseios internacionais.

Em outras palavras, ao pautar-se na negociação em vez do isolamento, bem como ao se posicionar contra as sanções diplomáticas e econômicas impostas ao Zimbábue, a administração Mbeki convergiu com países como Angola, Malawi, Moçambique, Namíbia, República Democrática do Congo, Tanzânia e Zâmbia, refletindo a máxima

da solidariedade africana, qual seja, a busca de soluções africanas para os desafios africanos.

Ainda que o não rompimento com o Zimbábue pudesse ser considerado um retrocesso para a imagem de país com forte componente moral, em verdade, tal escolha não impactou a inserção internacional do país. Vale ressaltar que a administração Mbeki manteve a política externa sul-africana alinhada com pontos como direitos humanos, a difusão de regimes democráticos, a resolução de conflitos por meios pacíficos, entre outros, que foram característicos do governo Mandela e eram estimados pelas potências ocidentais. Inclusive, tais pontos foram projetados, por defesa de Pretória, em iniciativas-símbolo do Renascimento Africano, como a UA, que não apenas acompanhou o desejo da África do Sul de fazer desta organização um instrumento direcionado à criação de normas, princípios e uma nova estrutura, mas também de regular a conduta dos Estados-membros via punições àqueles Estados considerados violadores dos direitos humanos e contrários a regimes democráticos (Otavio, 2014).

Além da União Africana, outra iniciativa-símbolo do Renascimento Africano, que também foi influenciada pelos pontos defendidos na administração Mandela e mantidos no governo Mbeki, foi a NEPAD, cujos objetivos de erradicação da pobreza, promoção do crescimento e do desenvolvimento sustentável, combate à marginalização

do continente no processo de globalização, entre outros considerados importantes para o desenvolvimento do continente, dialogavam com os Objetivos de Desenvolvimento do Milênio (ODM). Inclusive, a Nova Parceria foi aclamada na Cúpula do G7+1, em junho de 2002, em Kananaskis, Canadá (NEPAD AGENCY, 2011), e em seu documento constitutivo, apresentava-se como “um chamado para uma nova relação de parceria entre a África e a Comunidade Internacional, *especialmente os países altamente industrializados*, para superar o hiato no desenvolvimento que foi ampliado ao longo de séculos de relações desiguais” (NEPAD, 2001, p. 2).

Paralelamente à sinalização, ao menos para as potências tradicionais, de que a África do Sul manteria certo papel de agente de promoção e transformação do continente africano via apoio a princípios estimados e defendidos pelo Ocidente, o interesse sul-africano em se aproximar das potências emergentes também se fez presente. Por um lado, além das relações bilaterais, a aproximação de Pretória com tais potências pode ser encontrada na participação em iniciativas de caráter trilateral, como o Fórum IBAS, criado entre o Brasil, a Índia e a África do Sul em 2003 e favorável ao fortalecimento, bem como à reforma das Nações Unidas; e, no âmbito multilateral, o Fórum de Cooperação China-África (FOCAC), direcionado ao fortalecimento da cooperação entre Pequim e os países africanos. Por outro lado, a interação entre a África do Sul e os emergentes

se relaciona à defesa, por estes, de mudanças na governança global e na resolução de mazelas sociais.

Acerca da governança global, vale destacar a intensa atuação de tais países, que levou o G20 a assumir o protagonismo antes visto no G7, transformando-se no principal espaço voltado à discussão de temáticas relacionadas à economia internacional, como o desenvolvimento sustentável, o combate à fome e à pobreza, a redução da desigualdade por meio da taxação de fortunas, entre outros. No que concerne à resolução de mazelas sociais, vale destacar a chamada cooperação Sul-Sul (CSS), cujas divergências em relação à Cooperação Norte-Sul (CNS) não são meramente nominais, mas fundamentalmente paradigmáticas, seja quanto ao conceito de cooperação (sem condicionalidades políticas), seja quanto à forma de alcançar o bem-estar (benefícios mútuos e horizontalidade entre os envolvidos).

Em linhas gerais, ao se aproximar de países que defendiam mudanças na governança global, cujas agendas voltadas a temas socioeconômicos eram convergentes com os interesses africanos, Pretória também passou a ser vista como estratégica, uma representante ou a voz da África no cenário internacional (Otavio & Fingerhann, 2024). No entanto, diferentemente do êxito conquistado nos cenários regional e internacional, no âmbito interno, desafios socioeconômicos, destacadamente a dificuldade de romper com o desemprego e a pobreza extrema, passaram a

impactar a aceitação da administração Mbeki. Além disso, a vitória de Zuma à presidência do CNA, que lhe garantia a possibilidade de disputar as próximas eleições para presidente na África do Sul, foi um dos fatores que levaram o governo de Mbeki ao fim, culminando em sua renúncia em 2008.

ZUMA, RAMAPHOSA E A TRANSIÇÃO PARA A ESTRATÉGIA DE INSERÇÃO INTERNACIONAL PELA SELETIVIDADE

Em *The Globalization Paradox: Democracy and the Future of the World Economy*, Rodrik (2011) expõe o descompasso existente entre a democracia liberal e o mercado global no pós-Guerra Fria. Segundo o autor, tal hiato gera o chamado trilema na economia mundial, caracterizado pelos vértices Estado-nação, hiperglobalização e democracia, sendo que apenas dois desses podem ser conciliados simultaneamente. No que concerne à interação Estado-nação e hiperglobalização, observa-se a maior valorização de regras monetárias e o predomínio do Estado mínimo em detrimento de obrigações sociais e econômicas alcançadas pela democracia. Quanto à relação entre hiperglobalização e democracia, sincronia esta que simboliza o avanço da governança global, o protagonismo do Estado-nação seria substituído por instituições globais. Diferentemente dessas sincronias, a relação entre Estado-nação e democracia remete ao chamado Estado de bem-estar social, marcado pela remoção de

restrições ao comércio, pelo tratamento igualitário de parceiros econômicos e pela autonomia dos Estados no controle dos fluxos de capital (Rodrik, 2011).

Quando analisada a relação entre Estado e desenvolvimento no contexto sul-africano pós-Guerra Fria, ainda que houvesse certa simpatia pela relação Estado-nação e democracia, o que se viu foi o predomínio da interação Estado-nação e hiperglobalização. A expressão do Estado mínimo pode ser encontrada na dificuldade de romper com a pobreza, visto que, em 2008, a percentagem de sul-africanos vivendo abaixo da linha da pobreza mantinha-se próxima de 30% (Otavio, 2021b). Uma segunda expressão pode ser vista na taxa de desemprego, que em 2004 chegava a 19,64%, e, em 2010, a 23,18%, inclusive. Entre 2008 e 2009, mais de 900.000 postos de trabalho foram fechados na África do Sul (Verick & Islam, 2010; STATISTA, 2024).

Embora os desafios socioeconômicos já se mostrassem presentes durante as administrações Mandela e Mbeki, o êxito alcançado com as estratégias de inserção internacional pela assimilação e a inserção internacional pela representação do regional, em certa medida, minimizou tais flagelos sociais perante a retirada da África do Sul do ostracismo, apresentando-se como um importante ator no cenário internacional. Entretanto, a partir de eventos ocorridos em 2008, a importância do cenário interno já não poderia ser colocada em segundo plano, uma vez que passava a afetar a política externa

da África do Sul. Um primeiro evento relaciona-se à crise financeira de 2008 que, entre as diversas características e consequências, foi marcada pela retração das potências tradicionais no continente africano.

Em termos numéricos, em 2008 a União Europeia havia importado €161 bilhões e exportado €120 bilhões para o continente africano; em 2009, as importações caíram para €122 bilhões e as exportações para €108 bilhões (EUROSTAT, 2019). Neste mesmo período, o declínio norte-americano foi mais acentuado, passando de US\$ 113,5 bilhões (2008) para US\$ 62,4 bilhões em importações (2009) e, no que se refere às exportações, de US\$ 28,39 bilhões (2008) para US\$ 24,33 bilhões (2009) (STATISTA, 2024). Especificamente em relação à África do Sul, além da recessão econômica vista no país (Verick & Islam, 2010), houve a perda do posto de principal economia do continente africano para a Nigéria. Vale lembrar que Pretória inaugurava a década de 1990 com um Produto Interno Bruto (PIB) equivalente a 20% do PIB continental, contudo, em 2008, enquanto o PIB sul-africano era de US\$ 316,49 bilhões, o da Nigéria chegava a US\$ 330,26 bilhões (Otavio, 2021b; STATISTA, 2024).

Somado a essa perda, um segundo evento ocorrido em 2008 que também impactou a África do Sul, ao menos no cenário regional, diz respeito à violência de caráter xenófobo ou afrofóbico. Embora tal violência já fosse observada na administração Mandela, foi em 2008

que os ataques de cunho xenofóbico se mostraram alarmantes, como visto inicialmente em Alexandra e, posteriormente, espalhando-se para outras partes do país. O saldo foi a morte de 62 imigrantes, 670 feridos, dezenas de mulheres estupradas e cerca de 100 mil imigrantes expulsos de seus lares (Otavio, 2021b). Um terceiro evento ocorrido em 2008, que também impactaria a política externa, relaciona-se à crise político-partidária vivida no CNA, quando as constantes divergências entre Mbeki e grupos como o *Congress of South African Trade Unions* (COSATU), o *South African Communist Party* (SACP) e a *ANC Youth League* (ANCYL) levaram a sua renúncia à presidência do país (Otavio, 2014).

Diante de tais desafios internos e externos, a administração Zuma passou a representar a transição, distanciando-se da inserção internacional pela representação do regional, porém ainda sem demonstrar qual nova estratégia seria adotada. Tal impasse resultava da busca de Pretória em manter-se próxima tanto das potências emergentes quanto das tradicionais. Se, com as primeiras, houve ganhos para o país, com as segundas as divergências tornaram-se cada vez mais evidentes. No que se refere às emergentes, para além do convite para integrar, como membro efetivo, o Grupo dos BRIC — composto, à época, por China, Brasil, Rússia e Índia e que, a partir de 2011, passou a ser chamado de BRICS —, os ganhos para a África do Sul também se verificaram no âmbito comercial, destacadamente

com a China, que, no plano continental, havia incrementado as exportações em 22,6% e as importações em 22,4% entre 2000 e 2014 e que, em relação específica a Pretória, havia se transformado em seu principal parceiro comercial (Nowak, 2016; DTIC, 2020).

Diferentemente do êxito junto às potências emergentes, o descompasso entre a África do Sul e as potências tradicionais pode ser observado durante a Primavera Árabe, nome dado ao conjunto de revoltas de caráter popular que ocorreram em alguns países do Oriente Médio e do Norte da África (Otavio, 2014). Em termos específicos, a divergência se mostrou latente com a intervenção militar realizada pela OTAN na Líbia, então legitimada no Conselho de Segurança pelas potências tradicionais por meio da instrumentalização da *Responsibility to Protect* (R2P, na sigla em inglês). Nesse caso, o predomínio dos interesses das potências tradicionais, favoráveis à mudança de regime na Líbia, simbolizou a desvalorização da posição defendida pela UA de solução por meios pacíficos, refletido nas palavras do presidente Zuma no Conselho de Segurança em 2012, quando afirmou: “O plano da UA foi completamente ignorado em favor de bombardear a Líbia pelas forças da OTAN”.

A intervenção na Líbia também apresentou outro fator que simbolizava a fragilidade da inserção internacional pela representação do regional, qual seja, a dificuldade da África do Sul em ser mais presente no continente africano.

Reflexo disso pode ser observado no enfraquecimento da interação entre a África do Sul e a Nigéria, relação que, na administração Zuma, caminhou para o descompasso, conforme visto nas percepções acerca da Líbia. Vale ressaltar que Pretória, ao considerar que a intervenção tinha como objetivo a mudança de governo, não aceitou o Conselho de Transição Nacional (CTA) como legítimo representante do povo líbio; em contrapartida, a Nigéria, mesmo criticando a atuação da OTAN, não apenas aceitou o CTA como representante do povo líbio, mas também buscou incentivar outros países africanos a fazerem o mesmo.

Ainda no cenário regional, a fragilidade na inserção internacional também encontra respaldo na atuação sul-africana no conflito ocorrido na Costa do Marfim a partir de 2010, cuja guerra civil era polarizada por Laurent Gbagbo e Alessane Ouattara, seu principal expoente. Nesse cenário, o predomínio da contradição por parte da administração Zuma foi marcante, evidenciado no apoio inicial a Gbagbo e, posteriormente, no alinhamento à União Africana, que passou a defender Ouattara (Otavio, 2014). Embora ocorrido no âmbito interno, mas com impacto regional, outro exemplo que demonstra os limites da inserção internacional pela representação do regional diz respeito à contínua dificuldade em lidar com o imigrante africano. Inclusive, a afrofobia se apresentou como outro desafio às relações entre a África do Sul e a Nigéria, conforme representado pelo Ministro das Relações

Exteriores nigeriano, Olugbenga Ashiru (2011-2013), em 2012, quando acusou de xenofobia a deportação de 125 nigerianos que estavam na África do Sul (Landsberg, 2012b).

A dificuldade em romper com a afrofobia somava-se a outros desafios internos, como o desemprego e a tendência à estagnação econômica. No caso, enquanto a taxa de desemprego se mantinha elevada, variando entre 21% e 26% de 2011 a 2015 (Otavio, 2021b); a estagnação econômica era resultado do baixo crescimento do PIB, que, ao longo da administração Zuma, manteve a média de 1,6% ao ano, fator que levou a África do Sul a perder o posto de segunda maior economia do continente africano para o Egito em 2015, visto que, nesse ano, o PIB nigeriano chegava a US\$ 492,44 bilhões, o egípcio a US\$ 350,12 bilhões e o sul-africano a US\$ 346,66 bilhões (STATISTA, 2014).

Diante de tais desafios, a principal iniciativa adotada pela administração Zuma foi a priorização da diplomacia econômica que, semelhantemente às potências emergentes, voltou-se ao continente africano. No âmbito bilateral, destaca-se a construção dos chamados *Business Forums* com países como Senegal, Tanzânia, Namíbia, Zâmbia e Angola; já na dimensão multilateral, o apoio à NEPAD, a criação do Programa para o Desenvolvimento das Infraestruturas na África (PIDA) e da Agenda 2063 — iniciativa lançada em 2015 pela UA que, em linhas gerais, preza pelo desenvolvimento e pela nova inserção internacional do continente

africano — são reflexos dessa diplomacia econômica (Otavio & Lessa, 2024).

Ainda que a diplomacia econômica se apresentasse como um potencial meio para angariar recursos para a África do Sul, sua adoção não garantiu a ruptura com as mazelas socioeconômicas existentes no país, desafios que levaram Zuma a perder apoio interno no CNA e, semelhantemente a Mbeki, a renunciar à presidência do país. Em certa medida, o fracasso de Zuma gerou novas expectativas em relação ao próximo presidente, no caso, Ramaphosa, que passou a se distanciar da inserção internacional pela representação do regional e a adotar outra estratégia, aqui intitulada como inserção internacional pela seletividade, entendida como a busca pelo equilíbrio entre elementos encontrados nas estratégias de inserção internacional pela assimilação e pela representação do regional, e as condicionalidades socioeconômicas da África do Sul. Ainda que selecionar possa remeter a certa oposição à universalidade na política externa sul-africana, em verdade, a seletividade não significa contrapor-se à ampliação das relações internacionais, mas sim eleger e atuar em alguns temas considerados relevantes para o país.

A seletividade também não se relaciona ao caráter opcional, mas sim à necessidade de adequar a inserção internacional às limitações econômicas existentes na África do Sul. Em termos teóricos, o equilíbrio defendido pela nova estratégia de inserção internacional pode ser encontrado nos discursos

realizados pelas ministras das Relações Exteriores da África do Sul, Lindiwe Sisulu e Naledi Pandor. Enquanto Sisulu, em 2018, expôs a necessidade de resgatar o protagonismo conquistado durante o período Mandela, quando o país era “uma bússola moral e uma voz da razão em um mundo cada vez mais superado por interesses egoístas e estreitos” (Sisulu, 2018); Pandor, em 2019, afirmava que “nossa política externa, como a própria África do Sul, é e sempre foi baseada na defesa de um continente africano próspero, pacífico e democrático” (Pandor, 2019).

Em termos práticos, uma das temáticas selecionadas pela administração Ramaphosa diz respeito aos processos de pacificação no continente, refletidos nos casos da Líbia e do Sudão do Sul (Africa News, 2020). No primeiro caso, vale ressaltar o apoio dado ao *AU High Level Committee on Libya*, com o intuito de romper com a instabilidade política existente na Líbia desde a morte de Gaddafi. Já no segundo, a intermediação realizada por Ramaphosa foi fundamental para a assinatura do acordo entre os oponentes: o atual presidente, Salva Kiir Mayardit, e o *South Sudan People's Liberation Movement* (SPLM-IO), liderado por Riek Machar (South Africa, 2020b). Ainda no âmbito regional, outro exemplo de materialização da inserção internacional pela seletividade, que também se vincula à diplomacia econômica, diz respeito ao apoio sul-africano à Área de Livre Comércio do Continente Africano

(AfCFTA), criada em 2018 e que entrou em vigor em 2020.

No âmbito bilateral, a seletividade se apoia na busca por intensificar as parcerias com países considerados estratégicos, como Angola, cuja relação se destacou pela intenção e interesse de Ramaphosa e João Lourenço (presidente angolano), em cooperar nas áreas de extrativismo, comércio, infraestrutura, agricultura, turismo, entre outras consideradas relevantes para ambos (Africa News, 2018). Além de Angola, outro país que se mostrou relevante foi Gana, cuja interação que culminou, em 2018, na criação da Comissão Binacional (BNC), que passou a reunir-se a cada dois anos, de forma alternada, entre Accra e Pretória (Ramaphosa, 2018).

No cenário internacional, um primeiro exemplo da seletividade pode ser encontrado na busca por investimento externo, alcançado, por exemplo, com o acesso a empréstimos junto ao Novo Banco de Desenvolvimento (NBD), instituição que, em 2019, repassou US\$ 790 milhões para projetos sul-africanos. Além do NBD, um segundo exemplo relaciona-se ao anúncio de investimentos, como os da China, cuja soma dos acordos de compra de produtos de empresas sul-africanas por parte de companhias chinesas, realizados em 2023, totalizou US\$ 2,2 bilhões; dos EUA, país com o qual Pretória alcançou superávit de US\$ 16,2 bilhões em 2022; e da União Europeia, que, no mesmo ano, também registrou superávit favorável à África do Sul de aproximadamente €2,9

bilhões (Baker McKenzie, 2023; European Commission, 2024; United States Trade Representative, 2024). Embora os números conquistados entre 2018 e 2023 confirmem sua importância, é fato que a diplomacia econômica não mitigou alguns desafios socioeconômicos, como a taxa de desemprego, que saltou de 24,34% em 2020 para 28,84% em 2022. Além do desemprego, vale destacar a queda no PIB sul-africano: se em 2021 havia alcançado US\$ 420,01 bilhões, em 2023 seu montante foi de US\$ 377,78 bilhões (STATISTA, 2024).

Vale ressaltar que tais desafios estão relacionados à Covid-19, pandemia que, além dos impactos econômicos, também reforçou o hiato entre as necessidades do continente africano em geral — e, em específico, da África do Sul — e os interesses das potências tradicionais, países que concentraram e dificultaram a exportação de vacinas (Otavio & Lessa, 2024). Diante desse cenário, a administração Ramaphosa buscou defender os interesses africanos no cenário internacional e resgatar o status de país com forte dimensão moral. No que se refere à representação do continente, destaca-se a participação de Ramaphosa no *New Global Financing Pact Summit*, ocorrido em Paris entre os dias 22 e 23 de junho de 2023, quando expôs o ressentimento dos países africanos em relação à restrição das potências tradicionais no acesso a vacinas contra a Covid-19, argumentando que “nos sentíamos como mendigos quando precisávamos de vacinas e os países do hemisfério norte haviam

comprado todas, as monopolizavam e não queriam repassá-las quando mais precisávamos” (Ramaphosa, 2023).

Quanto à condição de país com forte dimensão moral, sua defesa se mostrou presente na crítica ao unilateralismo adotado por parte das potências tradicionais. Reflexo disso pode ser encontrado em discurso realizado na *76th Session of the UN General Assembly*, em setembro de 2021, quando Ramaphosa expôs que “mais de 82% das doses de vacinas do mundo tinham sido adquiridas por países ricos, enquanto menos de 1% foi para países de baixa renda” (Ramaphosa, 2021). Curiosamente, se durante a administração Mandela a defesa de pontos como democracia, direitos humanos e resolução de conflitos por meios pacíficos, entre outros, levou à aproximação do país com as potências tradicionais, com o advento da pandemia da Covid-19 e de seus impactos para o continente africano, o que se viu foi os mesmos pontos sendo utilizados para constranger tais potências por suas escolhas.

O caráter contestatório e a busca por defender os interesses africanos no cenário internacional, ambos encontrados na estratégia de inserção internacional pela seletividade, demonstram que, mesmo diante de desafios econômicos na África do Sul, a administração Ramaphosa não se ausentaria em demonstrar o ativismo do país em determinados temas. Logo, além da Covid-19, outra temática que se mostrou relevante diz respeito à defesa por reformas nas organizações

internacionais. Inclusive, ressalta-se a ativa defesa sul-africana pela entrada da UA como membro efetivo do G20, conquista alcançada na reunião do grupo em Nova Delhi, em 2023, que garantiu maior representatividade africana no principal espaço voltado a debater a economia internacional — até então a África do Sul era o único membro africano permanente no G20 (Otavio & Fingerhann, 2024).

Junto à reforma das instituições de caráter multilateral, a atuação sul-africana também se fez presente na busca por construir a estabilidade no cenário internacional. Exemplo disso foi o biênio 2019/2020, quando, como membro não-permanente do Conselho de Segurança, o país atuou em prol da independência do Saara Ocidental e do fim de sanções econômicas impostas pelos EUA a Cuba — país que havia apoiado o CNA na luta contra o apartheid e que, durante a epidemia da Covid-19, auxiliou Pretória enviando mais de 200 médicos (Deutsche Welle, 2020; Otavio, 2021a). No pós-biênio no CS, outros dois eventos que não apenas colocaram a administração Ramaphosa e as potências tradicionais em campos opostos, mas também reforçaram o caráter crítico de sua inserção internacional pela seletividade, dizem respeito à guerra Rússia-Ucrânia (2022-) e ao conflito Israel-Hamas (2023-).

No que diz respeito à guerra russo-ucraniana, ainda que os EUA buscassem apoio para isolar a Rússia, Pretória tendeu a adotar a neutralidade

no conflito, posicionamento evidenciado na votação da resolução que condenava a invasão da Ucrânia pela Rússia, ocorrida na Assembleia Geral em março de 2022, quando a administração Ramaphosa optou pela abstenção (White & Holtz, 2022). No conflito entre Israel e o Hamas, a África do Sul passou a ser ativa na crítica a Tel Aviv e na defesa da causa palestina, convergindo com a posição da União Africana, organização que havia expulsado Israel como membro observador na 36ª Reunião Ordinária da UA, em fevereiro de 2023 (Africa News, 2023). Nesse caso, além de manter o rebaixamento da embaixada sul-africana em Israel ao status de escritório de ligação — iniciativa adotada durante o governo Zuma —, a administração Ramaphosa, ao defender a causa palestina, ingressou, no final de 2023, junto à Corte Internacional de Justiça das Nações Unidas (CIJ), com o pedido de julgamento de Israel por crime de genocídio (International Court of Justice, 2023).

Embora não tenha alcançado o objetivo inicial — visto que a CIJ, no final de janeiro, havia indicado que Israel deveria apenas tomar medidas para evitar crimes que poderiam simbolizar genocídio (International Court of Justice, 2024) —, é válido destacar que a atuação sul-africana, direta ou indiretamente, acabou por demonstrar o êxito de sua estratégia de inserção internacional. Diretamente, porque, enquanto as potências tradicionais, destacadamente a União Europeia, o Reino Unido e os Estados Unidos, ficaram do lado

de Israel, os principais apoiadores da África do Sul foram desde organizações como a Liga Árabe e a Organização para a Cooperação Islâmica, até países como Brasil, Turquia, Paquistão, Namíbia e Colômbia, demonstrando a capacidade sul-africana de angariar apoio a suas demandas. Indiretamente, porque o equilíbrio entre as estratégias adotadas pelas administrações Mandela e Mbeki acabou por demonstrar que, mesmo o país passando por desafios socioeconômicos, como o desemprego e o declínio no PIB, a África do Sul ainda se mantém como um ator relevante no sistema internacional.

Acerca dos desafios encontrados no cenário interno, vale destacar as eleições gerais ocorridas em maio de 2024, quando o CNA perdeu a maioria dos assentos no Parlamento e precisou, pela primeira vez desde o término do regime apartheid, criar um Governo de Unidade Nacional (GUN), juntando-se a outros partidos, com destaque para a Aliança Democrática (AD) e o Partido da Liberdade Inkatha (PLI), que conquistaram, respectivamente, 87 e 17 cadeiras (Electoral Commission of South Africa, 2024). Nesse contexto, mesmo com a mudança de chefia do Departamento de Relações Internacionais e Cooperação (DIRCO) (Deutsche Welle, 2024), marcada pela saída de Naledi Pandor e a entrada de Ronald Ozzy Lamola, a DIRCO ainda permaneceu sob o comando do CNA, fator que, em linhas gerais, demonstra a tendência de

continuidade na política externa adotada pela África do Sul.

CONSIDERAÇÕES FINAIS

Ao longo do artigo, buscou-se analisar a política externa da África do Sul durante as administrações Mandela (1994-1998), Mbeki (1999-2008), Zuma (2009-2018) e Ramaphosa (2018-2024), bem como responder ao seguinte questionamento: quais foram as especificidades e escolhas adotadas por cada governo que garantiram a elevação da África do Sul ao posto de importante ator nos cenários regional e internacional? Feito isso, defendeu-se a hipótese de que o fim do isolamento diplomático resultante do apartheid, assim como o maior protagonismo da África do Sul nos cenários regional e internacional, é, em verdade, o resultado de três estratégias de inserção convergentes: a inserção internacional pela assimilação, a inserção internacional pela representação do regional e a inserção internacional pela seletividade.

Durante a administração Mandela, por exemplo, a adoção da estratégia de assimilação garantiu o êxito no cenário internacional — mensurado pela criação de 124 missões diplomáticas e pela participação em 45 organizações ou fóruns internacionais—, distanciando a África do Sul do isolamento causado pelo regime racista e garantindo-lhe o status de país com forte componente moral, o que contrastava com a dificuldade de obter resultados na inserção regional.

Ainda que mantendo o interesse pelo cenário internacional, bem como utilizando a universalidade na política externa e a defesa do multilateralismo, a administração Mbeki pautou-se na inserção regional, criando e adotando a chamada inserção internacional pela representação do regional. Defendendo o Renascimento Africano, promovendo a criação de parcerias estratégicas no continente e participando ativamente em iniciativas como a transição da OUA para a UA, a criação da NEPAD e a Agenda Africana, o segundo governo pós-apartheid garantiu o protagonismo de Pretória na inserção regional.

Já na administração Zuma, junto à continuidade na política externa, a diplomacia econômica e a busca por fortalecer laços com as potências emergentes ganharam destaque. No que diz respeito à primeira, a criação de meios para fortalecer a economia da África do Sul foi acompanhada de iniciativas como os chamados *Business Forums*, o apoio à NEPAD e ao PIDA, a continuidade da Agenda Africana e a defesa da Agenda 2063. No que se refere aos laços com potências emergentes, o convite para integrar, como membro efetivo, o Grupo dos BRIC e o fortalecimento das relações com a China contrastavam com a interação entre Pretória e as potências tradicionais, destacadamente no contexto da intervenção na Líbia realizada pela OTAN.

A crítica às potências tradicionais também passou a fazer parte da administração Ramaphosa, que adotou

a estratégia de inserção internacional pela seletividade, isto é, o equilíbrio entre elementos adotados no governo Mandela — destacadamente no âmbito internacional — e outros pontos relevantes para a administração Mbeki, principalmente, para o cenário regional. Se, no âmbito regional, houve a continuidade do fortalecimento de laços com outras potências africanas, da valorização da NEPAD, do PIDA, da Agenda 2063 e do empenho dado à AfCFTA, entre outras iniciativas vistas como relevantes para a diplomacia econômica; no cenário internacional, a defesa de pontos como democracia, direitos humanos e resolução de conflitos, entre outros símbolos do governo Mandela, caminhou lado a lado com a busca por estreitar laços com as potências emergentes e com a crítica às potências tradicionais, conforme analisado nos casos da Covid-19 e das guerras Rússia-Ucrânia e Israel-Hamas.

Conforme indicado anteriormente, após as eleições gerais de 2024, o CNA não apenas perdeu a maioria dos assentos no Parlamento, como também, em razão dessa condição, precisou formar um Governo de Unidade Nacional (GUN), juntando-se à Aliança Democrática (AD) e ao Partido da Liberdade Inkatha (PLI), que nas eleições conquistaram, respectivamente, 87 e 17 cadeiras (Electoral Commission of South Africa, 2024). Evidentemente, o advento do GUN gerou expectativas de mudanças na administração sul-africana, visto que houve a transferência

de 12 dos 32 ministérios para os partidos aliados. No entanto, ainda que tenha ocorrido a mudança na chefia da DIRCO, com a entrada de Ronald Ozzy Lamola, ao menos neste início do GUN, observa-se a manutenção da inserção internacional pela seletividade. Inclusive, os pontos que simbolizam tal estratégia de inserção internacional estiveram em destaque no discurso de Lamola, em julho de 2024, quando afirmou que o governo atual manter-se-á comprometido com uma política externa não alinhada e pautada nos direitos humanos, na solidariedade e na resolução pacífica de conflitos, na priorização da Agenda 2063, na valorização da diplomacia econômica, no multilateralismo e na universalidade na política externa.

Por um lado, a fala de Lamola se relaciona à percepção crítica expressa por Ramaphosa (2024, tradução própria) no encontro do G20 realizado no Brasil, quando o presidente afirmou que “quando nós, como África do Sul, assumirmos a presidência do G20 em 1º de dezembro, assumiremos o esforço para fortalecer e reformar o sistema multilateral para responder, efetivamente, às realidades globais”. Por outro lado, o discurso do novo chefe da DIRCO não apenas demonstra a importância da inserção internacional pela seletividade, mas também indica a relevância das estratégias de inserção internacional pela assimilação e representação do regional. Logo, corrobora com a hipótese defendida neste artigo,

qual seja, a de que o maior protagonismo da África do Sul nos cenários regional e internacional é, em verdade, o resultado da convergência das três estratégias de inserção adotadas entre 1994 e 2024.

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Sudáfrica: potencia regional e inserción internacional.

Un análisis de su presencia en los BRICS y la denuncia contra Israel*

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RESUMEN

En los últimos años, la competencia hegemónica y la crisis del sistema internacional han permitido observar y reconocer la importancia de las potencias regionales. En este contexto, Sudáfrica se ha posicionado como uno de los países más influyentes del continente

africano y ha tenido un papel activo en los procesos internacionales desde el fin del *apartheid*, muestra de esto es su participación en los BRICS+ y su denuncia contra Israel por el genocidio en Gaza ante la Corte Internacional de Justicia (CIJ). Así, a pesar de los retos internos del país, enmarcados en las lógicas del capitalismo global, su participación e

* Agradecemos las dos revisiones que se hicieron en el dictamen. Los comentarios nutrieron ampliamente los argumentos del artículo. Cualquier error o imprecisión corresponde exclusivamente a las autoras.

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Recibido: 11 de junio de 2025 / Modificado: 1 de septiembre de 2025 / Aceptado: 16 de septiembre de 2025

Para citar este artículo:

Franco Silva, A. y Montoya Leal, L. N. (2025). Sudáfrica: potencia regional y presencia internacional. Un análisis de su presencia en los BRICS y la denuncia contra Israel. *Oasis*, 43, 147-170.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18601/16577558.n43.07>

influencia en las dinámicas regionales e internacionales ha sido sumamente relevante. Por esa razón, el objetivo de este texto es estudiar a Sudáfrica como una potencia regional a partir de su participación en los BRICS+ y su denuncia contra Israel por el genocidio en Gaza desde perspectivas críticas para el estudio de las relaciones internacionales.

Palabras clave: Sudáfrica; potencia regional; capitalismo racial; BRICS; genocidio en Gaza.

South Africa: regional power and international presence. An analysis of its presence in the BRICS and the complaint against Israel

ABSTRACT

In recent years, hegemonic competition and the crisis of the international system have made it possible to observe and recognize the importance of regional powers. In this context, South Africa has positioned itself as one of the most influential countries on the African continent and has played an active role in international processes since the end of apartheid. Evidence of this includes its participation in BRICS+ and its accusation against Israel for genocide in Gaza before the International Court of Justice (ICJ). Thus, despite the country's internal challenges, framed

within the logics of global capitalism, its participation and influence in regional and international dynamics have been highly significant. For this reason, the objective of this text is to study South Africa as a regional power based on its participation in BRICS+ and its accusation against Israel for genocide in Gaza, from critical perspectives in the study of international relations.

Keywords: South Africa; regional power; racial capitalism; BRICS; Gaza genocide.

INTRODUCCIÓN

Desde inicios del siglo XXI, los límites sociales y ambientales del capitalismo son más evidentes. La insaciable acumulación de capital ha generado profundos problemas ecosociales, que el propio sistema es incapaz de resolver. En este contexto, la competencia hegemónica, es decir, la disputa por el liderazgo capitalista, también se ha agudizado, y las potencias emergentes se han situado como actores esenciales, que podrían permitir una distribución más equitativa de poder o proporcionar claves para diseñar formas de ordenamiento social alternativas. En el estudio de las Relaciones Internacionales, las potencias regionales han puesto las demandas de los gobiernos de las periferias en los foros internacionales, pero no necesariamente han contribuido a transformar las relaciones de poder de la política internacional. En algunos casos, la escala regional es su prioridad;

en otros, la internacional, pero en la mayoría actúan de manera transescalar. En general, estos Estados pertenecen a una región en particular y tienen capacidades materiales e influencia sobre la misma (Mesquita y Seabra 2020; Nel *et al.*, 2012).

El concepto de potencia emergente fue creado a inicios del siglo XXI para hacer referencia a los países que actualmente conforman los BRICS. En un primer momento, se planteó que estos países eran autónomos y podían transformar el orden internacional (Gratius, 2008, p. 4). Incluso, se pensaba que sus políticas eran contrahegemónicas. “La contrahegemonía es una posibilidad de orden que es concebida como una alternativa al *statu quo* de una estructura histórica. Es decir, la contrahegemonía es una posibilidad de orden que cuestiona una configuración particular e histórica de fuerzas” (Narea, 2020, p. 81). Sin embargo, los sujetos hegemónicos capitalistas continuaron determinando el entorno estratégico del sistema internacional y, por lo tanto, delimitando las decisiones políticas de las potencias emergentes. Así, “los Estados menos poderosos conservan su capacidad para buscar riqueza, influencia y seguridad, pero dentro de parámetros definidos por la interacción de las grandes potencias” (Lynch III, 2024, p. 9).

En África, una de las principales potencias regionales es Sudáfrica. En la actualidad, este país se enfrenta a retos profundos como consecuencia de la instauración del capitalismo racial en su territorio; es decir, el “sistema

económico que utiliza la lógica racial para potenciar la explotación sistemática de las personas negras y otras personas de color” (Majavu, 2023, p. 211), el cual está enmarcado dentro del capitalismo global. Este sistema surgió en Sudáfrica a partir del despliegue del capitalismo industrial con la colonización británica. En ese momento, los colonos británicos asumieron que las poblaciones negras eran su fuerza de trabajo. Más adelante, el gobierno segregacionista del *apartheid* reforzó la división racial del trabajo. Para la década de los sesenta del siglo XX, se afirmaba que en Sudáfrica no había blancos pobres, lo cual no pudo haber ocurrido sin el trabajo y la explotación de la comunidad negra en su conjunto (Majavu, 2023, pp. 211-214). Con el fin del *apartheid* en 1994, hubo un cambio en el poder político. No obstante, las relaciones desiguales se mantuvieron. La única transformación fue la incorporación de la burguesía negra bajo las lógicas del capitalismo neoliberal.

Sudáfrica, como muchas potencias emergentes, muestra contradicciones entre sus políticas internas y externas. No obstante, planteamos que, a pesar de los límites de las potencias emergentes en el orden internacional, su estudio es relevante para entender las transformaciones del sistema internacional contemporáneo. En ese sentido, analizar los límites y alcances de Sudáfrica como potencia regional en el marco de los BRICS, y la denuncia contra Israel, permite profundizar en el estudio de las potencias emergentes.

El artículo se divide en tres secciones. En la primera, se recupera la historia sudafricana para entender al país como una potencia regional con contradicciones. En la segunda, se describe la relación de Sudáfrica con los BRICS+ y se destacan la importancia y los límites de la participación y presencia de Sudáfrica en dicha alianza. En la tercera, se analizan los elementos más importantes de la denuncia de Sudáfrica contra Israel por el genocidio en Gaza y las implicaciones que esta ha tenido para el país africano en su relación con Estados Unidos. Finalmente, se comparten algunas reflexiones.

SUDÁFRICA COMO POTENCIA REGIONAL

A finales del siglo XX, se decía que África subsahariana estaba enfrentando numerosos riesgos políticos, que su infraestructura estaba colapsando, su fuerza de trabajo no estaba capacitada y el desajuste de su balanza de pagos era insostenible. Sin embargo, Sudáfrica se pensaba como la excepción: “con una economía diversificada y relativamente sofisticada, y una tasa de crecimiento poblacional muy inferior a la del resto del África subsahariana”

(Saul y Leys, 1999). Desde ese momento y hasta la actualidad, Sudáfrica se ha configurado como uno de los países que cuenta con una de las economías más avanzadas en el continente africano. De hecho, en 2023 Sudáfrica fue la segunda economía con mayor producto interno bruto (PIB) en el continente, solo por debajo de Egipto (Banco Mundial, 2023). Sin embargo, como señalan Saul y Leys (1999), este desarrollo económico fue posible por el sistema de segregación racial y la profunda represión impuesta por el capitalismo monopólico blanco.¹

Sudáfrica tiene una muy larga historia colonial, la cual se relaciona con “la hegemonía de las Provincias Unidas (Países Bajos) a mediados del siglo XVII, [y] la de Gran Bretaña a mediados del siglo XIX” (Wallerstein, 1988, p. 49). En 1652, los holandeses llegaron a El Cabo para establecer un puesto de abastecimiento. Sin embargo, al darse cuenta de que las tierras eran muy fértiles, decidieron ocupar el territorio sin importar que el espacio estaba habitado (Comaroff y Comaroff, 2010; Varela, 2019). A partir del siglo XVIII, los británicos llegaron al territorio por la alianza con las autoridades holandesas frente a

1 A pesar de que Jacob Zuma lanzó el lema del “capitalismo monopólico blanco” en 2017, en este texto se recupera la categoría analítica retomada por Saul y Leys en 1999 para enfatizar las lógicas del capitalismo racial impuestas en Sudáfrica por los gobiernos blancos antes del fin del *apartheid*. A pesar de esto, es importante mencionar que, en la actualidad, el concepto ha servido para ocultar los intereses de la burguesía negra, que reproducen las violencias y desigualdades impuestas por el capitalismo racial de la colonización. En ese sentido, aunque la categoría puede exagerar el alcance del control blanco y borrar los intereses de la élite negra en la época pos-*apartheid*, esta busca resaltar el hecho de que la raza tuvo y sigue teniendo un fuerte impacto sobre la política y economía sudafricana (Reddy, 2024).

la invasión de la República Neerlandesa por parte de las fuerzas revolucionarias francesas (Selby, 1973, pp. 34-35). Así, la injerencia europea sobre el sur de África transformaría las dinámicas sociopolíticas y económicas de las poblaciones, y aunque el discurso hegemónico planteó que la colonización era necesaria por la barbarie africana, “la llegada del hombre blanco [tanto de los holandeses como de los británicos] y su cierre de la frontera, condujo al único caso de verdadero salvajismo que se haya presentado” (Sparks, 1990, p. 10) en lo que ahora conocemos como Sudáfrica.

La colonización británica estuvo estrechamente relacionada con la extracción de minerales estratégicos, los cuales eran fundamentales para la producción capitalista del siglo XIX. De esa manera, el Estado colonial se estructuró bajo un esquema rentista, donde la exportación de minerales era la actividad central de la economía. En 1910, las comunidades afrikáners e inglesas declararon la independencia de la Unión Sudafricana. Esa “unidad blanca” excluyó a las poblaciones locales de las dinámicas políticas y económicas del país, pero mantuvo la dependencia económica frente al sujeto hegemónico del momento. En 1948, con la llegada del Partido Nacional de Sudáfrica al poder se institucionalizó la abyección con el establecimiento del sistema de segregación racial *apartheid*, el cual desplegó violencias estructurales, simbólicas, directas, territoriales y jurídicas, entre otras (Varela, 2019).

Desde la etapa colonial y hasta el fin del *apartheid*, las poblaciones negras fueron excluidas del poder político. Incluso, de acuerdo con la Geographical Research on War, Unified Platform (GROW^{up}, s. f.), las poblaciones negras sudafricanas fueron discriminadas prácticamente durante todo el siglo XX. Esta situación estuvo acompañada de múltiples violencias contra las poblaciones negras, reflejadas en afectaciones corporales, pobreza, desigualdades, despojo de tierras, discursos de odio, entre otros. A pesar de esto, a finales del siglo –como consecuencia de las protestas internas y de la presión internacional– inició una etapa de transición. De esta manera, a partir de 1995 las dinámicas de poder político cambiaron y la mayoría de los grupos socioculturales se convirtieron en socios del gobierno con una preeminencia de la comunidad xhosa hasta 2008 y de la zulú posteriormente (GROW^{up}, s. f.).

En abril de 1994 se realizaron las primeras elecciones democráticas en Sudáfrica, donde el Congreso Nacional Africano (ANC), grupo que había aglutinado la resistencia contra el *apartheid*, resultó ganador. Desde ese momento y hasta la actualidad, el ANC ha vencido en todos los comicios. Sin embargo, su porcentaje de aceptación ha disminuido en gran medida por la reproducción de las desigualdades bajo la dirección de una élite negra (GROW^{up}, s. f.). En las elecciones de 2024, el ANC fue electo con el 40% de los sufragios; la Alianza Democrática (DA) obtuvo el 22%; el uMkhonto weSizwe (M.K.), el 15%, y el

Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) cerca del 10% (Electoral Commission of South Africa, 2024). El DA es un partido liberal que tiene apoyo, principalmente, de poblaciones afrikáners, mientras que los otros dos son partidos nacionalistas negros. El M.K., como partido político, se creó solo un año antes de las elecciones de 2024. No obstante, consiguió el tercer lugar, debido, en gran medida, a que su líder político es Jacob Zuma, quien fue presidente de Sudáfrica de 2009 a 2018. Durante su gobierno, Zuma fue acusado de corrupción y violación. En 2018, fue expulsado del ANC. A pesar de eso, se ha consolidado como uno de los personajes más carismáticos del país. Esta situación muestra la crisis política que enfrenta el ANC, que no solo está perdiendo votos del electorado, sino que también se enfrenta a rompimientos y crisis internas (Savage, 2024).

Por su parte, el EFF, que fue creado en 2013 y había participado en una elección previa, mantuvo el porcentaje de votos. Este partido surgió de la crítica a la corrupción gubernamental. Para este partido, la masacre de Marikana fue un punto de inflexión. Marikana es una provincia en el noreste de Sudáfrica donde trabajadores de la minera de platino Lonmin fueron asesinados por las fuerzas policíacas sudafricanas. Esta minera mantenía estrategias de acumulación del periodo del *apartheid*, en las que la explotación y polarización racial “fijaba” a las poblaciones negras en torno a un complejo minero cuyo fin era controlar a los trabajadores y aumentar la producción (Schultz, 2020,

p. 54). Los mineros de Marikana fueron asesinados en 2012 por las fuerzas de seguridad del gobierno por exigir mejores condiciones salariales y de trabajo, lo que evidencia el vínculo entre las grandes corporaciones y los intereses gubernamentales, incluso con los gobiernos pos-*apartheid*. En ese marco, el EFF direccionó sus críticas contra el gobierno sudafricano. Además, el partido ha demandado la devolución de las tierras acaparadas por las poblaciones blancas, por lo que ha exigido la expropiación de dichas tierras, el reparto agrario entre las poblaciones negras y la nacionalización de la industria, entre otras (Mancebo, 2023, p. 10).

El gobierno sudafricano ha procurado implementar algunas legislaciones y acciones políticas para mejorar las condiciones sociales, rechazar la discriminación racial y tener presencia a nivel internacional (Odubajo y Akinboye, 2017). Sin embargo, estos cambios no han generado una transformación profunda, porque el ANC no rompió con la lógica neoliberal al aceptar los parámetros impuestos por el capital financiero sudafricano y las instituciones de Bretton Woods (Bond, 2009, p. 77). “El proyecto del CNA, neoliberalismo tecnocrático combinado con los flujos de recursos, gestionados de modo clientelista, procedentes de gravosos e improductivos proyectos del Estado y con los acuerdos del Empoderamiento Económico Negro, ha exacerbado las distorsiones sectoriales de la economía sudafricana durante los últimos quince años” (Bond, 2009, p. 79).

Asimismo, el modelo rentista de la economía sudafricana ha generado lo que Arrighi y Saul (1973) denominaron “un crecimiento perverso”, el cual obstaculiza el desarrollo nacional por la salida de las riquezas extraídas, a pesar del crecimiento económico. De acuerdo con información del Banco Mundial, desde 2002 y hasta 2011, Sudáfrica experimentó un crecimiento significativo en su PIB, pasando de 129.09 a 458.2 miles de millones de dólares. Después de ese año, su PIB ha oscilado, sin alcanzar el pico de 2011, configurándose como la segunda mejor economía del continente. Sin embargo, aunque esta situación ha permitido que algunos indicadores sociales mejoren, como lo muestra el acceso a la electricidad, aún hay mucho por hacer.

El crecimiento sudafricano se ha basado, principalmente, en su vasta riqueza mineral. Además, Sudáfrica tiene un complejo militar industrial bien establecido, lo que le ha permitido posicionarse como una potencia regional y emergente importante a nivel mundial (Odubajo y Akinboye, 2017). A pesar de esto, la desigualdad racial sigue presente en el país. Por ejemplo, de los puestos de alta dirección, el 63,2% lo siguen ocupando poblaciones blancas, mientras que las negras solo concentran el 17%. En las empresas de Johannesburgo, por cada 100 directores ejecutivos, 78 son blancos y 14 negros. También, la brecha salarial racial persiste (Majavu, 2023, p. 211). De igual forma, la implementación de las políticas neoliberales, y la crisis global de 2007-2009,

han profundizado las desigualdades en el país (Smith, 2021). Desde el fin del *apartheid*, el gobierno sudafricano implementó el Black Economic Empowerment (BEE), cuyo objetivo era crear una clase capitalista y media negra (Majavu, 2023, p. 215). No obstante, la estrategia de acumulación internacional actual, basada en la internacionalización del capital y en la relocalización de la producción, ha acentuado el desarrollo desigual (Smith, 2021, p. 183). Así, aunque algunos sectores de la población negra se han beneficiado con las políticas del ANC, sobre todo la burguesía negra, la gran mayoría no lo ha hecho.

Los retos del país son numerosos, sin embargo, estos se tienen que entender en el contexto de las políticas neoliberales, pero también de la larga duración del sistema capitalista. Por otra parte, a pesar de los desafíos internos, es importante reconocer que Sudáfrica se ha convertido en un actor trascendental a nivel regional, pero también internacional. Esto es relevante porque, como se mencionó, los problemas internos de Sudáfrica no se pueden resolver sin cuestionar al sistema internacional en su conjunto. Además, en un mundo que tiende a la multipolaridad, la presencia de los poderes regionales va a ser fundamental para el diseño de nuevos ordenamientos. Sudáfrica ha sido un actor internacional primordial. Sin embargo, su presencia ha sido delimitada por el entorno estratégico diseñado por las grandes potencias. Por lo tanto, aunque su actuar a nivel internacional ha

sido activo, este no ha sido contrahegemónico.

Desde el fin del *apartheid*, este país se unió a la Comunidad de Desarrollo de África Austral (SADC), en la que ahora juega un papel muy relevante. Asimismo, Nelson Mandela se comprometió a cooperar en el sistema internacional y a respetar las instituciones globales. Incluso, durante ese periodo Sudáfrica fue sede de conferencias internacionales como la Conferencia de las Naciones Unidas sobre Comercio y Desarrollo, y se adhirió al Tratado de No Proliferación Nuclear (Mesquita y Seabra, 2020, p. 369). En los años posteriores, Sudáfrica tuvo un papel activo en la consolidación de la Unión Africana y en la Nueva Alianza para el Desarrollo de África (Nepad). De 2007 a 2008 fue miembro no permanente del Consejo de Seguridad de las Naciones Unidas (Mesquita y Seabra, 2020, p. 370). Además, Sudáfrica es el único miembro africano en el Grupo de los 20 y, desde la segunda década del siglo XXI, es parte de los BRICS (Odubajo y Akinboye, 2017, pp. 71-72), una asociación sumamente relevante para entender las reconfiguraciones sistémicas actuales.

SUDÁFRICA EN LOS BRICS+: POSICIONARSE EN UN MUNDO MULTIPOLAR

El acrónimo BRIC fue acuñado en 2001 por Jim O'Neill, economista del banco Goldman Sachs, con el objetivo de destacar el potencial y crecimiento económico de Brasil, Rusia, India y China

(Haibin, 2012) como potencias emergentes. Años después, estos países se articularon políticamente. La primera reunión tuvo lugar en 2006, pero fue hasta 2009, tras la crisis financiera, que este acrónimo adquirió un significado más profundo, transformándose en un bloque político-económico que desde entonces busca crear mecanismos de colaboración entre economías emergentes y reequilibrar la balanza de poder mundial para construir un mundo multipolar que rompa con el orden internacional impuesto tras la Segunda Guerra Mundial (Delcourt, 2024).

La crisis financiera de 2008, desencadenada por el colapso de la burbuja inmobiliaria estadounidense, deslegitimó a las instituciones dominantes de la gobernanza mundial ante los países de la periferia. Este evento no solo reveló las deficiencias estructurales del sistema financiero internacional, sino que también impulsó a las naciones de los BRIC a identificar y desarrollar áreas comunes de cooperación multilateral (Delcourt, 2024). En 2009, los BRIC realizaron su primera cumbre oficial en Rusia para discutir cuestiones como la reforma de las estructuras financieras internacionales, la lucha contra el cambio climático y la seguridad alimentaria, entre otras. De esta manera, la reunión mostró el interés de los países miembros por entender los principales problemas del sistema internacional y buscar soluciones a ellos, aunque estas propuestas estuvieron enmarcadas en las lógicas del sistema capitalista.

Desde su surgimiento, los BRIC tuvieron un alto grado de legitimidad por parte de algunos sectores de la periferia, pues fueron vistos como un bloque comprometido con un orden multipolar más justo. Además, en sus narrativas promovían la emancipación de estos países de la dependencia y explotación neocoloniales (Optenhögel, 2024). Para ese momento, Sudáfrica ya había explorado posibles áreas de cooperación, pero fue después de la primera cumbre que el gobierno sudafricano, encabezado por el presidente Jacob Zuma, inició una activa campaña para ser invitado a la alianza. Zuma solicitó la adhesión mediante una carta, y para 2010 llevó a cabo una campaña diplomática con cada miembro de los BRIC con el fin de que el país fuera aceptado (Forero, 2025, p. 6).

Los esfuerzos diplomáticos tuvieron éxito en 2010, cuando Sudáfrica recibió una invitación formal por parte de China para participar en la tercera cumbre del bloque, programada para abril de 2011 en Sanya. Morasso (2013) señala que resulta comprensible que China haya anticipado esta invitación en su calidad de país anfitrión por los intereses estratégicos que el país asiático tiene en África (p. 12). Sin embargo, la incorporación de Sudáfrica no solo se puede entender a partir de los intereses de China, ya que desde 2003, este país había establecido vínculos con Brasil e India, a través de su participación en el foro de diálogo del Fondo para la India, el Brasil y Sudáfrica para el Alivio de la Pobreza y el Hambre (IBSA), que tenía

como propósito fortalecer la cooperación Sur-Sur y articular posiciones comunes frente a las asimetrías del orden global, particularmente en temas como la aplicación restrictiva de los derechos de propiedad intelectual, la liberalización del comercio agrícola y el papel hegemónico del G8. Además, el foro constituía un espacio para promover el derecho internacional y abogar por la reforma de las Naciones Unidas y otras instituciones multilaterales, con el fin de lograr una representación más equitativa de los países periféricos en los organismos de decisión global (Delcourt, 2024). De esta manera, aunque la propuesta cuestionaba las relaciones de poder, no constituía una respuesta contrahegemónica.

Los motivos que impulsaron a Sudáfrica a buscar su incorporación al bloque BRIC respondieron a una estrategia multidimensional que abarca objetivos políticos y económicos. Por un lado, el país aspiraba a posicionarse como representante de los intereses africanos, que en realidad son los intereses de los jefes de Estado, las corporaciones y los aliados de la élite (Bond y García, 2015), en una plataforma global conformada por potencias emergentes, reconociendo que la ausencia del continente en dichos espacios lo mantendría vulnerable a los intereses económicos de las grandes potencias.

En este sentido, Sudáfrica buscaba aprovechar su presencia en el bloque como un mecanismo de legitimación de su estatus como potencia regional. Al igual que otras naciones periféricas,

el país sudafricano compartía la aspiración de transformar el orden internacional, percibido como inequitativo y dominado por las potencias occidentales tradicionales. Finalmente, la integración al bloque representaba una oportunidad estratégica para fortalecer las relaciones Sur-Sur y diversificar sus vínculos diplomáticos y económicos más allá de los socios tradicionales (Morasso, 2013).

La incorporación de Sudáfrica en los BRICS generó profundas implicaciones tanto para la configuración del bloque como para el país. Para el bloque, el ingreso sudafricano reforzó significativamente la percepción de los BRICS como una alianza representativa en comparación con otras, como el G7. Sudáfrica añadió peso a la noción de multipolaridad, uno de los objetivos comunes del bloque. En la cumbre de 2011, el presidente Zuma afirmó lo siguiente: “nuestra presencia aquí subraya el cambio del orden mundial. El concepto original de los BRICS ha evolucionado hasta convertirse en una fuerza diplomática multisectorial que promueve cambios cualitativos y cuantitativos en la gobernanza global” (Zuma, 2011). En este sentido, Sudáfrica ha abogado por reformar el Consejo de Seguridad de la ONU, apoyando el Consenso de Ezulwini, que busca ampliar los asientos permanentes y no permanentes del Consejo (EFSAS, 2023, p. 9). Este ejemplo muestra, nuevamente, cómo la consolidación del país como potencia emergente no necesariamente implica su salida del ambiente

estratégico del sistema internacional o el impulso de una propuesta contrahegemónica.

Por otra parte, con la inclusión de Sudáfrica, los BRICS se consolidaron como una alianza con presencia en los cuatro continentes principales: Asia, Europa, América y África, lo que amplió considerablemente su alcance geopolítico. A su vez, esta expansión posicionó a Sudáfrica como un enlace fundamental entre los países de los BRICS y el continente africano, facilitando su acceso a los vastos recursos naturales de la región. Esta dimensión resulta particularmente relevante considerando la presencia de minerales estratégicos en territorio sudafricano, tales como el platino, el oro y los diamantes, cuya explotación ha constituido históricamente un pilar de la economía nacional y un factor de interés para los socios comerciales internacionales. Cabe destacar que para 2024, Sudáfrica se convirtió en el mayor socio comercial de China en el continente africano, con transacciones comerciales por un valor de 52,4 mil millones de dólares en bienes comercializados (The Africa Report, 2025).

A nivel nacional, esta adhesión ha mejorado la posición e influencia de Sudáfrica como una importante economía emergente, teniendo acceso a economías más consolidadas como la de China y la India, y contribuyendo a diversificar sus relaciones comerciales, lo cual es fundamental para reducir la dependencia hacia las economías occidentales. Para 2022, el 21% del comercio global de Sudáfrica provenía de

los BRICS, más del 14% de sus exportaciones iban al bloque, y alrededor del 30% de las importaciones provenían de ellos. Las principales áreas de inversión extranjera directa han sido la minería, la industria automotriz, el transporte, las energías limpias, los servicios financieros y las tecnologías de la información (Gobierno de Sudáfrica, 2023).

De acuerdo con el Gobierno de Sudáfrica (2023), la cooperación no solo ha sido económica, pues los BRICS han brindado beneficios en otros campos. Por ejemplo, se ha planteado la posibilidad de impulsar una cooperación en materia de energía, que permita la recuperación energética de Sudáfrica; se han financiado más de 100 proyectos de investigación multilaterales; se ha profundizado la cooperación para luchar contra el covid-19; se ha colaborado en el desarrollo de la tecnología espacial; se han creado plataformas para compartir mejores prácticas, conocimientos y experiencias, incluyendo el uso tecnología de código abierto, entre otras. No obstante, “los países BRICS promueven un modelo económico extractivista y de altas emisiones de carbono que amenaza con amplificar la catastrófica destrucción ambiental y social del capitalismo avanzado” (Bond y García, 2015, p. 3). En todos los casos, se han reforzado las lógicas de reproducción del sistema capitalista.

Actualmente, la presencia de Sudáfrica en los BRICS+² le ha permitido

ampliar su proyección internacional, al continuar posicionando la agenda del continente y la suya a nivel global. Por ejemplo, en la declaración de los BRICS+ de la cumbre de 2023, el bloque reafirmó su apoyo a la Agenda 2063 de la Unión Africana y a los esfuerzos de África hacia la integración, incluida la operacionalización de la Zona de Libre Comercio Continental Africana. En su momento, también apoyaron la inclusión de la Unión Africana en el G20 (Gobierno de Sudáfrica, 2023). La influencia de Sudáfrica también se refleja en la adhesión de la República Árabe de Egipto y la República Democrática Federal de Etiopía como miembros plenos de los BRICS, lo que aumenta la representación de África dentro del grupo (Naranjo, 2023). Sin embargo, a pesar de la retórica de democratización del orden mundial, las acciones de los BRICS+ a menudo refuerzan las estructuras capitalistas globales, intensificando las desigualdades y la explotación. Ejemplo de ello son la creación del Nuevo Banco de Desarrollo y el Acuerdo de Reserva Contingente, que reafirman la hegemonía del dólar y relegitiman la globalización (Bond y García, 2015).

Como se mencionó anteriormente, al pertenecer a los BRICS+, Sudáfrica ha demostrado, al menos discursivamente, su interés por construir un orden mundial multipolar que desafíe las estructuras hegemónicas existentes y promueva un sistema económico y

2 En 2023, el bloque se amplía al incluir a Arabia Saudí, Egipto, Emiratos Árabes Unidos, Etiopía, Irán y Argentina.

político global más equitativo (Wang, 2012), facilitando su proyección a nivel internacional y el fortalecimiento de su activismo. Whitford (2024) destaca que un elemento esencial del rol sudafricano dentro de los BRICS+ reside en su énfasis en la diplomacia multilateral y el diálogo como herramientas fundamentales para abordar los conflictos globales. Sobre este aspecto, el país ha aprovechado estratégicamente su posición dentro del bloque para pronunciarse contra las injusticias que suceden a nivel internacional, como en el caso del genocidio en Gaza.

Este posicionamiento evidencia el potencial y la relevancia de que las naciones emergentes se involucren activamente en la configuración y aplicación de las normas internacionales, desafiando así la hegemonía tradicional de las potencias occidentales en la definición de los estándares globales. Como señala Delcourt (2024), “no cabe duda de que el fenómeno BRICS simboliza el desplazamiento del centro de gravedad económico [y político] mundial del Norte al Sur”, ejemplo de esto es el crecimiento económico de países no occidentales como China. Sin embargo, no se debe confundir la búsqueda de un orden internacional multipolar con la construcción de un orden que cambie las estructuras de poder que lo mantienen, pues la cooperación entre los países del BRICS+ continúa anclada al modelo de acumulación capitalista que desde la construcción del Estado sudafricano ha contribuido al despojo y la desigualdad. Los países del BRICS+

no constituyen una alternativa radical al orden mundial capitalista; por el contrario, en muchos casos lo consolidan y expanden, pues contribuyen al mantenimiento del régimen neoliberal global, reproduciendo sus contradicciones estructurales de desigualdad y explotación, tanto hacia adentro como en su relación con otros Estados (Bond y García, 2015).

A pesar de esto, mediante esta estrategia Sudáfrica ha logrado proyectar una imagen de credibilidad e influencia significativa en el escenario internacional, contribuyendo a su consolidación como potencia regional. En este contexto, resulta particularmente significativo el liderazgo de Sudáfrica al impulsar la denuncia contra Israel por el genocidio en Gaza ante la Corte Internacional de Justicia (CIJ), posicionándola como un actor relevante en la defensa del derecho internacional humanitario. Sin embargo, es importante cuestionar si la reconfiguración geopolítica impulsada por los BRICS+ resulta suficiente para denunciar el genocidio, o si, por el contrario, su limitada capacidad contrahegemónica restringe tanto al bloque, como a Sudáfrica, en la posibilidad de colocar la dignidad humana en primer plano.

¿POR LA DIGNIDAD DE LOS PUEBLOS OPRIMIDOS?: LA DENUNCIA CONTRA ISRAEL

La presencia de Sudáfrica a nivel internacional no solo se ha concentrado en su participación en los BRICS+.

Recientemente, Sudáfrica exigió el respeto y mantenimiento del derecho internacional con la solicitud que presentó ante la Corte Internacional de Justicia (CIJ). Sin embargo, aunque la denuncia es un instrumento importante que cuestiona las injusticias del sistema internacional, esta no se ha acompañado de acciones directas que contribuyan a materializar la demanda de justicia.

El 29 de diciembre de 2023, la República de Sudáfrica denunció al Estado de Israel por no prevenir el genocidio en contra del pueblo palestino e, incluso, por instigarlo. Para ese momento, el genocidio contra las poblaciones gaza-tíes se había intensificado con ataques directos desde octubre, pero la denominada sociedad internacional había sido omisa a las violencias y violaciones del derecho internacional cometidas por Israel. En la solicitud, Sudáfrica resaltó su responsabilidad para prevenir el genocidio al señalar que “Sudáfrica también es muy consciente de su propia obligación, como Estado parte en la Convención sobre el Genocidio, de prevenir el genocidio” (CIJ, 2023, p. 8).

En la denuncia, Sudáfrica describió los actos cometidos por Israel como genocidio, porque las acciones contra las poblaciones palestinas han sido parte de un plan calculado cuya intención es eliminarlas. En el documento, Sudáfrica no ignoró las violencias cometidas por ciertos sectores palestinos. De hecho, criticó y rechazó la agresión perpetrada por Hamas y otros grupos armados palestinos contra civiles israelíes y de

otras nacionalidades el 7 de octubre de 2023. En este punto, se podría señalar que Sudáfrica reforzó la idea de una violencia irracional por parte de Hamas. Sin embargo, en el documento se recuperaron los antecedentes de la violencia israelí, los cuales permiten comprender la reacción violenta del grupo palestino, ya que, como diría Fanon (2018), en ciertos contextos, la violencia es la única alternativa para liberarse del yugo colonial, lo que permite entender, y no necesariamente justificar, los actos violentos de los pueblos subordinados.

Por otra parte, a pesar de criticar el ataque de Hamas en octubre de 2023, Sudáfrica menciona que “ningún ataque armado contra el territorio de un Estado, por grave que sea, ni siquiera un ataque que implique crímenes atroces, puede justificar o defender el incumplimiento de la Convención para la Prevención y la Sanción del Delito de Genocidio de 1948” (CIJ, 2023, p. 7). De esta forma, Sudáfrica rechazaba categóricamente el alegato israelí que pretendía justificar las acciones genocidas contra las poblaciones gaza-tíes. Además, Sudáfrica historizó las agresiones genocidas desde una perspectiva de más larga duración, rechazando el planteamiento israelí que aseguraba que todo había iniciado con los actos violentos cometidos por Hamas en octubre de 2023. Para la República de Sudáfrica:

Es importante situar los actos de genocidio en el contexto más amplio de la conducta de Israel hacia los palestinos durante

sus 75 años de *apartheid*, sus 56 años de ocupación beligerante del territorio palestino y sus 16 años de bloqueo de Gaza, incluidas las graves y continuas violaciones del derecho internacional asociadas a ellas, las graves violaciones del Cuarto Convenio de Ginebra, y otros crímenes de guerra y crímenes contra la humanidad. (CIJ, 2023, p. 8)

Esto es sumamente relevante porque, en general, el despliegue de la violencia en los países periféricos pocas veces se historiza. La omisión de esas historias contribuye a naturalizar y normalizar los procesos violentos en espacios periféricos (Mamdani, 2003), por lo que historizar es fundamental para entender las diversas acciones políticas y contribuir a la implementación de justicia social y epistémica. Sudáfrica no solo historizó y denunció los actos genocidas cometidos por Israel, demostrando su papel como potencia emergente, sino que también compartió la evidencia de sus acusaciones, entre las que destacan: las matanzas masivas contra civiles, la destrucción de las condiciones de vida (la vivienda, los servicios de salud, acceso a agua y alimentos, etc.), el desplazamiento forzado y las restricciones al ingreso de la ayuda humanitaria, los discursos de odio de los funcionarios israelíes, entre otras.

Las repetidas declaraciones de representantes del Estado israelí, incluso al más alto nivel, por parte del Presidente, el Primer Ministro y el Ministro de Defensa israelíes expresan la intención genocida. Dicha intención también puede inferirse adecuadamente de la naturaleza y la conducta de la operación militar de Israel en Gaza,

teniendo en cuenta, entre otras cosas, que Israel no ha proporcionado ni garantizado alimentos, agua, medicinas, combustible, refugio ni otro tipo de ayuda humanitaria esencial para el pueblo palestino asediado y bloqueado, lo que le ha llevado al borde de la hambruna [...] los ataques militares de Israel contra Gaza, que han supuesto el bombardeo sostenido durante más de 11 semanas de uno de los lugares más densamente poblados del mundo, obligando a evacuar de sus hogares a 1.9 millones de personas, es decir, al 85% de la población de Gaza [...] Israel ha matado ya a más de 21,110 palestinos, entre ellos más de 7,729 niños -y otros 7,780 están desaparecidos, presuntamente muertos bajo los escombros- y ha herido a más de 55,243 palestinos, causándoles graves daños físicos y mentales. Israel también ha arrasado vastas zonas de Gaza, incluidos barrios enteros, y ha dañado o destruido más de 355,000 hogares palestinos, junto con extensas zonas de tierras agrícolas, panaderías, escuelas, universidades, empresas, lugares de culto, cementerios, yacimientos culturales y arqueológicos, edificios municipales y judiciales e infraestructuras críticas, como instalaciones de agua y saneamiento y redes eléctricas, al tiempo que perpetraba un ataque implacable contra el sistema médico y sanitario palestino. (CIJ, 2023, p. 9)

Para el 7 de mayo de 2025, Naciones Unidas (2025) calculaba que había más de 52.600 personas palestinas asesinadas por los ataques israelíes implementados desde octubre de 2023. Es decir, después de la denuncia sudafricana y de la exigencia del alto al fuego, Israel continuó con las agresiones y el número de muertes –que no son solo números, sino complejas historias de vida– prácticamente se incrementó en un 150%. ¿Cuántas vidas se

hubieran salvado si la llamada sociedad internacional hubiera respondido al llamado sudafricano que exigía el respeto del derecho internacional y de las vidas humanas? Por otro lado, a pesar de la relevancia de la denuncia hecha por Sudáfrica frente a la CIJ, habría que señalar que el país tampoco ha implementado acciones directas para contribuir a detener el genocidio. Por ejemplo, el gobierno no ha roto relaciones diplomáticas ni establecido un boicot contra Israel, debido a que un tercio del comercio que Israel tiene con los países de África subsahariana se concentra en Sudáfrica. Asimismo, Sudáfrica tiene una comunidad judía muy influyente política y económicamente, y esta es muy cercana al gobierno de Israel (Phillips, 2024).

Así, aunque la denuncia es moralmente necesaria, el gobierno sudafricano no ha estado dispuesto a implementar acciones más contundentes por sus intereses político-económicos. Esto demuestra que Sudáfrica no diseña una propuesta contrahegemónica y que se mantiene en los límites impuestos por las grandes potencias. A pesar de esto, es importante reconocer el carácter simbólico de la solicitud, ya que en esta Sudáfrica también recuperó las narrativas subalternizantes y humillantes utilizadas por sectores israelíes para continuar con las masacres. En el documento, la República de Sudáfrica cuestionó y rechazó las maneras en las que los funcionarios y las figuras públicas de alto nivel israelíes nombran a los palestinos como “hijos

de la oscuridad” o “animales humanos” (p. 160). En Sudáfrica, estas narrativas remiten a las prácticas coloniales que vivieron las poblaciones sudafricanas tanto durante los procesos de colonización como en el *apartheid*. El *apartheid* se estructuró a partir de discursos raciales que subordinaron y violentaron a las poblaciones por el color de la piel (“hijos de la oscuridad”) y en donde lo negro se relacionó con el salvajismo (“animales humanos”), porque la modernidad escinde a los seres humanos de la animalidad a partir de la racialización (Fanon, 2018; Quijano, 2014; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020; Tamale, 2020).

Además, la denuncia sudafricana no solo recuperó las acciones cometidas contra las poblaciones palestinas, sino también contra periodistas (palestinos o no), quienes intentaban mostrar al mundo lo que estaba ocurriendo en Gaza. Samir Amin argumentaba que los países centrales mantienen su dominio a partir de cinco monopolios: 1) el de la tecnología, 2) el financiero, 3) el del acceso a los recursos naturales del planeta, 4) el de los medios y las comunicaciones y 5) el de las armas de destrucción en masa (1996, pp. 7-9). En ese sentido, el asesinato de periodistas se vincula de manera estrecha con el cuarto monopolio: la manipulación política a través del control de los medios de comunicación, lo cual se relaciona, a su vez, con otra acción enunciada en la solicitud sudafricana: los apagones contra las infraestructuras de telecomunicaciones (CIJ, 2023, p. 72), ya que estos no han sido fortuitos, sino que

responden a una estrategia que pretende asegurar el dominio de la narrativa israelí y no permitir que el mundo se entere de las atrocidades cometidas por su régimen.

En el documento, Sudáfrica también exigió el cese de todos los actos genocidas, así como la eliminación de las restricciones impuestas a la ayuda humanitaria. Para eso, propuso el establecimiento de medidas provisionales, entre las que destaca: suspender las operaciones militares de manera inmediata.

El Estado de Israel adoptará medidas eficaces para impedir la destrucción y garantizar la conservación de las pruebas relacionadas con las acusaciones de actos comprendidos en el ámbito del artículo II de la Convención para la Prevención y la Sanción del Delito de Genocidio; a tal fin, el Estado de Israel no actuará para denegar o restringir de otro modo el acceso de las misiones de investigación, los mandatos internacionales y otros órganos a Gaza para ayudar a garantizar la conservación y retención de dichas pruebas. (CIJ, 2023, p. 192)

En la defensa del pueblo palestino, Sudáfrica destacó su historia de resistencia contra el *apartheid*: “Debido a la dolorosa experiencia pasada de Sudáfrica con un sistema de *apartheid*, esto nos insta a [...] tomar medidas de conformidad con el derecho internacional” (CIJ, 2023, p. 10). No obstante, Sudáfrica argumentó que la denuncia no solo fue interpuesta por tratarse de una experiencia similar o por empatía, sino por su compromiso con el derecho internacional y su liderazgo diplomático

para que las violencias cometidas en las periferias sean visibilizadas, resaltando su papel como potencia regional. Argelia, Bolivia, Brasil, Chile, Colombia, Comoras, Cuba, Djibouti, Egipto, Irlanda, Jordania, Líbano, Libia, México, San Vicente y las Granadinas, Eslovenia, España, Turquía, Venezuela y Zimbabwe son países que se han sumado a la demanda. Por su parte, países de Europa occidental –como Alemania, Francia y Reino Unido– y Estados Unidos se han opuesto a ella.

A pesar de la negativa de países tan poderosos como los mencionados anteriormente, y de que muchos otros no se han posicionado, la solicitud sudafricana resonó a nivel internacional. Incluso, no es casual que en el documento que ingresó el gobierno sudafricano se haya recuperado la reunión extraordinaria de los BRICS del 21 de noviembre de 2023, donde el presidente sudafricano, Cyril Ramaphosa, mencionó que el bloqueo de la ayuda en Gaza equivalía a un genocidio. En la reunión enunciada en la solicitud, los países participantes reiteraron su apoyo a las iniciativas regionales e internacionales orientadas a conseguir un cese inmediato del fuego, garantizar la protección de la población civil y facilitar la provisión de asistencia humanitaria (Chahed, 2023). Posteriormente, en la Cumbre de Kazán de 2024, los países BRICS+ reafirmaron su apoyo hacia Palestina, manifestando una profunda preocupación por la escalada de violencia del régimen israelí (Alqarout, 2025).

Los ministros de Asuntos Exteriores de los BRICS+ resaltaron su rechazo a cualquier intento de desplazar o expulsar forzosamente al pueblo palestino de su tierra. También expresaron preocupación por el continuo desprecio de Israel por el derecho internacional, la Carta de la ONU, las resoluciones de la ONU y las órdenes judiciales. Aunado a ello, los BRICS+ reafirmaron su respaldo a la admisión plena de Palestina como miembro de las Naciones Unidas y reiteraron su compromiso irrevocable con la implementación de la solución de dos Estados, fundamentada en el derecho internacional y las resoluciones pertinentes del Consejo de Seguridad y la Asamblea General de la ONU, así como en la Iniciativa de Paz Árabe. Esta propuesta contempla el establecimiento de un Estado palestino soberano, independiente y viable dentro de las fronteras internacionalmente reconocidas en junio de 1967, con Jerusalén como capital, coexistiendo en condiciones de paz y seguridad con el Estado de Israel (Escobar, 2024).

Sin embargo, los pronunciamientos políticos de los BRICS+ han demostrado ser insuficientes para detener las hostilidades en Gaza. Como bloque, no han implementado medidas coercitivas adicionales, tales como sanciones económicas, embargos comerciales o restricciones diplomáticas, que complementen su discurso de apoyo al Estado palestino. Por lo tanto, resulta necesario analizar tanto los intereses subyacentes que impiden al bloque adoptar acciones más contundentes,

así como las limitaciones estructurales que restringen su capacidad de intervención. Además, como se mencionó, la denuncia sudafricana ha permitido que Sudáfrica se proyecte como una voz moral a nivel internacional resaltando su papel como potencia regional. Sin embargo, esta narrativa no se ha materializado en políticas directas por las repercusiones políticas y económicas, mostrando que el actuar de las potencias regionales queda anclado al diseño geopolítico de las grandes potencias.

Por otra parte, consideramos que el apoyo de otros países a la denuncia sudafricana ha sido limitado debido al fuerte control que tienen países como Estados Unidos en las decisiones políticas a nivel internacional. A pesar de esto, la denuncia sudafricana contra el Estado de Israel ha sido una afrenta al dominio imperial impuesto porque, con las reglas establecidas por los propios países centrales, Sudáfrica cuestionó tanto los actos cometidos por Israel, como la complicidad, el encubrimiento y la participación, tanto directa como indirecta (vendiendo armas, por ejemplo), de Estados Unidos, Alemania, Reino Unido, entre otros. Si reconocemos que la denuncia sudafricana no solo implicó la acusación contra Israel por los actos genocidas cometidos en los territorios ocupados de Palestina, sino que también cuestionó la utilización, a modo, del derecho internacional y de las instituciones liberales por parte de los sujetos dominantes, entonces podemos comprender una de las

razones por las cuales el gobierno estadounidense no ha dejado de criticar y hostigar al gobierno sudafricano con noticias falsas.

En enero de 2025, el presidente de Sudáfrica, Cyril Ramaphosa, anunció la promulgación de una ley que permitiría la expropiación de ciertas tierras sudafricanas. Una de las deudas históricas de la independencia sudafricana de 1994 ha sido la reforma agraria, ya que la injusta y desigual distribución de las tierras del periodo del *apartheid* se mantiene a pesar del fin de dicho régimen. De hecho, “la auditoría de tierras del gobierno revela que los blancos poseen el 72 por ciento del total de granjas y propiedades agrícolas de propietarios individuales; seguidos por los mestizos con el 15 por ciento, los indígenas con el 5 por ciento y los africanos con el 10 por ciento” (Majavu, 2023, p. 211). Además, las poblaciones blancas representan el 7% de la población total sudafricana, pero son quienes tienen los mejores estándares de vida (Micah, 2025, pp. 23-59).

En esta lógica, la iniciativa propuesta por Ramaphosa pretende hacer frente a las desigualdades impuestas por el sistema del *apartheid*, pero también diseñar estrategias que detengan la disminución de la aceptación social del partido gobernante. Sin embargo,

Donald Trump, con el apoyo de Elon Musk, han descontextualizado la iniciativa y la han proyectado como una estrategia genocida en contra de las poblaciones blancas afrikáners. Así, Estados Unidos utiliza el concepto “genocidio” a conveniencia, ya que mientras que en el caso palestino ha rechazado el uso del concepto a pesar de las pruebas, en Sudáfrica lo emplea sin cuestionamiento y con evidencias falsas. Retomar el concepto de genocidio para describir la criminalidad que está viviendo Sudáfrica de manera descontextualizada, es una manera de intentar disciplinar al gobierno sudafricano por atreverse a interponer la denuncia contra Israel.

En ese marco, Trump amenazó con suspender la ayuda estadounidense argumentando que la iniciativa respondía a políticas racistas en contra de las poblaciones blancas. Frente a las amenazas, el ministro de Recursos Minerales de Sudáfrica, Gwede Mantashe, señaló que si el país americano restringía el acceso al financiamiento, entonces ellos no proporcionarían minerales a Estados Unidos (Le Monde y AFP, 2025a)³. Más adelante, el 7 de marzo de 2025, Trump anunció que facilitaría el proceso de ciudadanía a las poblaciones campesinas sudafricanas que quisieran migrar a Estados Unidos

3 En este punto, vale la pena señalar que la familia de Musk es sudafricana y que su padre obtuvo ganancias de las minas de este país, lo que vincula la riqueza de Musk con el sistema del *apartheid* (McGreal, 2025). Esto nos remite nuevamente a los cinco monopolios descritos por Amin y a la forma en la que se estructuran.

por cuestiones de seguridad. Asimismo, sugirió la creación de un proceso de asilo para personas refugiadas afrikáners (Le Monde y AFP, 2025b).

Bajo el discurso de que los agricultores afrikáners blancos estaban siendo asesinados, en mayo de 2025 llegaron los primeros refugiados sudafricanos a Estados Unidos (Pager *et al.*, 2025). Esta acción ha generado muchas críticas por la forma tan expedita en la que se concedió el refugio bajo una falsa narrativa. Además, aunque los homicidios en Sudáfrica se han incrementado, estos no tienen una connotación racial. Incluso, la mayoría de los delitos que se comenten en las granjas son contra personas negras y no contra agricultores blancos (Pager *et al.*, 2025; Micah, 2025, pp. 01-42). La presencia de campesinos ricos y pobres en el espacio sudafricano es la forma en la que se ha desplegado el desarrollo capitalista en la agricultura (Shivji, 2009, p. 70), y esa es una de las principales causas de la criminalidad. De esta manera, no hay una violencia dirigida en contra de los granjeros por el hecho de ser blancos (Micah, 2025). Incluso, podemos afirmar que esta violencia está más vinculada con el eje de dominación de clase que con el racial.

En mayo de 2025, Trump recibió a Ramaphosa en la Oficina Oval. Ahí, el mandatario estadounidense mostró imágenes de una carretera con cruces a los costados, con el fin de “demostrar” el genocidio contra los campesinos blancos. Más adelante, se reveló que esta imagen no era actual y que

tampoco respondía a las acusaciones hechas por Trump. En la reunión de mayo, el presidente estadounidense también proyectó un video donde aparece Julius Malema (líder del EFF) cantando la canción “Kill the Boer”, lo cual no exhibe la postura del gobierno, que de hecho ha prohibido el uso de la canción (Green y Kanno-Youngs, 2025). Además, aunque algunos analistas cuestionan el uso de la canción en la actualidad, reconocen que esta es una canción de lucha contra el *apartheid* y que no es una incitación a un genocidio, sino una forma de rechazar la supremacía blanca que aún prevalece en el país (Micah, 2025). Así, las acusaciones injustificadas solo demuestran, desde nuestra perspectiva, la sanción ejemplar que Sudáfrica tendría que recibir por atreverse a cuestionar la hipocresía de los sujetos dominantes del sistema internacional, los cuales están violando, flagrantemente, el derecho internacional.

REFLEXIONES FINALES

El papel de Sudáfrica como potencia regional se explica principalmente por su crecimiento económico, su participación en alianzas internacionales, así como su liderazgo en la defensa de un orden internacional más justo. Si bien el crecimiento de la economía sudafricana ha permitido que el país sea atractivo para grandes potencias como China, facilitando su incorporación en los BRICS+, es necesario destacar que este crecimiento está basado en un modelo de desarrollo centrado

en la exportación de recursos naturales, el cual sigue arraigado en estructuras históricas de un capitalismo racial que actualmente se hacen evidentes con las desigualdades sociales, el despojo sistemático de tierras y la explotación laboral en sectores estratégicos como la minería.

El ingreso de Sudáfrica en los BRICS+ se debe a que el país funge como un enclave geopolítico de importancia fundamental para la alianza, ya que su participación ha facilitado el puente con el continente africano y reforzado la noción de multipolaridad. Esto, a su vez, ha permitido que Sudáfrica fortalezca su posición de influencia regional e internacional, lo cual ha contribuido a reducir, de manera relativa, su dependencia hacia las potencias occidentales. Esto ha permitido que el país adopte posturas más críticas frente a las injusticias globales y promueva un orden internacional más equitativo, pero siempre dentro de los márgenes impuestos por las grandes potencias del orden internacional. Un claro ejemplo es la denuncia presentada contra Israel ante la Corte Internacional de Justicia (CIJ) por el genocidio en Gaza, demostrando una postura comprometida con el derecho internacional, pero sin establecer políticas de acción directa para eliminar el genocidio.

A pesar de que Sudáfrica ha tenido un mayor margen de acción para implementar estas acciones, sigue siendo evidente el poder de potencias como Estados Unidos, que, a través de críticas y acusaciones infundadas, ha buscado

disciplinar al gobierno sudafricano por evidenciar el genocidio, las violaciones del derecho internacional y la hipocresía occidental. Este hecho demuestra que, si bien Sudáfrica ha aprovechado su posición como potencia regional emergente para denunciar crímenes de lesa humanidad, también ha sufrido las consecuencias de esa postura. Esto nos lleva a reflexionar sobre los intereses que subyacen en el silencio, ¿qué estrategias podrían permitir a la periferia exigir un orden internacional más justo? ¿Cómo desafiar el poder de países que históricamente los han condicionado? Estas preguntas reflejan la necesidad de pensar en los cambios que se necesitan para promover la multipolaridad y un sistema internacional justo, en un contexto de competencia hegemónica, y Sudáfrica ha dado algunas pinceladas para conseguirlo.

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Sudáfrica, la voz del Sur en el tema palestino, 1994-2024

Mariana Casanova Roque*
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RESUMEN

¿Por qué Sudáfrica presentó una demanda por genocidio contra Israel ante la Corte Internacional de Justicia a raíz de los ataques en Gaza, iniciados en 2023? El objetivo de este artículo es explicar, bajo el enfoque teórico del realismo neoclásico, la evolución de la política exterior de Sudáfrica hacia el tema palestino durante los gobiernos pos-*apartheid* de Nelson Mandela, Thabo Mbeki, Jacob Zuma y Cyril Ramaphosa (1994-2025). Las capacidades de poder material relativas de Sudáfrica, como potencia emergente dentro de un sistema internacional en transformación, inciden en la formulación de su política exterior solo después de ser filtradas

por factores del ámbito interno. Dentro de esos factores, las preferencias de los liderazgos son esenciales para explicar el posicionamiento sudafricano ante el tema palestino.

Palabras clave: Sudáfrica; política exterior; tema palestino; realismo neoclásico.

South Africa, the voice of the South on the Palestinian issue, 1994-2024

ABSTRACT

Why did South Africa file a genocide case against Israel at the International

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Recibido: 15 de junio de 2025 / Modificado: 12 de septiembre de 2025 / Aceptado: 18 de septiembre de 2025

Para citar este artículo:

Casanova Roque, M. y Tawil Kuri, M. (2025). Sudáfrica, la voz del Sur en el tema palestino, 1994-2024. *Oasis*, 43, 171-192.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18601/16577558.n43.08>

Court of Justice following the 2023 attacks in Gaza? This article aims to explain the evolution of South Africa's foreign policy toward the Palestinian issue from 1994 to 2025, under the post-apartheid governments of Nelson Mandela, Thabo Mbeki, Jacob Zuma, and Cyril Ramaphosa, using the theoretical framework of neoclassical realism. As an emerging power in a shifting international system, South Africa's relative material power capabilities influence the formulation of its foreign policy only after being mediated by domestic factors. Among these factors, leadership's preferences are critical in explaining the South African position on the Palestinian issue.

Keywords: South Africa; foreign policy; palestinian issue; neoclassical realism.

INTRODUCCIÓN

Las tensiones entre Palestina e Israel se agudizaron el 7 de octubre de 2023, cuando el movimiento nacionalista islamista palestino de resistencia, Hamás –organización calificada como terrorista por Israel, Estados Unidos y otras potencias occidentales– lanzó un ataque inédito contra la población israelí tras penetrar la zona fronteriza. La respuesta de Tel Aviv fue inmediata y desproporcionada. Desde entonces, el gobierno israelí no ha cesado los bombardeos contra la población civil palestina y ha bloqueado la entrada de ayuda humanitaria a Gaza.

Ante lo que organismos internacionales califican como genocidio, diversos Estados dieron a conocer sus posturas oficiales. En tal sentido, destacó el posicionamiento del gobierno de Sudáfrica, que no solo expresó preocupación por la devastadora escalada de tensiones y confirmó su apoyo a la causa palestina, sino que también presentó una demanda ante la Corte Internacional de Justicia (CIJ), el 29 de diciembre de 2023, por actos de Israel con un presunto carácter genocida.

El objetivo de este artículo es explicar la evolución de la política de Sudáfrica ante el tema palestino entre 1994 y 2024. Bajo el enfoque teórico del realismo neoclásico, se analiza la conjugación de los factores tanto externos como internos (políticos, económicos, sociales e ideológicos) que han incidido en la formulación de las políticas hacia la cuestión palestina por parte de los gobiernos de Nelson Mandela, Thabo Mbeki, Jacob Zuma y Cyril Ramaphosa.

El argumento central es que las capacidades de poder material relativas de Sudáfrica, como potencia emergente dentro de un sistema internacional en transformación, inciden en la formulación de su política exterior solo después de ser filtradas por factores del ámbito interno. Dentro de esos factores, las preferencias de los liderazgos son esenciales para explicar la actitud de Pretoria ante el tema palestino.

El artículo, bajo un enfoque interpretativo, se sustenta en el análisis de fuentes primarias, principalmente

declaraciones oficiales del gobierno sudafricano e intervenciones de los jefes de Gobierno y de los titulares de Relaciones Internacionales y Cooperación. De igual modo, se basa en la revisión de artículos periodísticos sobre la reconstrucción de hechos y artículos académicos que vinculan la teoría de las Relaciones Internacionales con el análisis de política exterior.

POTENCIAS EMERGENTES: SUDÁFRICA

El concepto de potencia emergente se utiliza para referirse no solo a aspectos económicos, sino también políticos, sociales y culturales. Para que un Estado alcance esa condición no basta con ser una potencia regional con determinados recursos materiales, sino que debe ser capaz también de influir en la agenda global o, al menos, ocupar un lugar destacado en la política internacional. Clarisa Giaccaglia (2017, p. 433) lo define como:

... aquel Estado que sobre la base de significativas capacidades materiales desarrolla un creciente activismo internacional en ámbitos multilaterales, tanto en su entorno regional más próximo, como en sucesivas y simultáneas negociaciones globales. Asimismo, se autopercibe y es percibido por otros agentes como diferente tanto de las restantes unidades estatales (pequeñas o iguales), como de las grandes potencias tradicionales.

Dentro de los poderes medios emergentes se incluyeron Brasil, India, China y Sudáfrica, aunque actualmente la

inclusión de China es cuestionada por su nivel de desarrollo que logra desafiar a Estados Unidos en distintas áreas de las relaciones internacionales. Estos países incrementaron sus niveles de actuación a escala global, sobre todo con la creación del Foro de Diálogo India-Brasil-Sudáfrica (IBSA) en 2003 y luego en el marco de los BRICS (2010). Algunas de sus principales reivindicaciones han sido la pertenencia al Sur, la lucha contra la pobreza y la desigualdad y el respeto por la soberanía de los Estados.

Sudáfrica ha consolidado su presencia económica y militar en África, al tiempo que se ha erigido como mediador en la solución de conflictos, como constructor de instituciones –entre ellas, la Unión Africana (UA) y su estrategia económica New Economic Partnership for the African Development (Nepad)– y como representante de África en las negociaciones internacionales. En las últimas décadas, ha ocupado el puesto de miembro no permanente del Consejo de Seguridad de las Naciones Unidas (CSNU) en varias ocasiones (2007-2008, 2011-2012 y 2019-2020).

APROXIMACIÓN TEÓRICA: EL REALISMO NEOCLÁSICO

El enfoque teórico del realismo neoclásico, forma más novedosa de la larga tradición de pensamiento político realista, tiene la virtud de reincorporar al Estado en el debate sobre la política exterior. Esta corriente sostiene que el comportamiento internacional de los

Estados no puede ser explicado exclusivamente a partir del poder, las capacidades y el interés nacional, sino que deben tomarse en cuenta también los contextos nacionales específicos dentro de los cuales se formulan e implementan las políticas exteriores.

De acuerdo con Mijares (2015, p. 588), los realistas neoclásicos otorgan importancia a la estructura internacional en tanto particular distribución de poder en el sistema, consideran a la política exterior como variable dependiente y a los complejos procesos de política interna como variables intervinientes. Este enfoque ofrece explicaciones sobre la política internacional sin dejar de lado las causas regionales y domésticas de la política exterior.

Los realistas neoclásicos otorgan primacía a las capacidades materiales relativas de los Estados dentro del sistema internacional, pero admiten que las respuestas estatales se ven afectadas por una amplia gama de factores políticos internos y de toma de decisiones como, por ejemplo: las percepciones, los motivos, las tradiciones, las identidades políticas, las instituciones nacionales, la ideología de los actores políticos y la relación del Estado con su sociedad (Kaarbo, 2015, p. 203).

La teoría del realismo neoclásico representa el mejor esfuerzo por construir un puente entre el estudio de la política internacional y la comprensión de los factores domésticos que, junto a los sistémicos, determinan la política exterior. La novedad de este artículo consiste en que, al centrarse

en los líderes individuales, sus interpretaciones e ideologías, genera nuevas perspectivas sobre los factores que impulsan las decisiones de política exterior de una potencia emergente.

En cada apartado de este artículo se analiza cómo los liderazgos políticos sudafricanos (Mandela, Mbeki, Zuma y Ramaphosa) interpretaron las presiones sistémicas y sus respectivos contextos nacionales, dando como resultado posturas particulares ante el tema palestino entre 1994 y 2024. Ese periodo se caracteriza por la transición de un sistema dominado por Estados Unidos a uno multipolar, en el que la legitimidad del liderazgo estadounidense se erosiona a causa de la invasión a Irak (2003), la crisis financiera global de 2008-2009 y el rápido ascenso de potencias emergentes, sobre todo en Asia.

NELSON MANDELA: UN NUEVO PARADIGMA EN LA POLÍTICA EXTERIOR SUDAFRICANA (1994-1999)

Entre 1989 y 1994, las presiones externas contra el régimen del *apartheid* y la desaparición del comunismo como fuerza internacional, así como factores internos, entre ellos, la reducción del producto interno bruto (PIB) y la crisis de gobernabilidad, propiciaron la transición democrática en Sudáfrica (Guelke, 1996, p. 99). La minoría blanca en el poder, al frente del National Party (NP), desarrolló transformaciones en el sistema político, mediante negociaciones con el Congreso Nacional Africano

(ANC - African National Congress). Este partido encabezó una alianza con otras fuerzas políticas anti-*apartheid*: South African Communist Party (SACP) y Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu).

El líder indiscutible de la alianza entre el ANC, SACP y Cosatu fue Nelson Mandela. Liberado en 1990, después de pasar 27 años en prisión, Mandela gozaba de autoridad moral, y era reconocido por su empatía con el pueblo y sus habilidades para la comunicación. Durante la transición a una democracia multirracial, Mandela se centró en integrar a los exiliados y cuadros de las filas del ANC con la masa heterogénea que había luchado contra el *apartheid* en el terreno y en lidiar con la resistencia del poder blanco y sus bases de apoyo.

En las elecciones de abril de 1994, el ANC ganó con el 62% de los votos y puso fin al régimen del *apartheid* (South African Government, 2025). Su alianza con SACP y Cosatu mantuvo la centralidad de las iniciativas políticas, pero se constituyó un gobierno de unidad nacional para facilitar una transición pacífica hacia la democracia. Estuvo integrado por el ANC, el NP –que luego se constituyó en oposición política en 1996– y el Inkatha Freedom Party. Al llegar al poder, Mandela se enfocó en la reconciliación para la construcción de la nación; su visión consistía en una *rainbow nation* (nación arcoíris), donde las diferencias eran consideradas una fortaleza y no una fuente de división.

Después de más de cuatro décadas de agresiones y de explotación

del sistema del *apartheid*, el primer gobierno multirracial en Sudáfrica implementó un nuevo paradigma en su política exterior. La nueva proyección internacional del país giró en torno al prestigio de la figura de Nelson Mandela, su interpretación de los asuntos internacionales y sus convicciones personales. Según Le Pere (2014, p. 38), entre 1994 y 1999, el dominio y las declaraciones de Mandela sobre cada asunto importante en política exterior eclipsaron el papel del gabinete y del Parlamento en la toma de decisiones.

Bajo la guía de Mandela, la política exterior sudafricana fue diseñada con un enfoque profundamente ético y moralista. La defensa de los derechos humanos se convirtió en el centro de la estrategia internacional del país. Mandela (1993, p. 88) señaló: “Sudáfrica no será indiferente a los derechos de los otros. Los derechos humanos serán la luz que guiará nuestros asuntos exteriores”. Otros principios establecidos fueron el respeto al derecho internacional, la democracia, la paz, la justicia y el desarme, sobre todo en África.

Los Estados africanos habían comenzado a cooperar más entre ellos para enfrentar desafíos comunes tras el fin de la Guerra Fría y la desaparición de la ayuda estadounidense y soviética, como lo evidencia la creación de Southern African Development Community (SADC) en 1992. No obstante, el poder de Sudáfrica era presenciado con recelo por parte de los líderes de Zimbabue, Mozambique y Angola. Pretoria decidió avanzar con cautela

en su política exterior para ganarse la confianza de los líderes y Estados regionales, y fomentar la cooperación (Burgess, 2021).

En tal sentido, Sudáfrica logró algunos éxitos diplomáticos tempranos como la reversión de un golpe militar en Lesoto en la segunda mitad de 1994. Ese mismo año, los líderes sudafricanos intervinieron ante sus homólogos mozambiqueños para persuadirlos de seguir adelante con las elecciones multipartidistas y completar con éxito la misión de mantenimiento de la paz de Naciones Unidas. Sudáfrica también se integró a la Organización de la Unión Africana (OUA) y a la SADC y, para 1999, había establecido relaciones diplomáticas con todos los Estados africanos.

El principio clave establecido por Mandela de defensa de los derechos humanos no solo se evidenció en las relaciones de Sudáfrica con los países africanos, sino también en el apoyo a otras causas del mundo como la lucha por la autodeterminación del pueblo palestino. Después de su liberación de prisión, el líder sudafricano se reunió con Yasser Arafat y declaró: “hay muchas similitudes entre nuestra lucha y la de la OLP. Vivimos bajo una forma única de colonialismo en Sudáfrica, así como en Israel”. Este mensaje se amplificó en el Día Internacional de Solidaridad con el Pueblo Palestino en 1997, cuando Mandela afirmó: “nuestra libertad está incompleta sin la libertad de los palestinos” (Bishku, 2023).

Cuando el ANC llegó al poder, en Sudáfrica existían esperanzas de que

israelíes y palestinos estuvieran encaminados a lograr una paz histórica y una coexistencia duradera entre dos Estados. La Conferencia de Paz en Madrid, que reunió por primera vez a todas las partes involucradas en el conflicto árabe-israelí en octubre de 1991, había abierto el camino para la firma de los acuerdos de Oslo. En ese contexto, Mandela, motivado por la experiencia sudafricana de transición pacífica, invitó al presidente israelí Ezer Weizmann y al líder palestino Yasser Arafat a su toma de posesión, y les pidió que resolvieran sus diferencias pendientes.

A la vez que promovía una política exterior moralista, Nelson Mandela era consciente de la necesidad de insertar al país en un sistema económico globalizado y ampliar las relaciones exteriores bilaterales. En esta etapa, Sudáfrica se incorporó a organizaciones internacionales como Naciones Unidas, el Movimiento de Países No Alineados (MNOAL), el Fondo Monetario Internacional (FMI) y el Banco Mundial. Como parte del esfuerzo por diversificar sus relaciones económicas, el gobierno de Mandela desarrolló los vínculos con Estados Unidos e Israel.

En un contexto internacional marcado por la supremacía del poder económico y militar de Estados Unidos, Pretoria normalizó las relaciones con esa nación. El presidente sudafricano realizó una visita a Estados Unidos en 1994, la cual fue reciprocada por el presidente Bill Clinton en 1998. En 1995, ambos gobiernos crearon una Comisión Binacional para coordinar la

cooperación en áreas como educación, salud y tecnología.

Sudáfrica también desarrolló relaciones constructivas con Israel. En 1995, el ministro de Relaciones Exteriores, Alfred B. Nzo, realizó una visita oficial a Israel y firmó un acuerdo por el que se establecía una Comisión Conjunta de Cooperación. Además, la embajada sudafricana en Tel Aviv albergó una de las 44 oficinas exteriores del Departamento de Comercio e Industria para promover las exportaciones y la inversión extranjera en el país africano.

Como se aprecia hasta aquí, el realismo neoclásico nos permite centrar la atención en el estilo de liderazgo y el enfoque reconciliador de Nelson Mandela para explicar su intención simultánea de diálogo con Israel y de solidaridad con Palestina, en un clima internacional marcado por cierto espíritu de entendimiento entre árabes e israelíes. El líder sudafricano, tras años de lucha contra el colonialismo en Sudáfrica, manifestó su apoyo invariable para poner fin también al colonialismo en Palestina.

THABO MBEKI: ENTRE LA DEFENSA DE LOS DERECHOS HUMANOS Y LAS NECESIDADES DE DESARROLLO (1999-2008)

La elección de Thabo Mbeki como sucesor de Nelson Mandela, en junio de 1999, consolidó el gobierno del ANC. Hijo de un destacado dirigente del ANC, Mbeki se graduó de Economía en Reino Unido y participó activamente en

la lucha contra el *apartheid* desde el exilio. Aunque su estilo reservado y poco carismático contrastaba con el de Mandela, Mbeki se consolidó como un hábil negociador y estrategia durante el periodo de transición democrática.

Una vez en el cargo de presidente, la fuerza impulsora de la estrategia internacional de Thabo Mbeki fue el compromiso con el Renacimiento Africano (*Africa renaissance*). Este movimiento reivindicaba los ideales de los movimientos de liberación africana y buscaba alcanzar la paz, el desarrollo sostenible y un mejor nivel de vida para las personas en África. Bajo la dirección de Mbeki, Pretoria apoyó la agenda de paz y la reconstrucción posconflicto en países como Burundi, Libia, República Democrática del Congo y Zimbabue.

Con el objetivo de propiciar la construcción de alianzas en el continente, sin dejar de ser sensible a la percepción de que Sudáfrica buscaba convertirse en una potencia hegemónica dominante, el gobierno de Mbeki impulsó el lanzamiento de New Economic Partnership for the African Development y desempeñó un papel importante en la fundación de la Unión Africana (UA), organización continental que sustituyó a la OUA y de la cual fue su primer presidente en 2002.

Como se ha señalado, Thabo Mbeki dio continuidad a los principios y las políticas a favor de la paz y los derechos humanos establecidos por Mandela; sin embargo, su estilo de liderazgo y estrategias fueron diferentes. Según William Gumede (2007, pp. 62-81), mientras

Mandela se distinguió por liderar con el ejemplo, priorizando la reconciliación nacional, el compromiso y la unidad, el liderazgo de Mbeki adoptó una postura más pragmática orientada a transformar la economía del *apartheid*.

Una iniciativa relevante en ese sentido fue la Black Economic Empowerment (BEE), lanzada en 2003 para incentivar la venta de acciones y empresas a personas negras, y así corregir las desigualdades económicas. No obstante, esta política derivó en un aumento de la desigualdad intrarracial y tuvo profundas implicaciones en la vida política del país. La nueva élite empresarial negra se apropió de recursos estatales a través del aparato político del ANC, lo que generó una intensa lucha faccional, la expansión de redes clientelares y fraudes electorales.

Aunque el gobierno de Mbeki logró, con sus medidas, sostener un crecimiento económico superior a 3% entre 2001 y 2008, estos resultados no fueron suficientes para revertir las tendencias de pobreza, desempleo y desigualdad (Seekings, 2013, p. 1). Adicionalmente, la gestión del VIH/sida constituyó un punto crítico de su administración, caracterizada por una política errática y negacionista que agudizó los efectos de la epidemia. Todo ello llevó a un incremento de las tensiones entre el ANC, y sus aliados Cosatu y SACP, los cuales percibían desatendidas las demandas

de los sectores populares y de la clase trabajadora.

En ese contexto de problemas socioeconómicos y tensiones políticas internas, los vínculos comerciales y las inversiones entre Sudáfrica y Estados Unidos aumentaron gracias al establecimiento del African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA)¹ en 2000. Washington comprometió, además, más de 50 millones de dólares entre 2004 y 2009 para el manejo y la prevención del VIH en Sudáfrica (Underwood, 2008, p. 10). Paralelamente, las relaciones Sur-Sur ganaron cada vez más espacio como lo muestra la inserción de Sudáfrica en el Foro de Cooperación China-África (2000)

A pesar del desarrollo de las relaciones de cooperación con Estados Unidos, ante los atentados del 11 de septiembre de 2001 y la subsecuente “guerra global contra el terrorismo”, Mbeki reconoció el derecho de Washington de perseguir a los inculpadados, pero resaltó la importancia de no desviar la atención de las necesidades de desarrollo de África, de alcanzar una paz duradera en Medio Oriente, y de erradicar la pobreza y el subdesarrollo en todo el mundo (Guimón, 2002, p. 102).

Luego, tras la guerra desatada contra Irak en la primavera de 2003, el viceministro sudafricano de Asuntos Exteriores, Aziz Pahad, rechazó las afirmaciones de Colin Powell en el Consejo de

1 El AGOA otorga acceso preferencial al mercado estadounidense a países de África subsahariana.

Seguridad sobre la presencia de Al-Qaeda en Irak y la amenaza de Saddam Hussein (van Wyk, 2014, p. 194). Pretoria expresó su desaprobación hacia una guerra carente de legitimidad, unilateral y violatoria de los principios del derecho internacional.

La “guerra global contra el terrorismo” y la campaña en Irak desplazaron el tema palestino de la agenda de Estados Unidos en Medio Oriente. El fracaso de la Cumbre de Camp David (julio de 2000) y la visita provocadora de Ariel Sharon a la Explanada de las Mezquitas desencadenaron un nuevo ciclo de violencia en los primeros años del siglo XXI con la segunda Intifada. Como respuesta, Sudáfrica condenó el uso agresivo y desproporcionado de la fuerza por parte de los israelíes y reafirmó el derecho del pueblo palestino a la autodeterminación.

En 2002, Pretoria presentó una declaración jurada ante la CIJ en la que afirmaba que el muro de separación, denominado como muro de *apartheid*, y los asentamientos exclusivamente judíos eran ilegales y violaban el derecho internacional². Además, la canciller sudafricana, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, viajó a Ramallah, junto con una delegación del MNOAL, para reunirse con Yasser Arafat en señal de solidaridad con el pueblo de Palestina.

Basado en su trayectoria en la resolución de conflictos en África, Thabo Mbeki se sumó a los intentos por mediar en las conversaciones de paz entre Israel y Palestina con la Iniciativa de Paz de Spier (2002). La iniciativa incluyó visitas a Sudáfrica de miembros del partido israelí Likud y de exgenerales de las Fuerzas de Defensa de Israel, así como visitas a Israel de funcionarios del gobierno sudafricano. Sin embargo, no se logró ningún resultado político tangible.

La denominada Hoja de Ruta del “Cuarteto” (Estados Unidos, la Unión Europea, Rusia y las Naciones Unidas), presentada en 2002 y que definía etapas conducentes a la creación de un Estado palestino, quedó paralizada tras la victoria de Hamás en las elecciones locales y legislativas de 2006. Estados Unidos y Europa calificaron a Hamás como un grupo terrorista y se negaron a tener contactos con su gobierno. Israel, por su parte, se mantuvo actuando de manera unilateral, gracias al apoyo recibido de Washington.

En ese nuevo escenario, con el objetivo de desempeñar un papel activo en el tema palestino, el gobierno de Mbeki desarrolló relaciones con facciones palestinas ajenas a la OLP. Pocos días después de que el líder de Hamás, Ismail Haniyeh, fuera elegido primer

2 Según Israel, el muro de separación consistía en una barrera de seguridad necesaria para detener atentados terroristas y proteger a su población. Organizaciones internacionales, como la CIJ, denunciaron que el muro violaba el derecho internacional y, en realidad, estaba diseñado para anexionar territorio palestino, aislar a sus comunidades y hacer inviable la creación de un Estado palestino.

ministro de la Autoridad Palestina en 2006, Mbeki lo invitó a Sudáfrica, aunque su visita no llegó a materializarse. A principios de 2008, el vicepresidente del ANC, Kgalema Motlanthe, visitó Damasco y se reunió con los líderes de algunas facciones palestinas, entre ellas Hamás.

Al mismo tiempo, los lazos bilaterales entre Sudáfrica e Israel se estrecharon con la visita de Ehud Olmert, viceprimer ministro y ministro de Comercio e Industria de Israel, en 2004. En ese marco, ambos gobiernos firmaron el Acuerdo sobre Protección y Promoción de Inversiones. Como resultado, entre 2005 y 2012, el comercio bilateral aumentó anualmente en casi 7% (Jee-nah, 2024, p. 7). La relación también se desarrolló en las áreas de agricultura y defensa, sobre todo con la visita de una delegación del Ministerio de Defensa sudafricano a Israel en junio de 2005.

El mayor acercamiento entre Pretoria y Tel Aviv no se efectuó sin el rechazo de la opinión pública en Sudáfrica. La visita de Ehud Olmert ocurrió en medio de protestas nacionales que exigían la aplicación de sanciones contra Israel. De igual modo, Cosatu y SACP exigieron que el gobierno sudafricano suspendiera las relaciones diplomáticas con Israel tras la invasión al Líbano en 2006.

Hasta aquí se aprecia que la figura de Thabo Mbeki, como continuador del compromiso ético y reconciliador iniciado por Mandela, intentó mediar en las negociaciones de paz entre Israel y Palestina, y fomentar los intercambios

con facciones palestinas de relevancia en el escenario político. No obstante, su estilo de liderazgo (variable interviniente según el realismo neoclásico) fue más pragmático por lo que, ante las necesidades de desarrollo nacional, Mbeki exploró las oportunidades de cooperación con Israel, aun en medio de la persistencia de la violencia en Medio Oriente y del rechazo de la opinión pública.

JACOB ZUMA: UNA MIRADA AL SUR
(2009-2018)

Jacob Zuma, caracterizado por su relación cercana y empática con el pueblo, asumió la presidencia de Sudáfrica en 2009. Sin haber recibido una educación formal, Zuma se unió al ANC en 1959 y, en 1962, integró su brazo militar, *Umkhonto we Sizwe* (Lanza de la Nación), por lo que participó activamente en la lucha armada contra el régimen del *apartheid*.

Fue encarcelado en Robben Island durante una década y, tras su liberación, continuó las actividades conspirativas desde el exilio. A pesar de su reconocida trayectoria, el ascenso de Zuma al poder estuvo marcado por reiteradas acusaciones de corrupción, fraude y abuso de poder, las cuales evidenciaron las tensiones al interior del ANC.

Al iniciar la presidencia de Zuma, los problemas de desempleo, pobreza y desigualdad se habían agravado como resultado de la crisis financiera global de 2008-2009, lo que provocó numerosas protestas sociales. A ello se

sumó la violencia xenófoba al interior del país, la corrupción y el clientelismo³. Lo anterior, llevó a la pérdida del liderazgo ético-moral del ANC y fortaleció la oposición política.

El partido Democratic Alliance (DA), fundado en 2000, obtuvo la victoria en Western Cape en 2009, y se ha mantenido gobernando en esa provincia desde entonces⁴. Reportes de la prensa revelaron que Nathan Kirsch, propietario de la compañía israelí Magal Security Systems, fue el principal financiador para la creación de la DA (Rapanyane, 2020, p. 2). Además, en 2013, fue creado el partido Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), autodefinido como un movimiento de emancipación económica y marxista-leninista, que se escindió del ANC.

Tras asumir el cargo en 2009, Zuma enfatizó la necesidad de un cambio en la dirección de la política exterior para garantizar que respondiera a los imperativos nacionales de generar crecimiento económico y oportunidades de empleo, mejorar el desarrollo social y humano, y combatir la delincuencia y la corrupción. Su gobierno puso énfasis en la cooperación Sur-Sur, el multilateralismo y la diplomacia económica. Como hecho relevante, Sudáfrica se incorporó al grupo BRICS en

2010. Además, estableció asociaciones estratégicas integrales con China en 2010, que se convirtió en su mayor socio comercial, y con Rusia en 2013.

En el ámbito regional, el gobierno de Jacob Zuma continuó con la promoción de la Agenda Africana. Contribuyó a la resolución de disputas en Madagascar, Costa de Marfil, Zimbabue, Sudán del Sur, Mali, República Centroafricana y Lesoto. Para buscar la estabilidad continental y limitar la presencia de potencias extranjeras en la resolución de conflictos, impulsó la entrada en vigor de la Carta Africana sobre Democracia, Elecciones y Gobernabilidad (2012), así como el establecimiento de la Capacidad Africana para la Respuesta Inmediata a las Crisis (2013) en la UA.

En su discurso del Estado de la Nación (2009), Jacob Zuma mencionó, junto con su disposición de asistir en la resolución de conflictos en África, su apoyo a la resolución pacífica del conflicto entre Israel y Palestina. Sudáfrica respaldó el informe de la Comisión de Derechos Humanos, que acusaba a Israel de violaciones del derecho internacional durante la Operación Plomo Fundido en Gaza (2008-2009), y, tras los ataques israelíes a los barcos de ayuda humanitaria con destino a Gaza, retiró a su embajador en Israel (junio de 2010).

3 En 2008, una ola de violencia contra inmigrantes —principalmente zimbabuenses, mozambiqueños y malauiés, dejó un saldo de aproximadamente 62 muertos, 670 heridos y miles de establecimientos saqueados o destruidos. Al año siguiente, alrededor de 3.000 extranjeros que vivían cerca de Ciudad del Cabo fueron expulsados de sus hogares (Otavio, 2021, p. 100).

4 La Democratic Alliance fue fundada como continuadora del Partido Demócrata, creado en 1989 por la minoría blanca en contra del *apartheid*.

Los miembros del gobierno de Zuma mantuvieron los intercambios políticos con las distintas facciones palestinas iniciados durante el mandato de Mbeki. El vicepresidente del ANC, Kgalema Motlanthe, viajó a Siria en 2010, donde se reunió con representantes de organizaciones políticas palestinas. Al año siguiente, Ebrahim Ismail Ebrahim, viceministro de Relaciones Internacionales y Cooperación, se reunió en Sudáfrica con Mustafa Barghouti, secretario general de la Iniciativa Nacional Palestina. Además, Sudáfrica apoyó la iniciativa diplomática presentada por la Autoridad Palestina (2012) para obtener el estatus de Estado observador no miembro en Naciones Unidas.

Ante los fuertes ataques israelíes contra la población palestina, como fue la Operación Pilar Defensivo (2012), el mantenimiento de vínculos cordiales de Sudáfrica con Israel se hizo cada vez más incompatible con el compromiso de Pretoria en materia de derechos humanos y la paz. En 2012, el comercio entre Sudáfrica e Israel alcanzó un pico de 1.190 millones de dólares y, al año siguiente, cayó a 871 millones (Jeenah, 2024, p. 10). La canciller Maite Nkoana-Mashabane reiteró en 2013 que “la lucha del pueblo palestino es nuestra lucha”, y anunció la decisión de limitar el contacto de altos dirigentes sudafricanos con el régimen israelí (Benjamin y Gruz, 2018, p. 185).

Jacob Zuma fue reelecto como presidente en los comicios de 2014, pero el ANC disminuyó en 15 sus escaños en el Parlamento. Por su parte, la DA

alcanzó 22% de los votos, convirtiéndose en el principal partido de oposición en Sudáfrica. Con menos de un año de creado, el EFF obtuvo 6% de los votos (BBC, 2014). En los años siguientes, el apoyo popular al ANC disminuyó aún más debido, en gran medida, a la poca credibilidad de Jacob Zuma como gobernante honesto. Los escándalos de corrupción que involucraban a Zuma con la familia Gupta, una de las más adineradas de Sudáfrica, popularizaron el término “captura del Estado” para referirse al uso del aparato y la propiedad estatal para beneficio personal.

La pérdida de legitimidad del ANC se puede explicar también por los problemas sociales y económicos, que incluían crecimiento mínimo del PIB, alto desempleo y pobreza generalizada. Según cifras del Banco Mundial, el desempleo creció hasta alcanzar 27% en 2017 y el crecimiento del PIB fue de 0,7% en 2016. Como resultado, el número de protestas sociales, que se situaba en un promedio de 82 anuales, se incrementó a un aproximado de 210 en 2016 (Staff reporter, 2016).

En esa situación de crisis política y socioeconómica, y en un contexto internacional marcado por el ascenso económico de China, que devino el mayor exportador global, y el fortalecimiento de su relación con Rusia (dos importantes socios de Sudáfrica), el gobierno de Zuma optó por mantener el papel moral internacional de su país, apoyar la causa palestina en foros multilaterales y condenar la política

apartheid de Israel, avalada por el gobierno de Barack Obama (2009-2017)⁵.

Durante el segundo mandato de Zuma, Sudáfrica intentó mediar en el conflicto en Gaza (2014) al designar dos enviados especiales. Pretoria mantuvo también los intercambios con las distintas facciones palestinas como lo muestra la visita del presidente de la Autoridad Palestina, Mahmúd Abbas en 2014, y de una delegación de Hamás en 2015, encabezada por su líder Jaled Meshal.

En contraposición, la visita de más alto nivel desde Israel fue la del director general del Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, Dore Gold, en 2016. La oposición política, por su parte, mantuvo intercambios con autoridades israelíes. El líder de la DA, Mmusi Maimane, se reunió con el Primer ministro Benjamín Netanyahu en 2017.

La política de Zuma hacia Palestina-Israel estuvo desafiada por las presiones internas de la sociedad sudafricana que, dividida en un bando proisraelí y otro pro-palestino, intentaba incidir en el posicionamiento del gobierno en direcciones opuestas. En el centro del bando proisraelí se encontraba la gran mayoría de la población judía, representada por South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) y

South African Zionist Federation (SAZF). El apoyo a Israel también provino de cristianos, quienes fueron reunidos por la organización South African Friends of Israel (SAFI)⁶.

En el bando propalestino, el grupo más activo fue el movimiento Boicot, Desinversión y Sanciones (BDS Sudáfrica). Este movimiento encontró terreno fértil en un país marcado por la opresión del régimen del *apartheid*. BDS SA fue apoyado por sindicatos, asociaciones estudiantiles, artistas, la comunidad musulmana, miembros del SACP, Cosatu y el ANC, y algunos judíos agrupados en South African Jews for a Free Palestine.

El descontento de los sectores propalestinos en Sudáfrica se acrecentó tras la propuesta del presidente Donald Trump de reconocer a Jerusalén como la capital de Israel. En reacción, el ANC, en diciembre de 2017, adoptó una resolución para degradar la embajada de Sudáfrica en Israel a una oficina de enlace.

Durante los mandatos de Jacob Zuma, el sistema internacional consolidó su tendencia multipolar con el ascenso de China y su alianza con Rusia, países con los que Sudáfrica estrechó los vínculos, al tiempo que el liderazgo internacional de Washington, principal

5 El presidente Barack Obama acordó incrementar la ayuda militar estadounidense a Israel, de aproximadamente 30 mil millones de dólares a 38 mil millones anuales en 2016 (Gaouette, 2016).

6 Según el censo de 2022, la mayoría de los sudafricanos continúa perteneciendo a distintas variantes del cristianismo (85,3 %), mientras que otras creencias religiosas como el islam (1,6 %), tradicionales africanas (7,8 %), el hinduismo (1,1 %) y el judaísmo (0,1 %) siguen siendo minoritarias. (Department Statistics South Africa, 2023).

aliado de Tel Aviv, se vio deteriorado. De acuerdo con el realismo neoclásico, esta distribución del poder, sumada a la desaprobación de la opinión pública sudafricana hacia las acciones israelíes, incidió en que Zuma –cuya reputación había sido afectada por escándalos de corrupción– decidiera limitar los intercambios oficiales con Israel.

GOBIERNO DE CYRIL RAMAPHOSA (2018-2024): REVITALIZACIÓN DEL LIDERAZGO MORAL DE SUDÁFRICA

En las elecciones parlamentarias de 2019, el ANC obtuvo su menor margen de victoria desde 1994. Fue elegido Cyril Ramaphosa como presidente de Sudáfrica, una de las principales figuras opuestas al *apartheid* en el ámbito sindical. Como secretario general del ANC (1991-1997), Ramaphosa jugó un papel clave en las negociaciones para el fin del *apartheid* y fue uno de los principales artífices de la Constitución aprobada en 1996.

Después de ceder la Secretaría General, Ramaphosa se mantuvo vinculado al gobierno como uno de los diseñadores de la estrategia Black Economic Empowerment, gracias a la cual devino en un importante empresario sudafricano. Regresó en 2012 al primer plano de la política como vicepresidente del ANC y, en 2014, asumió el cargo de vicepresidente de la República.

Uno de los grandes retos políticos del ANC en esta etapa fue la lucha faccional, sobre todo tras el arresto del expresidente Jacob Zuma. La

fragmentación del ANC se cristalizó con la formación del uMkhonto weSizwe o Partido MK en diciembre de 2023, respaldado por Jacob Zuma. Aunque el Tribunal Constitucional dictaminó que el expresidente no podía volver a ocupar un escaño en el Parlamento, Zuma fue la imagen del nuevo partido en las elecciones de 2024. El Partido MK obtuvo 14,6% de los votos y desplazó al EFF como el tercer partido político más importante de Sudáfrica (Rubin y von Soest, 2024, p. 1).

El presidente Ramaphosa se enfrentó no solo a un ANC fragmentado, sino también a un país con alta tasa de desempleo, creciente desigualdad social, bajo crecimiento del PIB y limitada capacidad para expandir las inversiones en áreas sociales. Esta crisis se agravó con el impacto del covid-19. A finales de marzo de 2021, Sudáfrica tuvo la peor tasa de mortalidad a causa de la pandemia (880 muertes por millón) (Strategic Comments, 2021, p. viii). El desempleo aumentó de 29,1% en 2019 a 34,4% en 2021 (Müller, 2021, p. 3) y el PIB cayó 6,2% en 2020, según el Banco Mundial.

Los problemas socioeconómicos mencionados socavaron la confianza en las instituciones. En agosto de 2021, el Afrobarómetro publicó que solo 38% de los encuestados confiaba en el presidente y 27% en el Parlamento (Müller, 2021, p. 5). El descontento de la población se canalizó a través de protestas regulares y, además, tuvieron lugar actos violentos contra los migrantes. En 2019, ciudadanos sudafricanos

desataron una ola de violencia contra migrantes en Johannesburgo y, como consecuencia, alrededor de 600 nigerianos fueron repatriados (Aljazeera, 2019).

El contexto nacional descrito repercutió negativamente en la imagen internacional de Sudáfrica. Para enfrentar esos desafíos, al igual que Mbeki y Zuma, Ramaphosa priorizó la diplomacia económica, las alianzas estratégicas y el multilateralismo. China fue el principal socio comercial de Sudáfrica en 2022, con un intercambio que alcanzó los USD 34.157 millones. Estados Unidos ocupó la segunda posición con un comercio bilateral de USD 18.9932 millones de dólares (World Integrated Trade Solution, 2022).

Ante la invasión rusa a Ucrania en 2022, Pretoria se abstuvo de criticar a Rusia y atribuyó la responsabilidad del conflicto a la expansión de la OTAN. La cooperación militar entre Sudáfrica y Rusia continuó desarrollándose, y el presidente Cyril Ramaphosa estuvo al frente de la Misión de paz africana, que sostuvo encuentros con Volodímir Zelenski y Vladímir Putin en junio de 2023.

Como se aprecia, el gobierno de Ramaphosa ha defendido una arquitectura de seguridad global que no dependa solo del liderazgo estadounidense. Su estrategia internacional ha estado dirigida a enfrentar las problemáticas internas, al tiempo que rescata el liderazgo de Sudáfrica con una sólida dimensión moral y restaura su reputación internacional.

Ramaphosa enfatizó la necesidad de que Pretoria actuara a favor de los principios establecidos por Mandela en el pos-*apartheid*, en particular, la democracia, los derechos humanos y la resolución pacífica de conflictos. De igual modo, las ministras de Relaciones Internacionales y Cooperación durante el primer mandato de Ramaphosa, Lindiwe Sisulu y Naledi Pandor, recuperaron los principios de política exterior de la Sudáfrica pos-*apartheid*.

Sisulu expuso la necesidad de que Sudáfrica retomara su liderazgo, el cual había sido conquistado durante el gobierno de Mandela, cuando el país era visto como “una brújula moral y una voz de la razón en un mundo cada vez más dominado por intereses egoístas y estrechos” (Department of International Relations & Cooperation, 2018). Por su parte, Pandor, en una entrevista en 2002, declaró: “si decimos que estamos comprometidos con la libertad, los derechos humanos y la democracia, no nos referimos a un país o pueblo en particular. Nos referimos a todo el mundo” (Council on Foreign Relations, 2022).

En el continente africano, Pretoria continuó trabajando para mantenerse como actor relevante en la resolución de conflictos e impulsor del desarrollo económico. Como presidente de la UA (2020-2021) y con el objetivo de “silenciar las armas”, Sudáfrica dirigió esfuerzos para resolver las crisis en Libia, Sudán del Sur y la Gran Presa del Renacimiento de Etiopía.

En el ámbito económico, Sudáfrica se enfocó en lograr la entrada en vigor del Área de Libre Comercio resultante del Acuerdo Tripartito entre SADC, Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (Comesa) y East African Community (EAC). Otra iniciativa relevante fue la firma del Tratado de Libre Comercio Africano, que entró en vigor en 2019 y dio paso a la creación de la Zona de Libre Comercio Continental Africana (AfCFTA, por sus siglas en inglés), la mayor área de comercio del mundo desde la fundación de la Organización Mundial del Comercio (OMC).

Recuperar la posición moral de Sudáfrica en un orden internacional en rápida evolución significaba elegir sus posturas en política exterior sin ceder ante la presión externa, así como participar activamente en temas o eventos que se consideran desafiantes en el sistema internacional, como es el caso de la causa palestina.

En tal sentido, ante las represiones contra los palestinos que participaron en la Gran Marcha del Retorno en mayo de 2018, Sudáfrica retiró a su embajador en Israel. Con ello, Lindiwe Sisulu anunció que se había completado la primera etapa de la degradación de los vínculos con Israel, aprobada por el ANC en 2017, y que el embajador no sería reemplazado (Al manar, 2019).

Asimismo, tras la guerra en Gaza en 2021, avalada por el gobierno de Joe Biden, las denuncias por parte del gobierno sudafricano se intensificaron. En mayo de 2021, en una entrevista para France 24, el presidente Ramaphosa

declaró: “por la forma en que han negado los derechos de los palestinos, por la forma en que han bombardeado la zona, por la forma en que han desatado el terror, uno podría fácilmente caracterizarlo como un estado de tipo *apartheid*” (France 24, 2021). Sudáfrica también se opuso a que Israel fuera Estado observador dentro de la UA.

Al año siguiente de iniciada la guerra en Ucrania, el ataque de Hamás, en octubre de 2023, marcó el escenario político internacional. El Departamento de Relaciones Internacionales y Cooperación de Sudáfrica emitió una declaración que atribuyó el ataque a la continua ocupación ilegal de territorio palestino, la expansión de los asentamientos, la profanación de la mezquita de Al Aqsa y de los lugares sagrados cristianos, y la opresión del pueblo palestino; y anunció la disposición de Sudáfrica para compartir su experiencia en la mediación de conflictos.

Un segundo comunicado del Departamento, emitido el 13 de octubre, condenó las violaciones de las convenciones de Ginebra y el abandono del derecho internacional humanitario por parte de Israel en Gaza. No fue hasta el 14 de octubre que el Comité Ejecutivo Nacional del ANC, además de calificar como genocidas y atroces las acciones de Israel, condenó el asesinato de civiles por parte de Hamás. A pesar de esta denuncia, el posicionamiento de Sudáfrica a favor de la lucha palestina fue evidente.

En un mensaje en la red social X, Ramaphosa reiteró su solidaridad con

el pueblo palestino y replicó un video junto a otros miembros del ANC portando la *kufiya*⁷. Además, la canciller sudafricana, Naledi Pandor, sostuvo una llamada telefónica con el líder de Hamás, Ismail Haniyeh, para discutir el envío de ayuda humanitaria a Gaza.

Las relaciones entre Sudáfrica e Israel se deterioraron rápidamente. Muestra de ello fue la decisión anunciada por la ministra de la Presidencia, Khumbudzo Ntshavheni, el 6 de noviembre, de retirar a todos los diplomáticos sudafricanos de Tel Aviv. Las críticas del gobierno sudafricano a las acciones israelíes fueron recurrentes. Durante una visita a Qatar, Ramaphosa respondió a la prensa el 17 de noviembre de 2023: "Gaza se ha convertido en un campo de concentración donde se está cometiendo un genocidio" (Dash, 2024, p. 8).

Desde el punto de vista multilateral, Sudáfrica votó a favor de todas las resoluciones que se presentaron en Naciones Unidas que abordaron temas como el cese inmediato del fuego. El 17 noviembre, junto a Bangladesh, Bolivia, Comoras y Yibuti, presentó una solicitud ante la Corte Penal Internacional para determinar si personas israelíes podrían ser acusadas por los crímenes de genocidio, lesa humanidad y crímenes de guerra, y el día 21 de ese mes, organizó una reunión especial de los BRICS para abordar la ofensiva contra Gaza.

Poco después (29 de diciembre), Sudáfrica presentó una demanda ante la CIJ por las violaciones por parte de Israel de sus obligaciones en virtud de la Convención para la Prevención y la Sanción del Delito de Genocidio de 1948. Según la solicitud, "los actos y omisiones de Israel [...] son de carácter genocida, ya que se cometen con la intención específica requerida [...] de destruir a los palestinos de Gaza como parte del grupo nacional, racial y étnico palestino más amplio" (International Court of Justice, 2023).

Sudáfrica señaló también que Israel violó el principio de proporcionalidad en su respuesta a los atentados del 7 de octubre. Ante la negativa por parte de Israel de acatar las medidas provisionales emitidas por la Corte el 26 de enero de 2024, como la autorización de la entrada de ayuda humanitaria, y frente al agravamiento de la situación en la Franja de Gaza, Pretoria solicitó a la CIJ nuevas medidas (12 de febrero, 6 de marzo y 10 de mayo de 2024).

En Sudáfrica, la opinión pública respecto de la guerra estuvo marcada por dos tendencias. Por un lado, miembros de la comunidad judía (SAZF y SA-JBD) colgaron globos rojos en el puente Nelson Mandela de Johannesburgo para llamar la atención sobre los rehenes israelíes y pedir su liberación. También el partido de oposición, DA pidió al gobierno sudafricano que asumiera una postura más neutral. Sin embargo, por

7 La *kufiya* es un pañuelo tradicional árabe, comúnmente de colores blanco y negro, que en Palestina se convirtió en un símbolo de identidad nacional y de resistencia frente a la ocupación.

otro lado, las movilizaciones de apoyo a Palestina fueron considerablemente superiores.

Miles de personas, organizadas por la Campaña de Solidaridad con Palestina, salieron a las calles de Ciudad del Cabo y Johannesburgo para protestar contra las acciones de Israel. También ocurrieron protestas frente al consulado de Estados Unidos en Johannesburgo y la embajada de Israel en Pretoria. El 21 de noviembre de 2023, el Parlamento sudafricano adoptó una resolución, presentada por el EFF, para cerrar la embajada de Israel en Sudáfrica y romper las relaciones diplomáticas, que no llegó a ser implementada por el gobierno.

En conclusión, tras la llegada de Cyril Ramaphosa al poder, las relaciones entre Pretoria y Tel Aviv se deterioraron aún más. En medio de un panorama internacional marcado por la consolidación de la alianza de los BRICS, y de un contexto interno de agudización de la crisis socioeconómica (pobreza, desempleo y desigualdad) y la crisis política (fragmentación del ANC y corrupción), la preferencia en política exterior de Ramaphosa, hábil estratega político, y de su Ejecutivo fue rescatar el liderazgo moral de Sudáfrica.

REFLEXIONES FINALES

Entre 1994 y 2024, Estados Unidos presencié una pérdida relativa de su liderazgo político y económico internacional a causa, entre otros factores, de incursiones militares arbitrarias en

países de Medio Oriente y de la crisis financiera global de 2008-2009. La erosión de la legitimidad estadounidense abrió el camino para la consolidación de un sistema multipolar, en el que los países del Sur, que históricamente ocuparon una posición de subordinación dentro del sistema internacional, promovieron nuevas alianzas políticas. Dentro de esta categoría, resaltan las potencias emergentes, agrupadas en el BRICS en 2010, para ganar mayor influencia en el orden político y económico internacional.

En el sistema internacional de la pos-Guerra Fría, los gobiernos sudafricanos pos-*apartheid*, marcados por décadas de discriminación y explotación, se trazaron como objetivo liderar la promoción de la justicia internacional y los derechos humanos en el continente africano y en el mundo. Dentro de esa concepción, la defensa de la lucha del pueblo palestino por la autodeterminación y el respeto al derecho internacional humanitario en el marco del conflicto fue relevante para los gobiernos de Nelson Mandela, Thabo Mbeki, Jacob Zuma y Cyril Ramaphosa al frente del ANC.

Esta tendencia general de la política exterior sudafricana hacia el tema palestino responde a una ideología del partido en el poder entre 1994 y 2024. Sin embargo, las formas en que se han materializado las políticas han variado como resultado de las preferencias individuales de los mandatarios ante la evolución del sistema internacional y

del contexto político, económico y social interno.

Ante un clima de diálogo entre árabes e israelíes a inicios de la década de 1990, Nelson Mandela, líder principal de la lucha contra el *apartheid* en Sudáfrica, apostó por la reconciliación entre las partes involucradas en el tema palestino. Su espíritu en defensa de la justicia y los derechos humanos fue continuado por Mbeki, quien intentó mediar en las negociaciones de paz, sin cesar las denuncias contra las violaciones del derecho internacional cometidas por Israel durante la segunda Intifada.

Tras el desplazamiento del tema palestino dentro de las prioridades estadounidenses en Medio Oriente, y el abandono de la Hoja de Ruta, el gobierno de Mbeki apostó por establecer contactos políticos con las distintas facciones palestinas en aras de mantener cierto rol de liderazgo en la gestión de la crisis en la región. Jacob Zuma continuó esa política, pero se distanció cada vez más de Israel e impulsó la cooperación Sur-Sur tras la crisis económica de 2008-2009.

Los indicadores de desarrollo socioeconómico en Sudáfrica se deterioraron durante el segundo mandato de Zuma y tras la pandemia de covid-19. Para revitalizar el liderazgo internacional del país, sumido en una crisis también de carácter político, Ramaphosa ejecutó acciones en política exterior sin ceder a la presión externa, como lo mostró su posicionamiento ante la guerra rusa contra Ucrania. En el caso

palestino, el gobierno de Ramaphosa decidió liderar las denuncias en contra de las atrocidades de Israel y rescatar el rol del país como abanderado en la defensa de la justicia y los derechos humanos.

Aunque los países que integran el grupo de las potencias emergentes presentan aspiraciones internacionales comunes, sus distintos contextos nacionales determinan heterogeneidades en cuanto a las preferencias de sus liderazgos. Así, el liderazgo funciona como variable que filtra las presiones sistémicas y los factores nacionales, determinando políticas exteriores específicas en los casos analizados. Cada presidente sudafricano implementó, en función de sus convicciones, objetivos y estilo personal, un balance particular entre principios éticos, intereses económicos y posicionamiento estratégico.

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Etiopía y la asociación estratégica con China: entre la geopolítica y la cooperación en el siglo XXI

Carla Morasso*

RESUMEN

La República Democrática Federal de Etiopía es una potencia regional del Cuerno de África que se ha perfilado como un actor con presencia global en las últimas décadas. En este camino, para su política exterior ha sido central la profundización de los vínculos con la República Popular China. Por ello, el presente artículo se propone indagar sobre la densidad de la relación sino-etíope y su incidencia en la proyección internacional, particularmente a partir del comienzo del gobierno de Abiy Ahmed. De este modo, desde un enfoque cualitativo basado en el análisis

de fuentes bibliográficas y discursivas, se describirán las dinámicas de cooperación Sur-Sur –tanto en la dimensión político-diplomática como económico-comercial– y los intereses geopolíticos compartidos que contribuyeron a la construcción de una “all-weather strategic partnership”. Se señala que esta asociación estratégica fue un vector clave que propició la incorporación de Etiopía al foro BRICS+ y la posicionó como un socio clave de la Iniciativa de la Franja y la Ruta en África Subsahariana.

Palabras clave: Etiopía; China; asociación estratégica; cooperación Sur-Sur; geopolítica.

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Recibido: 24 de abril de 2025 / Modificado: 30 de agosto de 2025 / Aceptado: 11 de septiembre de 2025

Para citar este artículo:

Morasso, C. (2025). Etiopía y la asociación estratégica con China: entre la geopolítica y la cooperación en el siglo XXI. *Oasis*, 43, 193-216

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18601/16577558.n43.09>

Ethiopia and the strategic partnership with China: between geopolitics and cooperation in the 21st century

ABSTRACT

The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia is a regional power in the Horn of Africa and has emerged as a significant global player in recent decades. A key aspect of its foreign policy has been the strengthening of ties with the People's Republic of China. This article aims to analyze the depth of Sino-Ethiopian relations and their impact on Ethiopia's international standing, particularly during Abiy Ahmed's administration. Using a qualitative approach grounded in the analysis of bibliographical and discursive sources, we will examine the dynamics of South-South cooperation, in both the political-diplomatic and economic-commercial spheres, and the shared geopolitical interests that have contributed to the establishment of an "*all-weather strategic partnership*". This partnership has not only facilitated Ethiopia's inclusion in the BRICS+ forum but has also positioned it as a key partner in China's Belt and Road Initiative in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Keywords: Ethiopia; China; strategic partnership; South-South cooperation; geopolitics.

INTRODUCCIÓN

La República Democrática Federal de Etiopía es considerada como una potencia regional del Cuerno de África (Cardoso *et al.*, 2021; Cilliers *et al.*, 2015; Klobucista, 2020; Le Gouriellec, 2018; Maru, 2017), que en las últimas dos décadas ha demostrado un rápido crecimiento económico y ha desplegado una activa diplomacia regional e internacional. En particular, luego de la llegada al poder del primer ministro Abiy Ahmed, la proyección internacional etíope exhibió hechos importantes como la incorporación a la Iniciativa de la Franja y la Ruta (BRI, por sus siglas en inglés), la firma del acuerdo de paz con Eritrea en 2018, el anuncio de una Asociación Estratégica Para Todo Tiempo (AEPTT) con la República Popular China y la incorporación del país al foro BRICS+ en 2024.

La relación con China es posible comprenderla en el marco de los debates sobre la presencia del gigante asiático en África en el siglo XXI (Addis y Zuping, 2018; Cilliers, 2021; De Carvalho *et al.*, 2019; Alaminos Hervás, 2022; Lathinen, 2018; Lechini, 2013; Mthembu y Mabera, 2020; Wan Yan Chan, 2018; entre otros) y más particularmente en Etiopía (Addis y Zuping, 2019; Bharti, 2023; Chakrabarty, 2016; Endaylalu, 2018; Tárrosy, 2020; Tesfaye, 2020).

Son cuantiosos los estudios que entienden que el gobierno chino despliega un comportamiento "neocolo-

nialista” que alude a la búsqueda de respuesta a sus necesidades de materias primas a bajo costo y de expansión de mercados para sus manufacturas, en el otorgamiento de préstamos en condiciones ventajosas –motivo por el cual se habla de “trampa de la deuda”– y en la promoción de inversiones sin condicionamientos políticos –lo cual es interpretado como un estímulo a la corrupción, un apoyo a gobiernos autoritarios y un accionar irresponsable en materia medioambiental–.

En los cimientos de esta lectura se encuentra la idea de que en esta relación asimétrica principalmente se satisfacen los intereses chinos, y que los países en desarrollo africanos son receptores pasivos de las decisiones de la potencia. De acuerdo con Kuditchar (2024, p. 729), dicha relación de subordinación implica que los gobiernos no tienen capacidad para codificar y perseguir activamente objetivos estratégicos, toman a la ligera su estatus soberano, no son actores estratégicos racionales y padecen de una especie de amnesia histórica que no les permite descifrar los designios imperialistas.

Adicionalmente, que el foco en las investigaciones haya estado en la presencia de los emergentes en África, y especialmente de China, contribuyó a instalar una tendencia a marginar de los análisis a los actores africanos y ofrecer una reflexión limitada de sus motivaciones y consideraciones estratégicas (Soulé, 2020, p. 646).

Sin desconocer la situación asimétrica de poder, otras perspectivas

señalan la presencia de matices en la vinculación sino-africana y destacan que en el marco de la cooperación Sur-Sur se fomentan tanto los intereses chinos como los africanos. Así, la combinación de préstamos, inversiones y cooperación contribuye al desarrollo en los Estados africanos en función de sus propias metas. Por ello es que se destaca la capacidad de agencia africana entendida como la habilidad de negociar y acordar con actores externos en su propio beneficio (Chipaike y Knowledge, 2018, p. 1).

En tal sentido, dichos argumentos plantean que en las luces y sombras de la relación desigual también deben considerarse las estrategias y políticas de inserción internacional de los países africanos bajo la concepción de que son “artífices” de su devenir nacional y no solamente “victimas” u “observadores” en los términos que señala Van Wyk (2015, p.111).

En línea con estas perspectivas que enfatizan la cooperación y la capacidad de agencia africana, el presente artículo pretende contribuir a la comprensión de las dimensiones política, geopolítica y económica de la asociación estratégica entre China y Etiopía en el último quindenio, con particular énfasis en el período de gobierno de Abiy.

El punto de partida es la noción de “asociación” definida como un marco de colaboración flexible entre las partes, orientado por intereses compartidos y que procura facilitar la cooperación en diferentes temáticas (Strüver, 2016, p. 7). Esta categoría se complementa

con la caracterización que realiza Oviedo sobre las asociaciones estratégicas promovidas por China. De acuerdo con su interpretación, las mismas no están dirigidas contra terceros Estados y no implican necesariamente la firma de tratados militares; subrayan el rol sustancial de la economía en la relación; proponen la asociación de intereses a través de la cooperación; e impulsan acuerdos, tratados o declaraciones conjuntas donde se explicita la cláusula de “socio estratégico” (2006, p. 390).

Con base en el enfoque estado-céntrico de las relaciones internacionales, el trabajo se centra en la interacción entre los gobiernos nacionales para comprender sus vinculaciones¹ con base en el esquema implementado por Zhang (2024) para analizar las asociaciones sino-latinoamericanas. De esta manera, examina las siguientes dimensiones analíticas de la asociación estratégica: 1) los intercambios político-institucionales de alto nivel; 2) los intereses y posicionamientos compartidos en los planos regional e internacional; 3) los vínculos económicos.

En función de la metodología cualitativa adoptada se realizó una investigación bibliográfica argumentativa con un alto contenido descriptivo a través de la revisión y el análisis de literatura especializada, piezas comunicacionales

gubernamentales, artículos de prensa, documentos oficiales y discursos de altos representantes gubernamentales.

El artículo se estructura en cuatro apartados. En el primero se revisitan las definiciones con las cuales se denominó la relación sino-etíope a partir del año 2000. Seguidamente, se da cuenta de la cantidad de visitas de alto nivel bilaterales y de las agendas compartidas en iniciativas multilaterales, señalando las motivaciones y expectativas políticas en torno a la cooperación. En el tercer apartado se exponen los principales intereses geopolíticos en materia de seguridad y paz que subyacen en el vínculo, mientras que en el último punto se abordan los flujos de financiamiento y comercio bilateral, y su incidencia en el plan de desarrollo etíope. Finalmente, a modo de conclusión, se presentan algunas reflexiones tendientes a condensar los aspectos centrales de la asociación estratégica.

LAS “ETIQUETAS” DE LA RELACIÓN BILATERAL

Es posible encontrar precedentes importantes de la presencia china en el continente africano desde el siglo XV y sus sucesivas etapas, cada una de las cuales tuvo diferentes propósitos e intensidades, siendo la Conferencia de

1 Cabe señalar que no se desconoce la relevancia que actores de la sociedad civil, otros actores públicos e instituciones y actores privados internacionales y transnacionales tienen para la comprensión del sistema internacional y el análisis de las políticas exteriores; sin embargo, en función del objetivo del presente artículo, los conceptos centrales y la propuesta metodológica no son analizados específicamente.

Bandung de 1955 y el establecimiento del Foro de Cooperación China-África (Focac) en 2000 dos hitos claves en esta larga historia. Posteriormente, la incorporación de la región a la BRI cristalizó el reforzamiento de la expansión china en la región. Tal como se expresa en los “Documentos sobre política africana de China” (*China’s African Policy Paper*) de 2006, 2015 y 2021, la región se convirtió en una zona de relevancia estratégica para la política exterior de China, hacia la cual ha dirigido sus flujos de cooperación e inversiones en el siglo XXI (Marchetti, 2024, p. 18).

Particularmente, en lo que respecta a los lazos sino-etíopes, las bases de la relación diplomática se remontan al establecimiento de la relación bilateral en 1970 y a la firma del primer acuerdo de cooperación técnica y económica de 1971.² En los años noventa, durante el gobierno de Meles Zenawi, la relación se profundizó en el marco de las políticas de reforma estructural y el despliegue de una “nueva diplomacia económica” que contemplaba la asociación con actores tanto occidentales como del Sur para que invirtieran en los proyectos de infraestructura, telecomunicaciones y energía que requería el país. Así, en 1995, el primer ministro visitó China, posteriormente recibió a Jiang Zemin en 1996 y en 1999 se creó la Comisión Conjunta entre el Ministerio de Finanzas y Desarrollo Económico etíope y el Ministerio de Finanzas y

Comercio chino como una plataforma de coordinación (Cheru, 2016, pp. 595-596).

En el siglo XXI, la relación fue engrosándose y subiendo escalones en la red global de asociaciones desplegada por China, lo cual se plasmó en las diferentes denominaciones que recibió el vínculo. Sobre este particular cabe señalar que si bien oficialmente no se han explicitado definiciones taxativas sobre lo que implica cada una de las etiquetas que denominan las relaciones entre China y sus socios alrededor del mundo, es posible encontrar distintas clasificaciones sobre los diferentes niveles de jerarquía (Chen, 2024; Li y Ye, 2019; Yue, 2018; Zhang, 2024) que permiten comprender mejor las implicancias para el caso etíope.

La línea de base a partir de la cual se han construido todas las asociaciones son los principios de la coexistencia pacífica. Discursivamente, se enfatiza que en estos partenariados ambos Estados cooperan sobre la base del respeto, la confianza y la igualdad para desarrollar una relación de beneficios mutuos. A partir de la profundización y complejización de los vínculos, las asociaciones cambian su adjetivación, transformando o sumando calificativos en su denominación. En consecuencia, más de una veintena de títulos dan cuenta de diferentes grados de intensidad de las relaciones, extendiéndose desde los más laxos, como por ejemplo

2 Para ampliar sobre los vínculos históricos: Bilate y Zou (2021), Tesfaye (2020) y Yalew (2024).

Nueva Asociación (*New Partnership*), hasta los de mayor compromiso, tal como Asociación Estratégica Integral de Coordinación (*Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of Coordination*).

En el caso sino-etíope, los principios básicos acordados al momento del establecimiento de los vínculos diplomáticos fueron el mutuo respeto por la soberanía y la integridad territorial, la no agresión, la no interferencia en los asuntos domésticos, la equidad, el beneficio mutuo y la coexistencia pacífica (Government of the People's Republic of China & Imperial Ethiopian Government, 1970). A partir de estos, en 2000 la relación fue denominada como Nueva Asociación Estratégica (*New Strategic Partnership*), donde el término “estratégico” implica que la cooperación es estable y que trasciende en el tiempo, superando las posibles diferencias ideológicas o entre sistemas políticos (Dittgen y Demissie, 2017, p. 15).

Posteriormente, la relación fue calificada con las etiquetas de Asociación Cooperativa Integral (*Comprehensive Cooperative Partnership*) en 2003 y Asociación Cooperativa Estratégica Integral (*Comprehensive Strategic Cooperative Partnership*) en 2017 (Yue, 2018, p. 18), las cuales se encuentran en un rango más elevado y refieren a un alto nivel de consenso estratégico en el cual se espera que los países socios apoyen a China en los grandes temas internacionales. La diferencia en la aplicación de la calificación “comprensiva”, de acuerdo con Yue (2018, p. 11), alude al alcance de la cooperación en términos

de áreas. En este sentido, Li y Ye (2019, p. 68) señalan que este adjetivo da cuenta de la extensión de la cooperación a diferentes campos –económico, tecnológico, cultural y político– y a que se desarrolla en múltiples capas, incluyendo, además de las relaciones gubernamentales, los lazos entre los pueblos (*people-to-people diplomacy*).

En 2023, la relación alcanzó un nuevo mojón al ser denominada Asociación Estratégica Para Todo Tiempo (AEPTT) (*All-Weather Strategic Partnership*), la cual implica la presencia permanente de mecanismos de consultas, asiduas visitas de alto nivel, apoyo mutuo en temáticas de interés nacional para cada una de las partes, activa participación en las estrategias de desarrollo de cada país, coincidencias en los posicionamientos sobre las agendas regionales y globales, y coordinación en los esquemas de diálogo multilateral.

La AEPTT se enmarca en la estrategia china de “asociación sin alineamiento”, la cual refleja el posicionamiento contrario a las alianzas de seguridad y respeta la tradición de “no alineamiento” frente los grandes bloques de poder que mantuvo durante la Guerra Fría. Como se señaló previamente, China “no tiene por objetivo unir a aliados militares sino socios” (Oviedo, 2006, p. 390).

Por ello, resulta necesario aclarar que en el presente trabajo se entiende la categoría de “alineamiento” desde una perspectiva que considera la convergencia de intereses, objetivos y desafíos de los Estados en diferentes temáticas del plano internacional y la

reducción de la incertidumbre sobre el mutuo comportamiento futuro (Zagare y Kilgour, 2003; Giaccaglia, 2024a). Es decir, el alineamiento no refiere exclusivamente a alianzas militares defensivas u ofensivas contra un enemigo concreto, si bien los temas de seguridad y defensa pueden ser parte de la agenda compartida.

Con el paso de los años, los cambios en la denominación del vínculo bilateral han reflejado las coincidencias entre ambas partes, motivo por el cual coincidimos con Adem (2012 p. 143) en que los vínculos podrían describirse como un intercambio de “infraestructura por apoyo diplomático”, y no tanto en un trueque de “infraestructura por recursos naturales”, como se plantea para otros casos del continente, tal como se examinará en los próximos apartados que describen el entramado de contenidos e intereses que han dado sustento a las diferentes etiquetas.

LAS BASES POLÍTICAS DE LA COOPERACIÓN

En el marco del anuncio del establecimiento de la AEPTT, Xi Jinping expresó que en la década pasada: “La cooperación entre China y Etiopía en el marco

de la iniciativa ‘Un cinturón, una ruta’ ha estado a la vanguardia de la cooperación entre China y África en términos de ámbitos de cooperación y resultados”³ (The State Council Information Office, 2023). Por su parte, Abiy Ahmed señaló: “China continúa siendo un socio fundamental para Etiopía” (ENA, 2023). Estas sintéticas aseveraciones de los mandatarios resumen la gran cantidad de acciones e iniciativas que engrosaron los vínculos en el presente siglo y de los cuales un primer indicador por resaltar es la cantidad de intercambios diplomáticos de alto nivel que tuvieron lugar.⁴

En el caso de las visitas de los primeros ministros etíopes a China encontramos que Meles Zenawi viajó en cuatro oportunidades (1995, 2004, 2006 y 2011), Hailemariam Desalegn realizó tres viajes (2013, 2015, 2017) y Abiy Ahmed lo hizo hasta el momento en cuatro ocasiones (2018, 2019, 2023, 2024).⁵ En cuanto a funcionarios de rango, puede señalarse que viajaron a China el presidente Mulatu Teshome (2014), el ministro de Estado de Finanzas y Desarrollo Económico, Ahmed Shide (2016), el ministro de Relaciones Exteriores, Demeke Mekonnen Hassen (2023) y el ministro de Finanzas Ahmed Shide (2025).

3 Las traducciones al español son de la autora.

4 Fuente utilizada para el relevamiento de las visitas: Ministry of Foreign Affairs The People's Republic of China (2025).

5 En 2018, en el marco de la Cumbre de Beijing del Foro de Cooperación China-África, Abiy mantuvo una reunión con Xi Jinping; en 2019 realizó visita de Estado bilateral; en 2023 visitó Beijing para asistir a la cumbre BRI; y en 2024 para una cumbre de la FOCAC.

Por parte de China, si bien ni Hu Jintao ni Xi Jinping han estado hasta el momento en Adís Abeba, se destacan las visitas de los primeros ministros Wen Jiabao (2003)⁶ y Li Keqiang (2014), y del viceprimer ministro chino Hui Liangyu (2012)⁷, las cinco visitas del ministro de Relaciones Exteriores Wang Yi (2014, 2017, 2019, 2021 y 2024) y la del ministro de Relaciones Exteriores Qing Gang (2023), las tres del viceministro de Relaciones Exteriores, Zhang Ming (2014, 2015 y 2016) y la del ministro adjunto de Relaciones Exteriores, Chen Xiaodong (2018). Junto con estas, también deben tenerse en cuenta los viajes de altos funcionarios tales como los del presidente del Congreso Nacional del Pueblo, Wu Bangguo (2008), del ministro de Comercio Chen Deming (2009), del presidente del Comité Nacional de la Conferencia Consultiva Política del Pueblo Chino, Jia Qinglin (2012), de la viceprimera ministra del Consejo de Estado, Liu Yandong (2013) o del consejero de Estado Yang Jiechi (2017).

Una aclaración amerita lo acontecido durante la pandemia de covid-19, período en el cual las conversaciones diplomáticas tuvieron lugar telefónicamente o través de videoconferencias, tanto entre los ministros de Relaciones

Exteriores como de los mandatarios Xi Jinping y Abiy Ahmed (2020). Por otra parte, también deben considerarse los encuentros de alto nivel bilaterales acontecidos en las márgenes de encuentros multilaterales, como por ejemplo, durante las cumbres BRICS en Johannesburgo (2023) o Kazán (2024), y el intercambio de delegaciones comerciales, culturales, educativas, militares, sanitarias, e incluso entre miembros de los partidos políticos y actores subnacionales y no gubernamentales bajo el paraguas de la diplomacia de los pueblos.⁸ Ciertamente, uno de los puntos destacados por ambas partes es la promoción del conocimiento mutuo de las “civilizaciones”⁹ de las dos naciones.

Las temáticas abordadas en los intercambios político-institucionales de alto nivel dan cuenta del apoyo etíope a la política de “una sola China” ante la situación con Taiwán, y de los intereses compartidos en el plano regional e internacional, los cuales se entrelazan y plasman en las agendas de la Focac, la BRI, la UA y los BRICS.

Las declaraciones de la Focac proveen los lineamientos políticos para guiar la agenda de cooperación sino-africana. En este foro, Etiopía ha sido un activo participante desde el primer

6 En el contexto de la segunda cumbre Focac realizada en Adís Abeba.

7 Asistió al funeral del primer ministro de Etiopía, Meles Zenawi.

8 A modo de ejemplo, podemos señalar que en el período 2022-2023 estudiaron en China más de 3.700 etíopes, y que funcionan dos institutos Confucio en el país (Ministry of Foreign Affairs The People's Republic of China, 2025).

9 La idea de “civilizaciones” alude a las raíces imperiales y culturas milenarias de la antigua China y del reino de Aksum.

momento, erigiéndose como el primer país africano coanfitrión de una de las conferencias trianuales en 2003 bajo el lema “Cooperación pragmática y orientada a la acción”. En dicha ocasión, el primer ministro Zenawi expresó la visión que sustenta hasta la actualidad las bases de la relación: “La contribución de China no se limitó únicamente a la liberación de África, sino también al desarrollo económico de nuestro continente. El pueblo chino siempre ha sido un amigo confiable para el pueblo africano, al igual que África siempre ha sido un amigo confiable para China y su pueblo (citado en Shelton y Paruk, 2008, p. 166)”.

Desde esta misma plataforma, el gobierno de Abiy Ahmed se pronunció a favor de involucrarse más en la BRI, donde Etiopía participa desde 2018. La BRI se trata de un proyecto transcontinental que procura expandir la conectividad y profundizar la integración económica a través de corredores marítimos y terrestres, y promueve para ello la cooperación. Es simultáneamente “una iniciativa y una estrategia, es decir, una iniciativa estratégica”, en tanto necesita la “cooperación voluntaria” de otros actores con intereses compartidos y complementa a las instituciones multilaterales en funcionamiento orientadas a mejorar la integración económica y los bienes públicos, a la vez que es ejecutada como un plan diseñado para alcanzar objetivos chinos

en materia de seguridad, economía y liderazgo global (Bussilli, 2020, p. 70).

De acuerdo con Yan y Sautman (2024, p. 222), es tal la participación de Etiopía en la BRI que ha llegado a convertirse en el “ejemplo de país BRI en África”, no solamente por el financiamiento recibido, la notable presencia de empresas chinas y las múltiples inversiones, sino también por el modelo de desarrollo nacional implementado.

En la BRI, el gobierno etíope encuentra una vía más para promover el desarrollo sustentable tanto nacional como continental. Durante el Tercer Foro BRI, oportunidad en la que también se anunció que los vínculos bilaterales habían alcanzado el estatus de AEPTT, el primer ministro etíope indicó:

El continente africano tiene una gran demanda de desarrollo sostenible y digno. Y gracias a las inversiones de la BRI, se han creado muchos puestos de trabajo y se han mejorado los medios de vida, y los proyectos de carreteras y ferrocarriles están conectando lugares que antes no lo estaban [...] El principio de conectividad de la BRI también ha ofrecido a los países africanos fuentes alternativas de capital, tecnología y habilidades necesarias para nuestra agenda de modernización. (Abiy, 2023)

Por cierto, ambos países procuran generar sinergias entre la BRI, la Agenda 2030 de Naciones Unidas y la Agenda 2063 de la Unión Africana (UA)¹⁰ para complementar los esfuerzos de las diferentes instituciones multilaterales

10 Esta perspectiva de complementación fue plasmada en el documento conjunto de la Focac denominado “Cooperación China-Africa Visión 2035” (2021).

comprometidas con el desarrollo africano. Como ya se ha señalado, África es una región estratégica para China y también lo es para Etiopía en su rol de potencia regional.

Al respecto, cabe indicar el lugar central que presenta la UA en la política exterior etíope, no solo por ser Adís Abeba la sede del organismo¹¹, sino también por la coincidencia entre las metas de los programas del organismo y los planes de desarrollo etíopes. En este sentido, es posible mencionar la convergencia de los propósitos del gobierno de Abiy por promover la industrialización y diversificar los socios comerciales con los objetivos del Área de Libre Comercio Continental Africana (AfCTA, por sus siglas en inglés), uno de los programas emblemáticos de la UA que tiene como meta incrementar el comercio intraafricano.¹²

Asimismo, es importante señalar la participación etíope en el Mercado Único de Electricidad de África (AfSEM, por sus siglas en inglés), el cual plantea integrar la generación y distribución de energía eléctrica regional. Etiopía es un actor clave en esta iniciativa por sus actuales capacidades de producción de energía y, sobre todo, por su potencial para la exportación a Kenia, Sudán y Yibuti como resultado de la puesta en marcha de la Gran Presa del Renacimiento Etíope (GERD, por sus siglas en

inglés). Su construcción comenzó en 2013, fue realizada casi en su totalidad con fondos nacionales y se convertirá en la mayor planta hidroeléctrica africana y en una de las diez más importantes del planeta por su capacidad de producción.

Otro de los espacios multilaterales donde se ha expresado fuertemente el alineamiento de intereses sino-etíopes es en el bloque BRICS. El proceso de ampliación del grupo fue impulsado por China en su búsqueda por consolidar su red de socios estratégicos y yuxtaponer las diferentes iniciativas –BRICS, BRI, Banco Asiático de Inversión e Infraestructura (BAII)– “en un entramado geopolítico y económico que redunde en su consolidación global” (Giaccaglia, 2024b, p. 53).

En este contexto, Etiopía, en función de sus capacidades domésticas y su relación estrecha con China, fue incorporada en 2024, lo cual significó un hecho sobresaliente para su política exterior, en tanto implicó su reconocimiento como actor emergente del Sur global y el acceso a una plataforma catalizadora para su proyecto su desarrollo nacional (Morasso, 2024, p.13).

Las coincidencias en el seno de los BRICS giran en torno a la necesidad de fortalecer la cooperación Sur-Sur y el multilateralismo para abordar problemas globales, afrontar los desafíos

11 Adís Abeba en un centro diplomático relevante donde se encuentran oficinas de la Comisión de las Naciones Unidas para África, de la Conferencia de las Naciones Unidas para el Comercio y el Desarrollo (UNCTAD) o del Banco Africano de Desarrollo.

12 El tratado del AfCTA fue ratificado por Etiopía en 2019.

del desarrollo sostenible, reducir las inequidades en el sistema internacional, reformar las instituciones financieras internacionales e incrementar las voces en el concierto mundial. En palabras del primer ministro etíope:

Los BRICS se encuentran en una posición única para impulsar el apoyo a un multilateralismo justo y representativo. Juntos podemos defender reformas que aborden las preocupaciones de los países en desarrollo y garanticen que sus voces sean escuchadas en la escena mundial. Etiopía, en particular, desea hacer hincapié en que la reforma del Consejo de Seguridad de las Naciones Unidas merece nuestra atención. Confiamos en que los países presentes en esta Cumbre darán prioridad a la representación africana en el Consejo de Seguridad de las Naciones Unidas. Adheridos a la posición común africana, no se trata solo de representación, sino de justicia, equidad y de garantizar que todas las naciones puedan contribuir a la gobernanza mundial. (Abiy, 2024)

Una mirada a lo acordado en la cumbre de Kazán da cuenta de estos principios y propósitos compartidos, así como de las propuestas conjuntas orientadas a alcanzarlos. En la declaración “Fortalecimiento del multilateralismo para un desarrollo y una seguridad global justos” (2024) se contemplan materias tales como la creación de una “Plataforma de Intercambio de Granos” con vistas a lograr la seguridad alimentaria mundial, expandir el Nuevo Banco de

Desarrollo del bloque, promover una “Iniciativa de pagos transfronterizos” entre los miembros para utilizar las monedas nacionales en sus intercambios, lo cual está línea con la idea de desdolarizar las finanzas y el comercio.

A decir de Optenhögel (2024, pp. 82-83), la cumbre continuó signada por los tres principales tópicos que caracterizaron los quince comunicados finales previos: el sistema financiero internacional, desarrollo y comercio, y reforma del sistema de Naciones Unidas. Junto con estos asuntos apareció también con fuerza el de la seguridad internacional, como lo indica la denominación del documento final en una coyuntura fuertemente marcada por la invasión de Rusia a Ucrania, el conflicto palestino-israelí y las inestabilidades en el Cuerno de África y el mar Rojo. Es entonces en este punto donde se plantea apropiado revisar aquellos aspectos vinculados a la geopolítica latente en la AEPTT.

LOS FACTORES GEOPOLÍTICOS SUBYACENTES

Desde mediados del siglo pasado, el Cuerno de África¹³ se ha caracterizado por ser un área convulsionada tanto por los acontecimientos domésticos que acontecen en los Estados partes como por las fricciones entre varios de ellos. Actualmente, se encuentra atravesada

13 Se adopta una delimitación amplia de la región: Yibuti, Etiopía, Eritrea (reincorporada tras la firma de la paz con Etiopía), Kenia, Somalia, Sudán, Sudán del Sur y Uganda.

por conflictos violentos en Sudán, las amenazas terroristas en Somalia y la crisis humanitaria en Sudán del Sur, a lo cual se sumó la denominada “crisis del mar Rojo”, la cual comenzó en noviembre de 2023 con los ataques de hutíes yemeníes a buques comerciales en el estrecho de Bab el-Mandeb.

En este contexto volátil, desde una perspectiva geopolítica, entendida como la relación entre el espacio geográfico y el poder estatal en la política internacional, o sea como “las relaciones espaciales exteriores de los Estados” (Cairo Carou, 1993, p.198), es posible realizar una aproximación a los motivos por los cuales el Cuerno de África y el mar Rojo son prioritarios para Etiopía y China.

Con respecto a los conflictos armados en el Cuerno de África, lo primero por destacar es que el desarrollo nacional pretendido por el gobierno de Abiy está muy vinculado a que se mantenga la estabilidad en sus países limítrofes, en tanto los planes de modernización y crecimiento implican la existencia de infraestructuras de conectividad compartidas.

Por tales motivos, desde su llegada al poder ha buscado profundizar su papel de proveedor de seguridad regional, el cual ha desplegado desde

los años noventa con base en sus capacidades militares,¹⁴ su participación activa en misiones de paz de Naciones Unidas y la UA, y su actuación en los mecanismos de diálogo para la paz promovidos por los mencionados organismos y por la Autoridad Intergubernamental para el Desarrollo (IGAD, por sus siglas en inglés)¹⁵ (Cardoso *et al.*, 2021; Cepik y Schneider, 2010; Virasoro, 2023).

Dicho papel, además, adquirió un nuevo ímpetu tras la firma de la paz con Eritrea en 2018. El acuerdo alcanzado entre Abiy y el presidente eritreo Isaías Afewerki puso fin a dos largas décadas de una situación de “no paz, no guerra”, en la que latía una amenaza constante de reanudación del conflicto armado por las cuestiones fronterizas irresueltas tras la independencia de Eritrea en 1993 y le valió el premio Nobel de la Paz al primer ministro etíope en 2019, un factor que contribuyó a la proyección internacional del país como un Estado promotor de la paz y la estabilidad regional.

Sin embargo, esta imagen buscada y promovida por el gobierno etíope se ve ensombrecida por diversos hechos que la contradicen. En primer lugar, el violento conflicto interno desatado breve tiempo después de que Abiy

14 Posee las terceras fuerzas armadas más grandes de África con formación para desplegar acciones de guerra convencional, de contrainsurgencia y de pacificación (Le Gouriellec, 2018).

15 El organismo fue conformado en 1986 para enfrentar los problemas de sequía, y posteriormente, en 1996, tuvo un relanzamiento para ser reorientado en sus objetivos, a fin de mediar los conflictos y promover el desarrollo de la región. Forman parte Etiopía, Kenia, Yibuti, Somalia, Sudán y Uganda.

recibiera el Premio Nobel de la Paz en la región de Tigray (2020-2022), y que le valió numerosas denuncias internacionales por violaciones de los derechos humanos y persecuciones políticas. Si bien fue un conflicto doméstico resultado de la resistencia tigrina al proyecto nacionalista de Abiy, las repercusiones en la región causaron inestabilidad por el desplazamiento de refugiados y la generación de puntos de fricción transfronterizos. Si bien existió una mediación de la UA que resultó en un “alto al fuego” (Molfino, 2021; Morasso, 2024), el conflicto está latente y continúa siendo una amenaza a la estabilidad del Cuerno de África (Demissie, 2025).

Por otra parte, también debe señalarse la persistencia de una tensión de larga data en torno al uso compartido de recursos hídricos con Egipto y Sudán, que si bien no ha implicado el uso de violencia armada, mantiene un alto perfil en la agenda externa etíope. La construcción de la GERD sobre el afluente Nilo Azul, generó fuertes protestas y reclamos sudaneses y particularmente egipcios, debido a que para Egipto el control del Nilo es materia de seguridad nacional (Torres Amurgo, 2019, p. 495). A pesar de las conversaciones tripartitas iniciadas y las diversas interlocuciones de actores internacionales, la cuestión aún no está resuelta y de allí que el ingreso de Etiopía y Egipto a los BRICS pueda convertirse en una oportunidad para planteos de cooperación orientados a la resolución de esta tensa problemática regional.

La proyección de Etiopía como una potencia regional con capacidad de acción diplomática y militar es un activo valorado por los actores extrarregionales, en particular China, que tiene un especial interés en que la región se mantenga estable y segura para sus ciudadanos, sus inversiones y empresas, para que continúe el flujo de provisión de materias primas desde el continente y la región sea previsible para el comercio y las inversiones.

De este modo, en el marco del Focac ha reiterado sostenidamente su compromiso con la estabilidad regional, apoya los esfuerzos de la UA y Naciones Unidas y, en 2022, organizó en Etiopía la “Primera Conferencia de Paz entre China y el Cuerno de África”, la cual reunió a altos representantes Yibuti, Kenia, Somalia, Sudán del Sur, Sudán y Uganda, y al enviado especial de Beijing, que desde hacía varios años visitaba la región para expresar el posicionamiento chino. Esta postura fue plasmada en el documento “Perspectivas de paz y desarrollo en el Cuerno de África”, que apunta a incentivar el diálogo y promover soluciones africanas a los desafíos africanos.

Cabe señalar que un tema central en dicho marco de diálogo fue el conflicto etíope en Tigray. Durante este muchas empresas chinas dejaron de operar en el parque industrial de Mekele y hubo evacuaciones de ciudadanos chinos (Lammirch, 2025, p. 12), mientras que el gobierno chino diplomáticamente apoyaba la paz y reconocía que la situación en Tigray era un

asunto interno de Etiopía, y que el mismo pueblo etíope tendría la sabiduría y la capacidad para resolver de forma independiente sus diferencias (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2023, par. 3).¹⁶

La inclusión de esta cuestión en la agenda de la conferencia y la cooperación en materia militar, que desde la firma del acuerdo de 2005 implica transferencia de tecnología, adquisición de equipamiento militar y entrenamientos conjuntos, da cuenta del apoyo de la potencia a su aliado regional en momentos de alta conflictividad interna, así como de la omisión a la violencia política y las violaciones de los derechos humanos. En cierto sentido, esta postura abona aquellas lecturas que ven en China un donante maligno (*rougue donor*) que lleva adelante su cooperación en África para satisfacer solamente sus propios intereses, e ignora e incluso fomenta los avasallamientos de los gobiernos autocráticos, la corrupción y las violaciones de los derechos humanos.

De acuerdo con Lammirch (2025, p. 13), en el Cuerno de África China confía en las herramientas de mediación de alto perfil que involucran a los gobiernos centrales en actividades de diplomacia anfitriona, visitas de alto nivel y enviados especiales. Este activismo en

temas de paz y seguridad indica para Alaminos Hervás (2022, p. 302) que Beijing se encuentra superando aquellos límites impuestos por “una retórica arraigada en la no injerencia en los asuntos internos que prohibía la participación en las cuestiones de seguridad africanas, para pasar a un conjunto de prácticas” que le posibilitan “desempeñar un papel más sustantivo en la seguridad del continente”.

Con respecto al mar Rojo, se evidencia que es un territorio estratégico para ambos Estados. En efecto, por el estrecho de Bab el-Mandeb transita el 12% del petróleo y el 8% del gas licuado que se transportan marítimamente, así como casi el 30% de los contenedores del mundo y el 40% del comercio entre Asia y Europa; no obstante, en los últimos años ha visto reducido el volumen del tráfico comercial de manera muy importante ante la inseguridad a causa de la crisis del mar Rojo (Bonfati, 2024, p. 66).

Desde el punto de vista etíope, dado que es un país sin litoral, la salida a través de los puertos de aguas profundas de Yibuti y Kenia es decisiva. En esta clave es posible observar la trascendencia que han tenido las obras de infraestructura financiadas con fondos chinos, tales como la construcción de siete puertos secos a lo largo del país, la

16 Mientras tanto, Estados Unidos sancionaba al gobierno etíope por violaciones de los derechos humanos con la suspensión del país de los beneficios de la Ley de Crecimiento y Oportunidades para África (AGOA), programa que ofrece a los países africanos amplias exenciones aduaneras para exportar sus productos al mercado estadounidense siempre y cuando estos se comprometan a respetar los derechos humanos y las condiciones laborales.

construcción de la ruta hacia Mombasa y el tren eléctrico entre Adís Abeba y Yibuti de la empresa estatal Ethiopian Railway Corporation, que fue inaugurado en 2018.

Desde la perspectiva china, el corredor entre Bab el-Mandeb y el canal de Suez es central para la BRI en tanto vía de conexión con África, Medio Oriente y Europa. Se estima que casi 280 mil millones de dólares en exportaciones e importaciones chinas transitan por este corredor cada año (Verschuur, 2024, par. 6), a lo largo del cual se han financiado proyectos de infraestructura centrales para garantizar el comercio, por ejemplo, los puertos de Doraleh en Yibuti y de Port Sudan en Sudán, que es uno de los más importantes del continente y está gestionado por firmas chinas.

Ante el conflicto desatado en las costas de Medio Oriente, el posicionamiento chino ha sido promover el diálogo diplomático, procurando garantizar que sus buques puedan transitar de manera segura. Esta fue una respuesta diferente al accionar militar que Estados Unidos llevó en el marco de la operación multinacional lanzada en 2023 “Guardián de la Prosperidad”. En paralelo, China ha continuado comprometido con iniciativas de Naciones Unidas para contrarrestar la piratería en las costas de Somalia y más ampliamente en el golfo de Adén, patrullando estas aguas con buques de la Armada.

Asimismo, es importante subrayar que la primera base militar china en territorio africano fue establecida en Yibuti en 2017.¹⁷

Dichas acciones pueden comprenderse mejor enmarcadas en el objetivo chino de fortalecer su poder naval global y, de modo más amplio, en la expansión de su presencia militar en el continente, dado que actualmente el mayor despliegue del Ejército Popular de Liberación de China en el extranjero tiene lugar en África, donde mantiene flotas, despliega más tropas en misiones de paz de Naciones Unidas que cualquier otro miembro permanente del Consejo de Seguridad, e instruye a militares africanos (Nantulya, 2024).

Por consiguiente, es posible observar que a nivel discursivo y diplomático los gobiernos de Adís Abeba y Beijing coinciden en sus posicionamientos oficiales y públicos en promover la paz y la seguridad en el Cuerno de África y en el mar Rojo, en tanto en estos territorios están en juego sus intereses políticos y económicos. Para Etiopía, contar con el respaldo chino es fundamental para ampliar su reconocimiento como potencia media entre otros actores regionales y extrarregionales; para China en tanto, es clave que Etiopía se mantenga como un socio local estable con capacidad de acción diplomática y militar en esta región estratégica para su proyección global.

17 En el país, además, hay bases militares de Estados Unidos, Francia, Italia y Japón.

Tal como plantean Li y Ye (2019, p. 79), para China es una “prioridad” tener socios que contribuyan a mantener un entorno estable fuera de sus fronteras. Además, si esos socios pueden brindar acceso a mercados, recursos y oportunidades de inversión, poseen más potencial para ser elegidos como socios estratégicos integrales, lo cual conduce a examinar la tercera dimensión analítica planteada en este trabajo, la cual se vincula con los flujos de comercio e inversión.

LOS INTERESES ECONÓMICOS DE LA ASOCIACIÓN ESTRATÉGICA

Uno de los rasgos que presentan las “asociaciones estratégicas para todo tiempo” con China es la activa participación en las estrategias de desarrollo del país socio. En el caso de Etiopía, esto se refleja principalmente en la articulación de los fondos chinos entre las prioridades del Focac y la BRI, y los marcos de acción nacionales, en particular los que fueron plasmados en los planes de Crecimiento y Transformación I y II y en el Programa de Reformas Económicas Internas: un camino hacia la prosperidad (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 2020). Este último plan brinda las grandes directrices de

una agenda de reformas y fortalecimiento de los diferentes sectores económicos para llegar a ser un país de renta media en el mediano plazo,¹⁸ a partir de una perspectiva que prevé una activa participación estatal en los procesos de modernización, industrialización y fortalecimiento de las infraestructuras.

En esta línea, se observa que el país ha utilizado los recursos financieros provenientes de China, su principal inversor y prestamista bilateral,¹⁹ para desarrollar megaproyectos en el país, tales como autopistas, centrales eólicas, proyectos para la provisión de agua, estaciones veterinarias, el ferrocarril ligero de Adís Abeba, el Hospital Tirunesh-Pekin o las redes de transporte de energía eléctrica.

A modo de ejemplo, puede indicarse que se han implementado 57 proyectos de infraestructura con un costo aproximado de 12.200 millones de dólares, que representan el 82,2% del total de los préstamos chinos, de los cuales 22 proyectos pertenecen al sector de transporte y comunicaciones, 35 al sector energético y 13 a plantas azucareras y de abastecimiento de agua urbana (Ministry of Finance Ethiopia, 2023, par. 8).

18 Etiopía es un “país menos adelantado” según los estándares del Comité de Políticas de Desarrollo de Naciones Unidas (Naciones Unidas, 2025), siendo uno de los países de menor ingreso per cápita del mundo USD1272 en 2023 (Banco Mundial, 2025), y ocupa el puesto 176 de 193 en el Índice de Desarrollo Humano (UNDP, 2025).

19 Una radiografía de la creciente deuda externa etíope muestra que casi en su totalidad fue tomada por acreedores oficiales (81%). De dicha deuda, el 48% es bilateral, de la cual el 30% corresponde a China (UNDP, 2023).

Asimismo, las compañías chinas han sido impulsadas por el gobierno de Beijing, por medio de créditos y exenciones, a invertir en Etiopía. De acuerdo con Addis y Zuping (2019), las empresas chinas, con el fuerte apoyo financiero de su gobierno, han ido consiguiendo mayor influencia y capacidad financiera respecto a inversores de otros países que operan en África y, de este modo, están en mejores condiciones para enfrentar riesgos.

Estos flujos se han dirigido en general a grandes proyectos de inversión, que incluyen parques industriales como los de Bole-Lemi I y II, Kilinto, Lebu, Huajian y Dire Dawa (bajo la concepción de emular la experiencia china); la fabricación de cuero y textiles; el sector de telecomunicaciones; la construcción de carreteras, ferrocarriles, aeropuertos e inmuebles; la fabricación de maquinaria y el desarrollo de proyectos de energía verde. De acuerdo con los datos oficiales, la inversión extranjera directa de China asciende a aproximadamente 4 mil millones de dólares y 1.844 proyectos (Ministry of Finance Ethiopia, 2023, par. 6).

En lo que respecta al comercio bilateral, puede indicarse que siendo Etiopía el segundo país más habitado del continente, con 128 millones de personas, continúa representado un mercado que aún tiene potencial de crecimiento para las exportaciones chinas. Actualmente, China es el principal socio etíope, con un volumen que alcanzó en 2024 los USD 3,5 mil millones, lo cual implicó un aumento del 17,5%

con respecto al año anterior (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2025, par. 4).

En esta relación se mantiene la asimetría y una fuerte dependencia. Desde China importa el 27% de sus compras al exterior, principalmente en bienes industriales livianos y de alta tecnología, equipos y maquinarias, y productos farmacéuticos y químicos, en tanto dirige el 17% de sus exportaciones conformadas por materias primas, en particular sésamo, además de incienso, mirra, cuero, algodón y café (CIA World Factbook, 2024).

La matriz de inserción comercial externa etíope, que se refleja en la balanza comercial con China, es uno de los motivos por los cuales entre los grandes objetivos de desarrollo del gobierno de Abiy se encuentra la promoción de la industrialización y la diversificación de sus exportaciones, y para ello encuentra un modelo a seguir en los procesos que tuvieron lugar en el este asiático y en particular en la experiencia China. En este camino, donde se continúa con las políticas de liberalización y reformas iniciadas con la administración de Zenawi, sigue teniendo un rol especial el Estado como promotor del desarrollo, con una fuerte injerencia en el mercado y el control de empresas estratégicas, como Ethiopian Airlines, Ethiopian Electric Power, Ethio Telecom o Ethiopian Railway Corporation.

La figura en la base de estas acciones es el "developmental state", que como plantea Van Wyk (2009, p. 47), representa a un Estado con capacidad,

autonomía y legitimidad para explicitar y alcanzar objetivos de desarrollo y crecimiento económico, buscando alianzas y consensos con diferentes actores. En este sentido, los estudios realizados por Yan y Sautman (2024) y Tesfaye (2020) indican que el gobierno etíope ha proyectado su capacidad de agencia al direccionar los fondos provenientes de China, tanto los préstamos concesionales como la inversión privada, a los proyectos planteados en sus planes estatales para el desarrollo, si bien la asimetría de poder es evidente.

Si bien la economía etíope ha mostrado un patrón de crecimiento sostenido superior al 5% anual desde 2004, que tuvo como correlato un incremento del PBI que la ubicó en el sexto puesto del continente con USD 163 mil millones en 2023 (Banco Mundial, 2025), aún requiere de las transferencias tecnológicas y del financiamiento chino para alcanzar el desarrollo sustentable. De este modo, si bien la AEPTT puede ser un reaseguro para que continúen ingresando al país los fondos y la tecnología, también representa un factor que profundiza la dependencia económica y hasta política que puede socavar las dinámicas de la cooperación Sur-Sur.

Desde la perspectiva china, continuar apoyando el fortalecimiento de las infraestructuras comunicacionales es esencial para asegurarse el aprovisionamiento de recursos desde la región y la llegada de sus mercancías, así como también el funcionamiento de las empresas chinas intensivas en mano de obra que instalaron en Etiopía.

REFLEXIONES FINALES

La relación sino-etíope fue ganando densidad y fuerza desde los años noventa y tomó un impulso decisivo tras el establecimiento del New Strategic Partnership de 2000. A partir de ese momento, comenzó a configurarse una asociación estratégica en los términos planteados por Oviedo (2016), la cual se reflejó en tres dimensiones divisibles analíticamente pero plenamente entrelazadas entre sí.

Respecto a los aspectos político-diplomáticos, es posible observar que se desarrolló un alineamiento en el plano regional e internacional. Las coincidencias en los planteamientos sobre el multilateralismo, el lugar de los países del Sur global en el sistema internacional y la necesidad de impulsar el desarrollo africano se expresaron en las cumbres de Focac, BRI y BRICS, y también en las numerosas visitas de alto nivel y en diversos acuerdos bilaterales en los cuales se reiteró la mención de la cláusula de “asociación estratégica”.

La concurrencia de intereses también se expresó en la dimensión geopolítica, donde la estabilidad del Cuerno de África y la seguridad en el mar Rojo son centrales para el desarrollo nacional etíope y la expansión global china, motivo por el cual plantean la profundización de la cooperación securitaria. Para China, es fundamental que su socio mantenga un rol de interlocución en los convulsionados escenarios de Somalia y Sudán del Sur, y cumpla con su función de proveedor de seguridad

regional, y lo ha apoyado diplomáticamente sin pronunciarse sobre las violaciones de los derechos humanos en el ámbito doméstico.

En un tercer plano, se observa el énfasis que ambos gobiernos depositaron en los vínculos económicos, en particular en sectores vinculados a los servicios y a la industria en mayor medida que en las actividades extractivistas. Las coincidencias en los modelos de desarrollo y la intensa vinculación en materia de comercio, préstamos e inversiones cimentaron el vínculo bilateral y propiciaron la implementación de proyectos de desarrollo que responden a los planes nacionales y que tienen efectos positivos más allá de las fronteras etíopes. Esto es un activo importante para la iniciativa BRI, que requiere estabilidad, mercados ampliados, nuevas infraestructuras en el este africano, así como un modelo de país que incentive a otros gobiernos de la región a seguir la propuesta china.

Con base en las consideraciones realizadas es posible pensar en nuevos interrogantes sobre el futuro de esta “asociación estratégica para todo tiempo” vinculadas al rol empresarial y de la sociedad civil, al devenir de los vínculos con Egipto en el marco de BRICS y al papel de Etiopía en la BRI en un contexto de competencia estratégica y guerra comercial global. Asimismo, son numerosos los interrogantes por responder sobre los márgenes de autonomía que, con su capacidad de agencia, tendrá Etiopía en el marco de una muy estrecha vinculación asimétrica con China.

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Política externa no contexto africano: um estudo exploratório da cooperação internacional para o desenvolvimento da China na África

Júlio Sani Lopes*

RESUMO

Este artigo analisa a política externa chinesa na África no âmbito da Cooperação Internacional para o Desenvolvimento (CID) entre 1990 e 2019. O artigo utiliza uma metodologia qualitativa e interpretativa para analisar dados referentes à CID chinesa na África, com foco nas agendas e atores chineses envolvidos no continente, que é rico em recursos naturais e uma das regiões mais relevantes para a nova disputa

mundial neste século XXI, marcada pela emergência de novas potências do Sul Global. Os resultados indicam o papel cada vez mais central da China no continente africano, o que se evidencia pela intensidade das transações comerciais, que envolvem a aquisição de matérias-primas africanas e a venda de produtos industrializados chineses. Além disso, há um aumento nos investimentos e empréstimos que financiam setores econômicos nos países africanos, como infraestrutura, agricultura e

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Recebido: 16 de junho de 2025 / Modificado: 25 de agosto de 2025 / Aceito: 8 de septiembre de 2025.

Para citar este artigo:

Sani Lopes, J. (2025). Política externa no contexto africano: um estudo exploratório da cooperação internacional para o desenvolvimento da China na África. *Oasis*, 43, 217-241.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18601/16577558.n43.10>

mineração, enquanto o financiamento destinado a setores sociais, como saúde e educação, é muito limitado.

Palavras-chave: política externa; cooperação Sul-Sul; cooperação internacional para o desenvolvimento; política externa da China; relações internacionais da África.

Foreign policy in the African context: an exploratory study of China's international development cooperation in Africa

ABSTRACT

This article analyzes China's foreign policy in Africa within the framework of international development cooperation (IDC) between 1990 and 2019. The study employs a qualitative and interpretive methodology to analyze data on Chinese IDC in Africa, focusing on Chinese agendas and actors involved in the continent, which is rich in natural resources, and one of the most relevant regions in the new global competition of the twenty-first century, marked by the emergence of new powers from the Global South. The results indicate China's increasingly central role on the African continent, as evidenced by the intensity of trade transactions, which involve the acquisition of African raw materials and the sale of Chinese manufactured goods. Furthermore, there

has been an increase in investments and loans that finance economic sectors in African countries, such as infrastructure, agriculture, and mining, while financing for social sectors, such as health and education, remains very limited.

Keywords: Foreign policy; South-South cooperation; international development cooperation; China's foreign policy; Africa's international relations.

Política exterior en el contexto africano: un estudio exploratorio de la cooperación internacional para el desarrollo de China en África

RESUMEN

Este artículo analiza la política exterior china en África en el marco de la cooperación internacional para el desarrollo (CID) entre 1990 y 2019. El estudio utiliza una metodología cualitativa e interpretativa para analizar datos relacionados con la CID de China en África, centrándose en las agendas y los actores chinos involucrados en el continente, que es rico en recursos naturales y una de las regiones más relevantes de la nueva competencia global del siglo XXI, marcada por el surgimiento de nuevas potencias del Sur global. Los resultados señalan el papel cada vez más central de China en el continente africano,

como lo demuestra la intensidad de las transacciones comerciales, que implican la adquisición de materias primas africanas y la venta de productos manufacturados chinos. Además, se observa un aumento en las inversiones y los préstamos que financian sectores económicos en los países africanos, como la infraestructura, la agricultura y la minería, mientras que la financiación destinada a sectores sociales, como la salud y la educación, es muy limitada.

Palabras clave: política exterior; cooperación Sur-Sur; cooperación internacional para el desarrollo; política exterior de China; relaciones internacionales de África.

INTRODUÇÃO

Ao longo da história, as grandes potências globais, especialmente as europeias, estiveram ativas no continente africano. Esses países sempre consideraram o continente um local propício para a implementação de suas agendas geopolíticas. Com a chegada do novo século, o continente africano passou a desempenhar um papel relevante na política global e ganhou visibilidade nas relações exteriores de diversos países.

Dessa forma, Visentini (2013) recorda que a África se transformou no epicentro da nova disputa global no século XXI, em um cenário semelhante ao que aconteceu no século XIX. A diferença é que, hoje em dia, o processo é liderado pela presença marcante das potências emergentes, especialmente pela China.

Neste século XXI, a inserção internacional da China é marcada por uma forte presença na África, contexto no qual o país asiático tem atuado como provedor de cooperação internacional para o desenvolvimento (CID).

No cenário africano, a presença da China se baseia nos Cinco Princípios de Coexistência Pacífica, ajustando sua política externa de forma estratégica para integrar a dinâmica comercial a sua visão de *soft power*, a fim de alcançar seus objetivos geopolíticos. Tendo o desenvolvimento pacífico como vetor, a China se coloca como um *global player*. Visentini (2013), porém, observa que a China não só é o principal ator da Cooperação Sul-Sul (CSS) no continente africano, mas também que sua presença, juntamente com a de outros países emergentes, sugere uma nova partilha do continente. Isso tem elevado o interesse pelos estudos sobre a presença chinesa na África.

Perante o exposto, este artigo tem como objetivo analisar a política externa da China na África no contexto da CID entre 1990 e 2019. Esse período foi caracterizado pela reaproximação da China com os países africanos e também marcou o momento em que a CID começou a ganhar destaque nas políticas externas dos países do Sul.

Do ponto de vista metodológico, o artigo adotou uma abordagem qualitativa e interpretativa, empregando a análise de conteúdo dos dados referentes à cooperação bilateral entre China e África como técnica. Isso permitiu identificar os tipos de CID mais

predominantes a partir das seguintes categorias analíticas: 1. Significados atribuídos à CID no contexto africano; 2. Países prioritários; 3. Fluxos de investimento; 4. Principais setores de cooperação. O embasamento teórico abrangeu a análise da política externa da China e as discussões teóricas sobre a CID.

Neste contexto, além desta introdução, na segunda seção deste artigo discute-se a CID como ferramenta de política externa dos Estados, desde sua trajetória histórica até as discussões mais recentes sobre a CSS. Na terceira e última seção, apresenta-se o estudo da política externa e da CID chinesa, destacando seus elementos teóricos, institucionais e contextuais, com foco específico na África. Por fim, são expostos os resultados referentes aos atores e agendas mais envolvidos na CID chinesa na África.

POLÍTICA EXTERNA EM QUESTÃO

Cervo (2016) explica os âmbitos das relações internacionais, dividindo-os em três dimensões distintas, porém complementares: relações internacionais, diplomacia e política externa. Cada uma delas aporta uma dimensão específica em termos de abrangência. As relações internacionais abrangem um nível mais amplo, já que contemplam a política externa e a diplomacia. A diplomacia funciona como a ação externa dos governos, com base em seus valores e condutas, buscando cumprir suas próprias agendas e objetivos de política

externa. Esta última compreende um conjunto de princípios definidos por formuladores de política externa como estratégia para nortear a ação externa de seus Estados; ou seja, “a política externa fornece o conteúdo da diplomacia, sendo responsável por seus erros e acertos” (Cervo, 2016, p. 9).

Assim, define-se a política externa como a forma pela qual um Estado direciona suas relações com outros Estados, conduzindo, desde o ambiente interno, à formulação, implementação e avaliação dos princípios e condutas projetados para o ambiente externo (Oliveira, 2005).

Para Figueira (2011, p. 5), a política externa “é constituída por um conjunto de iniciativas que emanam do ator estatal, tendo em vista mobilizar para o serviço o máximo de fatores disponíveis tanto no ambiente interno como no cenário externo”.

Por sua vez, Hill (2003, p. 3) aponta que a “política externa é a soma das relações externas oficiais conduzidas por um ator independente, normalmente um Estado, nas relações internacionais”.

Com uma visão mais ampla, Milani e Pinheiro (2013) definem a política externa como uma política pública do Estado, sendo o governo o responsável por sua projeção no nível externo.

Por muitos anos, a visão explicativa das relações internacionais derivada de concepções realistas definia a política externa (PE) como um campo por excelência dos Estados, enfatizando inclusive o papel central dos entes estatais

na formulação e implementação da PE, relegando aos demais atores um papel quase inexistente nesse processo, isto é, trata o Estado como um ator monolítico e racional; além disso, defende também a primazia da agenda de segurança e o poder bélico, conferindo baixa importância à agenda econômica na formulação e implementação da PE (Sato, 2010; Figueira, 2011).

A questão, para Putnam (2010), é que as visões tradicionais de ênfase “estatocêntrica” tratam o Estado como ator unitário (“ele, o Estado”), perdendo de vista o caráter plural (“eles, o Estado”) dos tomadores de decisão, e desconsideram inclusive a luta política inerente ao processo decisório, as classes sociais, os grupos de interesse (tanto econômicos quanto não econômicos), os legisladores e até mesmo a opinião pública e as eleições — e não apenas os funcionários do Poder Executivo e os arranjos institucionais. Ou seja, essas abordagens ignoram as variáveis domésticas (Putnam, 2010, p. 150).

O autor defende a lógica dos jogos de dois níveis. Sua teoria considera que, ao menos em larga escala, a política interna e a política externa estão estritamente ligadas e se relacionam de forma dialética, obrigando os tomadores de decisão a conduzir as negociações em dois níveis simultaneamente.

A análise de política externa (APE), enquanto subcampo do estudo, aporta novas perspectivas teóricas que reavaliam e criticam as visões analíticas tradicionais da PE. Hill (2003) defende a legitimidade do subcampo da APE,

assentado em um viés pluralista e articulando fronteiras internas e externas — isto é, estrutura e conjuntura. Sua teoria define o Estado como ente principal, mas ressalta o papel relevante de outros atores, como empresas, organizações não governamentais (ONGs) e sociedade civil organizada, enfatizando inclusive que, a depender do contexto, esses atores conseguem exercer poder de agência no processo de formulação e de implementação da PE.

Os diferentes autores que compõem o campo da APE têm como ponto de partida a busca por uma compreensão mais ampla da política, com base em seu processo de construção, considerando que diversas variáveis influenciam diretamente a formação da agenda e os processos de decisão e de implementação de política (Figueira, 2011).

Sato (2010) nos lembra que, até a Guerra Fria, a agenda internacional era dividida em dois planos: o da *high politics* (alta política) e o da *low politics* (baixa política). Enquanto a *high politics* referia-se às questões associadas diretamente à segurança estratégica, a expressão *low politics* era empregada para designar as questões relacionadas à economia, comércio, desenvolvimento, educação e outros temas que não se vinculavam diretamente à segurança estratégica dos países e, conseqüentemente, não faziam parte de suas agendas.

Segundo Figueira (2011), no período pós-Guerra Fria, ganharam espaço, na matéria da PE, atores como ONGs,

empresas e grupos sociais, cuja capacidade lhes permite interagir cada vez mais com os Estados, em um processo que se convencionou chamar de interdependência complexa¹. Ainda assim, Oliveira (2005) ressalta que os Estados continuam a exercer o papel de representantes legítimos na defesa dos interesses políticos desses novos atores.

As mudanças supracitadas incidem diretamente na forma como os Estados conduzem suas políticas externas. Uma das razões é que os temas internacionais estão cada vez mais presentes na vida cotidiana; hoje, o doméstico e o

externo estão entrelaçados. Assim, não existem necessariamente essas hierarquias: temas de *low politics*, como economia, saúde e educação, podem ser entendidos como *high politics* e, por isso, fazem parte da agenda prioritária do Estado. Além disso, o cenário internacional tornou-se mais horizontal, favorecendo a atuação de outros atores, que também conseguem influenciar o sistema (Sato, 2010).

O Quadro 1 ilustra as fronteiras teóricas entre as perspectivas da APE e as visões tradicionais da PE.

QUADRO 1. DIFERENÇAS ENTRE A APE E A VISÃO REALISTA DA PE

Análise da Política Externa (APE)	Visão Realista da PE
Perspectiva interdisciplinar.	Abordagem teórica essencialmente realista.
Compreensão da realidade que entrelaça o contexto interno e externo — ambos os tabuleiros importam.	Apenas a estrutura sistêmica determina a atuação diplomática dos Estados.
Entendimento da política externa como uma política pública do Estado — ambas obedecem aos mesmos ciclos, o que explica a defesa da politização e da democratização da PE.	O Estado é concebido como uma estrutura monolítica e racional.
O interesse nacional é socialmente construído.	O interesse nacional sobrepõe-se aos interesses de grupos, explicando as políticas externas dos Estados.

Fonte: Elaboração própria, adaptado de Hill (2003), Putnam (2010) e Figueira (2011).

1 Robert Keohane e Joseph Nye, dois autores clássicos, são reconhecidos como pioneiros na formulação do conceito de interdependência. Eles a caracterizam como uma relação de dependência mútua, utilizada para descrever o cenário internacional em transformação, influenciado por fenômenos como a globalização. Na política global, a interdependência refere-se a circunstâncias em que ocorrem efeitos recíprocos entre nações ou entre agentes de diferentes países. Esses efeitos geralmente decorrem de transações internacionais que envolvem o fluxo de dinheiro, bens, pessoas e comunicações além das fronteiras nacionais. Desde a Segunda Guerra Mundial, houve um aumento significativo desse tipo de transações (Keohane & Nye, 1989, pp. 8-9).

Sem dúvida, a PE é geralmente determinada pela interação e pela disputa entre diferentes valores, ideologias, normas e tipos de conhecimento dos *stakeholders*, que buscam influenciar as agendas do Estado. Ademais, deve-se considerar também o papel de cada ator em razão de sua função, definido, por exemplo, na Constituição da República, bem como seu próprio poder de agência para influenciar as decisões políticas.

COOPERAÇÃO INTERNACIONAL PARA O DESENVOLVIMENTO E ANÁLISE DA POLÍTICA EXTERNA

Malacalza (2014) entende a política de cooperação internacional para o desenvolvimento como uma dimensão da política externa, responsável pela transferência de tecnologias e recursos, financeiros ou não, com o objetivo de promover o desenvolvimento econômico e social dos países pares.

Entretanto, a CID, desde sua fase embrionária, tem servido como instrumento de política externa dos países ocidentais na expansão de suas políticas e práticas de governança e na persecução de suas agendas de cooperação com os países do Sul. Hoje, a CID também é um meio para a inserção internacional de países em desenvolvimento. Tanto que integra as agendas de política externa de países como Brasil, China e Índia, considerados potências emergentes, na medida em que promovem parcerias estratégicas no âmbito da CSS, através de

relações bilaterais de cooperação com seus pares do Sul, com destaque para o componente técnico em áreas como, saúde, educação, ciência e tecnologia, agricultura, meio ambiente e gestão pública, mas também por intermédio de fóruns multilaterais, nos quais desempenham um importante papel na agenda política e econômica internacional, particularmente nos processos de reforma da governança global (Milani & Carvalho, 2013).

Se a CID é um instrumento da PE, então o estudo da inserção internacional da China no âmbito da CSS deve considerar fatores sistêmicos e domésticos. Milani e Carvalho (2013) operam com as mesmas premissas: os dois autores assinalam que a análise sobre a CSS da China e de outros emergentes deve se centrar em dois níveis diferentes e complementares:

- i) nível sistêmico, que considera uma forma de inserção internacional que os distingue teórica e discursivamente das políticas e práticas estabelecidas nos sistemas tradicionais de cooperação internacional ou “ajuda” internacional, nas instituições já existentes, como o Comitê de Assistência ao Desenvolvimento (CAD), da Organização para Cooperação e Desenvolvimento Econômico (OCDE);
- ii) nível de agente estatal, no qual o processo de formulação e implementação de política externa é objeto de barganha entre atores

estatais e não estatais que incidem na agenda do tabuleiro doméstico.

Milani e Carvalho (2013) fornecem essas explicações para ilustrar como tanto o nível de agente estatal quanto o nível sistêmico fornecem dimensões importantes para a compreensão da forma como a oferta de cooperação pode ser decidida e operacionalizada.

Portanto, existem particularidades que podem ser notadas na forma como cada país conduz sua PE; elas são extremamente importantes inclusive para definir o que a CID representa dentro da proposta de PE de cada Estado, e servem também para mensurar as semelhanças e diferenças entre as PE dos Estados no âmbito da CID, por exemplo. Por isso, muitos estudiosos consideram importante entender a PE por trás da lógica da APE e as práticas da CID como instrumento da PE.

OS ASPECTOS HISTÓRICOS E CONCEITUAIS DA COOPERAÇÃO INTERNACIONAL PARA O DESENVOLVIMENTO

A constituição da CID, como se convencionou chamar, ocorreu de maneira mais “organizada, regular e previsível” no período pós-Segunda Guerra Mundial, época em que se deu início a seu processo de institucionalização, através do qual emergiu um conjunto de “normas, discursos, práticas, agendas e comportamentos” de seus protagonistas (Milani, 2014).

Nesse período, os Estados Unidos da América (EUA), cujo papel de liderança assumiram a partir de então, criaram o Plano Marshall, com o objetivo de financiar a recuperação da Europa pós-guerra, estabelecido em duas dimensões diferentes, mas complementares, em relação à projeção de poder norte-americana: a primeira, comercial e econômica, significava recuperar um parceiro econômico relevante; a segunda dizia respeito à dimensão geopolítica, assente na contenção da expansão do comunismo no Velho Continente (Martinussen & Pedersen, 2003).

Os países-membros do CAD-OCDE, que, após 1945, receberam incentivos financeiros na forma do Plano Marshall, assumiram, a partir dos anos 1960, junto com os Estados Unidos da América e o Canadá, o papel de doadores tradicionais, enquanto os países do chamado Terceiro Mundo, à época, foram identificados como receptores — então, países recém-independentes que dependiam de assistência externa para garantir a sustentabilidade de suas economias e, portanto, assegurar a construção de suas instituições nacionais (Souza, 2014).

De fato, a CID tradicional é uma prática iniciada pelo Norte a partir de seus próprios princípios, e se consolidou em organizações como a OCDE, o Banco Mundial (BM) e o Fundo Monetário Internacional (FMI). Porém, a modalidade de assistência feita no âmbito do CAD-OCDE, concedida como doação de ajuda para o desenvolvimento, é diferente daquela que o BM e o FMI

desenvolvem enquanto instituições credoras. Aliás, o próprio conceito de ajuda externa estabelecido pelo CAD-OCDE, como sendo aquele fluxo internacional proveniente normalmente de um fornecedor governamental com o objetivo de contribuir para o processo de construção do desenvolvimento dos países receptores de cooperação, deixa claras as fronteiras entre a Ajuda Oficial para o Desenvolvimento (AOD) e os empréstimos, embora, além da ajuda bilateral, esses países utilizem canais multilaterais, como o Banco Mundial, para destinar suas contribuições ao âmbito da ajuda (Pena, 2009).

Apesar de diferenças entre essas modalidades da CID, o regime de governança das instituições de Bretton Woods, por meio de seus programas de ajustes estruturais intransigentes em relação às reformas macroeconômicas, ganhou proeminência na agenda de desenvolvimento², através da qual conseguiu vincular suas regras a outras instituições financeiras e também às agências bilaterais, no âmbito do regime de AOD, determinando as reformas econômicas como condição necessária para que os países receptores de cooperação não ficassem fora do fluxo de ajuda internacional (Cimini, 2015).

Talvez por essas vinculações, as críticas acabam sendo dirigidas à CID

como um todo. Tanto que a CID foi amplamente questionada em todas suas fases, quanto a sua eficácia e à reprodução de relações de dependência e desigualdade entre os países (Tomazini, 2017).

No entanto, as indagações e os questionamentos ocorreram em ritmos e tons diferentes, a depender do cenário e dos interesses em jogo. No contexto da Guerra Fria, tanto o regime da AOD quanto o dos empréstimos foram pouco questionados e, de igual modo, eram menos exigentes, em razão da corrida bipolar por aliados. Mesmo naquela época, porém, já havia uma tensão Norte-Sul, o principal das reivindicações era a cobrança pelo cumprimento da meta de ajuda fixada através de iniciativas dentro da ONU, encetadas pelo bloco do Terceiro Mundo, de 0,7% do Produto Nacional Bruto (PNB) dos países ricos, que deveria ser destinado ao AOD por ano, com o objetivo de superar os 0,4% que haviam sido atingidos.

Inclusive, o não cumprimento dessa meta, com exceção dos países nórdicos, tem sido apontado pelos críticos das políticas da AOD como motivo do insucesso desse regime, que não conseguiu mobilizar um grande volume de assistência para os países

2 Isso também influenciou a ajuda internacional proveniente dos países nórdicos e de outros doadores que outrora mantinham a redução da pobreza como o maior objetivo. Os programas de ajuste estrutural tornaram-se dominantes na cooperação internacional para o desenvolvimento, de modo que quase todos os doadores bilaterais aceitaram trabalhar dentro desse marco (Martinussen & Pedersen, 2003, p. 27).

em desenvolvimento, tal como ocorreu com o Plano Marshall (Pena, 2009).

Assim, o regime da AOD foi, ao longo dos anos, suscitando reticências e questionamentos por parte dos países receptores do então Terceiro Mundo, principalmente dos emergentes, que apelavam à redefinição de seus princípios e práticas (Souza, 2014).

Em relação ao regime dos empréstimos, as críticas tornaram-se mais intensas após a Guerra Fria. Os países do Sul Global, por não conseguirem, em sua maioria, implementar com sucesso as políticas econômicas e financeiras de influência neoliberal indicadas pelo BM e pelo FMI, começaram a apontar a ineficácia dos modelos políticos fundamentados nas políticas de Bretton Woods, em sua imbricação com os anseios de desenvolvimento dos países do Sul, inclusive notando as discrepâncias em torno dos modelos de cooperação.

Em função dessas críticas, houve uma sequência de projetos políticos do Terceiro Mundo, dirigidos por países considerados emergentes, juntamente com organizações intergovernamentais, empresas e organizações da sociedade civil, voltados para a redefinição dos princípios e práticas de cooperação (Souza & Mello, 2014).

Na época da Guerra Fria, o espírito terceiro-mundista de Bandung deu base para as críticas à CID tradicional, porém, após o conflito bipolar, principalmente nos anos 2000, os países emergentes do Sul passaram da condição de receptores e tornaram-se atores

relevantes da CID, assumindo o papel de novos fornecedores de cooperação internacional para o desenvolvimento a partir do eixo Sul, embora alguns continuem, ao mesmo tempo, doadores e receptores (Milani & Carvalho, 2013).

A CID contemporânea é composta por atores bastante heterogêneos: países de renda alta ou média, economias de baixa renda, economias emergentes, os BRICS, o G-20, além de atores não governamentais, como a sociedade civil organizada global, empresas privadas e ONGs (Souza, 2014).

Em termos conceituais, Ayllón (2006) descreve a CID como:

Conjunto de atuações de caráter internacional realizadas por atores públicos e privados, entre países de diferentes níveis de renda, para promover o progresso econômico e social dos Países em Desenvolvimento (PVD) e alcançar um progresso mais justo e equilibrado no mundo, com o objetivo de construir um planeta mais seguro e pacífico. Essas atuações situam-se no quadro das relações internacionais, das quais constituem um âmbito específico, e perseguem metas comuns baseadas em critérios de solidariedade, equidade, eficácia, interesse mútuo, sustentabilidade e corresponsabilidade. A finalidade primordial da CID está relacionada à erradicação da pobreza e à execução social, bem como ao incremento permanente dos níveis de desenvolvimento político, social, econômico e cultural nos países do Sul. (Ayllón, 2006, p. 7)

Sato (2010) aponta que, à medida que se registra um crescente avanço dos mecanismos de cooperação, avançam também novas oportunidades e novos problemas que, por sua vez, demandam

a construção de sistemas de cooperação internacional mais coerentes e compatíveis entre si, seja considerando suas práticas, seja em suas instituições.

Assim, Souza (2014) realça que o fato de os desafios do desenvolvimento global ainda persistirem impõe aos atores da CID a construção de um arcabouço institucional inclusivo, que sirva para harmonizar seus princípios e suas práticas.

Não obstante, a CID continua sendo, neste século XXI, indiscutivelmente, um dos principais instrumentos para o desenvolvimento de ações de governança de atores internacionais, buscando assegurar o pleno funcionamento das relações internacionais, assente no princípio de ajuda mútua entre dois ou mais Estados, tendo o desenvolvimento como seu objetivo, ou seja, é através dele que a cooperação emerge e se sustenta.

AS CARACTERÍSTICAS INSTITUCIONAIS DA POLÍTICA EXTERNA E COOPERAÇÃO INTERNACIONAL PARA O DESENVOLVIMENTO CHINÊS

A cooperação para o desenvolvimento consubstancia-se em uma importante ferramenta de política externa chinesa (PEC), e seu escopo é amplamente influenciado pelo espírito terceiro-mundista de Bandung.

A China considera a política de ajuda externa um mecanismo indispensável da PEC, que, por exemplo, ajudou o governo de Pequim a garantir sua cadeira na ONU em 1971. Dessa maneira,

Pequim combina objetivos diplomáticos e econômicos, tanto que a composição das agências governamentais do regime de ajuda externa reflete essa visão (Rudyak, 2019).

A coordenação e a decisão sobre a política externa e o programa de ajuda externa chinesa ficam a cargo do partido — ou seja, do governo central —, através do Conselho do Estado Chinês (CEC). A governança da ajuda externa foi, até o início de 2018, partilhada pelo Ministério do Comércio (MOFCOM), que coordenava e fiscalizava o programa de ajuda e toda a matéria da CID; pelo Ministério das Relações Exteriores (MFA), que administrava o planejamento de ajuda junto ao MOFCOM, fornecendo análises sobre o ambiente diplomático e procurando garantir que os acordos se alinhassem aos objetivos da política externa; pelo Ministério das Finanças (MOF), responsável por coordenar o orçamento da ajuda; e ainda pelo China Export-Import Bank (China Eximbank), que implementa políticas econômicas da China (Zhang & Smith, 2017; Rudyak, 2019).

Além das agências governamentais supramencionadas, as empresas estatais sob a administração central da China (SOEs) são atores importantes no sistema de ajuda externa chinesa. Devido ao relevante papel que desempenham na implementação da diplomacia econômica chinesa, gerando receitas para o Estado, as SOEs são apoiadas política e financeiramente pelas demais agências do governo. Assim, essas empresas conseguem influenciar

a política de ajuda externa, inclusive propondo projetos de cooperação, seja através da interação com atores nacionais, como o MOFCOM e o China Eximbank, seja negociando nos bastidores com os governos nacionais dos países beneficiários, nos quais, uma vez instaladas, constroem relações estreitas e cordiais com agentes locais, políticos e empresários.

Portanto, muitos projetos de cooperação chinesa começam a ser articulados por empresas que geralmente conhecem as demandas locais e se preocupam mais com os ganhos comerciais. Isso explica, em parte, por que o programa de ajuda externa chinesa é dominado por projetos de infraestrutura fortemente apoiados pelo China Eximbank, através de empréstimos concessionais (Zhang & Smith, 2017).

Apesar da participação de vários ministérios no programa de ajuda, o governo chinês criou, em março de 2018, a China International Development Cooperation Agency (CIDCA), buscando conceder maior agilidade à gestão da ajuda externa, acabar com gastos irracionais e com disputas de agendas entre departamentos governamentais e, com isso, atribuir maior significado aos regimes de cooperação internacional (Rudyak, 2019).

Conforme o comunicado de imprensa oficial do governo chinês³, a CIDCA foi criada “para operacionalizar o regime de ajuda externa, garantir a

eficácia da ajuda como um instrumento-chave da política externa, otimizar o planejamento estratégico e a coordenação geral da ajuda, reformar os métodos de entrega da ajuda para melhor servir aos objetivos da diplomacia geral da China e à construção da Belt and Road.”

Antes mesmo dessas mudanças institucionais na gestão do regime de ajuda, Zhang e Smith (2017) já chamavam a atenção para o fato de que a estrutura de governança da política externa chinesa não é monolítica, ou seja, na prática, embora o MOFCOM desempenhasse um papel indispensável na formulação de políticas de ajuda externa, não coordenava sozinho o programa de ajuda da China. Os autores apontam que, na verdade, o sistema de ajuda chinês é composto por uma acirrada e contínua competição entre diferentes atores que buscam incidir na agenda.

Mesmo com a criação da CIDCA, porém, a fragmentação política entre atores governamentais não cessou, pois à nova agência cabe a coordenação e gestão da ajuda, enquanto o papel de execução continua a cargo dos ministérios centrais e provinciais, comissões e agências, sob a liderança do MOFCOM (Rudyak, 2019).

A análise da estrutura interna do programa de ajuda chinesa sugere os mecanismos pelos quais ocorrem os processos de implementação dos

3 Formação da Agência de Cooperação Internacional para o Desenvolvimento da China.

projetos de ajuda externa, isto é, desde o processo de decisão e formulação no contexto interno até a implementação no nível externo. Um conjunto de agências participa do planejamento e da execução dos projetos de ajuda; ou seja, mesmo com a criação da CIDCA, muitos departamentos governamentais continuam desempenhando um papel relevante no regime de ajuda externa.

Com a instituição da CIDCA, estavam previstas inovações no regime de ajuda. Uma das mais lembradas foi a mudança do termo que o governo chinês atribuiria a sua agência de ajuda.

A China preferiu o termo “ajuda externa” (*duiwai yuanzhu*), por entender que, sendo um país em desenvolvimento, não se encontra no mesmo estágio dos países que fornecem ajuda ao desenvolvimento para outros países em crescimento; portanto, não seria mais adequado continuar a designar o mesmo termo utilizado pelo CAD da OCDE. O termo “ajuda ao desenvolvimento” (*fazhan yuanzhu*) passa a ser empregado para dar ênfase à China ainda em desenvolvimento, cujo progresso, bem como o de seus parceiros, deve ser buscado com base na visão do “desenvolvimento comum”, conforme traçada pela política da BRI (Rudyak, 2019).

Assim, o governo chinês desenvolve projetos de cooperação internacional principalmente por meio da cooperação bilateral, mas também tem estabelecido acordos por canais multilaterais, através da promoção de conferências internacionais, entre as quais se destacam: as Conferências de Alto Nível da ONU, sobre Financiamento para o Desenvolvimento e sobre os Objetivos de Desenvolvimento do Milênio para o ano de 2015, o Fórum de Cooperação China-África (FOCAC) e o Fórum de Cooperação Econômica e Comercial entre a China e os Países de Língua Portuguesa.

O multilateralismo institucionalizado ilustra bem a postura “globalista” que caracteriza a política de cooperação chinesa. Isso significa que a China, por meio do princípio de convivência pacífica, não quer ser vista como um beligerante, muito menos como um *outsider*⁴. Portanto, coloca-se como um ator responsável, que fornece financiamento para o desenvolvimento dos países parceiros e, de igual modo, continua buscando seu próprio crescimento econômico e social.

De fato, no caso da China, pode-se compreender que a prática política é multilateral — ou seja, de participação em fóruns internacionais —, mas a prática cooperativa é bilateral, buscando

4 Faz referência aos casos de países que assumem posturas unilateralistas e se mantêm afastados do jogo e das regras internacionais, ou seja, são atores imprevisíveis. Foi o cenário que caracterizava a China, mas que mudou no século XXI, quando o país passou a buscar uma ascensão pacífica. Pode-se citar ainda a famosa frase de Deng Xiaoping, ex-líder chinês, que se tornou popular: “Não importa a cor do gato, contanto que ele cace o rato”. Essa frase é hoje usada para fazer referência a essa postura globalista da China.

manter o poder de barganha frente a países menos desenvolvidos.

No contexto africano, a China tem promovido o discurso *win-win* (ganha-ganha), tentando deixar claro que já não é mais um provedor de ajuda gratuita, em que suas ações de cooperação seriam economicamente desinteressadas; ou seja, reconhece que também obtém ganhos com os projetos que desenvolve na África. Essa visão, empregada com maior ênfase a partir do início do milênio, é uma tentativa de afastar-se do discurso da “ajuda internacional” levado a cabo no âmbito do CAD da OCDE (Milani & Carvalho, 2013).

Essa abordagem política está embasada na ideia de que, como a China é (por definição) um país em desenvolvimento, seus gastos com ajuda devem estar alinhados a seus interesses de mercado, traduzidos em benefícios mútuos, para servir aos objetivos de desenvolvimento econômico dos beneficiários e da própria China (Rudyak, 2019).

Desde 1964, o governo chinês já havia elencado oficialmente os principais vetores de sua política de cooperação internacional, baseada em princípios de assistência econômica e técnica, quais sejam: respeito mútuo à integridade territorial e à soberania nacional; igualdade e benefícios mútuos, ou negociação *win-win*; apoio à sustentabilidade nacional para a eficiência econômica e produtiva; concessão de subsídios e empréstimos; perdão da dívida; cooperação técnica para capacitação de recursos humanos

e troca de expertise; ajuda humanitária de emergência e programas de voluntariado nos países receptores; uso de bens e materiais chineses (Zhang & Smith, 2017; Rudyak, 2019).

Ao colocar-se como não interven-tora em assuntos domésticos de outros Estados, a China se contradiz, pois sua política de cooperação para o desenvolvimento na África é historicamente guiada pela cláusula *sine qua non* chamada “*One-China Policy*” (Uma Só China). Ou seja, “os países africanos que ainda hoje reconhecem Taiwan e mantêm relações diplomáticas com a ilha não podem ser beneficiários da cooperação chinesa (Milani & Carvalho, 2013, p. 30).

Atualmente, Essuatíni é o único país africano que mantém relações diplomáticas com Taiwan, contrariando a política de “Uma Só China». Como resultado, não participa do FOCAC, por exemplo. Os casos de Burquina Fasso, São Tomé e Príncipe e Gâmbia, no passado, exemplificam esse condicionalismo.

O que não se pode contestar é a postura multiforme com que a inserção internacional chinesa tem ocorrido, não se limitando apenas à cooperação econômica e à assistência técnica, mas também a empréstimos e doações.

No caso chinês, a CSS assume múltiplas formas: desde o envio de missões médicas, a construção de rodovias e pontes, a cooperação técnica e a instalação de estações termoelétricas até programas de treinamento e empréstimos de apoio ao comércio exterior.

Do ponto de vista financeiro, inclui doações, empréstimos a juro zero e empréstimos subsidiados. As doações e os empréstimos concedidos sem cobrança de juros são gerenciados pelo Ministério do Comércio, seguindo orientações da política externa chinesa (Milani & Carvalho, 2013, p. 17).

O Estado chinês tem sido pragmático, articulando sua política externa de forma flexível, com poucas condicionais, exigências ou preocupações com o sistema político e o modelo ideológico dos parceiros de cooperação; ou seja, diferentemente de grande parte dos provedores da OCDE, a China não exige compromissos com a democracia, a governança ou os direitos humanos.

Por outro lado, a política de inserção internacional da China tem sido criticada, sob a acusação de desinteresse em relação às questões afetas aos direitos humanos, à democracia e à sustentabilidade nos países parceiros. A crítica, porém, tem lógica, uma vez que, ultimamente, a China tem articulado seus projetos de forma verticalizada (entre Pequim e os presidentes e governos dos países beneficiários de cooperação). Essa postura *top-top* não leva em consideração os componentes de *ombudsman local*, principalmente diante das denúncias sobre a falta de compromisso com a agenda ambiental, das quais a China tem sido alvo.

Contudo, Rudyak (2019) lembra que um dos objetivos da CIDCA é mudar essa tendência, tornando o sistema de ajuda chinesa mais transparente e, principalmente, interagir com e

envolver um conjunto de atores locais — desde governos centrais e regionais até a sociedade civil e as ONGs—, considerando, portanto, as pautas e os interesses das comunidades locais, como forma de evitar agitação social decorrente de disputas e confrontos e permitir efetivamente que o projeto de cooperação sirva tanto aos interesses da China quanto aos objetivos de desenvolvimento dos países parceiros de maneira sustentável.

Ademais, cabe lembrar como se não bastasse que a institucionalização da CIDCA, enquanto nova agência de ajuda, não significa dizer que ela lida apenas com o programa de ajuda externa, o que poderia dar a entender que a China tem agências específicas para tratar, por exemplo, de empréstimos e investimentos. Na verdade, como já apontado, o programa de ajuda é combinado com outros instrumentos de política externa; por isso, a CIDCA integra as doações e a assistência técnica aos empréstimos e investimentos. Por isso, além da CIDCA, atores como o MOFCOM, o China Eximbank e as empresas estatais participam tanto da elaboração quanto da execução dos projetos.

AGENDAS E ATORES IMPLICADOS NA COOPERAÇÃO INTERNACIONAL PARA O DESENVOLVIMENTO CHINÊS NA ÁFRICA

Na perspectiva da política externa, a inserção internacional da China na África ocorreu de duas formas distintas,

entre os séculos XX e XXI⁵. No passado, as relações sino-africanas emanaram de um forte vínculo político, ligado à grande política terceiro-mundista da Guerra Fria, em que o país asiático já promovia projetos nas áreas de infraestrutura, recursos naturais, agricultura e indústria têxtil, embora com motivação estritamente política, quando apoiava os movimentos de libertação nacional africanos. Neste século, porém, a ascensão chinesa no continente africano passou a ter uma ênfase econômica, vinculada a seu projeto desenvolvimentista (Esteves *et al.*, 2010).

A década de 1980, marcada pela crise econômica ainda mais profunda na África e pelos programas de ajustamento estrutural, caracterizou-se pela marginalização das relações China-África. Não obstante, as sanções e o pretense isolamento da China pelo Ocidente, como reação ao célebre evento político ocorrido em 1989 na Praça da Paz Celestial, redirecionaram a política externa chinesa para outros contextos fora do Ocidente. A reaproximação com a África tornou-se uma realidade, pois as lideranças políticas africanas, imbuídas do espírito solidário terceiro-mundista, foram flexíveis, afastando-se do jogo ocidental e opondo-se a sancionar Pequim, além de sugerirem possibilidades de cooperação para o desenvolvimento. Por outro lado, a

China também já havia começado sua campanha para tornar-se uma economia de mercado.

Na verdade, as relações China-África passaram a ganhar um melhor enquadramento, e os fundamentos da cooperação tornaram-se mais institucionalizados com a criação, em 2000, do FOCAC e o estabelecimento do China Development Bank (que criou, em 2007, o China-África Development Fund), o China Eximbank e o Agrícola Development Bank of China (ADBC), todos servindo de instrumento para a operacionalização dos investimentos e empréstimos da China para a África (Esteves *et al.*, 2010; Milani & Carvalho, 2013).

Além do aumento da intensidade dos laços cooperativos entre a China e os países membros desse fórum, após a criação do FOCAC também houve uma maior coesão diplomática, ou seja, uma convergência em temas de política externa entre a China e os países africanos (Montenegro & Alves, 2016).

Na mesma linha, o lançamento, em 2006, no âmbito do FOCAC III, do African Policy Paper (documento de política externa para a África) revela a importância política — e, principalmente, econômica — do continente africano para a China. Ao mesmo tempo, sinaliza que as relações sino-africanas começaram a ocorrer em um

5 Na verdade, essa revisão histórica não levou em conta que os primeiros contatos entre a China e a África ocorreram já nas expedições marítimas do almirante Zheng He pela costa oriental da África e pelo Mar Vermelho, no século XV.

ritmo bastante acelerado em termos de ajuda, comércio e investimento. O documento também reforça a solidariedade, a igualdade, o benefício mútuo e o desenvolvimento comum como princípios que guiam as relações sino-africanas. Entretanto, faltou o documento precisar “como as iniciativas políticas para a África devem ser implementadas”, o que acabou de provocar diferentes interpretações entre os ministérios implicados na política externa, facilitando a competição entre agências governamentais (Corkin, 2011).

Com a sua chegada ao poder, o presidente chinês Xi Jinping desenvolveu uma estratégia de inserção internacional que busca tornar a China um ator proativo no âmbito da CID, com enfoque particular na CSS. Um exemplo disso foi o sexto encontro do FOCAC, no qual Xi prometeu apoio financeiro à África na ordem de 60 bilhões de dólares, incluindo compromissos com doações no valor de 5 bilhões de dólares e empréstimos concessionais de expressivos 35 bilhões de dólares. Foi através dessa postura que o governo chinês lançou a Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), um projeto bastante ambicioso cuja estratégia, entre outras, é alinhar a agenda de ajuda chinesa aos objetivos gerais da política externa da BRI (Zhang & Smith, 2017; Rudyak, 2019).

Ribeiro (2015) destaca que as relações comerciais sino-africanas se intensificaram neste século XXI. A China importa da África essencialmente os bens primários — entre outros, algodão, madeira, couros, peles e recursos

energéticos, particularmente carvão, petróleo e gás natural—, enquanto os países africanos compram da China os produtos manufaturados, como roupas, carros e produtos eletrônicos.

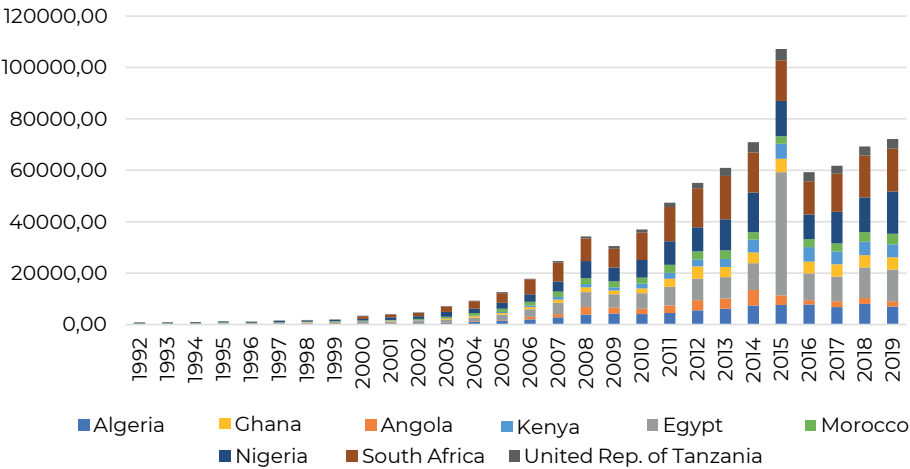
Em termos de países prioritários, os Gráficos 1 e 2 mostram as principais exportações da China para a África e indicam a direção dos principais exportadores da África para a China.

O comércio entre a China e a África tem crescido ano após ano. Os dados da China-África Research Initiative (2019), por exemplo, revelam que, apenas em 2019, o valor do comércio bilateral China-África atingiu 192 bilhões de dólares, superando os 185 bilhões registrados em 2018. Nesses empreendimentos, alguns países africanos ricos em recursos naturais se destacam como maiores exportadores de *commodities* para a China, são eles: Angola, Gabão, República Democrática do Congo, Líbia, Congo, Nigéria e Zâmbia. Por sua vez, Nigéria, África do Sul, Egito, Argélia, Gana, Marrocos e Quênia são os principais compradores de produtos chineses (Ribeiro, 2015; China-Africa Research Initiative, 2019).

O investimento estrangeiro direto (IED) consubstancia-se também em uma das modalidades da atuação internacional da China.

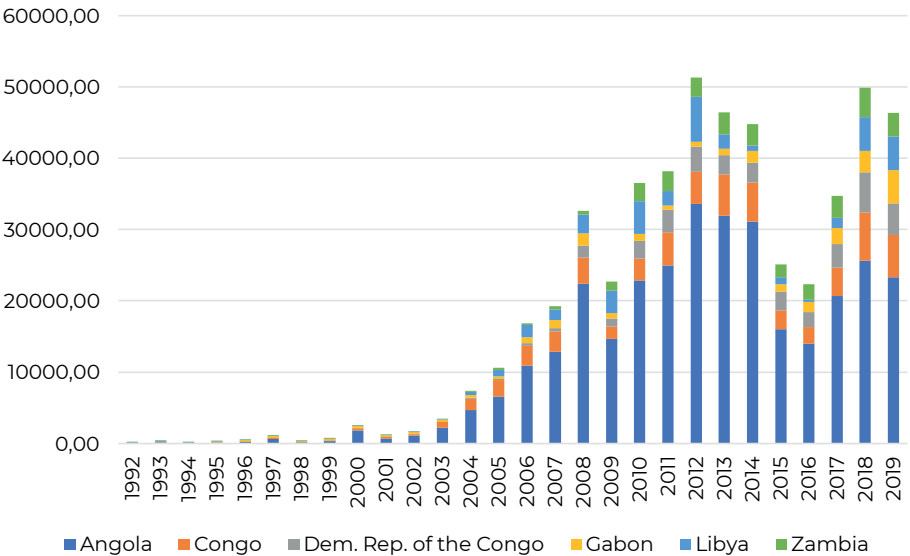
Para a África, o IED tem aumentado de maneira exponencial, ultrapassando os EUA desde 2014. O valor cresceu de 75 milhões US\$ em 2003 para 2,7 bilhões US\$ em 2019, tendo nesse ano a República Democrática do Congo, Angola, Etiópia, África do

**GRÁFICO 1. PRINCIPAIS EXPORTAÇÕES DA CHINA PARA A ÁFRICA
(EM MILHÕES DE DÓLARES)**



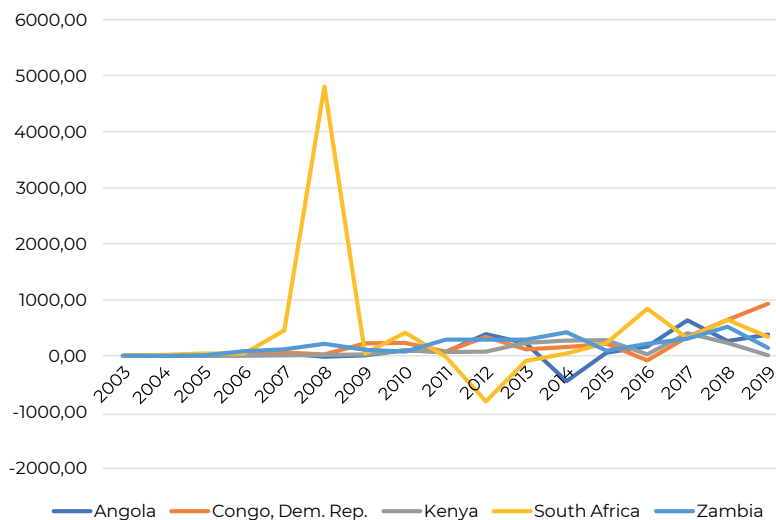
Fonte: Dados de SAIS-CARI (2019). Tradução de Júlio Sani Lopes.

**GRÁFICO 2. PRINCIPAIS EXPORTADORES DA ÁFRICA PARA A CHINA
(EM MILHÕES DE DÓLARES)**



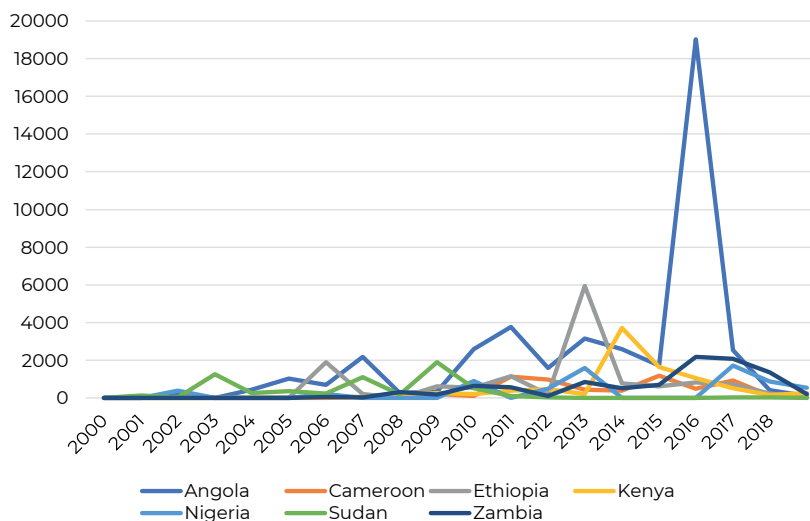
Fonte: Dados de SAIS-CARI (2019). Tradução de Júlio Sani Lopes.

**GRÁFICO 3. FLUXO DE INVESTIMENTO DIRETO CHINÊS PARA PAÍSES AFRICANOS
(EM MILHÕES DE DÓLARES)**



Fonte: Dados de SAIS-CARI (2019). Tradução de Júlio Sani Lopes.

**GRÁFICO 4. PRINCIPAIS EMPRÉSTIMOS CHINESES PARA PAÍSES AFRICANOS
(EM MILHÕES DE DÓLARES)**



Fonte: Dados de SAIS-CARI (2019). Tradução de Júlio Sani Lopes

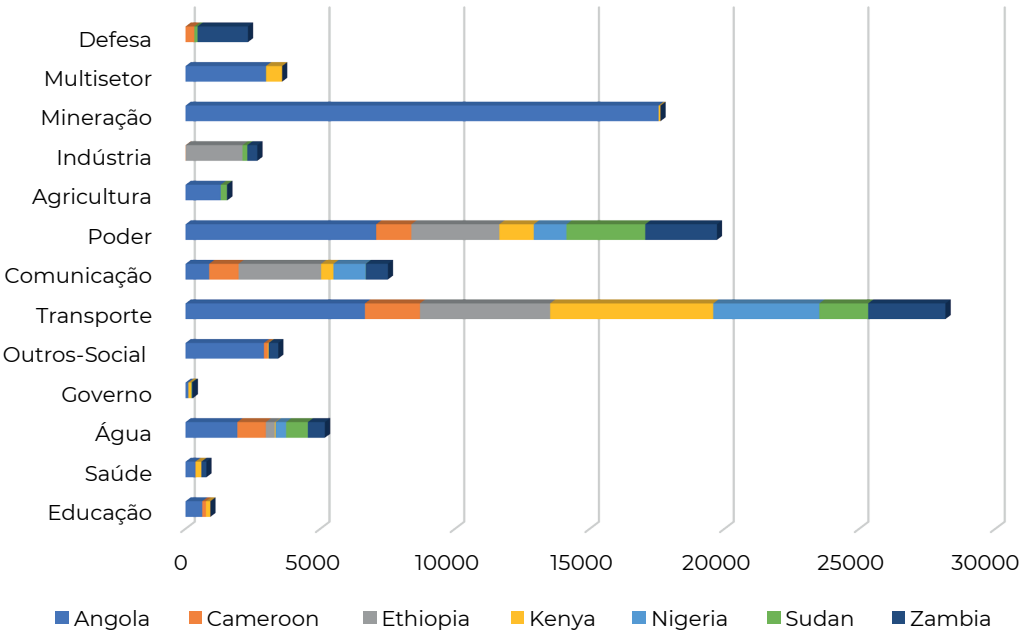
Sul e Ilhas de Maurício, como os principais beneficiários. Não obstante, com a compra de 20% das ações do Standard Bank of South Africa por Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC) foi possível atingir o pico desse tipo de investimento no contexto africano no ano de 2008, no valor de US\$ 5,5 bilhões (China Africa Research Initiative, 2019).

Os Gráficos 4 e 5 mapeiam os empréstimos chineses para a África, por países e por setores. Até 2019, os principais destinos africanos do IED chinês foram a República Democrática do Congo, Angola, África do Sul, Quênia e

Zâmbia. Os principais países beneficiários dos empréstimos chineses, em milhões de dólares, na África são: Angola, Camarões, Etiópia, Quênia, Nigéria, Sudão e Zâmbia. Esses empréstimos são destinados para financiar setores econômicos, especialmente mineração, agricultura, telecomunicações e recursos hídricos, e, em muito menor escala, aos setores sociais, como saúde e educação.

Na dinâmica da relação bilateral entre a China e a África, nações como Angola, Argélia, África do Sul, Gana, Nigéria, Egito, República Democrática do Congo e Zâmbia se destacam como

GRÁFICO 5. PRINCIPAIS EMPRÉSTIMOS CHINESES PARA GOVERNOS AFRICANOS, POR SETOR, 2000-2019 (EM MILHÕES DE DÓLARES)



Fonte: Dados de SAIS-CARI (2019). Tradução de Júlio Sani Lopes.

os principais parceiros, tanto no que diz respeito às transações comerciais quanto aos investimentos e empréstimos.

Com foco no estudo da expansão chinesa no continente africano, através dos empreendimentos comerciais, investimentos e fluxos financeiros, Ribeiro (2015) enaltece a forma como a China articula sua estratégia de inserção internacional a partir de uma perspectiva tripartite, na medida em que une o governo, as instituições financeiras e as empresas estatais para atuar como protagonistas de seus diferentes regimes de CID no contexto africano.

De acordo com Corkin (2011), por muitos anos, os principais atores governamentais implicados na elaboração e implementação da política externa chinesa foram o MFA e o MOFCOM. Para a África, especificamente, o MOFCOM tornou-se a agência mais influente, pois o ministério mantém relações cordiais com o China Eximbank. Por meio da parceria entre as duas agências, o governo chinês passou a priorizar sua agenda comercial em detrimento de seus objetivos puramente políticos no continente.

Em um estudo sobre a internacionalização das empresas chinesas, Acioly *et al.* (2009) revelam que, na África, atuam aproximadamente 800

empresas chinesas⁶, sendo 100 estatais, que concentram a maior parte dos investimentos, voltados principalmente à exploração de recursos naturais, ao passo que empresas privadas operam nos setores de serviços e manufatura, porém com investimentos de menor dimensão.

De fato, as SOEs chinesas são instituições de prestígio que representam os interesses econômicos do governo chinês na África e, por isso, exercem um papel fundamental no processo de implementação de políticas econômicas no continente. Tanto que, “durante as visitas à África, os líderes chineses frequentemente realizam reuniões com empresas chinesas e buscam suas opiniões sobre questões econômicas” (Zhang & Smith, 2017, p. 12).

Ribeiro (2015) destaca as empresas chinesas que atuam no setor de telecomunicações, com ênfase para Huawei, Alcatel-Lucent Shanghai Bell, China Mobile e ZTE. No entanto, apesar de notar também a importância das áreas de mineração, manufatura, agricultura e pesca, a autora aponta o setor de infraestrutura como área prioritária e fundamental no processo de inserção internacional chinesa. Esse setor recebe a maior parcela do investimento chinês na África, financiada pelo Eximbank; ou seja, trata-se de um setor que

6 Na verdade, os dados sobre o número de empresas chinesas no continente africano variam conforme a fonte e a metodologia de contagem. Por exemplo, uma matéria da BBC, publicada em janeiro de 2025 e baseada em fontes de estudos vinculados ao Fórum Econômico Mundial, aponta que há cerca de 3 mil empresas chinesas no continente africano. Sobre a quantidade de empresas chinesas atuantes na África, vide: <https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/articles/c5ye24dd-0w9o>.

dá suporte aos investimentos chineses em outras áreas, como mineração, petróleo e telecomunicações, e ainda serve como um elemento de barganha para responder às carências de infraestrutura nos países africanos, possibilitando também maior presença das empresas chinesas que nele atuam.

A inserção internacional da China na África ocorre também por meio de doações e assistência externa. Os gastos com assistência externa chegaram a 3,1 bilhões de dólares em 2019, sendo que o continente africano recebeu 45% dessa assistência entre 2013 e 2018 (Sais-Cari, 2019).

Ademais, a China também se dedica à diplomacia cultural (*soft power*) em sua estratégia de inserção internacional. O governo chinês criou na África um total de 54 Institutos Confúcio, apesar de que o impacto dessa política ainda seja simbólico, alguns estudos revelam pouca relação estatisticamente robusta entre esses institutos e o programa de ajuda externa, os empreendimentos comerciais e os investimentos chineses no continente (Montenegro, 2019).

Sem dúvida, nos dias atuais, a CID chinesa na África se estabelece por meio de múltiplas modalidades — empréstimos, investimentos externos, doações e assistência técnica. Embora cada uma possua sua própria especificidade, todas estão inseridas nas estratégias de inserção internacional da China no âmbito de CID, com base nas diretrizes de sua política externa.

Em comparação, a presença chinesa na África é mais forte no setor

comercial e menos expressiva em termos de cooperação técnica. Aliás, o próprio modelo de ajuda ao desenvolvimento adotado pelo governo chinês, desde o MOFCOM até o CIDCA, diferencia as formas de investimento da China — entre o apoio aos setores sociais nos países beneficiários e os empreendimentos comerciais e empréstimos, que a posicionam como credora.

Isso significa que, quando se fala em CID chinesa na África, deve-se considerar tanto o regime de ajuda quanto o de empréstimos. Embora essas modalidades divirjam em sua natureza, ambas são partes da cooperação chinesa. A articulação entre elas não apenas torna a China um dos maiores parceiros da África, como também revela o papel dos órgãos governamentais e das empresas estatais, que, em um sistema de complementariedade, incidem nos projetos desenvolvidos naquele contexto.

CONSIDERAÇÕES FINAIS

O presente artigo analisou a política externa da China em relação à África. O objetivo precípua foi estudar as dinâmicas de cooperação, especialmente no que tange aos atores e às agendas mais envolvidos na cooperação internacional chinesa nesse contexto.

De forma estratégica, a China utiliza, como ferramenta de política externa, os empréstimos concessionais e os investimentos alinhados a seus interesses de mercado, na busca por *commodities* africanos.

Não é surpreendente que os principais parceiros comerciais da China na África estejam também entre os países nos quais a China tem concentrado seus empréstimos e investimentos. Esses investimentos abrangem diversos setores, tais como mineração, manufatura, construção, agricultura, pesca e telecomunicações.

Dessa forma, conclui-se que a política externa da China para a África é marcadamente pragmática e diversificada. O país combina governo, instituições financeiras e empresas estatais para promover seus interesses econômicos e estratégicos. Embora ofereça alternativas distintas do modelo ocidental — especialmente no que se refere às modalidades de empréstimos e investimentos — o foco primordial no mercado e em outros segmentos econômicos, bem como a limitada atenção às áreas sociais, como saúde e educação, têm intensificado as críticas à China.

O país tem sido alvo de acusações relacionadas à falta de sustentabilidade e ao baixo compromisso com a agenda ambiental. Os avanços dessa relação cooperativa dependerão da capacidade de Pequim de conciliar seus objetivos com as demandas africanas por parcerias mais equitativas e benefícios mútuos tangíveis.

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**NUEVAS ALIANZAS, ACTORES
EMERGENTES Y PERSPECTIVAS
REGIONALES**

**NEW ALLIANCES, EMERGING
ACTORS AND REGIONAL
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**NOVAS ALIANÇAS, ATORES
EMERGENTES E PERSPECTIVAS
REGIONAIS**

Africa and The Cooperation Forums With Extra-Continental Countries

Peter Joilah Lambon*

ABSTRACT

This article examines Africa's role in cooperation forums. Despite the continent's strategic relevance to these platforms, it acknowledges Africa's peripheral role within them. Recent decades have revealed a more assertive Africa. It remains to be seen whether the AU will demonstrate a more pragmatic sense of agency and strategy within these forums. The study used liberal institutionalist theory to examine Africa's representation in these forums. A qualitative content analysis was used to analyze existing literature. The findings reveal the instrumental role of cooperation forums in driving the interests of its members. Thus, cooperation has become a crucial strategic platform, shedding light on the manifest and latent goals of extra-continental

countries. The study highlights the inherent challenges within cooperative forums, including navigating complex bilateral and multilateral relations, framing collective goals, resolving disputes, building mutual trust, and ensuring sustainability. For Africa, the findings reveal that the continent has made substantial gains from its participation in cooperation forums, notably in infrastructure growth, trade relations, economic aid, scholarship opportunities, military capacity building and security initiatives, the fight against diseases, promotion of human rights and strengthening of its democracies. The study also reveals AU's moderate agency in pursuing its continental agenda. However, the AU lacks an "African Strategy" that defines

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Received: August 21th, 2025 / Modified: October 16th, 2025/ Accepted: October 17th, 2025

To cite this article:

Lambon, P. J. (2025). Africa and The Cooperation Forums With Extra-Continental Countries, *Oasis*, 43, 245-268.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18601/16577558.n43.11>

its participation in cooperation forums. The study recommends that the AU adopts an “African Strategy” to optimize its role in global cooperation forums.

Keywords: Africa; BRICS; FOCAC; EU; US; Cooperation Forums & Liberal Institutionalism.

África y los foros de cooperación con países extracontinentales

RESUMEN

El artículo examina el papel de África en los foros de cooperación. A pesar de la relevancia estratégica del continente para estas plataformas, se reconoce su papel periférico dentro de ellas. Las últimas décadas han mostrado un continente más asertivo; sin embargo, aún está por verse si la Unión Africana (UA) demostrará un sentido más pragmático de agencia y estrategia dentro de estos foros. El estudio empleó la teoría del institucionalismo liberal para analizar la representación de África en dichos espacios. Se utilizó un análisis cualitativo de contenido para examinar la literatura existente.

Los hallazgos revelan el papel instrumental que desempeñan los foros de cooperación en la promoción de los intereses de sus miembros. Así, la cooperación se ha convertido en una plataforma estratégica crucial que da luces sobre los objetivos manifiestos y latentes de los países extracontinentales. El estudio identifica los desafíos

inherentes a los foros de cooperación, entre ellos la gestión de relaciones bilaterales y multilaterales complejas, la formulación de metas colectivas, la resolución de conflictos, la construcción de confianza mutua y la garantía de sostenibilidad.

En el caso de África, los resultados muestran que el continente ha obtenido avances significativos gracias a su participación en los foros de cooperación. El estudio también evidencia una agencia moderada de la Unión Africana en la promoción de su agenda continental. No obstante, la UA carece de una “estrategia africana” que defina su participación en estos foros; por ello, el estudio recomienda que la UA adopte esta estrategia para optimizar su papel dentro de los foros globales de cooperación.

Palabras clave: África; BRIC; Focac; UE; EE. UU.; Foros de cooperación; institucionalismo liberal.

INTRODUCTION

The history of Africa is inextricably linked to colonialism and slavery. The effects of Cold War-era proxy conflicts and subsequent neocolonial plans have trapped the continent in a cycle of poverty and underdevelopment. Despite these circumstances, several nations and international organizations have divided Africa into areas of interest, depicting the continent as strategically important (Atanasu, 2024). This is evident in several international policy agendas involving numerous players

from the international arena, such as the UN, the EU, the World Bank, the BRICS, the US, Russia, China, Japan, and the Arab Nations of the Middle East. It is important to note that Africa's role as a provider of resources and consumer of security is crucial to the strategic interests of these countries and continental groupings (Atanasiu, 2024). Until the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the rivalry between the East and the West for influence over Africa robbed the continent of its strategic importance (Cilliers, 2024).

Despite a brief period when Africa's development priorities were prioritized, the slow pace of growth, poor governance, protracted conflicts and instability further stifled the continent's ability to achieve genuine independence. However, Africa's strategic location and oil exports to the United States and Europe during the early 21st century briefly boosted its standing (Cilliers, 2024). Furthermore, China's footprint and influence in Africa grew in importance dramatically after 2000. The EU, the US, Canada, Israel, and Japan competed for influence in Africa as China continued to establish its position on the continent. Due to the driving force of globalization and recent geopolitical shifts, numerous foreign players have emerged, further diversifying Africa's pool of partners. However, the EU continues to remain a crucial partner to Africa (European Union, 2024). Driven by specific national interests framed within foreign policy lenses, countries pursued strategic partnerships with

Africa which were dependent on its vast resource base.

Consequently, major international organizations such as the UN, the EU, and the BRICS, as well as great powers, and smaller countries saw Africa as strategically important due to its strengths. These strengths include the continent's vast natural resources, energy security, and potential new markets for trade and investment (Pavocat, 2023; Aljazeera, 2022). Africa as a continent continues to play important roles within the geopolitical landscape due to its geographical location (Pavocat, 2023). As geopolitical rivalry increased in Africa, particularly among major powers such as the USA, China, Russia, and the EU, it was anticipated that Africa's strategic importance would be a major factor in the formation, shaping and sustenance of global cooperation forums (IEP, 2024). Consequently, the emergence of cooperation forums such as the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), the BRICS-Africa partnerships, and the AU-EU partnerships were motivated by a combination of strategic, economic, political, and developmental considerations (Anand, 2020). As strategic platforms, cooperation forums act as institutional levers in attaining specific objectives of its members.

One of the driving forces behind the BRICS alliance was advocating for a multipolar global order and competing with Western-dominated organizations such as the IMF and the World Bank (Nach, et al., 2024). Additionally, China's objectives of increasing its global

influence and securing resources for its growing economy, were among the motivators behind cooperation forums such as the FOCAC (Sarpong et al., 2024). Over time, extra-continental countries developed several strategic alliances and schemes in the form of partnership agreements centered on security, energy, business, commerce and trade and other essential sectors vital to the sustenance of their economies. As a result, cooperation summits and forums have grown in popularity largely due to the strategic significance of the African continent to the survival and hegemonic proclivities of these powers (Olivier et al., 2015). Thus, bilateral and multilateral cooperation forums have been leveraged by its members in strengthening its relations with other countries. Africa could enhance its role within cooperation forums by aligning its continental priorities with the numerous challenges the continent faces.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The research is based on liberal institutionalism, which historically has emphasized the importance of institutional frameworks for initiating and maintaining cooperation between nations (Nuruzzaman, 2008). Ten years prior, there was a conflict between realist and liberal theorists regarding the ability of institutions to promote and maintain cooperation between nations. John Mearsheimer fired the first shot when he published his popular piece “The False Promise of International

Institutions” in 1994/95. In this work, he attempted to expose the inherent flaws in institutionalist ideas, particularly liberal institutionalism. He contended that institutionalist theories are inadequate and have little impact on how states behave and asserted that the promise of liberal institutionalism to foster cooperation and stability in the post-Cold War era was mostly unfounded. Keohane and Martin (1995:40) argued that institutions are important in guiding state behavior, but that the challenge was to “discover how, and under what conditions” institutions might foster successful interstate cooperation. They accused Mearsheimer of favoring his own realist perspective and added that institutionalism might absorb realism by outlining the conditions for cooperation.

It is worth noting that liberal scholars emphasize the significance of international institutions in fostering international cooperation (Axelrod et al., 1985). They contend that institutions have the capacity to offer a forum for discourse, serving as a mediating force and fostering collaboration between states. Furthermore, liberal institutionalism espouses the notion that states are rational actors, prioritizing absolute gains through cooperation and paying less attention to the relative gains made by other states. According to liberal institutionalism, international institutions can use norms, rules, and shared interests to lessen anarchy and promote cooperation (Moravcsik, 1993). Scholars such as Nissen and Dreyer (2024),

contend that the EU exemplifies liberal institutionalism through its thorough integration and legalism. The recent trend towards “skeptical liberalism” is a sign of adaptive institutionalism in the face of emergencies (Nissen et al., 2024). According to Chekol (2020), the AU reflects liberal institutionalist goals, despite its structural flaws. Dijkhuizen et al., (2019) also argues that liberal institutionalism best explains how the BRICS nations cooperate in the UN General Assembly.

Monyae & Matambo (2021) also emphasizes how the development of BRICS and FOCAC was in reaction to perceived inequalities in international organizations, resulting in platforms that embody liberal institutionalist ideals of cooperation and norm creation. Similarly, Nuruzzaman (2020) also claims that BRICS functions within the liberal international order, rather than against it, thereby improving global governance via parallel institutionalism. Despite realist and liberal institutionalists’ common position on the fact that anarchy is a significant barrier to interstate cooperation (Mearsheimer, 1994), liberal institutionalists believe that cooperation is still possible in an anarchic environment. In contrast, the neorealists argue that institutions mirror the distribution of power in the international order and have little independent impact on how states act (Mearsheimer, 1990). On the other hand, Liberal institutionalists think that these problems may be solved through institutions that encourage cooperation by

disseminating information to all parties and lowering the possibility of deception. Platforms like BRICS, the EU, the AU, and FOCAC are examples of how institutional frameworks in a multipolar world foster collective action and changes in global governance. In this way, cooperation is possible under anarchy when nations pursue absolute gains (Axelrod et al., 1985).

GLOBAL ALLIANCES & COOPERATION FORUMS

The economic union known as the BRICS alliance is made up of rising markets in the Global South. It includes economic behemoths like China, the second-largest market in the world after the US, Russia, a European Orthodox superpower, Brazil, a Latin American economic powerhouse, and India, an economic competitor of China and Taiwan in Asia, and lastly South Africa, the most industrialized nation, and the second-largest economy in Africa (Tella, 2017). Presently, the BRICS inter-governmental organization consists of ten nations: Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates. The concept of a BRICS-like organization may be traced back to Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov and the two RIC (Russia, India, China) and IBSA (India, Brazil, South Africa) forums (Patnaik, 2023). The phrase BRIC was first created by British economist Jim O’Neill and then supported by his employer Goldman Sachs in 2001 to refer

to the collection of developing markets (Baumann et al, 2017). A combination of strategic, economic, political, and developmental factors led to the development of international cooperative platforms like BRICS established in 2009. The AU started to represent African interests in BRICS-related meetings and summits, especially after South Africa joined BRICS in 2010 (Anand, 2020).

In the midst of the changing global economic landscape, the BRICS nations have emerged as champions of economic multilateralism, challenging conventional paradigms of economic governance and integration (Nach et al., 2024). The factors driving the BRICS-Africa partnership include economic multilateralism, in which the BRICS nations support a multipolar global order and question Western-dominated institutions like the IMF and the World Bank (Nach, et al., 2024). Strategic investment is another important aspect, since Africa has a wealth of natural resources and expanding markets, while BRICS provides technology transfer and infrastructure funding (Yiblet, 2024). Additionally, South Africa's membership in BRICS in 2010 helped bring African interests into the bloc, which promoted greater interaction with the continent (Parfinenko, 2020). The primary motivator of geopolitical influence is the desire to change international norms for development and governance through BRICS expansion and programs like the New Development Bank (Zhao, 2025). It is also worth

noting that before the emergence of the BRICS+ bloc, several bilateral relations had existed particularly between Africa and Brazil, Russia, India, China, Europe and also the US. With respect to Brazil-Africa partnerships, Brazilian influence on the African continent has grown dramatically over the past ten years. Between 2003 and 2013, the South American nation expanded its diplomatic presence from 17 to 37 representations in Africa (MRE, 2011).

Brazil has successfully improved its global standing by providing assistance to its African partner nations in their battle against hunger and poverty (Brazilian Cooperation Agency, 2012). Brazil has also become an integral part of the international effort to address food production issues and hunger (Bodman et al., 2011). This has led to the introduction of a number of incentives for Brazilian businesses to enter the African market in an effort to establish Brazil as a reputable participant on the continent (Menezes 2012). Economic relations between Brazil and its neighboring continent have flourished throughout the last ten years. Brazilian companies have established a presence in 27 of the 54 African nations with more countries viewing the continent as a desirable location to do business (Vieitas et al., 2013). Former Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff sought to woo the African continent while maintaining strong ties with African nations (Instituto Lula, 2014).

As of Russia-Africa partnerships, Russia has shown a renewed

commitment to the African continent in recent times. For starters, by the early 1990s, the Cold War was over, and Russia's foreign policy was now driven by its true strategic economic considerations. The newly formed Federation of Russia faced serious economic challenges in the 1990s because of the legacies of the former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev's policies of "Perestroika" and "Glasnost" (Fidan et al., 2010). Consequently, Africa was forced to the margins of the Kremlin's foreign policy radar (Tralac 2011). In the 2000s, Russia's interest in Africa was revived. This resurgence took place in the context of Russia's evolving foreign policy, which started to take shape in the late 1990s (Fidan et al., 2010). Russia shifted its attitude toward foreign policy throughout the 2000s because of numerous disagreements with the West on various international agendas. In its relations with Africa, Russia provided multilateral projects to foster diplomatic ties with the OAU and other regional organizations (Ivanov 2002). Filatova (2000) argues that there are two primary drivers of Russia's relationship with Africa: history, as Russia continues to maintain varied political and geographical configurations with African countries, and the fact that Russia has never colonized any African nation.

In relation to India-Africa Partnerships, the connection between "India" and "Africa" brings to mind an ancient and lengthy trip, characterized by repeated allusions to the millions of years ago when Gondwana

land was the same; the commercial and cultural interactions that started in the pre-Christian era; the proximity and issues brought by colonization; the shared fight for independence and emancipation under shared symbols and strategic alliance (Shubhajt, 2015). It is important to highlight that, in contrast to the major powers' current competition to improve their collaboration with Africa, India has had the longest relationship with the landmass and the longest friendship with the people of the African continent (Roy, 2015). At the inaugural plenary meeting of the first summit in New Delhi, in 2008, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh referred to Africa as "our Mother Continent" (Vigyan Bhawan, 2008). The Third India-Africa Forum Summit (IAFS-III), which took place in New Delhi in 2015, was a historic event which brought together representatives from all 54 African nations (Bhatia, 2015). As a result, India announced a generous package of economic aid to Africa (Narayan, 2015). At the historic opening of the third summit, Modi emphasized that the relationship between India and Africa represents "a partnership beyond strategic concerns and economic benefits" (Narayan, 2015).

For a variety of reasons, China and Africa began to interact at the end of the Cold War. In terms of giving help and development aid to Third World nations, China's role as an emerging power became clear. It was at this point that Africa began to recognize China's importance as a reliable economic

partner when the West had neglected to support the continent (Naidu et al., 2009). As a result, China became a crucial political ally and began to serve as an alternative to the Western model of development. China's engagement with individual African countries increased throughout the 1990s (Muekalia, 2004). Within the global community, both China and Africa collaborated to challenge US's position as a leader and advocate for an equitable global order (Naidu et al., 2009). The establishment of FOCAC in 2000 served as a forum for promoting diplomatic, trade, security, and investment ties with Africa (Anshan et al., 2012). FOCAC has evolved from a forum of diplomatic exchange and development-centric body to a more comprehensive economic-political-security soft power nexus, that drives China's long-term vision in Africa (Ze Yu, 2022). According to McDonald (2012), China is not only offering the continent possibilities of financial gain, but it is also attempting to strengthen Africa's frequently marginalized institutions, such as the NEPAD and the AU, in international affairs.

Finally, the EU and the US have constantly worked together to strengthen their relations with Africa. Historical events, culture, geography, a shared future, and a shared set of values all connect Africa and Europe (The Council of the European Union, 2007). The Treaty of Rome, the Yaoundé Convention, and its successor Lomé agreements are examples of the long-standing ties between the EU and

Africa. The idea of collaboration has underpinned the EU's relationship with Africa (Farrell, 2006). Since the historic Africa-EU Summit in Cairo, in 2000, where partnership was strengthened by institutionalizing dialogue, there has been significant changes on both continents in terms of accelerating integration processes while deepening the unions (The Council of The European Union, 2007). This led to the formalization of the AU-EU alliance (European Union, 2025). On the other hand, the first formal US-Africa relations begun when the US and Morocco signed the "Moroccan American Treaty of Peace and Friendship", in 1786, establishing diplomatic and commercial ties (U.S Africa Command, 2008). Following the Cold War, the United States and Africa moved closer to fostering economic growth, democracy, and security collaboration. As a result, programs like the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) and the establishment of the US Africa Command (AFRICOM) in 2007 were created (U.S Africa Command, 2008). Over the years, Africa has also been able to diversify its partners, which has resulted in changes in both European and Africa relations (Shiferaw et al., 2023).

ASSESSMENTS OF GLOBAL COOPERATION FORUMS

Several commentators and world leaders have expressed both positive and negative opinions about the BRICS (Wolff, 2023) in relation to its competing

interests, disputes resolution, and lack of clarity in goal pursuit. However, the BRICS has worked together to create rival projects such as the New Development Bank, the BRICS Contingent Reserve Arrangement, BRICS PAY, the BRICS Joint Statistical Publication (Federal State Statistics Service (2024), and the BRICS basket reserve currency (Raimondi, 2023). Over the course of its 15-year existence, BRICS has created about 60 intra-group organizations and think tanks to engage in conversation on topics spanning 34 fields (Kirton et al., 2022). The BRICs have launched a number of initiatives, including the Belt and Road Initiative, the New Development Bank, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the G20, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (Hooijmaaijers, 2021a). These initiatives pose a clear threat to Western leadership in world governance as regional nations compete with the West for power (Kim et al., 2015).

As a group, the BRICS is working to change the course of world economic growth and development. Since 2009, the annual BRICS Summits have been one of the most important initiatives (O'Neill, 2001). The BRICS Business Council (BBC) and the BRICS Think Tank Council (BTTC), offer intellectual support, promote private sector collaboration, and make policy recommendations (Kirton et al., 2022). Given the increasing influence of the BRICS in the world economy, experts have seen the BRICS as "a solid, increasingly comprehensive, cooperative success" (Kirton,

2015). Some analysts recognize the favorable outcomes of some multilateral programs, such as the establishment of the New Development Bank and the foreign-exchange reserves pool (Cooper et al., 2015), as well as the bright future of the BRICS Interbank Cooperation Mechanism (Shelepov, 2017).

Regarding Brazil, its initiative SEP-PIR planned and implemented a wide range of activities to advance racial equality, including quotas for afro-descendant students and scholarships (such as PROUNI). The Brasil Quilombola Program, among other programs, gave priority to health initiatives that specifically targeted Brazil's black community. The Lula administration mandated the instruction of Afro-Brazilian and African History in Brazilian schools in an effort to highlight Brazil's African heritage (Lechini 2008). The Lula administration viewed Africa as a key partner in the UN because of its significant vote count in the UN General Assembly (UNGA) (Beri 2012). Due to its strong ties with Africa, Brazil has been able to establish significant international positions in other areas (Valadares, 2013). Beginning in 2007, BNDES credit lines for Africa were created and progressively increased from USD\$149 million to USD\$766 million in 2009 before experiencing a significant decrease as a result of the global financial and economic crisis that occurred towards the end of the Lula administration (BNDES 2012). Vale, Camargo Corrêa, Queiroz Galvão, and other major Brazilian firms started to engage in Africa throughout

the Lula era with the financial backing of BNDES and the government's political backing. About 25 Brazilian businesses are currently operating in 30 different African nations (Vieitas et al., 2013).

According to the African Development Bank (2011), Brazilian firms invested between USD\$10 billion and USD\$15 billion in African countries in 2013, based on the Brazilian business presence there. Significantly, since 2008, more than half of Brazil's development cooperation has gone to Africa. Another noteworthy finding is that South-South collaboration with Africa increased at a faster rate than it did with Latin America and Asia (Brazilian Cooperation Agency, 2012). Despite the fact that Brazil's development cooperation with non-Lusophone Africa began in 2005, South-South cooperation projects were already established with Botswana, Sudan, Burkina Faso, Benin, Gambia, Equatorial Guinea, Tanzania, and Zambia in 2006 (Brazilian Cooperation Agency, 2010:6). The number of collaboration projects that Brazil carried out on the African continent jumped from 115 in 2008 to almost 300 by the end of President Lula's administration in 2010 (Brazilian Cooperation Agency, 2011). Among African states, Brazil raised awareness of its technical proficiency in tropical agriculture, renewable energy sources (ethanol), and electrification initiatives for rural regions (Stolte 2012). Brazil further established a favorable reputation among the African nations by treating them

as partners in development, which also created opportunities for Brazilian firms (Stolte 2012; Stolte 2013).

In relation to Russia-Africa partnerships, the study reveals Russia canceled the debts of impoverished nations in 1999, amounting to USD\$ 904 million. By the year 2000, Russia had also granted debt relief totaling USD\$572 million (Ivanov 2004). In 2012, Russia informed the UN that it had cancelled USD\$20 billion in debt owed by a number of African nations. It also committed to double its Overseas Development Aid (ODA) to African nations (African Development Bank 2011). Education also became a central strategic tool that Russia employs in its relationship with Africa. Government scholarship quotas amounted to 4,700 scholarships in the 2023–2024 academic year and about 34,000 African students were given scholarship during the 2022–2023 academic year (изучают, 2023). As a result, Russia still provides 100,000 Africans with practical training or education at military academies and Russian institutions (Bilinov, 2006). Notably, Russian trade and investment in Africa have increased dramatically, particularly in the Maghreb, Egypt, and Sudan (Paczyńska, 2020). The increasing appeal of the African gas and oil markets for Russian businesses like Lukoil, Gazprom, Rosneft, and others was one factor (Shakhovskaya et al., 2019). In order to strengthen its position as a major contributor to global food security, Russia has also increased its wheat exports to sub-Saharan Africa including

vegetable oil production with Egypt and meat export contracts with Ghana and Morocco (Gavrilenko, 2019).

Since 2023, Russia has established military technical cooperation with around 43 African nations in order to train their military personnel and other law enforcement officials in Russian military academies (Caprile et al., 2024). According to Besenyő (2019), Moscow has been pursuing an “Africa policy” that mixes diplomatic outreach, military cooperation, weapons transfers, and economic engagement after decades of post-Cold War retreat. For governments looking for diversified alliances or respite from Western monitoring, Russia has become a tempting option because of this “no-strings-attached” approach (Ramontja, 2025). Also, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (Guensburg, 2022) reported that Alrosa, the largest diamond mining firm in the world, was attempting to increase its operations in Angola and Zimbabwe. For instance, Alrosa mines diamonds in South Africa, Sierra Leone, Namibia, and Angola, where it has a 60% market share for diamond extraction. Renova, Lukoil, Rusal Boksit, and Norilskiy Nikel are some of the other significant businesses that conduct business in Africa (Lopatov 2007). In 2014, Gazprom bank, the third largest bank in Russia, established the first representative office in South Africa (Gillian, 2014). The primary sectors of Russian collaboration with Africa are mineral resources, energy, infrastructure, telecommunications, fisheries, education,

healthcare, tourism, and defense (Kwinnika, 2015).

In the case of India, it has helped Africa by providing USD\$1.2 billion in grants and USD\$7.4 billion in concessional credit and training 25,000 young Africans over the past three years. Establishing 100 capacity-building institutions, and promoting infrastructure, public transportation, clean energy, irrigation, agriculture, and manufacturing throughout the continent (India-Africa Forum Summit, 2008). Currently, India's connection with Africa is focused on commerce, science, and technology. India now plans to boost bilateral commerce to \$70 billion by 2015, after it has increased from USD\$ 967 million annually in the mid-1960s to USD\$ 40 billion in 2008–09 (Naidu, 2010). India's present plan in Africa places a strong emphasis on energy (IMF, 2010). The number of training opportunities for Africans in Indian universities has grown with over 15,000 African students enrolled in Indian universities on scholarships (Sharma, 2019). India's main oil and gas firm, ONGC Videsh, manufactures Sudanese oil and invested USD\$ 750 million in 2003 to acquire a 25% ownership in the Greater Nile Petroleum Operating Company (GN-POC) in Sudan (Beri, 2005). India now imports 3.24 million tons of “equity oil” from GNPOC every year.

In 2008, India finished building a \$200 million oil pipeline connecting Khartoum to Port Sudan on the Red Sea (Vines, et al., 2008). Nigeria is India's top commercial partner in

Africa. Between 8% and 12% of India's oil imports originate in Africa's most populous nation, while Nigeria continues to be the biggest importer of Indian-produced pharmaceuticals and goods in Africa (Singh, 2007). India's top investor in Africa, the Tata group, is currently represented in 11 African nations (Vines et al., 2007). Trade, investment, and development aid remain the foundation of maintaining and growing the partnership, particularly in economic relations (Obuah & Komi, 2024). Biswas (2024) notes a shift from traditional donor-recipient frameworks to developing strategic partnerships. India's strategy now focuses on infrastructure development, technology transfer, and capacity development in line with the development goals of the African Union. Biswas (2024) claims that these projects are influenced by India's desire to present itself as a South-South development partner that differs from Western or Chinese models, as well as by its historical solidarity.

Furthermore, the first FOCAC summit in 2000 led to China writing-off 10 billion RMB yuan in debt owed by heavily indebted poor nations in Africa. Beijing also established an Africa Human Resource Development Fund to support the training of skilled professionals in a variety of fields in African nations (Mishra, 2022). By the time the 2006 FOCAC summit took place in Beijing, more than 440 commodities from African LDCs were eligible for export to China. Additionally, Beijing gave different African nations USD\$3 billion

in preferential loans and USD\$2 billion in preferential buyer's credit. The commercial interchange between China and Africa increased by a factor of 5.2 during this time (Ze Yu, 2022). In 2006, Chinese President Hu Jintao gave Africa USD\$5 billion in concessionary credit and loans, which further cemented China's growing position as a creditor in the continent (Ighobor, 2013). In 2013, China also introduced its flagship Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) with the goal of fostering connectivity and collaboration between China and emerging nations. African leaders saw the BRI as an appealing alternative development model based upon the BRI's emphasis on trans-continental infrastructural connectivity which aligns with Africa's top priorities as stated in its Agenda 2063 (Githaiga et al., 2019). The China-Africa Development Fund, which was initially valued at USD\$5 billion has encouraged Chinese investment in Africa (Sun, 2018).

China continues to invest in energy security and infrastructure which include the USD\$666 million invested in Kenya's tech city and Nairobi's highway projects, as well as the 2600 MW hydropower project in Nigeria (Reuters, 2019). However, these projects have been accompanied by significant debt owed to China by Angola (USD\$ 25 billion), Congo Brazzaville (USD\$7.3 billion), Ethiopia (USD\$13.5 billion), Sudan (USD\$6.4 billion) (Broadman, 2021), and Zambia (USD\$6.6 billion) (Brautigam et al., 2021). Despite these debt traps, it is important to highlight that the Chinese

investment in Africa is growing under the umbrella of “One Belt, One Road” program (World Bank Group, 2019). The USD\$1.3 billion Tanzania Standard Gauge Railway (Nyabiage, 2021) and Nigeria’s longest double-track railroad in West Africa are two examples of the investments in railway projects and telecommunications. At least USD\$1 billion has been invested by China in Digital Silk Road initiatives in Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Ethiopia, and Angola. By finishing the Addis Ababa African Union Conference Center in 2012, China also followed through on its infrastructure development initiatives. By the end of 2009, China had finished more than 500 infrastructure projects throughout Africa (Mohan and Power, 2008). On the African continent, China has solidified its position as an appealing and alternative development partner (Mishra, 2022). Yiagadeesen (2010) argues that China’s aid to Africa is not selective as it has given aid to nations that have few or no strategic resources and has also provided grants, loans, infrastructure, and other forms of assistance to these countries due to their geopolitical and market value.

The European Union has also partnered with the African Union on several regional and continental projects. In 2018, negotiations commenced between the EU and the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP, now OACPS) countries in relation to the new post-Cotonou agreement since the existing agreement had reached its maturity (Medinilla et al., 2019). However, the

negotiation process involved several internal bargaining on Africa’s representation in the discussions (Hurt, 2020). Consequently, the AU agreed that negotiations could proceed whilst it was consented that AU representatives could preside over regional protocol negotiations with the EU (Medinilla et al., 2019). According to the European Commission (2024), the EU is Africa’s largest trading partner, largest investor, and largest source of official development aid. It is worth noting that Europe and Africa have both undergone repositioning in this shifting global environment. The realignment of Africa is advantageous because it has given the continent more power to diversify its relationships (Shiferaw et al., 2023). The European Commission (2022) unveiled a USD\$168 billion investment plan, with a strong emphasis on energy, transportation, digital infrastructure, health, and education. The Africa-Europe Investment Package under the Global Gateway committed around €150 billion to enhance collaboration with African partners (European Commission, 2023).

Due to the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP), the economic partnership agreements (EPAs) with sub-Saharan Africa, and the free trade agreements (FTAs) with some North African nations, more than 90% of exports from African countries enter the EU duty free (European Council, 2024). Nevertheless, the majority of Europe’s trade collaboration with Africa is still centered around raw materials and

other basic items (Lejarraga, 2023). For decades, the EU has been actively involved in security concerns in Africa making use of tools which include development, trade, economics, diplomacy, politics and military (European Union, 2004). The African Peace Facility (APF) and the Pan-African Programme (PANAF) are the two primary sources of EU financing for the AU (European Union, 2023). With €845 million for 2014–2020, the Joint Africa-EU strategy was supported by the EU's Development Cooperation Instrument (European External Action Service, 2018). Furthermore, the AU depends on the EU's assistance for its peacekeeping operations (Teevan, 2024). Although the EU has more financial and institutional resources, the AU asserts greater political legitimacy throughout the continent. This imbalance can occasionally give the impression of dependence or external dominance in peacekeeping missions (Horváth, 2024).

In addition, Horváth (2024) cautions that the relationship may turn into a competition if the EU's participation is seen as paternalistic or excessively restrictive.

In relation to US-Africa partnerships, numerous programs, like the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), were established in 2000 in response to the effects of US-Africa relations. This granted qualifying Sub-Saharan African nations duty-free access to the US market for a broad array of commodities. As a result, there was an increase in exports, job creation, and

industrial expansion in industries such as textiles and agriculture (U.S. Trade Representative, 2025). In an effort to strengthen economic links and encourage sustainable development, the US has signed a number of trade agreements with African countries and regional blocs, like the East African Community (East African Community, 2025). As a result, the EAC countries gained access to new technologies, manufacturing partnerships, and support for infrastructure development through interaction with partners such as the EU (Biswas, 2024; Obuah & Komi, 2024).

Additional initiatives under the PEPFAR programs include support for health, education, and infrastructure. In the fight against illnesses like HIV/AIDS, this has been crucial (Bush Center, 2025). Additionally, the U.S. has created AFRICOM, which is essential to organizing military aid and training in Africa (U.S. Africa Command, 2008). Over the years, AFRICOM has boasted about the capacity of various national militaries in terms of combat drills, counter defense tactics, intelligence gathering and joint training exercises. Notwithstanding these initiatives, recent US tariff policies have caused worries about the future of US-Africa relations, particularly about how they will affect the AGOA project and the stability of trade ties (Washington Post, 2025). The transition from aid-based to trade-based engagement has also received mixed responses, with some African leaders voicing concerns about the possible

loss of financial assistance for development initiatives (AP News, 2025).

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

In general, the study found that cooperation forums are instrumental in promoting the strategic interests of countries outside the continent. However, several challenges such as navigating complex bilateral and multilateral relations, establishing collective goals, resolving disputes, and building mutual trust continue to undermine its sustainability. The findings suggest that Africa's partnerships with various extra-continental countries such as Brazil, Russia, India, China, the EU and the US have largely benefited the African continent. Africa has benefited from its participation in cooperation forums through provisions for economic aid, increased trade, infrastructure development, technical support in agriculture, and the export and import of goods and services. Other benefits include military capacity building initiatives, economic aid and provisions of scholarships for African students, etc. These engagements have also led to the promotion of human rights, democratic consolidation, and the tackling of various pandemics and epidemics, and poverty. The study findings further reveal substantial gains made by Africa within cooperation forums. It can be deduced from the above findings that Africa has moderately enhanced its agency within cooperation forums.

Scholars such as Soule (2021) argue that African governments and leaders are making strategic and sensible decisions about their partners when exercising their agency within global cooperative forums. This assertion is largely true when observing the shift of Africans from passive to active actors within various groupings. This shift is largely due to a reawakened Africa that seeks to demand value for its resources within the global space. Consequently, leaders are becoming more aware of the people's voices when addressing Africa's underdevelopment and creating opportunities for its citizens. Even though recent developments by African governments within cooperation forums indicate a shift toward a more assertive and self-defined approach to partnerships. The findings reveal a lack of pragmatism within the AU bloc, which has yet to optimize gains from its partnerships within these forums. This has led to a lack of acceleration in the Agenda 2063 project. This bottleneck is evident in the AU's marginal role in cooperation forums, which further hampers its chances of achieving its noble continental project.

Despite the noble objectives of the Global South agenda, which seeks to counter Western Hegemony and promote prosperity among its members, Africa is still lagging behind. It appears that Africa's influence in cooperation forums is limited due to its countries' poor capacity to negotiate fair partnerships and leverage their resources

effectively. This is affirmed by Kwinika (2015), who argues that Africa's most pressing challenge is the need for capacity to negotiate fairly, taking into account the added value of products derived from the continent's vast natural resources (Kwinika 2015). The inability to negotiate equitable agreements strategically has led some African countries into debt vulnerabilities, particularly those receiving significant Chinese aid and loans. These countries' situations have worsened as they are not able to repay the loans, which continue to accrue interest. However, analysts believe that China's presence in Africa might serve as a catalyst in charting new pathways to address Africa's underdevelopment (Agbebi et al., 2017).

From a liberal perspective, it can be deduced that extra-continental countries have sought to maximize their gains from cooperation forums while strengthening their relations with Africa. The liberal institutionalism logic is reflected in these institutionalized platforms, which establish organized, rule-based frameworks for commerce, investment, development cooperation, and conversation (Besenyő, 2019; Biswas, 2024; Obuah & Komi, 2024). These organizations help Africa and its partners advance their shared economic and political goals by fostering predictable engagement and lowering uncertainty (Horváth, 2024). Though these organizations' support is not geared towards addressing Africa's

structural issues, it has often alleviated the continent's numerous underdevelopment challenges. However, in line with criticisms of institutional liberalism, the study also recognizes that Africa's participation in these forums occurs within asymmetrical power dynamics. Often, external partners dominate the agenda and funding (Alden & Large, 2019; Arukwe, 2024). Consequently, no nation in Africa has ever released a "Chinese Strategy", an "Indian Strategy," or a "European Strategy" This poses a challenge because it could result in inconsistent regulations that might not always be in line with the national development goals of African nations (Zhang et al., 2017).

CONCLUSION

Globally, cooperation forums have become major platforms for extra-continental countries seeking geopolitical influence and relevance in the contemporary world. A comparison of various engagement models with extra-continental partners reveals Africa's evolving position as a strategic actor in global affairs. While China emphasizes development security and Russia prioritizes military practicality with minimal political intervention, the EU on the other hand, places a high priority on normative governance (Ramontja, 2025). These models present Africa with a diverse array of partnerships that could transform its underdeveloped sectors. To achieve this the African Union, as

the continental leading body, must leverage its participation in the BRICS cooperation forum to garner support for its continental projects, especially those related to infrastructure and industrialization. Partnerships between Brazil and Africa remain relevant in key areas of Africa's underperforming sectors particularly agriculture. These partnerships could encourage youth initiatives within the sector. Regarding India-Africa relations, African nations could benefit from India's development capacity and technology transfer. African relations with the EU and the US could be enhanced in areas that align with the AU's Agenda 2063 and offer mutual benefits. To maximize the benefits of cooperation forums, Africa must spearhead an African strategic framework to guide its partnerships with extra-continental countries while protecting its sovereignty and institutional integrity. This would involve using strategic diplomacy to negotiate competing paradigms (Ramontja, 2025). Additionally, Africa's participation in cooperation forums should take a results-oriented approach by aligning with Agenda 2063, the continent's defining framework for long-term development. This hinges on Africa's ability to establish its niche through an "African Strategy" and ensure that its relationships with various blocs and partners are mutually beneficial, based on fairly negotiated partnerships that consider Africa's underdevelopment.

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Beyond Guns for Hire: Rethinking African Agency through Security Cooperation with SADAT

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the evolving landscape of contemporary Turkish foreign policy, marked by its expansive global engagement and the strategic implementation of a multi-track approach that includes non-state actors. While existing scholarship extensively analyzes Türkiye's increasing presence in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), insufficient

attention has been paid to the nuanced ways African states exercise agency within these partnerships, particularly concerning the growing role of private military security companies (PMSCs). This study addresses this gap by foregrounding the intermediary function of SADAT, a prominent Turkish PMSC, in shaping Türkiye-Africa relations. Drawing on an analysis of public statements, military expert reports, and

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Received: June 20th, 2025 / Modified: September 5th, 2025 / Accepted: September 16th, 2025

To cite this article:

Gast, F., Yazıcı, I. E., Ruzkowski, J. (2025). Beyond Guns for Hire: Rethinking African Agency through Security Cooperation with SADAT. *Oasis*, 43, 269-298.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18601/16577558.n43.12>

conceptual frameworks of African agency, we argue that SADAT acts as a crucial conduit, affording both Türkiye and African states plausible deniability and strategic ambiguity, respectively. This enables a diversification of security partnerships for African governments, allowing them to pursue national and regional priorities beyond traditional Western blocs or alternative Eastern ones. Ultimately, the article demonstrates how the selective engagement with actors like SADAT, often cloaked in rhetoric of shared values and anti-imperialism, reflects a sophisticated exercise of African agency, challenging one-sided narratives of foreign influence and enriching the understanding of South-South cooperation in a securitized global environment.

Keywords: Turkish foreign policy; private military security companies; african agency; security cooperation; multi-track diplomacy.

Más allá de las armas por contrato: repensar la agencia africana mediante la cooperación en seguridad con SADAT

RESUMEN

Este artículo examina el panorama cambiante de la política exterior contemporánea de Turquía, caracterizado por su creciente compromiso global y la implementación estratégica de un

enfoque de múltiples vías, que incluye actores no estatales. Aunque la literatura existente analiza extensamente la creciente presencia de Turquía en el África subsahariana (ASS), se ha prestado poca atención a las formas matizadas en que los Estados africanos ejercen su agencia dentro de estas asociaciones, especialmente en relación con el papel creciente de las empresas militares y de seguridad privadas (PMSC - private military security companies). Este estudio aborda esa brecha al destacar la función intermediaria de SADAT, una destacada PMSC turca, en la configuración de las relaciones entre Turquía y África. A partir del análisis de declaraciones públicas, informes de expertos militares y marcos conceptuales sobre la agencia africana, sostenemos que SADAT actúa como un conducto crucial que otorga a Turquía y a los Estados africanos, respectivamente, una negación plausible y una ambigüedad estratégica. Esto permite a los gobiernos africanos diversificar sus alianzas en materia de seguridad, y perseguir prioridades nacionales y regionales más allá de los bloques occidentales tradicionales o las alternativas orientales. En última instancia, el artículo demuestra cómo la participación selectiva con actores como SADAT, a menudo envuelta en una retórica de valores compartidos y antiimperialismo, refleja un ejercicio sofisticado de la agencia africana, que desafía las narrativas unilaterales de influencia extranjera y enriquece la comprensión de

la cooperación Sur-Sur en un entorno global securitizado.

Palabras clave: política exterior turca; empresas militares y de seguridad privadas; agencia africana; cooperación en seguridad; diplomacia de múltiples vías.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past 25 years, Türkiye has expanded its global engagement significantly, driven by an evolving foreign policy that leverages trade, development assistance, and an increasing focus on security cooperation (Lebovich & van Heukelingen, 2023). This contemporary approach, articulated in the 'Türkiye Yüzyılı' vision and shaped by the Davutoğlu Doctrine, involves a multi-directional, multitrack strategy that integrates nonstate actors alongside traditional diplomatic channels (T.C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı, n.d.; Donelli, 2021). The strategic inclusion of entities such as SADAT, a prominent Turkish private military security company (PMSC), highlights the increasing role of the defense sector in advancing Turkish foreign policy objectives, particularly in regions of expanded interest including Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) (SADAT, 2023).

While scholarship extensively examines Türkiye's increasing presence in SSA and the drivers behind its foreign policy, there remains a critical lacuna in the literature: insufficient attention to the active and strategic exercise of agency by the governments of African states within these partnerships.

Traditional analyses often implicitly or explicitly portray African nations as passive recipients of external influence, obscuring their ability to shape, influence, negotiate, and leverage South-South collaborations for their own strategic purposes. Moreover, the specific role of PMSCs, such as SADAT, as critical intermediaries in facilitating these complex dynamics, has largely gone unexplored.

This article addresses this lack of research on PMSCs by arguing that SADAT functions as a crucial intermediary between African governments and Türkiye. SADAT provides Ankara with plausible deniability and enables strategic ambiguity for African governments. Ultimately, this enhances the agency of African administrations within these bilateral relationships. Accordingly, this analysis critically builds upon earlier work on SADAT and Turkish foreign policy, yet it does not cover every facet of these topics. Attempting such a comprehensive survey within one article would be neither possible nor prudent. The task, therefore, is more focused: to discern how African governments negotiate and enact agency in their relations with Türkiye through SADAT's mediations. Examining SADAT's operations within the context of Türkiye's evolving multi-track foreign policy and applying contemporary conceptualizations of African agency demonstrates how African governments selectively engage with external partners to diversify their security portfolios, assert sovereignty, and pursue national priorities beyond traditional geopolitical

blocs. Finally, this article should be read as a temporally situated analysis. The dynamics of Türkiye's foreign policy, SADAT's role therein, and African governments' strategies are constantly changing. Part of this study's value lies in capturing these processes as they unfold. In doing so, the study mitigates hindsight bias and provides future scholarship with a temporal snapshot of an ongoing story rather than a rationalized and retrospective account.

The article proceeds as follows: first, it traces the evolution of contemporary Turkish foreign policy and its underlying ideological influences, particularly in relation to engagement in Africa. Second, it critically reviews conceptualizations of African agency and emphasizes their relevance to understanding external partnerships. Third, it provides an overview of SADAT's history, structure, and operations. Lastly, the article synthesizes these threads to demonstrate how SADAT's intermediary role enables the sophisticated exercise of African agency and promotes a more nuanced comprehension of South-South security dynamics.

CONTEMPORARY TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY

Over the past quarter century, Türkiye has expanded its global engagement through trade, development assistance, and the establishment of new diplomatic ties and military operations predominantly across the Islamic world (Lebovich & van Heukelingen, 2023).

Marking its 100th year as a country in 2023, Türkiye launched the '*Türkiye Yüzyılı*' (Türkiye Century), signaling a new shift in its foreign policy. The Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs has communicated an increased focus on strengthening regional peace and security. The ministry aims to expand the institutional basis of foreign relations, develop regional economic prosperity and welfare, and influence the transformation of the global system (T.C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı, n.d.). Not only does Türkiye perceives itself as an active regional leader, but the new foreign policy also emphasizes Türkiye's efforts in more distant regions, including the initiation of the Africa Partnership Policy (T.C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı, n.d.). Within the context of the '*Türkiye Yüzyılı*' and its expanded global aspirations, the defense industry has been identified as playing a guiding role in Turkish foreign policy. SADAT has positioned itself within this narrative by advocating for increased attention to the defense consultancy sector. They assert that they are a unique service provider in this field (SADAT, 2023). However, this domestic advocacy represents only one facet of SADAT's engagement with Turkish foreign policy. More critically, SADAT has emerged as a significant nonstate actor, operationalizing the multitrack approach that defines Türkiye's contemporary foreign relations.

The Türkiye Yüzyılı is not the only shift in recent Turkish foreign policy. Alongside its self-prescribed role as an international actor, Türkiye's

foreign policy has undergone significant changes over the past two decades (Donelli, 2021). The 2002 victory of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP) (Justice and Development Party) marked the rise to the power of a political party with Islamic roots, which has been the source of many of the changes enacted. Under the AKP, Türkiye sought to attain greater global status. The Davutoğlu Doctrine has served as a guide to transform Turkish foreign policy. The Doctrine is based on three pillars: greater strategic depth; a multi-directional orientation; and the inclusion of non-state actors in foreign policy (Donelli, 2021). The inclusion of non-state actors, widely referred to as the multi-track approach, shifted the focus of foreign policy from government actors to include civil society, such as businesses and non-governmental organizations. Adopting the multi-track approach represented a foundational shift that created an operational space for entities like SADAT, which is central to Türkiye's contemporary foreign policy execution.

Furthermore, Davutoğlu emphasized integrating Muslim heritage into policymaking, framing Islam as a means to strengthen ties with Muslim-majority countries (Sadik, 2012). His doctrine marked a departure from the secular, Western-oriented approach by elevating Islam as a policy instrument and refocusing foreign policy toward Muslim communities and Islamic identity (Öztürk, 2021). This shift was driven by domestic and regional factors; the

AKP viewed Islam as a guiding principle of foreign policy (Sadik, 2012).

IDEOLOGICAL INFLUENCES ON TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY

Both the Davutoğlu Doctrine and AKP leadership are widely associated with neo-Ottoman and neo-Islamist ideologies. Consequently, Giray Sadik (2012) argues that ideologies have become as important as geopolitical realities in influencing the formulation of Turkish Foreign Policy. Neo-Ottomanist foreign policy draws on the Ottoman model of influencing other countries' religious, cultural, and political realms through the use of soft power (Donelli, 2021; Gülbay, 2023). This soft power is employed with 'familiar faces', targeting formerly Ottoman-controlled states (Gülbay, 2023). Adopting a multi-track approach, a pillar of the Davutoğlu Doctrine, is conceptualized as following neo-Ottomanist ideals. The increasing visibility of non-state apparatuses in foreign policy, pointed out by Mehmet Karahan and Ziya Abbas (2022) support this claim, underscoring the growing significance of non-traditional foreign policy instruments.

In line with the religious values and doctrine of the AKP, many NGOs active abroad, as a part of the multi-track approach, have a religious philosophy, and since 2013, the Diyanet Bakanlığı (Ministry of Religion) has become an increasingly important instrument of soft power (Öztürk, 2021). While the use of Islam as a foreign policy tool dates

back to the early 1970s in the Turkish context, its use has intensified since 2013 (Öztürk, 2021). Alterations to Islam are not new in Türkiye, as the early founding elite attempted to 'Turkify' Islam, prioritizing Turkishness and transforming Islam into a state-institution (Ozkan, 2013). More recently, the AKP has attempted to reconcile Islamic theology with civilization philosophy, to create a new 'moderate Islam' (Turhan, 2021). These various reinterpretations of Islam on a national scale have resulted in the creation of a 'Turkish Islam', which, with its moderate approach, is more palatable than the interpretations of other regional actors, such as Iran and Saudi Arabia. Conversely, Hakki Taş (2020) argues that too much attention is being paid to the Islamization of Türkiye and that this focus on ideological transformations leads to oversight of the increasingly prominent security regime. Such claims of overlooking the securitization of Türkiye warrant inquiry into Turkish foreign policy in SSA, especially given SADAT's growing role.

TÜRKİYE'S FOREIGN POLICY TOWARD AFRICA

During the 20th century, Türkiye's diplomatic efforts largely overlooked SSA. Effort to expand relations beyond North Africa can be divided into three periods: the Africa Plan in 1998, the declaration of an Africa Year in 2005, and the 2011 famine in Somalia (Donelli, 2021). Although the Africa Plan was published in 1998, the first period was limited to

the development of diplomatic infrastructure (Ozkan, 2013). Later, the AKP declared 2005 'Africa Year' and introduced the Africa Açılım Politikası (Africa Opening Strategy). This policy focused on humanitarian aid, and relied on soft power channels, such as scholarships and cultural contracts, to implement Turkish foreign policy (Donelli, 2021). The second period saw an increase in international cooperation in the private sector and NGOs founded in shared Muslim heritage (Wheeler, 2011). The increase in Turkish NGO involvement as well as private sector investments came as Türkiye adopted a multi-track approach to its foreign policy, which solidified as of 2013 (Donelli, 2021). Türkiye's extensive humanitarian efforts in response to the 2011 crisis in Somalia marked a new chapter in Turkish involvement in SSA, paving the way for more diverse engagement, that would increasingly include security cooperation.

There are a myriad factors that make Türkiye an attractive partner for SSA states. The perceived lack of a colonial past in SSA combined with the emphasis on African agency, present in government discourse in phrases such as 'African solutions to African problems' as famously coined by Erdoğan, positions Türkiye as a trustworthy partner (Wheeler, 2011; Karahan & Abbas, 2022). It should be noted, however, that although Türkiye was not present as a colonial force in SSA, claims of being an anti-imperialist force are incompatible with the emphasis placed

on its Ottoman legacy. Islam plays a significant role in both directing religiously motivated Turkish NGOs to the continent's Muslim majority countries, which benefit the Turkish image, as well as placing Türkiye as a desirable partner owing to the more moderate values of Turkish Islam (Turhan, 2021). Claiming the policies to be neo-Ottomanist, Federico Donelli (2021) accepts that Turkish foreign policy towards the continent as a whole possesses religious motives. However, the religious aspects were toned down during the period of opening up to SSA so as not to drive away non-Muslim majority countries from partnership (Donelli, 2021). Lastly, Türkiye's good relations with both the West and the East, while not being a pillar of either, made Türkiye a safe partner for many countries (Süsler & Alden, 2022).

Although aid and humanitarian efforts are at the forefront of Turkish foreign policy towards the SSA, there are many temporal and political motivations behind its increased diplomatic relations. Donelli (2021) argues that Turkish foreign policy towards SSA was part of the broader goal of establishing Türkiye as a global actor. While Islam is deemed central to Türkiye's approach to the continent, the objective is not to spread Islam, but rather to use it as a tool to achieve global influence. Initially, the difficulties faced in the EU accession process, combined with the search for greater autonomy from traditional Western allies pushed Türkiye to seek new partners to bolster its presence

in international forums (Donelli, 2021). The pursuit of material gains through fostering sustainable economic development acted as financial motivators, and the investment opportunities in SSA presented an avenue for the production of domestic consent for AKP rule, by introducing Anatolian entrepreneurship to a new market. Such consent was further produced throughout society through a religious charitable dimension because much of Turkish civil society its involvement was religiously motivated (Donelli, 2021).

Opinions diverge concerning the extent of the Turkish state's involvement in non-governmental actors of multi-track foreign policy. Some argue that, initially, these actors were not regulated by the state, and that business-people and NGOs acted organically (Lebovich & van Heukelingen, 2023). The debate about state oversight is particularly relevant for understanding the strategic ambiguity and plausible deniability provided by non-state actors, such as SADAT. However, accounts of those involved in the Gülen movement confess that said actors did not directly deviate from Turkish operations until early 2013, which coincided with the beginning of the fallout between the Gülen movement and the Erdoğan government (Öztürk, 2021). Coincidentally, 2013 was the year where the activity of the Diyanet increased exponentially (Donelli, 2021). Furthermore, Yunus Turhan (2021) claims that the role of leadership in shaping a country's identity and its subsequent reflection in foreign

policy is often overlooked. The religious aspect of the multi-track approach is widely discussed in the literature. Çağlar Kurç (2024) draws attention to the financial interests, by emphasizing Türkiye's goal of pursuing the track to support its arms export policy through its various non-state actors that supplement state-based diplomacy.

AFRICAN AGENCY

Buğra Süsler and Chris Alden (2022) add to the growing body of literature on African agency. They examine how African states interact with Türkiye's increasingly assertive foreign policy on the continent. The authors propose a dual framework - transactional (through trade, aid, and co-operation) and ideational (via shared Islamic identity, Ottoman heritage, and anti-colonial solidarity) - to explain how African actors navigate and negotiate South-South partnerships. This model aligns with the broader scholarly shift toward foregrounding African negotiation and agenda-setting in international relations. It seeks to move beyond structuralist accounts that portray African states as passive recipients of foreign influence (Fisher, 2018; Harman & Brown, 2013; Mohan & Lampert, 2013). However, despite this intention, Süsler and Alden's framework ultimately recasts African agency through a Turkish-centric lens. Their reliance on Turkish state rhetoric, particularly Erdoğan's speeches invoking brotherhood and equality, as evidence

of ideational co-production risks reducing agency to mere alignment or receptivity, rather than exploring the autonomous preferences, strategies, and institutional pathways of African governments.

A broader conceptualization is offered by Tshepo Gwatiwa (2021), whose analysis of African Union partnerships with global powers emphasizes institutional control, preference alignment, and leadership as key markers of African agency. Through the concepts of *shirking* and *slippage*, Gwatiwa (2021) highlights how the AU has selectively engaged multilateral actors; exemplified by strategic assertion with the EU, versus more passive or deferential relationships with NATO, the UN, and AFRICOM. While Gwatiwa's (2021) analysis is explicitly multilateral and thus not directly applicable to bilateral partnerships like those between Türkiye and African states, his framework nonetheless underscores the importance of analyzing how agency remains structured, negotiated, and contested internally - something largely absent from Süsler and Alden's focus on Turkish initiative. Adding further analytical depth, Elijah Munyi *et al.* (2022) *Beyond History* adds further analytical depth by expanding the concept of African agency past outcome-shaping power. The volume introduces alternative modalities of agency: agency as identity-deepening through collective action, and as promoting norms and resisting dominant international discourses. However, the book's focus on

non-state actors, including filmmakers, women's groups, and traditional networks, demonstrates the importance of informal sites of resistance and agency production. This perspective is critical given the increasing role of extra-institutional actors in African foreign policy. Thus, the concept of agency proposed by Munyi *et al.* (2022) lends itself particularly well to examine Türkiye's multi-actor approach.

This layered and actor-diverse view of agency is particularly important when considering the security-development nexus. However, Süssler and Alden's framework, which focuses on formal cooperation, largely excludes the influence of opaque non-state intermediaries, such as SADAT, which facilitate Turkish security cooperation through paramilitarized, hybrid forms. Thus they are crucial in enabling the agency of African governments through strategic ambiguity. As Paul Nantulya (2023) argues in his analysis of China–Africa security partnerships that non-state actors, including private security companies and state-linked corporate actors, are reshaping how African states pursue security objectives, often outside conventional diplomatic frameworks. This signals a broader trend of informal securitization in African international relations and one which must be examined through the lens of agency. Accordingly, Jonathan Fisher and David Anderson (2015) offer a particularly incisive critique of the idea that securitized development is merely imposed on African states by

Western actors alone. In their study of Chad, Ethiopia, Uganda, and Rwanda, Fisher and Anderson demonstrate how African regimes actively encourage and co-produce securitized aid and development frameworks. They embed these frameworks strategically in militarized, illiberal state-building projects. Their concept of *authoritarian agency*, in which African governments shape donor agendas, outsource security through private actors, and frame domestic threats as global concerns, complicates any simplistic notion of African passivity. Though not centered on formal bilateral diplomacy, this work is crucial for understanding how African agency in security affairs is deeply intertwined with hybrid arrangements, where informal actors, private networks, and narrative manipulation play decisive roles.

Together, these contributions challenge the limited definition of agency proposed by Süssler and Alden (2022). Viewing African agency only through formal cooperation or rhetorical alignment is to overlook the complex ways in which African actors - state and non-state - construct, mediate, and even exploit international partnerships for their own strategic ends. Whether through the institutional maneuvering explored by Gwatiwa, the norm promotion and narrative agency in *Beyond History*, or the securitized statecraft analyzed by Fisher and Anderson, a far more layered understanding of agency emerges. This article seeks to foreground this layered, actor-diverse conception

of agency—one that accounts for the strategic utility of non-state intermediaries like SADAT, in the context of Turkish-African relations, thereby contributing to the spare body of work on the topic.

PRIVATE MILITARY SECURITY COMPANIES IN AFRICA

If religion can be considered a useful ideological conduit for establishing and maintaining foreign relations, then private military security companies (PMSCs) represent another critical instrument in the contemporary multi-track foreign policy. They are frequently used today as hard power tools with similar objectives. According to Robert Mandel (2001), the modern proliferation of PMSCs can be traced back to the end of the Cold War. The combination of reductions in sizes of state militaries, growing reluctance of powerful countries to officially intervene in high-risk regions abroad, and increases in non-state actor conflicts contributing to heightened perceptions of threat; all helped create the conditions for the growth of PMSCs (Mandel, 2001). Following the Cold War, many African countries were left especially vulnerable, as foreign powers reduced their overt entanglements. This left unresolved proxy wars, propped-up authoritarians, and easy access to weapons in their wake (Bala & Tar, 2021). In this context, foreign PMSCs have historically been employed in Africa to support weak regimes facing challenges from

armed contesters, and also to provide protection to public and private entities, given the insufficient capabilities of national security and military forces (Bala & Tar, 2021).

The wide variety and diverse functions of foreign PMSCs operating in Africa complicate attempts to provide a broad definition of PMSCs. For the purpose of this paper, Peter Singer's definition of PMSCs has been used: "private business entities that deliver to consumers a wide spectrum of military and security services, once generally assumed to be exclusively inside the public context" (Singer, 2001, cited in Ameyaw-Brobbe & Antwi-Danso, 2024, p. 1053). Foreign PMSCs in Africa can be differentiated by their countries of origin, their capabilities, and their reputations. American PMSCs, such as Academi, PAE Group, and DynCorp International, are known to provide a wide variety of services, including private security, logistical support, weapons provisions, and armed forces training (Gumedze, 2007). These companies are often contracted by the United States government, and in many cases, have been used to achieve foreign policies or economic objectives with minimal financial and political risk (Ameyaw-Brobbe & Antwi-Danso, 2024). Similarly, French PMSCs, such as Amarante International, have historically provided high-level security services, such as protection of the EU Border Assistance Mission in Libya, that align with French foreign interests (Bátora & Koníková, 2025). As Chinese business

interests expand, Chinese private security companies have begun operating in Africa, coordinating closely Belt and Road Initiative projects (Yuan, 2022). Chinese companies, such as DeWe Security Group Limited, do not carry firearms, and specialize in risk assessments and coordination with local authorities to protect Chinese businesses and economic assets (Yuan, 2022). Between 2017 and 2023, the notorious Russian PMSC Wagner also expanded its operations across Africa in close alignment with Kremlin diplomatic and economic interests (Ameyaw-Brobbe & Antwi-Danso, 2024). In contrast to western counterparts, Wagner's reputation as able and willing to operate in political and ethical gray zones made it a preferable choice for controversial employers, such as authoritarian regimes. (Ameyaw-Brobbe & Antwi-Danso, 2024). Depending on the country and context, Wagner provided armed private security services, training of armed forces, and mercenary combat services. This exemplifies the increasingly dynamic role of PMSCs that are beholden to both foreign employers and home country governments (Ameyaw-Brobbe & Antwi-Danso, 2024). Following a conflict with regular Russian forces and the death of the company's founder, Yevgeny Prigozhin, in 2023, Wagner's infrastructure and personnel were largely subsumed by a succeeding Russian paramilitary group, Africa Corps, which is under more direct Kremlin control (Ogbonna, 2025). In June 2025, Wagner announced that it had completed

its mission in Mali and would withdraw from the country, even though countries across the Sahel, including Mali, have begun to see increased attacks from Islamic extremist groups (Ogbonna, 2025). After the announcement, the Malian government invited the Russian mercenaries, now operating under the guise of Africa Corps, to stay in Mali and continue to support the country's war against Tuareg 'rebel' forces (Vorobyov, 2025).

In recent years, a new PMSC from Türkiye called the "International Defense Consultancy Construction Industry and Trade Inc.", better known as SADAT, has begun operating in Africa. SADAT's emergence and operational model in the region serve as a primary empirical illustration of how Türkiye leverages non-state actors for strategic foreign policy goals, and how African governments and political elites, in turn, use such intermediaries to enhance their agency. Existing literature has compared SADAT to Russia's Wagner (before its transformation into the Africa Corps in 2023). Both offer African clients a useful alternative to western-affiliated PMSCs. Both were started by founders with close ties to their respective governments' inner circles. Both appear to offer a wide variety of services, including personal and asset security, armed forces training, and potentially active combat capabilities. However, apparently conscious of Wagner's disreputable image and that of other controversial PMSCs, SADAT distinguishes itself through a low

profile and the self-proclaimed mission to bolster the military and anti-terrorist capabilities of armies in Muslim-majority countries. Currently, little publicly available information exists regarding SADAT (Powers, 2021). The following sections describing SADAT largely rely on a combination of local news reports, analyses by military experts, government press releases, and peer-reviewed articles.

BRIEF HISTORY OF SADAT

Adnan Tanrıverdi, a former one-star general in Türkiye's army, founded SADAT in 2012 as a for-profit company designed to train clients in irregular warfare (Taş, 2020). Formed in the midst of the Arab Spring, SADAT can best be understood in the context of the "politicization of the military and the militarization of politics in Turkey" in the early 2010s (Taş, 2020, p. 2). This context, particularly the development of paramilitary forces like SADAT through informal links, created a mechanism for plausible deniability that would become central to Türkiye's execution of foreign policy. Seeking to maintain control and popular support among an increasingly secular population, the ruling AKP party adopted militarized liberation rhetoric against Western influence, and increased military interventions in neighboring countries such as Syria and Azerbaijan (Taş, 2020). At the same time, coercive power and resources were distributed between the army and the Interior Ministry so that

each would counterbalance the other, while a third militarized bloc consisting of paramilitary groups such as SADAT and proxy forces was developed to "insulate the office of the president" through informal links (Taş, 2020, p. 5).

The first mention of SADAT operating outside of Türkiye was in Libya in 2013 (Parens & Plichta, 2025). According to reports by the U.S. Department of Defense Inspector General, SADAT paid and trained as many as five thousand Syrian mercenaries fighting in the Libyan Civil War, while also training fighters from the Turkish-backed Government of National Accord (Parens & Plichta, 2025). Sources have also claimed that SADAT may have played a role in training and supervising members of the Syrian National Army, also known as the Turkish-backed Free Syrian Army, a coalition of rebel factions pursuing Turkish interests in Northern Syria during the Syrian Civil War (Powers, 2021; Vial & Bouvier, 2025). Additionally, SADAT may have also been used to help Türkiye deploy Syrian mercenaries to support Türkiye's ally, Azerbaijan, during the conflict with Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh from 2020 to 2023 (Taş, 2020).

From the beginning, SADAT's character and capabilities have largely been shaped by the group's founder, Adnan Tanrıverdi. Before forming SADAT, Tanrıverdi worked in the Turkish Armed Forces, where he collaborated with the Special Forces Chief of Staff and trained the country's land forces (Jaklin, 2024). Early in his career, Tanrıverdi

was appointed brigade commander in Istanbul. This position allowed him to develop a friendship with the city's mayor and the future President of Türkiye, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (Jaklin, 2024). Tanrıverdi and Erdoğan are both ardent supporters of conservative Islamic reforms in Türkiye, and both have framed Türkiye as a force against rapacious Western imperialism throughout their careers (Jaklin, 2024). In 1996, Tanrıverdi was dismissed from the military due to his anti-secular beliefs and Islamist ties. However, his outspoken stance on Turkish nationalism and Islamic conservatism positioned Tanrıverdi as a staunch ally of the president. Following the 2016 attempted coup, Tanrıverdi was appointed Erdoğan's Chief Military Advisor (Jaklin, 2024). Tanrıverdi's position in the Turkish government helped elevate SADAT's authority, however, he resigned in 2020 after making controversial comments about SADAT's role in preparing for the imminent return of the Messiah and the end of the world (Jaklin, 2024). His resignation may have also been an attempt to decrease SADAT's public profile and reduce the company's overt connection to the government at a time when SADAT began operating in Libya (Jaklin, 2024).

Today, SADAT is headed by Melih Tanrıverdi, son of Adnan Tanrıverdi, and the organization continues to pursue its goal of "...[reorganizing] and [modernizing] the armed forces and internal security forces of Islamic countries in a modern and effective manner to ensure national defense and internal security..."

(SADAT, 2024). Many of these partners are in Africa. As European countries, such as France, that have historically maintained close, albeit controversial, political and economic ties with African countries have disengaged from the continent in recent years, a window of opportunity may be opening for Türkiye and SADAT. The forced removal of some foreign militaries, including those from France and the United Kingdom, as well as a diverse range of UN peacekeeping forces from regions such as the Sahel, has created a security void in which companies like SADAT can operate. Additionally, the reduction of Western development and investment activity, due to increased threats of violence, can be supplemented by Turkish companies, backed by Turkish security (Parens & Plichta, 2025; Ravikumar *et al.*, 2022; Burke, 2022).

OPERATIONS OF SADAT

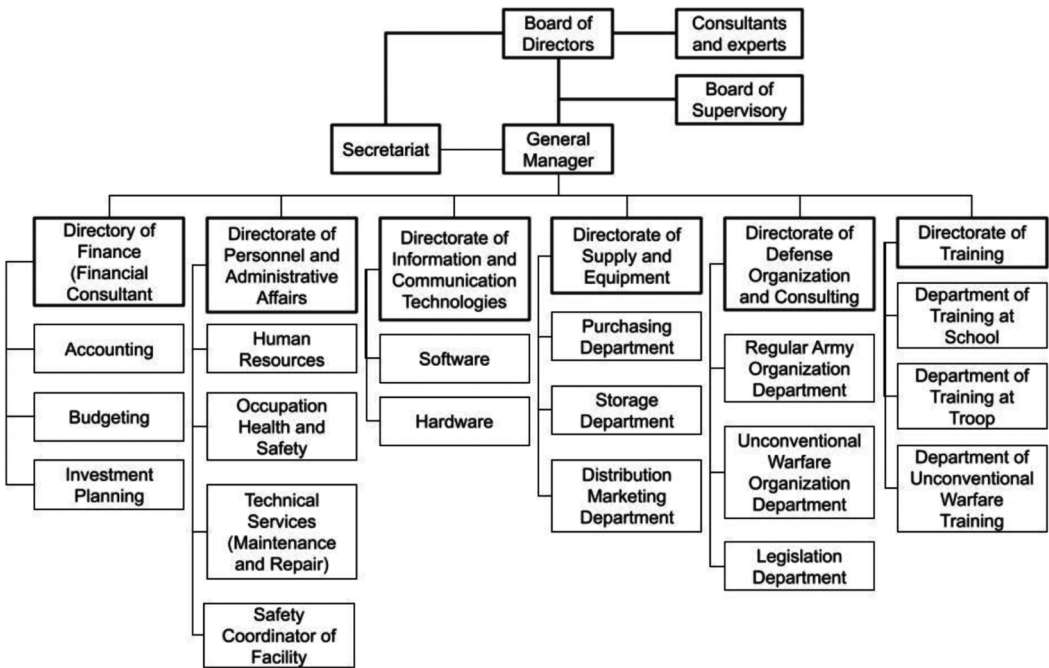
According to its official website, SADAT is composed of 23 co-owners and 64 officers and non-commissioned officers, all of whom appear to be from the various branches of the Turkish Armed Forces (Tanrıverdi, 2024). At the top of the organization, a Board of Directors (on which Adnan Tanrıverdi sits) and an independent group of "Consultants and Experts" overlook the organization (Fonseca, 2023). Below, is an independent supervisory board and the organization's general manager (Fonseca, 2023). Reporting to the general manager are the finance, personnel and

administrative affairs, information and communication technologies, supply and equipment, defense organization and consulting, and training directorates (Fonseca, 2023). Within each of these directorates are various departments that oversee the operations and service provisioning, such as accounting, purchasing, and unconventional warfare organizations (Fonseca, 2023).

SADAT claims to have worked in 22 countries and aims to work in “all 60 Islamic countries” already (Tanriverdi, 2024). SADAT is known for providing consultancy and training services to armed forces, as well as personal

security services, in these countries. Consulting services include, “assessing possible military threats and identifying collective defense opportunities with allies/other countries as well as (re-) organizing the armed forces; audits of the readiness of the armed forces - offering solutions to deficits; cyber defense and assault software” (Jaklin, 2024, p. 3). Training services include “conventional military training for land, sea and air forces, as well as unconventional training including ambush, raid, road closing, destruction, sabotage, and rescue and abduction trainings and in turn the defense against

FIGURE 1. SADAT ORGANOGRAM



Note: This organogram is adapted from the one presented by Tomás Fonseca (2023, para. 4).

these operations. Special forces training is also provided for land, air and sea; in conventional and unconventional warfare” (Jaklin, 2024, p. 4). Evidence from Mali also shows that clients can pay SADAT for personal bodyguards (Parens & Plichta, 2025). Additionally, while SADAT does not appear to directly engage in combat, as Wagner and some other PMSCs do, it has been known to deploy trained Syrian mercenaries in active combat roles, a service which it does not publicly advertised and has been explicitly denied (Parens & Plichta, 2025). Lastly, some evidence suggests that SADAT also provides logistics support, and especially transportation using its own aircraft (Fonseca, 2023). One such example are the allegations of SADAT providing logistical support for proxy fighters in Syria (Powers, 2021).

SADAT’s relatively low profile makes it difficult to determine its connection to the broader Turkish Military structure. However, assumptions can be made based on reports of SADAT Turkish military activities. Indeed, SADAT appears to play a crucial role in enabling Türkiye’s plausible deniability, particularly by deploying Syrian mercenaries in conflict zones where direct Turkish military intervention might incur significant international backlash (Taş, 2020). Examples include SADAT’s use of Syrian mercenaries in regional hotspots such as Libya and Nagorno-Karabakh and its activities focused on protecting Turkish assets in countries like Nigeria, Burkina Faso,

and Niger (Vial & Bouvier, 2025). Additionally, SADAT also appears to be the entity upon which Türkiye relies upon for training the armed forces of other countries when those countries sign bilateral security cooperation agreements (Vial & Bouvier, 2025). All of the African countries in which SADAT has provided training services have signed security cooperation agreements with Türkiye (Vial & Bouvier, 2025). The strategic function of SADAT’s plausible deniability capability is further illuminated by the stated operational procedures of SADAT itself. Despite official denial of connections to Türkiye’s government and armed forces, SADAT’s CEO, Melih Tanrıverdi, was quoted in a 2021 radio interview as saying, “We do the following when we receive an offer that meets our own service provision criteria. We communicate the offer from a country to the Turkish Foreign Ministry. We also provide information to the National Intelligence Organization [MIT] and the Ministry of Defense about the request and ask for their views. This is the way we work” (Bozkurt, 2021).

From a broad perspective, the services offered by SADAT can be seen as part of a broader package of defense-and-security-focused arrangements, such as the sale of weapons, intelligence systems, etc.) This package has played a significant role in the increased economic and political cooperation between Türkiye and African countries in recent years (Lebovich & van Heukelingen, 2023). Türkiye now ranks fourth among arms exporters to

Africa, and the greatest growth in partnerships between Türkiye and Sahelian countries has been in the defense and security sectors (Lebovich & van Heukelingen, 2023; Parens & Plichta, 2025). In 2018, Türkiye pledged five million euros to the G5 Sahel joint force and signed a military cooperation agreement with Niger (Lebovich & van Heukelingen, 2023). In 2019, Burkina Faso and Türkiye signed a defense industrial agreement (Lebovich & van Heukelingen, 2023). In 2020, Türkiye and Niger signed a second security cooperation agreement (Lebovich & van Heukelingen, 2023). Defense exports from Türkiye to Burkina Faso jumped from \$277000 in 2020 to \$7 million in 2021 (Lebovich & van Heukelingen, 2023). By 2022, at least 30 African countries had signed security cooperation agreements with Türkiye, 19 of which included training services for national armies (Baez, 2024). The agreements often included exports such as armored vehicles, small arms, helicopters, trainer aircraft, and drones (Parens & Plichta, 2025). Surveillance and armed drones, such as the Bayraktar TB2 and Akıncı, have become an especially important export from Türkiye to African partners, and purchases have been recorded from Niger, Burkina Faso, Mali, Togo, and Djibouti (Parens & Plichta, 2025). Turkish arms and equipment have generally developed a reputation in Africa as being well-priced for their quality. Moreover, Türkiye's willingness to sell weaponry without restrictions sets it apart from

Western suppliers (Lebovich & van Heukelingen, 2023; Parens & Plichta, 2025).

In addition to training and weapons procurement, deals signed between Türkiye and African countries sometimes include the deployment of official Turkish military personnel. For instance, in 2025, Chad's government allowed the Turkish military to replace French troops at the Abéché military base (Parens & Plichta, 2025). Similarly, in 2025, Niger allowed the Milli İstihbarat Teşkilatı (MIT), Türkiye's national intelligence organization, to establish an operations center Agadez, a city in the north of the country (Parens & Plichta, 2025). The most significant location of the official Turkish military presence in Africa is Camp TURKSOM situated near Mogadishu, the capital of Somalia (Parens & Plichta, 2025). Strategically located near the Indian Ocean, and costing Türkiye around \$50 million, Camp TURKSOM is where the Turkish Armed Forces have agreed to train 10000 Somali soldiers, including special forces (Parens & Plichta, 2025). Türkiye has also signed agreements with Somalia to collaborate together in maritime security and law enforcement, and to provide equipment and training to Somalia's navy (Baez, 2024).

Reports of SADAT's activities have coincided with the presence of Turkish business enterprises and the Turkish military in some African countries. For instance, conflicting reports from regional news outlets in Somalia describe varying degrees of SADAT intervention

in Mogadishu to support the Somali National Army in defending the capital against Al-Shabaab increasingly successful campaign that began in February 2025 (Mogadishu24, 2025; Mohamed, 2025; Somali Guardian, 2025; Tejeda, 2025). According to the *Somali Guardian* (2025), Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud recently requested that Türkiye send at least 3000 mercenaries to help stop Al-Shabaab's advance towards the capital. The same article describes SADAT as already having a presence in Mogadishu, where they are training Somali soldiers (Somali Guardian, 2025). However, accounts vary. Different sources indicate as few as three SADAT "officers", hundreds of SADAT "mercenaries", or 5000 SADAT "personnel" have been contracted from Türkiye to assist the Somali armed forces (Agenzia Nova, 2025; Mogadishu24, 2025; Mohamed, 2025; Somali Guardian, 2025; Tejeda, 2025). Another article from *Somaliland Concurrent* claims that, in addition to pushing back Al-Shabaab, SADAT's forces will also take on security roles in the capital and enforce martial law (Mohamed, 2025). Incidentally, it has not been confirmed what sort of SADAT forces might be deployed (Syrian mercenaries, SADAT trainers, SADAT forces in active combat roles, etc.), or if any SADAT forces have in fact been deployed to Somalia at all. On April 4th, SADAT released a public statement concerning its suspected involvement in Somalia. The statement clearly denied any current or planned activity in the country but claimed that

SADAT is prepared to offer support services to the Somali Armed Forces (Mogadishu24, 2025).

SADAT has also reportedly been present on the ground in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso (Parens & Plichta, 2025; Vial & Bouvier, 2025). Following a Turkish delegation's visit to Bamako in 2024, Mali purchased arms and drones from Türkiye, and SADAT assumed the role of providing personal security for the country's junta leader, Assimi Goïta (Vial & Bouvier, 2025). This may be especially significant given reports of growing anonymity and division between the president and the Malian Defense Minister Sadio Camara. According to at least one source, Camara is personally guarded by Russian mercenaries (The North Africa Journal, 2024; The Editorial Staff, 2025). Following this, in August 2025, Mali announced plans to host its first ever arms fair, "Bamex", in Bamako (Africa Intelligence, 2025). The event is scheduled for November of 2025 and will reportedly feature predominantly Turkish defense industry technology (Africa Intelligence, 2025). In Niger and Burkina Faso, SADAT may have been contracted to protect Turkish financial interests, including mines and the Niamey International Airport in Niger (Rigoli, 2025). SADAT appears to have used Syrian mercenaries for these security operations, which may have caused friction with Russian mercenaries and mine workers at the Russian owned Nordgold mines in Burkina Faso (Parens & Plichta, 2025). According to BBC reporting, Syrian mercenaries working

for SADAT in Niger have at times been commanded by Russian forces, despite Russia's numerous war crimes in Syria and its support of the authoritarian Assad regime (Africa Defense Forum, 2025). In interviews, Syrian mercenaries said they hate their Russian counterparts in Niger, but still go to work in Niger for economic reasons (Africa Defense Forum, 2025).

BENEFITS FOR AFRICA

Partnerships with Türkiye, particularly through intermediaries like SADAT, provide strategic ambiguity that empowers African governments and ruling elites to pursue their interests in ways that enhance their agency on the global stage. The Turkish government has presented itself as a neutral alternative to traditional colonial and exploitative powers in Africa; positioning itself an ally in the fight against Western imperialism and as a proponent of Islamic solidarity (Parens & Plichta, 2025). This framing resonates with the longstanding postcolonial African political tradition of rejecting binary allegiances. During the 1960 Conference of Independent African States, Kwame Nkrumah declared, "We face neither East nor West: we face forward" (Nkrumah, 1960, 1967). This ethos reflects the strategic ambiguity that partnerships with countries like Türkiye may offer African states, enabling them to assert their independence by forming alliances based on national priorities and leaders' personal interests rather

than on external geopolitical blocs. Moreover, formerly colonized African countries may find common cause with Türkiye's anti-colonial rhetoric and may view these partnerships as less politically risky than closer ties with Russia or China (Parens & Plichta, 2025). Similarly, SADAT portrays its value to African states as enabling the training, reorganization, and modernization of their armies in order to reduce "dependence on Western imperialist crusader countries" and to promote "defensive collaboration and defensive industrial cooperation among Islamic countries with the [intent] of serving Islamic Union" (Tanrıverdi, 2024). While JNIM, an al-Qaeda-affiliated organization in the Maghreb and West Africa, has espoused similar anti-Western and militant Islamic rhetoric, many African governments have so far found SADAT to be a reliable ally in fighting Islamic insurgencies (Parens & Plichta, 2025). In 2024, JNIM issued a message in which it described Russia and Türkiye as "foreign mercenaries" working for criminal governments and called for Muslims across the Sahel to unite in their fight against groups like SADAT and Wagner (BBC Monitoring, 2024).

Although it is difficult to determine how all African governments view the benefits of collaborating with Türkiye and SADAT, a few countries have released brief press statements in recent years that offer some insights. For example, after Türkiye's ambassador to Mali visited Major General Daoud Aly Mohammedine, Mali's Minister of

Security and Civil Protection, in February of 2024, the ministry released a statement describing cooperation between the two countries as “rich and fruitful”, “diversifying and growing in volume”, and “focused primarily on the defense and security sectors” (Ministère de la Sécurité et de la Protection Civile, 2024). The document also described the partnership as “mutually beneficial” (Ministère de la Sécurité et de la Protection Civile, 2024). A second Malian press release following a subsequent meeting between the two officials in September 2024, referred to Türkiye as a “strategic partner” for Mali, and highlighted Türkiye’s contribution to “Mali’s stability” and its apparent “commitment to supporting Mali in its efforts to restore peace and security throughout its territory” (Ministère de la Sécurité et de la Protection Civile, 2024). The press release also noted Türkiye’s willingness to train Mali’s security forces, and described Türkiye as an asset in “collaboration in the fight against terrorism, transnational crime, intelligence, cybersecurity, and experience sharing” (Ministère de la Sécurité et de la Protection Civile, 2024). In 2024, Burkina Faso’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Cooperation and Burkinabé Abroad published a news report describing a meeting between Mr. Karamoko Jean Marie Traoré, the head of Burkinabe diplomacy, and Mr. Hakan Fidan, Türkiye’s minister of foreign affairs (Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, de la Coopération Régionale et des Burkinabè de l’Extérieur, 2024). Similar to

that of Mali and Somalia, the report highlights Burkina Faso’s and Türkiye’s partnership in combating terrorism and protecting national sovereignty, however it also describes mutual interest in expanding educational opportunities and economic partnerships between the two countries (Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, de la Coopération Régionale et des Burkinabè de l’Extérieur, 2024). This report may show how the Burkinabé government sees military cooperation with Türkiye as a useful initial step in building relations that could lead to beneficial arrangements in other sectors.

The repeated use of terms like “mutually beneficial,” “strategic partner,” and “shared values” across African government communications indicates more than just diplomatic convention. Rather, it indicates a deliberate rhetorical strategy to frame Türkiye as a partner that aligns with African priorities and demonstrate the abilities of African governments to foster partnerships and create narratives in pursuit of their own domestic and international objectives. This consistent language suggests that these states are actively shaping the narrative around the partnership to assert control over its terms, rather than passively receiving aid or security assistance. Although the emphasis on counterterrorism and defense collaboration is significant, it is not presented as a coerced choice or a default option. Instead, countries like Burkina Faso explicitly link military cooperation with broader engagement in

areas such as education and economic development. This suggests that African governments may view security partnerships as pragmatic way to build long-term, multidimensional relationships. The repeated emphasis on shared struggles, including Somalia's reference to domestic terrorism, further positions Türkiye as a peer rather than a patron. In doing so, African states thus frame these alignments as strategic choices that reflect national and regional priorities, not as signs of opportunism or dependency. Thus, the pattern of official language reflects a larger exercise of agency for African governments, who use partnerships like those with Türkiye to diversify foreign relations, build institutional capacity, protect themselves, and expand resources for domestic development and authority enforcement on their own terms.

The framing of partnerships with Türkiye as mutually beneficial may be viewed as an example of the selective and strategic international engagements pursued by Sub-Saharan African countries, as described by Gwatiwa (2021). The emphasis placed by Sub-Saharan African governments on counter-terrorism and anti-imperialist rhetoric is especially significant. The security and self-determination references in the press releases not only bolster Türkiye's international self-projection but also orient and affirm national purpose and goals for domestic African audiences. Building on the ideas of Munyi *et al.* (2022), these narratives

about partnerships with Türkiye may play a role in identity-building and norm promotion for African governments that promote nationalism and defiance against neocolonialism while also facing internal security threats.

Beyond military partnerships and arms sales, many African governments have materially and economically benefited from increased cooperation with Türkiye (Süsler & Alden, 2022). Driven by private and public business initiatives and investments, trade between Türkiye and African countries increased from US\$4.3 billion to \$25.3 billion between 2002 and 2019 (Süsler & Alden, 2022). This increase in trade may be partially attributed to Turkish government policies, such as tax exemptions, that encourage Turkish investment in African countries (Lebovich & van Heukelingen, 2023). Simultaneously, the Turkish government has also provided traditional development aid in the form of schools, commercial airline partnerships, healthcare and water projects, and funded scholarships to study in Türkiye (Lebovich & van Heukelingen, 2023; Süsler & Alden, 2023).

In addition to economic engagement, Türkiye has also provided political support for some African countries (Lebovich & van Heukelingen, 2023). Türkiye's military interventions provide valuable coercive capabilities that can legitimize and enable the government with which Türkiye works. This assistance is particularly important for countries whose national governments have relatively weak power and

are contested by domestic or foreign entities. Additionally, Türkiye's political support can be symbolically valuable, particularly when governments are viewed as controversial by foreign power blocs, such as the West. For instance, Türkiye's vocal support of the 2020 coup in Mali may have helped legitimize the new political leadership and encouraged other countries to normalize relations with Mali (Lebovich & van Heukelingen, 2023). Working with SADAT specifically may also afford various benefits to African governments beyond the scope of security. As previously mentioned, choosing SADAT over other PMSCs may be a strategic decision for African governments seeking economic and political gains, such as foreign direct investment and support in the United Nations, through closer relations with Türkiye.

Furthermore, as previously mentioned, since Türkiye is not seen as a direct adversary with other foreign powers in Africa, such as Russia, China, the US, and European countries, countries that choose to work with SADAT face less risk of compromising their relationships with other countries and their PMSCs (Parens & Plichta, 2025). Through such strategic ambiguity and by inserting SADAT as an insulating layer in bilateral relations, African governments further increase their agency as active brokers negotiating external influence and calibrating their partnerships. In addition, SADAT's ability to protect economic assets, such as infrastructure projects and mineral and

energy deposits, can benefit both Türkiye and domestic owners or partners (Rigoli, 2025). In general, the protection offered by SADAT may help increase investment from countries that might otherwise be dissuaded from investing due to security concerns. For example, during brief periods of relative stability in Somalia since the outbreak of civil war in 1991, oil and gas companies, such as ExxonMobil and Shell have expressed interest in extracting Somalia's nearly 30 billion barrels of untapped oil (Baez, 2024). The possibility of receiving rents from such vast reserves would further increase state capacity for Somalia, potentially enabling a positive feedback loop.

Although the use of SADAT and other PMSCs may give political elites in countries like Mali and Somalia more power and agency, questions remain about the benefits and disadvantages to average citizens. In this paper, we claim that choosing SADAT and Türkiye for partnerships is a strategic decision that can provide African governments with increased leverage and options, however further research is needed to analyze the effects of these partnerships on average citizens. Considering that African governments use SADAT to enhance and bolster their armed forces, and that government forces have, in many cases, been used against citizens of their own countries, there is reason to suspect not all citizens of African countries see partnerships with SADAT and Türkiye as beneficial (Rubin, 2020). While this paper is specifically

dedicated to analyzing the relationships between governments and how SADAT has been a strategic resource for African leaders, future research is encouraged to study how SADAT's employment in African countries affects and is perceived by people outside of governments.

While working with SADAT may benefit some African governments, there may also be drawbacks. Although SADAT advertises itself as wholly dedicated to the needs of its clients, the company's apparent close connections with the Turkish government may cause it to prioritize Ankara's interests as well as those of any client (Powers, 2021). Additionally, SADAT and Türkiye's rhetoric about championing inter-Muslim solidarity and leading Islamic security and defense may be challenged by non-Muslim SADAT clients who, in some cases, attack Muslim communities (Parens & Plichta, 2025). For example, reports from Togo, a predominantly Christian country, describe SADAT contractors supporting the Togolese army in combating JNIM (Zenn, 2025). Recently, concerns have also been raised about the quality of Turkish military and intelligence exports (Africa Defense Forum, 2025). In May of 2025, Niger ended its intelligence-sharing cooperation with Türkiye and Russia citing dissatisfaction with "the quality of telephone communications interceptions" (Africa Defense Forum, 2025). Finally, SADAT's use of Syrian mercenaries may create conflicts with other actors in the areas where SADAT operates. As previously

mentioned, reports indicate that Syrian mercenaries may come into conflict with Russian mercenaries. The latter committed numerous human rights abuses in Syria and played a key role in supporting the Assad regime during the Syrian Civil War (Parens & Plichta, 2025).

BENEFITS: TÜRKİYE & SADAT

When considering the benefits gained by SADAT through operating in SSA, and furthermore the benefits gained by Türkiye through these operations, it is challenging to separate the two actors and their respective benefits. By operating in majority-Muslim Sub-Saharan countries, SADAT can actively pursue its vision of modernizing "the armed forces and international security forces of Islamic countries" as well as establishing "defense collaboration and defense industry cooperation among Islamic countries" (SADAT, nd-a; SADAT, nd-b). Up until now, Türkiye's primary partners in Africa have been countries in which SADAT operates. The convergence between African countries that have received training services from SADAT and those that have signed security cooperation agreements with Türkiye demonstrate such bilateral relations (Vial & Bouvier, 2025). Furthermore, SADAT has stated that they naturally advise client countries to purchase Turkish defense systems, making the expansion of their operations on the continent financially lucrative for Türkiye (SADAT, 2024). In

turn, supporting the creation of a new market for Turkish arms sales makes SADAT the natural instructor for such weapon systems.

After facing criticism in the French media, SADAT released a statement that framed the criticism as an attack on Turkish foreign policy in the region. The statement emphasized the lack of a colonial past in SSA. This juxtaposed Türkiye and France, highlighting their different historical engagements with Africa. The statement also emphasized the aid and the African-centered that Türkiye provides (SADAT, 2024). By continually referring to the positive approach Türkiye is taking in SSA, the dialogue shifts away from SADAT's questionable activities and reinforces the positive nature of Turkish foreign policy in SSA. Notably, by emphasizing African agency in their partnerships, Türkiye, and by extension, SADAT, can strategically deflect responsibility for potential missteps or controversial actions. By framing African states as autonomous and equal partners, Turkish actors can position any outcomes, including negative ones, as the product of joint decision-making rather than external imposition. Thus, the rhetoric of African agency becomes not only a tool of empowerment but also a foreign policy instrument that diffuses accountability. Hence, the interconnectedness of SADAT and Türkiye extends the benefits in both directions.

In line with the multi-track approach, although Islam is at the center of the debate, it is difficult to conclude

that Türkiye is actively promoting its Turkish Islamic values. Instead, Islam is viewed as a means of establishing connections with SSA countries, both through direct government initiatives, such as the expanded operations of the Diyanet, and allegedly through independent bodies with Islamic foundations like SADAT. Thus, Islam ultimately serves as a tool in Turkish foreign policy toward the SSA, enabling Türkiye to build strong bilateral relations aligned with its material and strategic interests. Furthermore, through these policies, Türkiye has developed its foreign policy's overarching goals: Turkish autonomy in the international sphere and establishing its role as a regional security actor. Statements released by the Malian and Somalian governments demonstrate the international support that Türkiye has received. The Malian government's statement emphasizes the "importance of sharing experiences in the fight against terrorism", suggesting that Mali views Türkiye as facing similar challenges with domestic terrorism (Ministère de la Sécurité et de la Protection Civile, 2024). Such a statement aids in legitimizing the fight against terror Türkiye claims to be fighting at home. These sentiments were echoed in 2024 press release from Somalia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs & International Cooperation (2024) which strongly condemned what it described as a "heinous terrorist attack on Turkish Aerospace Industries (TUSAŞ) in Kahraman Kazan, Ankara." The document describes how Somalia empathized

with Türkiye because it faced “similar challenges”, while also emphasizing Somalia’s commitment to “standing with Türkiye and the international community in the fight against terrorism, with a partnership grounded in shared values and mutual trust” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs & International Cooperation, 2024).

Although it is well established that Turkish foreign policy has taken on neo-Ottoman characteristics, some theoretical parameters limit its applicability to the SSA region. There is a disagreement over whether geographies outside of historical Ottoman territories can be considered within the realm of neo-Ottoman ideology. Regardless of whether the ideological aspect is accepted or not, the operational manner of employing a multi-track approach is undoubtedly neo-Ottoman. A crucial point for consideration is the degree of independence afforded to non-state actors within Türkiye’s multi-track approach. The close linkage between seemingly independent non-state actors like SADAT and the Erdoğan government highlights the calculated nature of Türkiye’s multi-track approach and its capacity to exert influence while maintaining a degree of plausible deniability. This dynamic is central to understanding contemporary Turkish-African relations.

CONCLUSION

This article has explored the intricate evolution of contemporary Turkish

foreign policy, which is marked by an expansive global reach and a multi-track approach that incorporates non-state actors such as private military security companies (PMSCs). By focusing on Türkiye’s growing involvement in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) and the specific role of SADAT, this study addresses a critical gap in existing scholarship that often underestimates the active role of African states in their bilateral relations. The analysis affirms that SADAT operates as a pivotal intermediary, providing Türkiye with plausible deniability in sensitive security operations while simultaneously enabling African governments to achieve strategic ambiguity and diversify their partnerships beyond traditional blocs.

It has been demonstrated how Türkiye’s foreign policy, shaped by ideological influences such as neo-Ottomanism and a reinterpreted “Turkish Islam,” has strategically embraced a multi-track approach that fosters connections through both official and non-state channels. In SSA, this has translated into an expansion of relations initially driven by humanitarian aid and soft power, now significantly augmented by security cooperation and the deployment of actors like SADAT. Critically, this analysis shows that African states are not passive recipients in this dynamic. Using frameworks that highlight African agency, such as those emphasizing institutional control, norm promotion, and even “authoritarian agency,” the analysis has illustrated how African governments actively

engage with, negotiate, and leverage these partnerships. SADAT's presence, as an opaque non-state actor, provides an additional layer of strategic maneuverability for African capitals, allowing them to pursue security objectives and economic gains while managing external perceptions and minimizing political risks associated with more overt alliances.

The reciprocal benefits of this arrangement are clear. SADAT expands its operational reach and promotes Turkish defense interests, while Türkiye reinforces its ambition to become an independent global actor with significant regional security influence. For African states, partnerships involving SADAT offer diverse security solutions, access to competitive arms markets, and often, political support and economic investment. Furthermore, African governments' framing of these collaborations with rhetoric of mutual benefit, shared values, and anti-imperialism serves as both diplomatic convention and a deliberate strategy to assert control over the narrative and affirm national purpose for domestic audiences.

This study significantly contributes to the literature on South-South cooperation, non-state actors in foreign policy, and the multifaceted nature of African agency in international relations. It underscores the necessity of moving beyond structuralist accounts to recognize the complex, layered ways in which African actors, both state and non-state, actively shape their external

engagements. While this analysis highlights the strategic value of intermediaries like SADAT, future research could explore the long-term implications of such opaque security arrangements for governance, human rights, and regional stability in SSA. Additionally, comparative studies examining the specific mechanisms and conditions under which African states gain or lose agency in partnerships with other non-traditional external actors would provide valuable insights into the evolving global security landscape.

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África entre potências: o papel da União Africana nas relações com Estados Unidos e China

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RESUMO

Este artigo analisa o papel estratégico da União Africana (UA) diante das distintas abordagens dos Estados Unidos e da China em relação à África no século XXI. O continente africano tem ocupado uma posição central nas disputas geopolíticas globais, refletindo dois caminhos distintos: os EUA, com uma agenda securitária e foco na contenção de influências, especialmente sob o primeiro governo Trump; e a China, que se consolidou como alternativa

às potências ocidentais, ampliando sua atuação por meio de investimentos e da Iniciativa Cinturão e Rota (BRI). Nesse contexto, a África busca se posicionar como protagonista, alinhando-se à Agenda 2063 e evitando ser reduzida a palco de interesses externos. Questiona-se, assim, qual é o papel da UA nessas relações, partindo-se da hipótese de que a organização atua como articuladora estratégica, mediando interesses globais em favor das prioridades africanas. Em termos metodológicos, a pesquisa baseia-se em

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Recebido: 16 de junho de 2025 / Modificado: 26 de agosto de 2025 / Aceito: 1º de septiembre de 2025.

Para citar este artigo:

Ribeiro Lobato, J. y Costa, K. (2025). África entre potências: o papel da União Africana nas relações com Estados Unidos e China, *Oasis*, 43, 299-323.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18601/16577558.n43.13>

revisão bibliográfica, análise documental e interpretação de dados.

Palavras-chave: União Africana; China; Estados Unidos; África.

Africa between powers: the role of the African Union in relations with the United States and China

ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the strategic role of the African Union (AU) in light of the differing approaches of the United States and China toward Africa in the 21st century. The continent has become central to global geopolitical disputes, with the U.S. promoting a security-oriented agenda—especially during the first Trump administration—and China expanding its presence through investments and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), presenting itself as an alternative to Western powers. In this context, Africa seeks to assert its agency, aligning with Agenda 2063 and avoiding being reduced to a stage for external interests. The article questions the AU's role in these dynamics, based on the hypothesis that it acts as a strategic coordinator, mediating global interests in favor of African priorities. Methodologically, the research draws on a literature review, document analysis, and interpretative data to examine how the AU navigates external pressures while

advancing the continent's long-term strategic objectives.

Keywords: African Union; China; United States; Africa.

África entre potencias: el papel de la Unión Africana en sus relaciones con Estados Unidos y China

RESUMEN

Este artículo analiza el papel estratégico de la Unión Africana (UA) frente a los distintos enfoques de Estados Unidos y China hacia África en el siglo XXI. El continente africano es cada vez más central en las disputas geopolíticas globales: Estados Unidos tiene una agenda securitaria, especialmente durante el primer gobierno de Trump; mientras que China se presenta como una alternativa a las potencias occidentales, ampliando su presencia mediante inversiones y la Iniciativa de la Franja y la Ruta (BRI). África busca afirmarse como protagonista, alineándose con la Agenda 2063 y evitando ser escenario de intereses externos. Se cuestiona el papel de la UA en estas relaciones, partiendo de la hipótesis de que actúa como articuladora estratégica, mediando intereses globales en función de las prioridades africanas. Metodológicamente, la investigación se basa en una revisión bibliográfica, análisis

documental y en la interpretación de datos, para examinar cómo la UA maneja estas dinámicas y fortalece los objetivos del continente.

Palabras clave: Unión Africana; China; Estados Unidos; África.

INTRODUÇÃO

O início do novo século marcou uma importante inflexão na África, rompendo com um longo período de declínio econômico, conflitos e marginalização no contexto internacional. Desde os anos 2000, observou-se um esforço crescente dos países africanos em assumir papel proeminente, acompanhado de medidas concretas em diversos campos, com o objetivo de superar desafios estruturais e consolidar sua integração à economia mundial (Cardoso, 2019). Nesse sentido, um dos marcos desse período de transformações foi a formação da União Africana (UA) em 2002, concebida como um verdadeiro instrumento de luta pela inserção do continente no cenário global (Diallo, 2005).

Diferentemente de sua antecessora – a Organização da Unidade Africana (OUA) –, a UA dispõe de um arcabouço institucional mais robusto, adotando uma abordagem intervencionista e criando mecanismos legais para responder rapidamente aos desafios enfrentados pelos países africanos (Murithi, 2008). Nesse contexto, em 2015 foi lançada a Agenda 2063, considerada um marco no estabelecimento de uma visão estratégica de longo prazo para

a África. O documento, fundamentado nos princípios do Pan-Africanismo e do Renascimento Africano, reflete os interesses e as prioridades africanas, visando promover o desenvolvimento sustentável, fortalecer a integração regional e afirmar o continente como um ator global relevante (Oliveira & Otavio, 2021).

Diante de tais mudanças, verifica-se também um renovado interesse internacional pela África, impulsionado por disputas geopolíticas e econômicas. Em especial, a rivalidade entre os Estados Unidos e a China tornou-se um dos eixos centrais dessa dinâmica. De um lado, destaca-se o protagonismo estadunidense, historicamente orientado por uma agenda securitária, sobretudo após a criação do Comando dos Estados Unidos para a África (AFRICOM). Nos últimos anos, contudo, essa agenda passou por reformulações, especialmente durante a primeira administração de Donald Trump, quando o tradicional viés militar cedeu espaço a uma maior ênfase na contenção de influências emergentes. De outro lado, a China consolidou-se como um ator cada vez mais presente, assumindo o papel de parceira estratégica do continente por meio de investimentos em infraestrutura, comércio e desenvolvimento, notadamente no âmbito da Iniciativa Cinturão e Rota (BRI). Esse modelo chinês, ao oferecer uma alternativa às potências ocidentais tradicionais e priorizar o eixo comercial, intensifica o quadro de competição no continente.

Nesse cenário, a África enfrenta o desafio de se posicionar como protagonista, atuando como um agente ativo no cenário internacional para promover seus próprios interesses, em vez de se limitar a ser um mero palco de disputas externas (Delgado-Caicedo & Oliveira, 2025). Com base em tal problemática, questiona-se: qual tem sido o papel da União Africana na relação do continente africano com os Estados Unidos e a China ao longo do século XXI? Como hipótese, considera-se que a organização desempenha um papel estratégico como articuladora nas relações entre os países africanos e as potências globais, buscando explorar os interesses externos de forma a garantir as prioridades de desenvolvimento e integração do continente. O recorte temporal, do início do século XXI até o governo Biden, justifica-se pela consolidação das principais estratégias dos EUA e da China na África. Assim, o estudo analisa o posicionamento da UA frente a essas dinâmicas, em defesa de seus interesses de desenvolvimento, conforme a Agenda 2063.

Em termos metodológicos, a pesquisa adota uma abordagem qualitativa, baseada em revisão de literatura, análise documental e interpretação de dados sobre as dinâmicas em questão. Para isso, utiliza-se como fontes artigos acadêmicos, documentos oficiais da UA, relatórios de fóruns e iniciativas internacionais, além de dados econômicos e militares. Dessa maneira, o artigo estrutura-se em três seções. Primeiramente, apresenta-se um panorama

histórico do continente, destacando a evolução dos interesses africanos por meio do surgimento da UA e suas diferenças em relação à OUA. Em seguida, examinam-se as relações da África com os EUA e a China, analisando como esses países moldaram sua presença no continente ao longo do século XXI, com o objetivo de compreender seus objetivos e as rivalidades resultantes. Por fim, analisa-se de que maneira os objetivos da União Africana se refletem nas iniciativas dessas potências no continente, bem como em que medida os interesses africanos são atendidos nesse cenário de disputas internacionais.

DO LEGADO DA OUA À CONSTRUÇÃO DA UA E AO PROJETO DA AGENDA 2063

Nos últimos anos, a África tem buscado intensificar sua participação nas dinâmicas internacionais, rompendo com a visão tradicional de um continente passivo e dependente. O fortalecimento de parcerias estratégicas e o esforço para um equilíbrio na ordem mundial marcaram essa transformação. Nesse contexto, os países africanos passaram a negociar questões globais de forma equitativa, com o objetivo de reafirmar sua soberania e reduzir dependências externas (Shiferaw, 2023). Esse novo posicionamento reflete tanto uma resposta às dinâmicas geopolíticas contemporâneas quanto à continuidade histórica das lutas por autonomia e autodeterminação, influenciadas pelos ideais do Pan-Africanismo e pelo Renascimento Africano, que promoveram

a valorização da identidade, a integração regional e a construção de uma estrutura global mais justa (Murithi, 2007; Alves, 2019).

O Pan-Africanismo, enquanto movimento político, ideológico e cultural, visava à unidade dos povos africanos, a resistência ao colonialismo e a construção de uma identidade comum, fundamentando-se na história e nas tradições do continente (Oliveira & Otavio, 2021). Esse movimento surgiu na segunda metade do século XIX, em especial entre intelectuais da diáspora africana, como Edward Blyden, William E. B. Du Bois e Marcus Garvey. Tais pensadores, por meio de diferentes abordagens, defendiam a valorização das raízes africanas e a construção de uma África livre e unificada, buscando superar a opressão colonial e garantir a emancipação dos povos africanos (Barbosa, 2016).

No século XX, os ideais pan-africanos, fortemente caracterizados pela liberdade e integração, consolidaram-se por meio dos Congressos Pan-Africanistas, que desempenharam um papel crucial na promoção da independência dos Estados e na formulação de estratégias para superar os desafios do continente. Esses congressos, realizados em várias partes do mundo, reuniram lideranças africanas e da diáspora na luta contra o colonialismo e o racismo, além de redefinir a inserção da África no cenário internacional (Oliveira & Otavio, 2021).

Em maio de 1963, foi fundada a Organização da Unidade Africana (OUA),

que se tornou um símbolo de liberdade, unidade e esperança para o continente (Yihdego, 2011). Entretanto, sua criação foi marcada por divergências entre as lideranças africanas da época. De um lado, situava-se o Grupo de Casablanca, composto por dirigentes associados à segunda onda do Pan-Africanismo, como Nkrumah (Gana), Nyerere (Tanganica, atual Tanzânia) e Nasser (Egito), que defendiam uma unificação política plena da África. De outro, encontrava-se o Grupo de Monróvia, integrado por líderes como Senghor (Senegal), Houphouët-Boigny (Costa do Marfim), Tubman (Libéria) e Balewa (Nigéria), os quais priorizavam a preservação da soberania dos Estados recém-independentes e uma integração gradual (Murithi, 2008; Chanaiwa & Kodjo, 2010).

Como consequência desse impasse, a OUA foi concebida com poderes limitados. A Carta da OUA estabeleceu dois princípios fundamentais que se revelaram conflitantes em seu desenvolvimento: o compromisso com a paz e a segurança no continente, e a defesa da soberania, da integridade territorial e da independência dos Estados-membros (Murithi, 2008). Embora essenciais, as tensões entre tais diretrizes restringiam a atuação da organização, visto que intervir em crises internas para garantir a paz colidia com a obrigação de respeitar a autonomia dos Estados (Yihdego, 2011). Dessa forma, sob a doutrina da não interferência, a OUA adotou uma postura de não ingerência, o que contribuiu para a manutenção de regimes autoritários e limitou a implementação

de medidas mais efetivas para a resolução de crises no continente (Murithi, 2008; Yihdego, 2011).

Outro elemento importante do planejamento da OUA foi a busca pela redução da dependência em relação às potências externas, reforçando a ideia de que a África deveria conduzir seu próprio destino político e econômico. Tal abordagem, conhecida como estratégia de contestação, defendia a autossuficiência e a integração regional como formas de fortalecer o continente (Oliveira & Otavio, 2021). Nesse processo, o Plano de Ação de Lagos, de 1980, refletiu essa orientação ao promover políticas voltadas para a autonomia econômica por meio da industrialização e do comércio intra-africano. Entretanto, essa visão enfrentou dificuldades significativas devido à falta de recursos financeiros, à infraestrutura precária, à fragmentação política e à resistência de atores externos, sobretudo das potências ocidentais e das instituições financeiras internacionais (Otavio, 2017; Cardoso, 2019). Além disso, a ascensão do neoliberalismo nas décadas de 1980 e 1990 impôs modelos que restringiram a autonomia econômica da África, causando estagnação e aumento da dívida externa (Fonseca, 2015).

Diante do fracasso da estratégia de contestação e das transformações no contexto global e africano do

pós-Guerra Fria, emergiu a ideia do Renascimento Africano, impulsionada principalmente por líderes como Thabo Mbeki, ex-presidente da África do Sul (Landsberg, 2012). Essa nova visão buscava revitalizar a identidade africana, enfatizando o desenvolvimento econômico e político, por meio da combinação entre autonomia e colaboração com potências externas. Desse modo, surgiu a estratégia de responsabilidade compartilhada, que, diferentemente da contestação, reconhecia que o desenvolvimento da África não era responsabilidade exclusiva das nações africanas, mas também dependia do apoio de atores extracontinentais, que deveriam desempenhar um papel ativo nesse processo (Oliveira & Otavio, 2021).

Essa abordagem foi consolidada com a implementação da Nova Parceria para o Desenvolvimento da África (NEPAD)¹, e a criação da União Africana (UA). A Sessão Extraordinária da OUA em Sirte, na Líbia, realizada em 1999, foi um grande marco dessa transição (Otavio, 2017; Oliveira & Otavio, 2021). Nessa ocasião, os líderes africanos se reuniram para revisar a Carta da OUA, destacando a importância de fortalecer a solidariedade entre os países africanos e reviver o espírito do Pan-Africanismo. Diante dos desafios crescentes da globalização, buscou-se estabelecer uma unidade maior no continente e

1 Adotada em 2001 para promover o desenvolvimento sustentável e a integração regional, a NEPAD foi incorporada à União Africana em 2002. Em 2010, tornou-se a agência de planejamento da UA e, em 2018, foi transformada na AUDA-NEPAD, com mandato ampliado para apoiar projetos prioritários, fortalecer capacidades e impulsionar a Agenda 2063 (AUDA-NEPAD, s.d.).

implementar um projeto de integração regional. Assim, em julho de 2000, foi assinado o Ato Constitutivo da UA, em Lomé, no Togo, e, em julho de 2002, a União Africana foi oficialmente lançada em Durban, na África do Sul, substituindo a OUA (Murithi, 2008).

Semelhante a sua antecessora, a UA também foi resultado do confronto e posterior acomodação entre duas visões opostas: uma mais integracionista, liderada por Muammar Gaddafi², que defendia a criação dos “Estados Unidos da África”, com um governo centralizado e supranacional; e outra mais soberanista, apoiada por países como Nigéria e África do Sul, que priorizavam a autonomia dos Estados-membros e a integração gradual, baseada no fortalecimento de instituições regionais. Enquanto a primeira visão procurava uma fusão política dos países africanos sob um único governo, a segunda enfatizava a necessidade de consolidar a cooperação econômica, a governança democrática e a estabilidade política antes de qualquer avanço para uma união profunda (Tieku, 2004; Landsberg, 2012).

O modelo adotado para a União Africana refletiu uma postura intermediária, focando na construção de instituições continentais comuns, como o Parlamento Pan-Africano e o Conselho de Paz e Segurança, sem comprometer a soberania dos Estados-membros

(Landsberg, 2012). Embora a UA tenha adotado uma estrutura institucional mais robusta em comparação à OUA, criando órgãos permanentes com mandatos definidos e mecanismos de monitoramento, sua principal inovação foi a incorporação de princípios normativos fundamentais. Entre esses, destacam-se o direito de intervenção em casos de crimes contra a humanidade, crimes de guerra e genocídio, bem como a promoção da democracia e dos direitos humanos (Murithi, 2008).

Essa transformação está diretamente ligada à Agenda 2063, lançada em 2015, que evidencia a evolução das estratégias africanas de desenvolvimento e inserção internacional com base nas concepções do Pan-Africanismo e do Renascimento Africano (Alves, 2019; Oliveira & Otavio, 2021). Com uma visão estratégica de longo prazo, esse documento busca orientar a transformação socioeconômica do continente nos próximos 50 anos, incorporando lições e experiências do passado (Deghetto *et al.*, 2016). Nesse sentido, a Agenda 2063 se compromete com a construção de uma África integrada, próspera e pacífica, estabelecendo orientações para um crescimento inclusivo e sustentável, ao mesmo tempo em que garante que o desenvolvimento africano seja conduzido de forma autônoma e alinhada às necessidades da população (União Africana, 2015).

2 Chefe de Estado da Líbia entre 1969 e 2011, foi o organizador do movimento que substituiu o governo do antigo rei da Líbia por um Conselho Revolucionário (Campbell, 2013; Sousa, 2018).

Como ressaltam Deghetto *et al.* (2016, p. 9), a Agenda 2063 da UA é “uma visão ambiciosa e potencialmente transformadora”, tendo como pilares fundamentais três ideias essenciais: unidade, prosperidade e paz para todos os cidadãos (Deghetto *et al.*, 2016). Para sua plena concretização, foram definidas sete grandes aspirações³, que se desdobram em 18 objetivos, 44 áreas prioritárias e 161 metas em nível nacional. Dentre as principais iniciativas, destacam-se a erradicação da pobreza, a industrialização, o fortalecimento de instituições democráticas, a capacitação da juventude, a igualdade de gênero, a implementação da Área de Livre Comércio Continental Africana (AfCFTA) e o desenvolvimento de megainfraestruturas (União Africana, 2015).

A integração continental, nesse contexto, é um pilar central da Agenda 2063, funcionando como um elemento-chave para fortalecer a autonomia política e econômica da África. Nesse sentido, a modernização da infraestrutura é considerada essencial para impulsionar o comércio intra-africano, consolidar a posição do continente no cenário internacional e promover maior conectividade entre os países africanos, facilitando a cooperação regional

e o crescimento econômico sustentável (Oliveira & Otavio, 2021).

Segundo Oliveira e Otavio (2021), a Agenda 2063 combina elementos da estratégia de contestação com a estratégia de responsabilidade compartilhada, reconhecendo que, embora o desenvolvimento africano deva ser conduzido pelos próprios africanos, a cooperação internacional desempenha um papel essencial na realização desses objetivos. Ademais, a recente inclusão da União Africana como membro permanente do G20, em 2023, simboliza um avanço notável na projeção internacional africana, refletindo a valorização de sua crescente importância geopolítica e econômica. Esse marco fortalece a capacidade da UA de representar os interesses africanos nas decisões globais, ampliando sua agência no sistema internacional (Delgado-Caicedo & Oliveira, 2025). Assim, a organização segue evoluindo como uma força estratégica e autônoma, comprometida com a promoção do desenvolvimento sustentável, da paz e da inclusão social no continente.

Para tanto, observa-se que a África, ao longo dos últimos anos, tem procurado se firmar como protagonista no cenário global, fortalecendo sua agência

3 A Agenda 2063 estabelece sete aspirações principais: (1) uma África próspera, baseada no crescimento inclusivo e no desenvolvimento sustentável; (2) um continente integrado, politicamente unido, com base nos ideais do Pan-Africanismo e na visão do Renascimento Africano; (3) uma África de boa governação, democracia, respeito aos direitos humanos, justiça e Estado de Direito; (4) uma África pacífica e segura; (5) uma África com forte identidade cultural, patrimônio, valores e ética comuns; (6) uma África cujo desenvolvimento seja centrado nas pessoas, valorizando especialmente o potencial das mulheres e da juventude, e garantindo dignidade às crianças; e (7) uma África atuante, unida e influente no cenário internacional (UA, 2015).

por meio da consolidação da soberania continental, da promoção da integração regional e da busca por parcerias estratégicas voltadas para o desenvolvimento sustentável e à estabilidade política (Delgado-Caicedo & Oliveira, 2025). A Agenda 2063 reflete essa visão ao priorizar o crescimento econômico inclusivo, a industrialização e o fortalecimento das instituições democráticas. Contudo, para concretizar tais objetivos, a cooperação internacional é fundamental, especialmente no que diz respeito a investimentos em infraestrutura, tecnologia e comércio. Diante disso, potências globais como os EUA e a China intensificaram sua presença no continente, oferecendo acordos comerciais, financiamento e assistência militar, conforme abordado a seguir.

PRESENÇA E ESTRATÉGIAS DOS ESTADOS UNIDOS E DA CHINA NO CONTINENTE AFRICANO

Após a exposição da postura histórica adotada pelos países africanos, observa-se que a consolidação da União Africana significou um esforço coletivo de integração, pautado por ideais como o Pan-Africanismo e o Renascimento Africano. Desse modo, o continente tem adotado uma postura mais estratégica nas negociações, buscando equilibrar suas relações externas de modo a garantir que as parcerias favoreçam suas prioridades de desenvolvimento. Nesse cenário, cresce a disputa entre os Estados Unidos e a China pela

influência na África. Enquanto, de um lado, os EUA ampliam sua presença, sobretudo no campo militar, a China, por outro lado, intensifica suas relações econômicas. A seguir, analisam-se as abordagens adotadas por cada uma dessas potências e a forma como elas se refletem nos interesses africanos.

RELAÇÕES CHINA-ÁFRICA

As relações entre a China e a África têm raízes históricas profundas que remontam à Conferência de Bandung, realizada em 1955, a qual simbolizou o reconhecimento de interesses comuns entre as partes em suas lutas pela libertação do domínio colonial (Abegunrin & Manyeruke, 2020). Para os africanos, Bandung representou um momento de afirmação política, em que puderam se posicionar como atores autônomos no cenário externo. Já para a China, foi uma oportunidade de ampliar sua inserção no mundo em desenvolvimento e de buscar legitimação internacional para seu regime (Sun, 2014; Abegunrin & Manyeruke, 2020).

A partir de 1955, o governo chinês passou a apoiar diversos movimentos de libertação e a estreitar laços diplomáticos e econômicos com várias nações do continente (Abegunrin & Manyeruke, 2020). Nos anos seguintes, muitos atores africanos começaram a perceber a China como uma alternativa às antigas potências coloniais, destacando-se por uma postura pautada no respeito à soberania e na não interferência nos assuntos internos, princípios

essenciais para os Estados africanos no pós-independência (He, 2008).

Com as reformas econômicas de Deng Xiaoping, no final dos anos 1970, o acelerado crescimento econômico chinês deu origem à estratégia “*Going Global*”, por meio da qual a China expandiu seus investimentos no exterior, com foco especial nos países do Sul Global, incluindo os africanos (Sun, 2014). Nesse processo, a China se consolidou como protagonista da Cooperação Sul-Sul, promovendo parcerias fundamentadas em interesses mútuos, complementaridade econômica e preservação da autonomia nacional, buscando reforçar sua imagem como aliada do progresso para outras economias em desenvolvimento (Contipelli & Picciau, 2015).

As relações sino-africanas, dessa maneira, têm sido apresentadas como uma forma mais horizontal de cooperação, em contraste com as abordagens tradicionais de ajuda internacional (Breuer, 2017). A aproximação com a África representou um dos pilares centrais da estratégia de política externa chinesa, orientada tanto à projeção global de sua influência quanto à consolidação de parcerias econômicas que impulsionaram seu crescimento interno (Pautasso, 2017).

A institucionalização dessas relações firmou-se com a criação do Fórum

de Cooperação China-África (FOCAC)⁴, em outubro de 2000 (Pautasso, 2017). O FOCAC fortaleceu os vínculos diplomáticos e econômicos entre a China e os países africanos e estabeleceu um espaço formal para o debate e o planejamento de ações conjuntas. As reuniões trienais resultam em Planos de Ação que abrangem áreas como desenvolvimento econômico, infraestrutura, saúde, educação e segurança (Murphy, 2022). Para He (2008), o fórum representa uma continuidade do espírito de Bandung, ao servir como plataforma estratégica para a construção de uma ordem internacional multilateral e não alinhada, centrada nos interesses do mundo em desenvolvimento.

Como resultado da dinâmica Sul-Sul, o comércio bilateral entre ambas as partes registrou um crescimento expressivo. Entre 2000 e 2008, a taxa média anual de expansão foi de 33,5%. Somente em 2008, o volume das transações superou os US\$ 100 bilhões, culminando, no ano seguinte, com a China ultrapassando os EUA como principal parceiro comercial do continente africano (Frimpong, 2022). Paralelamente, o Investimento Externo Direto (IED) chinês apresentou um salto significativo, passando de US\$ 317 milhões em 2004 para US\$ 1,44 bilhão em 2009, evidenciando o interesse da China em aprofundar sua presença econômica

4 Atualmente, o FOCAC é composto pela República Popular da China (RPC), por 53 países africanos e pela Comissão da União Africana. Eswatini (antiga Suazilândia) não participa, por manter relações diplomáticas com Taiwan, o que contraria o princípio de “Uma Só China” exigido por Pequim para o estabelecimento de vínculos oficiais (Murphy, 2022).

na África⁵ (Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China, 2012).

Em 2013, a China lançou a ambiciosa Iniciativa Cinturão e Rota (BRI), com o objetivo de redesenhar os fluxos de comércio global por meio de grandes investimentos em infraestrutura e conectividade. Inicialmente, o foco da BRI era a Eurásia, com a criação de seis corredores econômicos e duas rotas marítimas centrais, que pretendiam reconstruir as antigas passagens comerciais da Rota da Seda (Aoyama, 2016). Contudo, a estratégia logo se ampliou para incluir a África, uma vez que se defendeu que a expansão da iniciativa para o continente estimularia o crescimento regional e facilitaria a transferência de indústrias intensivas em mão de obra chinesa para a região. Essa proposta foi bem recebida pelos africanos, que identificaram uma oportunidade de mitigar o déficit de infraestrutura dos países (Chen, 2016).

A formalização da participação africana ocorreu somente em 2018, na Cúpula do FOCAC em Pequim. Nessa ocasião, a China e a União Africana estabeleceram sinergias entre a BRI e a Agenda 2063, consolidadas na Declaração de Pequim de 2018, intitulada "Rumo a uma Comunidade China-África Ainda Mais Forte com um Futuro Compartilhado" (Lisinge, 2020; Murphy,

2022). O documento reafirmou o compromisso mútuo com a expansão dos mercados africanos e com o fortalecimento da infraestrutura do continente, destacando-se principalmente os setores estratégicos, como transporte de alta velocidade e integração econômica regional (Murphy, 2022).

Desde então, dezenas de países africanos passaram a integrar a BRI, com 53 dos 55 países do continente firmando Memorandos de Entendimento com a China; apenas Eswatini e Benim ainda não participaram formalmente (Nedopil, 2025). A União Africana, por sua vez, desempenha um papel essencial como parceira institucional, coordenando a compatibilização dos projetos chineses com a Agenda 2063 e articulando-os com iniciativas continentais (Murphy, 2022).

Irandu e Owilla (2020) ressaltam que o alinhamento entre os objetivos da BRI e os da Agenda 2063 da UA pode ampliar a inserção da África em cadeias de valor regionais e globais, criando oportunidades para o desenvolvimento econômico e industrial do continente. Assim, diversas nações enxergam na iniciativa uma oportunidade valiosa para acelerar o desenvolvimento de longo prazo (Ndzendze & Monyae, 2019). Ademais, embora os projetos estejam alinhados aos interesses geopolíticos

5 Essa tendência de crescimento continuou nas últimas décadas, alcançando, em 2024, um volume comercial de US\$ 296 bilhões e um IED de US\$ 3,96 bilhões em 2023, reforçando a consolidação da China como parceira estratégica de longo prazo para os países africanos (China Africa Research Initiative, 2025; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2025).

e econômicos chineses, muitos líderes africanos os consideram essenciais para superar gargalos históricos em infraestrutura e promover maior conectividade continental (Irandu & Owilla, 2020).

Nesse panorama, as relações sino-africanas, construídas sobre laços históricos e valores de soberania e cooperação, evoluíram para uma parceria multifacetada, com ênfase nas dimensões econômica, comercial e diplomática. O aprofundamento dessa cooperação, especialmente por meio do FOCAC e da BRI, tem contribuído significativamente para a modernização de setores-chave nos países africanos. Assim, ao alinhar os objetivos da BRI com as metas da Agenda 2063, a China e os países africanos reforçam um modelo de desenvolvimento baseado na complementaridade, na conectividade e na autonomia, apontando para a construção conjunta de uma ordem internacional mais equitativa.

RELAÇÕES ESTADOS UNIDOS-ÁFRICA

Ao fim da Segunda Guerra Mundial, as relações dos Estados Unidos com o continente africano, até então marcadas por um engajamento limitado, passaram a se intensificar (García & Nieto, 2022; Chin & Bartos, 2024; Nagar & Mutasa, 2018). Com o apogeu da Guerra

Fria, a África passou a representar um palco estratégico na rivalidade entre as superpotências, no qual tanto os EUA quanto a antiga União Soviética procuravam assegurar a lealdade dos países recém-independentes, resultando em um envolvimento crescente em dinâmicas regionais por ambos os lados (Schraeder, 1994). Em decorrência disso, ao fornecer ajuda militar a seus aliados, tais potências alimentaram guerras por procuração⁶, desencadeando conflitos violentos com consequências duradouras (Jackson, 2018).

À medida que a Guerra Fria se aproximava do fim, os Estados africanos enfrentavam sérias dificuldades políticas e econômicas (Schmidt, 2013). Nesse cenário, observa-se um período de desengajamento das potências ocidentais no continente (Chazan *et al.*, 1999; Schraeder, 1994). Como exemplo, até o final da década de 1990, os investimentos do Departamento de Defesa dos Estados Unidos somavam menos de US\$ 700 milhões, estando abaixo de qualquer outra região (Walker & Seegers, 2012). Além disso, esse baixo comprometimento se refletiu na ausência de atenção internacional diante das principais crises do período, como os conflitos na Somália e em Ruanda, nos quais a atuação das grandes potências foi mínima e tardia (García & Nieto, 2022; Chin & Bartos, 2024; Chazan *et al.*,

6 Em síntese, a guerra por procuração (ou *proxy war*) é um conflito no qual uma terceira parte intervém, ainda que indiretamente, em uma guerra já existente, com o objetivo de influenciar o resultado e promover seus objetivos estratégicos, sem assumir os custos de uma intervenção direta (Brown *et al.*, 2018).

1999). Em resumo, conforme Alaminos (2018), a política africana de Washington após a Guerra Fria concentrou-se em quatro frentes: o combate ao fundamentalismo islâmico, o acesso a longo prazo ao mercado africano, a prevenção da AIDS e o combate ao terrorismo.

Progressivamente, essa última questão se tornou um componente fundamental na estratégia dos EUA e, a partir dos atentados de 11 de setembro de 2001, a África passou a ocupar um papel central na estratégia de segurança estadunidense, tanto por sua importância na luta contra o terrorismo quanto por seu potencial para fornecer matérias-primas (Congressional Research Service, 2015; Alaminos, 2018). Observando as vulnerabilidades africanas, os Estados do continente eram considerados “frágeis” e, portanto, vistos como um terreno fértil e um refúgio seguro para atividades desempenhadas por organizações terroristas (Walker & Seegers, 2012; Bellamy, 2009). Como resultado, houve uma crescente militarização da ajuda externa dos EUA à África, representada por ações como a Operação Liberdade Duradoura⁷, em 2001, a Iniciativa de Contraterrorismo da África Oriental (EACTI)⁸, a fundação da primeira base militar estadunidense

permanente em Djibuti e a criação do Comando dos Estados Unidos para a África (AFRICOM) (Chin & Bartos, 2024).

A criação do AFRICOM, por sua vez, gerou intensos debates. Idealizado para unificar três comandos regionais em um único órgão, buscava-se promover intervenções ágeis para conter conflitos, combater ameaças e prestar assistência quando necessário. No entanto, mesmo diante de afirmações que eliminavam a relação entre o AFRICOM e um aumento da presença militar dos EUA no continente, esse empreendimento reforçou a tendência de uma abordagem militarizada do país na região (Nagar & Mutasa, 2018). Sendo assim, houve forte resistência africana a seu funcionamento, baseada, especialmente, em três motivos principais: a ausência de uma justificativa convincente por parte do governo estadunidense para a implementação do Comando; a concepção do AFRICOM como uma organização híbrida, a qual combina ações militares com funções tradicionalmente desempenhadas por agências civis; e, por fim, a falta de transparência em sua criação, o que reforçou a sensação de exclusão dos países africanos (Schewe, 2018).

7 A Operação Liberdade Duradoura foi a resposta estadunidense aos ataques de 11 de setembro, iniciada em 7 de outubro de 2001, com bombardeios contra a Al-Qaeda e o Talibã no Afeganistão. Oficialmente, terminou em 28 de dezembro de 2014, embora forças da coalizão tenham permanecido no país (Naval History and Heritage Command, 2024).

8 A Iniciativa de Contraterrorismo da África Oriental integrou a agenda antiterrorista dos EUA, oferecendo apoio, materiais e treinamentos a países africanos no combate a ameaças terroristas (U.S. Department of State, 2004).

Posteriormente, em 2009, o início da administração de Barack Obama gerou expectativas globais de uma renovação da política externa estadunidense – orientada à priorização de demandas econômicas e sociais e a uma maior aproximação com os africanos (Katito, 2010). Entretanto, sua administração permaneceu com uma postura semelhante à de seu antecessor, ao manter a tendência de aumento da presença militar dos EUA no continente, com um crescente número de tropas e assessores (García & Nieto, 2022; Chin & Bartos, 2024). Em paralelo, o AFRICOM também realizou treinamentos de forças de segurança africanas em atividades de contraterorismo (Magu, 2019).

Com a ascensão de Donald Trump em 2016, tal cenário se alterou. O posicionamento singular do presidente instaurou uma nova fase de isolamento, simbolizada pela queda do orçamento militar destinado à África e pela diminuição do número de forças especiais em até 50% no AFRICOM (García & Nieto, 2022). Dessa forma, a Estratégia de Segurança Nacional de 2018 desviou o foco do combate ao terrorismo para, gradativamente, desenhar um cenário de competição frente aos desafios impostos pela presença russa e chinesa no continente (García & Nieto, 2022). Ao final do mandato, notaram-se os resultados: em 2021, os níveis oficiais de tropas dos EUA na África – que haviam atingido um número superior a 5.000 soldados em 2017 – caíram para níveis anteriores aos atentados de 11 de

setembro, resultando em aproximadamente 1.200 soldados (Chin & Bartos, 2024). Logo, tal conjuntura refletiu uma ruptura significativa com o habitual percurso que as relações entre os Estados Unidos e o continente africano vinham trilhando até o momento (Alaminos, 2018).

Ademais, a administração de Joe Biden manteve uma configuração semelhante à de seu antecessor. Embora a publicação da *National Security Strategy* (NSS) de 2022 tenha destacado a importância da cooperação com o continente africano, afirmando que a promoção dos interesses nacionais dos Estados Unidos dependia de uma colaboração mais estreita com as nações africanas e com organismos regionais, não houve um aumento significativo da ajuda externa destinada aos diferentes setores da África (Chin & Bartos, 2024; NSS, 2022). Dessa forma, apesar de seu governo adotar iniciativas distintas das de Trump – como a realização de uma viagem presidencial ao continente e o lançamento da *U.S. Strategy Toward Sub-Saharan Africa*, a qual reconhecia a insuficiência da política estadunidense para a região –, essas ações não se traduziram em mudanças efetivas (Chin & Bartos, 2024; Donati, 2024).

Em termos de iniciativas militares, observa-se uma redução nos orçamentos destinados a programas de paz e segurança do Departamento de Estado voltados ao continente africano entre 2022 e 2024, refletindo o afastamento dos Estados Unidos em relação à região (Husted et al., 2023). Além disso, assim

como no governo anterior, a prioridade que se destacou foi a contenção da influência chinesa, evidenciada pela criação da iniciativa *Build Back Better World* (B3W), lançada durante a cúpula do G7. A proposta buscou criar uma parceria de infraestrutura para financiar projetos em países em desenvolvimento, funcionando como alternativa à BRI da China (G7 Research Group, 2021).

Em síntese, identifica-se uma tendência dos Estados Unidos em priorizar a dimensão securitária em suas relações com o continente africano. Ao longo do século XXI, essa aproximação foi impulsionada por investimentos militares crescentes, com destaque para a atuação do AFRICOM. De certo modo, tais iniciativas se aproximam de uma das aspirações centrais da Agenda 2063: a construção de uma África pacífica e segura, livre de conflitos armados, terrorismo, intolerância e violência. Contudo, é fundamental refletir sobre os caminhos possíveis para alcançar esses objetivos, uma vez que, embora o discurso estadunidense enfatize a proteção dos africanos, é inegável a presença de seus próprios interesses estratégicos nesse cenário. Além disso, considerando a continuidade de diretrizes do governo Trump durante a administração Biden, torna-se necessário repensar os rumos das relações com a África, bem como compreender as implicações da crescente influência chinesa no continente. Na seção seguinte, esses desafios e seus desdobramentos serão explorados com maior profundidade.

O PAPEL DA UNIÃO AFRICANA NA REPRESENTAÇÃO DOS INTERESSES AFRICANOS NAS RIVALIDADES GLOBAIS

À luz das discussões anteriores, observa-se que a África se consolidou como um palco de disputa entre as grandes potências nas últimas décadas, o que exige esforços significativos por parte dos países africanos para que atuem como atores soberanos e capazes de promover seus próprios interesses. Nesse sentido, a presente seção busca analisar o papel desempenhado pela UA na articulação das relações do continente com os Estados Unidos e a China, examinando, especialmente, como essa atuação contribui para assegurar as prioridades africanas de desenvolvimento e integração regional.

Inicialmente, cabe destacar que a criação – e posterior atuação – da União Africana se insere em um contexto de mudanças no sistema internacional, marcado pela reconfiguração de uma nova ordem global e pela emergência de novos blocos de poder. Nesse cenário, o continente africano – representado, institucionalmente, pela UA – emerge como um bloco estratégico, contestando as relações assimétricas Norte-Sul e fortalecendo os laços com os países do Sul Global. Tal aspiração, por sua vez, ganha forma com a criação da Agenda 2063, visto que, diante das dificuldades já enfrentadas e dos aprendizados decorrentes, o documento compromete-se com a construção de uma África integrada, próspera e pacífica, ao estabelecer diretrizes para o crescimento do continente.

Sendo assim, esta análise buscará avaliar em que medida a atuação das grandes potências no continente converge com os objetivos delineados na Agenda 2063. Desse modo, o foco incidirá sobre as iniciativas chinesas e estadunidenses implementadas no continente africano e anteriormente mencionadas, não com o intuito de compará-las entre si, mas de compreender de que forma esses projetos expressam as respectivas estratégias de inserção no continente e como tais ações contribuem para a realização das metas definidas pela UA. Ainda, além da análise empírica desses projetos, serão consideradas as perspectivas dos países africanos, a fim de problematizar os interesses que fundamentam os programas externos e compreender os limites e as potencialidades da cooperação com as grandes potências envolvidas.

Primeiramente, ao observar a trajetória das relações entre a China e a África, constata-se que a cooperação entre ambas as partes apresenta vínculos estreitos com os objetivos da Agenda 2063 da União Africana, sobretudo em relação à promoção do desenvolvimento sustentável e da integração

regional. Essa parceria intensificou-se com o passar dos anos por meio de mecanismos como o FOCAC e a BRI, que consolidaram as bases de uma cooperação estratégica mantida até o presente.

Como evidência dessa aproximação, destaca-se a reunião mais recente do FOCAC, realizada em 2024. Nessa ocasião, foi elaborado o Plano de Ação de Pequim para o período de 2025 a 2027, no qual a China reafirmou seu compromisso com o progresso dos países africanos, ressaltando seu apoio por meio do Programa de Desenvolvimento de Infraestrutura na África (PIDA)⁹. Com essa iniciativa, são realizados investimentos em redes de transporte, energia e abastecimento de água, a fim de impulsionar o comércio africano e fomentar o crescimento econômico do continente. Ademais, a China se comprometeu a contribuir para a implementação do Segundo Plano de Ação Prioritária do PIDA¹⁰, que enfatiza o planejamento de projetos, reforçando, assim, a ideia de uma cooperação orientada por interesses compartilhados (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2024).

9 Criado em 2012 pela Comissão da União Africana, pela AUDA-NEPAD e pelo Banco Africano de Desenvolvimento, o PIDA é uma iniciativa continental que visa promover a integração regional por meio do desenvolvimento de infraestrutura. Sua implementação exige coordenação entre os países, as comunidades regionais e os parceiros financeiros (AU, s.d.).

10 O Primeiro Plano de Ação Prioritária do PIDA (PIDA-PAP1) cobriu o período de 2012 a 2020 e buscou promover o crescimento econômico sustentável e a conectividade continental. Até o final de 2020, os compromissos de investimento haviam atingido US\$ 82 bilhões, superando em 20% a meta inicial. Os principais financiadores foram os Estados-membros da União Africana (42%), seguidos por membros da ICA (24%) e pela China (24%) (AUDA-NEPAD, 2023).

Além do apoio técnico e financeiro, a China exerce um importante papel ao reconhecer e valorizar a responsabilidade da União Africana como articuladora da integração regional. Na mesma reunião do FOCAC, o governo chinês saudou a entrada da UA no G20, reafirmando que apoiará sua atuação no grupo e suas principais demandas institucionais. Ainda, Pequim expressou suporte ao fortalecimento das capacidades da UA na prevenção de conflitos, validando o princípio de “soluções africanas para os problemas africanos”, frequentemente defendido pela organização (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2024).

Diante desse cenário, identifica-se uma convergência entre os interesses chineses e os objetivos da União Africana. Essa sintonia se destaca particularmente na Aspiração 2 da Agenda 2063, que propõe a construção de um continente integrado e politicamente unido, inspirado pelos ideais do Pan-Africanismo e do Renascimento Africano, anteriormente mencionados (UA, 2015). Dessa forma, além de demonstrar um apoio explícito a esses princípios, a China busca estabelecer uma parceria que estimule não somente o desenvolvimento econômico dos países africanos, mas também a afirmação de sua soberania e a estabilidade continental.

Ademais, é válido destacar que tais projetos desenvolvidos no âmbito do FOCAC encontram, adicionalmente, suporte na BRI, a qual se alinha aos eixos da Agenda 2063. Desde a formalização

da adesão africana à iniciativa chinesa, diversos países passaram a integrar o projeto, reconhecendo que, apesar da predominância dos interesses chineses em seu planejamento, há também uma oportunidade de superação de problemas estruturais históricos. Desse modo, a complementaridade entre essas agendas é promissora para o avanço do desenvolvimento africano.

Contudo, a participação africana na BRI e em outros projetos de cooperação com a China suscita preocupações, especialmente devido ao endividamento crescente de muitos países, o que gera dúvidas quanto à sustentabilidade dessas parcerias a longo prazo (Nantulya, 2019). Diante disso, em 2021, Moussa Faki Mahamat, então presidente da Comissão da União Africana, ressaltou que o alívio dessas dívidas permanece uma prioridade para a organização. Ele reconheceu os esforços da China para aliviar parte do fardo financeiro, mas destacou que tais medidas ainda são insuficientes diante da lacuna de financiamento estimada em cerca de US\$ 290 bilhões, conforme apontado pelo Banco Mundial (AU, 2021).

A União Africana, portanto, mantém seu apelo para que a China intensifique as ações de ampliação das iniciativas de alívio da dívida, sobretudo considerando que muitos Estados-membros comprometem grande parte de seus orçamentos com segurança, dificultando investimentos em desenvolvimento (AU, 2021). Assim, embora a parceria sino-africana configure um instrumento estratégico, a

UA enfatiza a necessidade de que essa cooperação se baseie em princípios de responsabilidade compartilhada e sustentabilidade, a fim de mitigar os riscos de vulnerabilidade econômica para os países africanos.

Ainda que existam evidentes assimetrias na relação entre a China e os países africanos, é importante reconhecer a existência de pontos de convergência inseridos no contexto mais amplo da Cooperação Sul-Sul. Dessa forma, a presença chinesa na África é frequentemente percebida como uma alternativa às propostas condicionadas pelos interesses dos países ocidentais, razão pela qual há maior atratividade diante de suas iniciativas. As relações sino-africanas, portanto, devem ser analisadas em sua complexidade, sem que sejam automaticamente equiparadas ao padrão histórico de atuação do Ocidente no continente, marcado tradicionalmente por práticas intervencionistas.

De forma contrária à China, os Estados Unidos priorizaram uma abordagem securitária. Essa orientação, de maneira correspondente, se alinha à Aspiração 4 da Agenda 2063, que direciona esforços para promover a construção de uma África pacífica e segura (UA, 2015). Sendo assim, ao observar o documento oficial da Agenda, nota-se que alguns de seus objetivos – como promover valores humanos e enfrentar ameaças terroristas, extremistas e intolerantes – refletem preocupações semelhantes às frequentemente declaradas pela política externa

estadunidense, as quais servem como justificativa para a atuação militar e diplomática do país.

Em termos gerais, a principal expressão dessa estratégia securitária materializou-se com a criação do AFRICOM, no ano de 2007. Concebido como uma alternativa para coordenar as ações militares na África, o AFRICOM, desde sua proposta inicial, foi recebido com forte resistência por parte de diversas lideranças africanas, as quais demonstraram receios quanto à perda de soberania e à instrumentalização do continente para a garantia de interesses externos (Schewe, 2018). Inicialmente, países como Botsuana e Libéria demonstraram interesse em sediar a estrutura do Comando; entretanto, com a forte oposição de outras nações, intensificada pela intervenção da UA, ambos recuaram (The Tricontinental, 2021). Diante da resistência à instalação em solo africano, o Comando foi estabelecido em Stuttgart, na Alemanha (Schewe, 2018) – decisão que revelou, de um lado, o desconforto político com a ampliação da presença militar dos EUA no continente e, de outro, o papel relevante da União Africana na proteção dos interesses africanos.

Essa resistência ficou ainda mais evidente no contraste entre a postura de certos governos africanos – especialmente os mais dependentes da ajuda estadunidense – e a opinião pública. Enquanto alguns líderes políticos mostraram-se receptivos às operações do AFRICOM, a recepção popular foi marcadamente negativa (Schewe,

2018). Nesse cenário, a mídia africana desempenhou um importante papel, argumentando que a criação de um novo comando militar aprofundaria os problemas estruturais da região, além de temer que o continente seguisse os exemplos negativos do Iraque e do Afeganistão (Mboup *et al.*, 2010).

No entanto, apesar dos receios anteriormente mencionados, alguns anos após sua criação, o AFRICOM iniciou tentativas de cooperação com a União Africana. Em 2013, durante uma reunião entre a Comissão da UA e representantes do governo estadunidense, foram firmados compromissos conjuntos com o objetivo de ampliar essa colaboração. Na ocasião, o AFRICOM estabeleceu diálogos técnicos com a Divisão de Operações de Paz e Segurança da Comissão, marcando a primeira vez em que representantes militares dos EUA e a UA realizaram consultas em conjunto. Esses encontros, por sua vez, buscaram identificar setores prioritários para uma possível ampliação do apoio em questões de paz e segurança (AU, 2013). Além disso, relatórios de atividades do próprio AFRICOM fazem referência a seu envolvimento em missões de paz organizadas pela UA, nas quais os militares atuam como mentores da Força-Tarefa Regional da organização (United States Africa Command, s.d.).

Desse modo, apesar das incertezas envolvidas, é possível perceber uma disposição da União Africana em explorar os benefícios oferecidos pelo AFRICOM, sobretudo diante da capacidade militar significativa dos EUA para lidar com conflitos no continente.

Considerando essas observações, torna-se pertinente estabelecer uma comparação entre a percepção dos países africanos em relação ao AFRICOM e à BRI. Enquanto diversos países aderiram voluntariamente à iniciativa chinesa, enxergando nela formas concretas de desenvolvimento em áreas como infraestrutura e industrialização, a recepção do AFRICOM foi marcada por desconfiança e resistência. Essa diferença de percepção revela a natureza, os propósitos e os benefícios atribuídos a cada uma dessas iniciativas.

Em síntese, a atratividade da BRI pode ser compreendida pela prática de uma parceria de caráter horizontal que a China tem sustentado com os países africanos. O histórico das relações sino-africanas, intensificadas desde a criação do FOCAC, é associado a benefícios mútuos e à ausência de interesses políticos condicionantes internos¹¹. Em contraste, os Estados Unidos ainda carregam um legado histórico como potências imperialistas, o que fortalece a desconfiança em relação às

11 Embora Pequim exija o reconhecimento da política de “Uma Só China” como condição diplomática para o estabelecimento de relações oficiais, não impõe condicionalidades políticas internas, como exigências de instituições democráticas liberais, comumente associadas à cooperação ocidental (Murphy, 2022).

motivações de sua presença no continente. Desse modo, enquanto a China é vista como uma potência “aliada” dos países africanos, os EUA são percebidos como um ator externo movido exclusivamente por interesses estratégicos próprios.

Nesse cenário, o papel da União Africana ganha relevância estratégica, especialmente para o controle de ameaças securitárias no continente. A principal ferramenta utilizada pela organização nesse âmbito é o Conselho de Paz e Segurança (CPS), um órgão permanente responsável por prevenir, gerir e resolver possíveis conflitos (AU, s.d.). O CPS atua, nessa perspectiva, como um sistema de alerta e coordenação de respostas às crises africanas, consolidando a UA como uma mediadora e promotora da paz. Além disso, espera-se que a organização possa, de maneira progressiva, atuar de forma autônoma na contenção de ameaças externas e na prevenção de intervenções não alinhadas aos interesses africanos.

Por fim, diante de um cenário de tensões e dificuldades, torna-se compreensível que os EUA tenham adotado uma nova postura em relação à África. Em contraste com as ameaças à segurança que dominaram a agenda do país no continente, o protagonismo chinês passou a ser visto como um importante desafio. Essa mudança de foco reflete também as limitações da abordagem tradicional estadunidense nas últimas décadas, cuja eficácia foi, em muitos casos, questionável. Por outro lado, a

China tem oferecido aos africanos uma alternativa atraente, com investimentos que dialogam com as aspirações da Agenda 2063, ainda que isso implique um aumento significativo do endividamento de várias nações.

Assim, ao deixar de priorizar iniciativas de cooperação que respondam às demandas reais africanas, é provável que a influência dos Estados Unidos se mantenha em declínio, enquanto a presença chinesa tende a seguir em expansão. Diante disso, o papel da UA ganha ainda mais importância, atuando como articuladora das prioridades do continente e promotora de uma cooperação que reflita os interesses genuínos dos países africanos.

CONSIDERAÇÕES FINAIS

A análise realizada neste artigo evidenciou o papel estratégico da União Africana na intermediação das relações da África com os Estados Unidos e a China. Diante de um quadro marcado pela intensificação das rivalidades geopolíticas, a organização tem buscado se afirmar como uma voz coletiva e articuladora dos povos africanos, atuando como um agente cada vez mais ativo na defesa da soberania africana, na promoção do desenvolvimento sustentável e na coordenação de uma integração regional baseada em prioridades definidas internamente.

As iniciativas externas no continente são recebidas com ambivalência pelos africanos, que reconhecem tanto suas oportunidades quanto seus

riscos. A presença estadunidense, centrada majoritariamente em uma lógica securitária, materializada por meio do AFRICOM, é frequentemente percebida com desconfiança. Nesse sentido, a ausência de um diálogo horizontal e a priorização de interesses estratégicos dos Estados Unidos – como o combate ao terrorismo e o controle de zonas instáveis – suscitam críticas quanto à real contribuição dessa abordagem para a paz duradoura e o fortalecimento das capacidades africanas de segurança.

Por outro lado, a China, por meio da Iniciativa Cinturão e Rota, oferece uma alternativa que se alinha aos objetivos da Agenda 2063, especialmente no que diz respeito à infraestrutura e à conectividade. Entretanto, mesmo sendo bem recebida por muitos governos, a BRI não está isenta de críticas. Entre elas, destacam-se as preocupações com o crescente endividamento dos países, que geram dúvidas sobre a sustentabilidade dessa parceria a longo prazo.

Nesse contexto, a União Africana tem buscado, com esforços ainda em construção, filtrar essas influências externas, garantindo que sejam incorporadas de forma estratégica e que respeitem os marcos normativos e os objetivos estabelecidos pelo próprio continente. A UA tem se esforçado para construir uma postura mais assertiva frente às grandes potências, posicionando-se não somente como mediadora, mas contribuindo diretamente na definição das prioridades africanas.

Embora persistam desafios estruturais e assimetrias, é por meio de uma

postura propositiva e coordenada que a União Africana poderá consolidar seu papel como guardião dos interesses coletivos do continente. Para tanto, será necessário continuar fortalecendo sua institucionalidade, promover maior coesão entre seus membros e aprofundar o diálogo interno sobre os limites e possibilidades das parcerias externas. Somente assim a África poderá deixar de ser objeto das disputas globais para tornar-se sujeito central na construção de uma ordem internacional mais plural e equitativa, na qual os países africanos não sejam apenas receptores de agendas externas, mas protagonistas de seu próprio destino.

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La anatomía del Magreb: retos y oportunidades para su posicionamiento en el sistema internacional

Gabriela Andrea Ruiz Casseres*

RESUMEN

El Magreb, a pesar de sus bajos niveles de integración regional y los profundos conflictos internos que atraviesa, constituye una región estratégica por su abundancia de recursos naturales, su relevancia en la gestión de flujos migratorios y los desafíos securitarios que le rodean. Este artículo, construido bajo un enfoque cualitativo y analítico, recurre a la revisión de literatura académica, informes de organismos multilaterales y fuentes oficiales para identificar las oportunidades y limitaciones que enfrentan los Estados magrebíes en su posicionamiento internacional. El análisis se enmarca en la teoría liberal y en los enfoques funcionalista y

neofuncionalista de las relaciones internacionales, que permiten comprender cómo la cooperación y la integración regional podrían convertirse en una alternativa viable para transformar los activos geopolíticos del Magreb en poder efectivo. La investigación se articula alrededor de tres ejes centrales – migración, recursos y seguridad – como categorías que, más allá de representar desafíos inmediatos, se constituyen en posibles ventanas de oportunidad para fortalecer la inserción global de la región. La conclusión principal es que, si bien los Estados magrebíes han logrado avances de manera individual, el déficit de integración regional continúa

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Recibido: 2 de julio de 2025 / Modificado: 1 de septiembre de 2025 / Aceptado: 18 de septiembre de 2025

Para citar este artículo:

Ruiz Casseres, G. A. (2025). La anatomía del Magreb: retos y oportunidades para su posicionamiento en el sistema internacional. *Oasis*, 43, 325-350.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18601/16577558.n43.14>

siendo un obstáculo que limita su capacidad de proyectarse como un bloque cohesionado en las estructuras globales de poder.

Palabras clave: migración; seguridad; recursos naturales; diplomacia; cooperación regional.

The Anatomy of the Maghreb: Challenges and Opportunities for Its Positioning in the International System

ABSTRACT

The Maghreb, despite its low levels of regional integration and persistent internal conflicts, stands as a strategic region due to its abundance of natural resources, its central role in migration management, and its complex security challenges. This article, based on a qualitative and analytical approach, draws from academic literature, multilateral reports, and official sources to identify both the opportunities and the constraints faced by Maghreb states in their international positioning. The study is framed within liberal theory and the functionalist and neofunctionalist approaches in international relations, which help explain how cooperation and regional integration could serve as viable alternatives to transform the Maghreb's geopolitical assets into effective power. The analysis focuses on three main axes —migration,

resources, and security— which, beyond posing immediate challenges, also represent windows of opportunity for strengthening the region's global insertion. The main conclusion is that although Maghreb states have achieved progress individually, the persistent lack of regional integration remains an obstacle that prevents them from projecting themselves as a cohesive bloc within global power structures.

Keywords: Migration; security; natural resources; diplomacy; regional cooperation.

INTRODUCCIÓN

Cuando se habla del Magreb (en árabe Al-Magrib), se hace referencia geográficamente a la región situada al norte de África y al sur del mar Mediterráneo, que se conforma en su sentido más amplio por Marruecos, Argelia, Libia, Túnez y Mauritania —que también es incluido en el sector regional del Sahel—, así como por el territorio no autónomo del Sahara Occidental (Naciones Unidas, s. f.), que está siendo administrado casi en su totalidad por Marruecos. Es una región distinta al vecino Máshrek, la región al este de Libia que comprende a Egipto, Palestina, Jordania, Líbano y Siria.

El Magreb es también un concepto que une a estos países de manera histórica y cultural, que además se caracteriza por tener una multiplicidad de religiones, etnias, lenguas y regímenes políticos. Los Estados magrebíes, además, comparten el peso del

legado colonial, que si bien proviene de diferentes potencias colonizadoras (Francia, España e Italia), es una herencia que parecen arrastrar a día de hoy y que define gran parte de sus lógicas de política exterior e integración –o (des) integración– entre sí.

De la misma manera, estos Estados experimentan a la par las repercusiones de las llamadas “primaveras árabes”, que inician precisamente en Túnez en 2010, y que representaron un cambio en la organización política de los países de la región, dejándola con una amplia variedad de estructuras gubernamentales. En Túnez se establece actualmente una república presidencialista, en Argelia una república constitucional semipresidencial, Marruecos constituye una monarquía constitucional, Mauritania una república islámica semipresidencialista, y Libia ha mantenido una fragmentación interna profunda desde las revoluciones de la década anterior, que la deja en una situación política interna dividida en dos facciones.

Para el entendimiento de la relevancia de esta región, es clave conocer los privilegios estratégicos que le otorga su ubicación, así como los desafíos y las oportunidades que posee a nivel de recursos, puesto que en sus Estados se encuentran reservas de materias esenciales para la economía internacional, como son los tradicionales combustibles fósiles –gas, petróleo, y, en menor medida, carbón– (BP, 2024), las tierras raras, y a su occidente, en las costas marroquíes y saharauis, el océa-

no Atlántico, que es una zona propicia para el sector pesquero (Global Fishing Watch, s. f.). Adicionalmente, cuenta con unos atributos climáticos que cobran más importancia desde el nuevo milenio y los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible (ODS), que son la potencialidad de energía eólica y fotovoltaica. Asimismo, comparten con los otros países alrededor del mediterráneo la amenaza climática latente de las sequías y la escasez de agua (Tuel y Eltahir, 2020), haciéndolos especialmente vulnerables a las altas temperaturas y, por ende, a afectaciones en el sector agrícola, con impacto directo sobre la seguridad alimentaria.

El Magreb es también un territorio donde se concentra una gran movilidad humana, pues no solo tienen flujos migratorios de origen y tránsito hacia Europa, sino que además sus países se han convertido en destino para miles de migrantes. En Libia se identificaron 761.322 migrantes de diversas nacionalidades africanas entre junio y julio de 2024, un incremento del 5% desde el último censo (OIM, 2022). Sin embargo, las migraciones irregulares hacia el continente europeo son, en efecto, una de las particularidades que ha establecido a la región como sector estratégico para la injerencia de la Unión Europea y su política migratoria. Adicionalmente, la región atraviesa problemáticas de seguridad relacionadas con el terrorismo, la criminalidad organizada y la trata de seres humanos, cuyo abordaje es dispar en cada uno de los países magrebíes.

Otro elemento central para comprender las dinámicas del Magreb es la disputa que se lleva a cabo hace aproximadamente medio siglo por el territorio del Sahara Occidental, del que la soberanía es todavía un punto por esclarecer y que marca la política exterior de los Estados magrebíes (principalmente de Marruecos). Por la soberanía sobre este territorio perdura un conflicto constante de bajo impacto y que se traduce en hostilidades diplomáticas entre la vecindad magrebí; de la misma manera, los Estados buscan en alianzas exteriores la legitimación de sus intereses territoriales sobre él.

Por toda esta multiplicidad de aristas que definen la relevancia de la región del Magreb, vale la pena comprender de dónde surge su concepto más allá de las delimitaciones geográficas. La concepción del Magreb como estructura unificadora surge en el momento independentista de sus Estados, en el marco de la descolonización. Era, en principio, un movimiento nacionalista liderado por estudiantes, trabajadores y exiliados políticos. De acuerdo con Abed Jabri (2016), posterior a la Segunda Guerra Mundial se celebró la Convención del Magreb Árabe, en febrero de 1947, en la que se definían estrategias de acción conjunta para coordinar los movimientos de liberación en cada uno de los Estados. En ese mismo año, se estableció el Comité de Liberación del Magreb Árabe y, en su proclamación, se constataba que su conformación tenía sus orígenes en el islam y la unión árabe, y abogaba por el

derecho de cada país magrebí a luchar por su independencia individual, así como también afirmaba el compromiso de cada país para cooperar con los otros para conseguirla.

Asimismo, como indica Abed Jabri (2016), en 1956 se completa la independencia de Túnez y Marruecos, por lo que la potencia colonizadora, Francia, endureció sus esfuerzos por contener la de Argelia. La “Argelia francesa” constituía un terreno extenso que incorporaba partes del Sahara que se creían correspondientes a Túnez y Marruecos –territorio que además contaba con riqueza en recursos naturales tales como gas, crudo y minerales–, por lo que la delimitación de las fronteras coloniales significaba un debate importante dentro del Magreb; sin embargo, en el marco de la unión magrebí, los esfuerzos comunes se enfocaron en conseguir la independencia de Argelia, con ánimos de resolver la cuestión fronteriza una vez conseguido este propósito. Con la llegada la independencia argelina en 1962, la cuestión territorial fue inminente e irreconciliable, lo que llevó a Marruecos y Argelia a una inmediata guerra por motivos basados en la herencia colonial.

Es evidente que de esa disposición de integración y unificación poco quedó después de la descolonización e independencia de los Estados del Magreb. Esto estableció las bases para dos ideas principales sobre la integración en la región; en primer lugar, aquella que promovía “primero el desarrollo de los Estados del Magreb, luego la

unidad” y, en su lado contrario, aquellos que consideraban que la única manera de conseguir el desarrollo era mediante la unidad (Abed Jabri, 2016). Desde entonces, si bien es cierto que se han realizado otros esfuerzos en materia de integración, estos no han tenido éxito, ni se han mantenido en el tiempo. Entre estas iniciativas destaca la Unión del Magreb Árabe, fundada en 1989, y que ha celebrado seis cumbres desde su fundación hasta 1994, mientras que la última reunión del Consejo de Ministros Extranjeros se llevó a cabo en 2007, así como la del Comité de Monitoreo (Magreb Árabe Unido, s. f.).

La integración en materia económica y comercial de la región también ha sido más bien ausente, con pocas iniciativas exitosas y que incluyan a todos los países del Magreb. Una importante es el Trade Facilitation Agreement que entró en vigor en 2017 a través de su ratificación por los miembros de la Organización Mundial del Comercio (OMC), de la que son parte Mauritania, Marruecos y Túnez, y tanto Libia como Argelia han solicitado su adhesión, pero no han hecho mayor esfuerzo por negociarla (FMI, 2018). Este acuerdo podría beneficiar a los países magrebíes para potencializar su crecimiento económico y el comercio intrarregional, que para 2019-2020 era significativamente más costoso que el comercio de la región con Europa (Sara, 2021).

Este breve recuento sobre los fallidos intentos de integración regionales en la historia reciente del Magreb sirve

para dar cuenta de la desconexión latente de este territorio. La relación entre estos países está profundamente marcada por el aislamiento en materia económica e incluso política, lo que es consecuencia a su vez de la herencia colonial (Abed Jabri, 2016). Esto ha resultado en que cada Estado desarrolle un abordaje distinto de problemáticas comunes para la región, bien sea en la lucha contra el crimen organizado y el terrorismo, la administración de los flujos migratorios, la inserción al comercio internacional y los mercados productivos, o la transición energética en el marco de la crisis climática. En definitiva, el desarrollo del Magreb encuentra sus límites en las fronteras intrarregionales.

El Magreb constituye una región estratégica en el sistema internacional contemporáneo por su papel en tres áreas decisivas: la gestión de los flujos migratorios, la abundancia de recursos naturales y energéticos, y los retos securitarios vinculados tanto a conflictos internos como a dinámicas regionales más amplias. Cada país ha emprendido acciones unilaterales para defender sus intereses en la arena global –con mayores o menores grados de éxito–, pero el potencial colectivo que ofrece la región permanece fragmentado. Esta paradoja limita su capacidad de proyectarse como bloque cohesionado y reduce la eficacia con la que podrían maximizar su influencia en las estructuras globales de poder frente a las potencias tradicionales.

En este marco, el presente análisis parte de la premisa de que la falta de integración regional constituye un obstáculo estructural significativo para que los Estados del Magreb transformen sus ventajas estratégicas en poder efectivo. A través de los ejes de migración, recursos y seguridad, se explora cómo estos factores, que definen la agenda inmediata de la región y concentran la atención de actores externos, funcionan a la vez como ventanas de oportunidad y como fuentes de vulnerabilidad. Así, el presente estudio busca describir las principales acciones que llevan a cabo los Estados magrebíes en cada una de estas esferas, a la vez que identificar cómo la cooperación regional –en línea con las teorías liberales y neofuncionalistas de la integración– no solo podría optimizar la gestión de estas problemáticas, sino también abrir nuevas posibilidades de desarrollo y agencia internacional para los países magrebíes.

Para ello, el artículo se divide en cuatro apartados; en primer lugar, se presenta la metodología y el marco teórico empleados en el desarrollo del análisis, para posteriormente explorar la cuestión migratoria en el Magreb y las aristas más relevantes en esta materia, tanto en movimientos intrarregionales como hacia el continente europeo, para así describir un panorama general sobre el abordaje de las oportunidades y los desafíos que acompañan a este fenómeno. En segundo lugar, se abordará la cuestión de los recursos naturales en el Magreb; se buscará darle

una mirada holística a la situación de recursos en la región y a los principales sectores con potencial de crecimiento en el Magreb.

En tercer lugar, del artículo busca aproximarse al estado de la cuestión de seguridad en el Magreb, donde se identificarán los principales desafíos y avances en los ámbitos con más relevancia securitaria en la región, principalmente la cuestión del Sahara Occidental y la lucha contra el terrorismo en relación con el aumento de las amenazas provenientes de la región inmediata al Magreb, el Sahel. Por último, en cuarto lugar, se hace un análisis de la política exterior de los Estados del Magreb respecto al resto de actores en el sistema internacional, para comprender el rol que representan los países magrebíes en las esferas de poder, a fin de llegar a una conclusión que contenga las temáticas esenciales para comprender la inserción global de los países del Magreb en la actualidad.

METODOLOGÍA

Este artículo se construye bajo un enfoque cualitativo analítico, que permite observar las múltiples dimensiones que atraviesan al Magreb en su posicionamiento internacional. Para ello, se recurrió a la revisión de literatura académica especializada, informes de organismos multilaterales y fuentes oficiales de carácter gubernamental, con el propósito de articular un marco interpretativo que dé cuenta tanto de los elementos históricos como de las

dinámicas más recientes en la región. Así, la investigación se cimenta en un ejercicio de rastreo documental que combina el estudio de fuentes primarias –tratados internacionales, resoluciones de Naciones Unidas, estadísticas de comercio y migración– con fuentes secundarias provenientes de artículos científicos y análisis especializados en materia de política exterior, seguridad y recursos naturales.

De la misma manera, la metodología se fundamenta en un análisis comparativo que permite distinguir las particularidades de cada Estado magrebí, al tiempo que se identifican las constantes regionales que los atraviesan como conjunto. En este sentido, el enfoque empleado no pretende ofrecer una visión unificada, sino más bien evidenciar los contrastes entre los distintos actores y cómo estos marcan divergencias en el camino hacia la proyección internacional. La utilización de categorías como migración, recursos energéticos, seguridad y diplomacia externa sirvió de guía para estructurar el análisis, procurando siempre un abordaje holístico que otorgue un panorama general sobre el estado actual de estas áreas para cada país de la región.

Así las cosas, la metodología aplicada busca hacer una aproximación amplia a cómo el Magreb se está insertando en las dinámicas globales desde una perspectiva liberal y neofuncionalista de las relaciones internacionales, que favorece la integración regional. Con ello se persigue trazar un boceto que dé cuenta de las oportunidades y

los desafíos que la región enfrenta en el sistema internacional contemporáneo, al mismo tiempo que se reconoce el peso de los condicionantes históricos que continúan moldeando su presente.

MARCO TEÓRICO

Si bien el análisis se concentra en casos concretos sobre migración, recursos y seguridad, los beneficios que la integración regional le brindarían a la región del Magreb son un tema recurrente y central del presente artículo. Se plantea que, a través de la cooperación intrarregional, los Estados magrebíes podrían obtener capacidades de influencia y una proyección internacional más cohesionada.

Esta idea en favor de la integración como alternativa para el desarrollo se enmarca en la teoría liberal de las relaciones internacionales, según la cual los Estados cooperan no solo para maximizar su seguridad –como lo plantea el realismo–, sino para obtener beneficios compartidos en términos de prosperidad y crecimiento económico. Si bien los postulados realistas son efectivos para comprender ciertas dinámicas internas de la región, se buscará una aproximación a una postura liberal que concibe la cooperación como alternativa viable frente a la persistente rivalidad regional.

En este marco, resulta necesario recuperar los aportes del funcionalismo y el neofuncionalismo en las relaciones internacionales, teorías que marcaron la discusión sobre integración en

el ámbito europeo, pero que ofrecen claves útiles para pensar su aplicabilidad en otras regiones. David Mitrany, desde el funcionalismo, proponía que la función esencial de la sociedad internacional debía ser la cooperación técnica, la cual podía luego extenderse a otros sectores. El neofuncionalismo, por su parte, reconoció las limitaciones de dicho enfoque, especialmente la dificultad de separar lo económico de lo político y la renuencia de los Estados a ceder competencias a autoridades supranacionales. Así entonces:

El neofuncionalismo trata a la integración como un proceso en el cual los involucrados reprograman gradualmente sus intereses en términos de orientación regional en reemplazo de una orientación nacional. Sin embargo, a diferencia de lo planteado por el funcionalismo, ello ocurre por motivos materiales y no por motivos altruistas, debido a que prevén que las instituciones supranacionales constituyen el mejor camino para alcanzar sus intereses particulares. (López, 2024)

Asimismo, la noción de “derrame” (*spillover*) es central en este enfoque: la cooperación exitosa en un sector impulsa la voluntad de ampliar la integración hacia otros ámbitos. Si bien es claro que estas formulaciones surgen en contextos diferentes al magrebí, su utilidad analítica reside en mostrar cómo la cooperación regional puede generar beneficios que trascienden los intereses inmediatos de cada Estado. En regiones plurales y heterogéneas como el Magreb, donde la diversidad de regímenes políticos impone límites

a la cesión de soberanía, la integración no puede replicar de manera idéntica el modelo europeo. Sin embargo, experiencias como el Mercosur en América Latina muestran que, aun con marcos institucionales diversos, la cooperación puede traducirse en beneficios económicos y políticos concretos.

LOS FLUJOS MIGRATORIOS EN EL TERRITORIO MAGREBÍ

El primer elemento fundamental para comprender la posición de los Estados magrebíes respecto al orden internacional es el manejo de los flujos migratorios. Por tanto, en primer lugar se abordará en esta sección la migración desde los países del Magreb hacia el continente europeo. Por su ubicación, esta región constituye un puente importante para la llegada de migración irregular hacia Europa a través del mar Mediterráneo, por lo que miles de personas al año se enfrentan a la peligrosa travesía que implica cruzar hacia costas europeas y se encuentran vulnerables a posibles violaciones de los derechos humanos.

Los flujos migratorios irregulares son definidos por la Organización Internacional para las Migraciones (s. f.) como el “movimiento de personas que tiene lugar fuera de las leyes, reglamentos o acuerdos internacionales que rigen la entrada o salida del Estado de origen, tránsito o destino”. Aquellos que provienen del continente africano hacia el continente europeo a través del Magreb, si bien no son mayoritarios –pues

la mayoría de la movilidad se presenta intracontinentalmente–, sí representan una prioridad de política exterior tanto para los países europeos situados en el mediterráneo, como para la Unión Europea en su conjunto. Existen tres principales vías irregulares hacia Europa que pasan por el Magreb: la ruta de África Occidental, que comprende la travesía desde Senegal, Mauritania y Marruecos hasta las Islas Canarias españolas; la ruta Mediterránea Occidental, que constituye la vía de Marruecos a España ya sea por tierra –mediante las ciudades de Ceuta y Melilla– o por mar hacia las costas de Andalucía, y, finalmente, la ruta Mediterránea Central, que parte desde Libia y Egipto hacia Italia (Frontex, 2024; CEAR, 2017).

La primacía de la cuestión migratoria en la agenda europea se traduce frecuentemente en esfuerzos para cimentar y reforzar alianzas estratégicas con los Estados magrebíes en materia de control fronterizo. La extraterritorialidad de las fronteras europeas en el Magreb se materializa de manera más exacerbada en cuanto la ruta migratoria y el flujo de migrantes que esta posee. En la historia reciente, por ejemplo, la ruta del Mediterráneo Occidental ha experimentado un progresivo aumento de afluencia de migrantes, con un crecimiento de 20.567 en 2021 a 43.906 en 2022, y de 60.177 en 2023 a 70.295 en 2024 (Consejo de la Unión Europea, 2023). Este aumento ha generado una creciente tensión en las relaciones diplomáticas entre España, el país receptor, y Marruecos, que en este caso se

caracteriza por funcionar como territorio de tránsito y origen.

Especialmente, las relaciones bilaterales entre ambos países se han visto impactadas por el episodio ocurrido en 2021, en el que el Reino de Marruecos suavizó el control fronterizo en los límites de las ciudades españolas de Ceuta y Melilla dando paso a miles de migrantes, esto como una demostración de rechazo a que el país europeo recibiese en su territorio a Brahim Ghali, líder del Frente Polisario –facción armada en favor de la independencia del Sahara Occidental–, para recibir atención médica (Abourabi, 2022).

Esta maniobra representa una técnica de negociación que ha resultado hasta ahora efectiva para imponer los intereses marroquíes a la Unión Europea y España, pues a raíz de este suceso el gobierno español emitió una carta en la que se pronunciaba indicando que “España considera la propuesta marroquí de autonomía [del Sahara Occidental] como la base más seria, creíble y realista para la resolución de este diferendo” (Blanco, 2023), rompiendo la tradicional posición de neutralidad española sobre el asunto de esta región, por lo que se ha establecido una suerte de balance en la relación de poder Norte-Sur. Sin embargo, también esta estrategia implica un desafío para el posicionamiento de Marruecos en el sistema internacional, esto teniendo en cuenta las posibles implicaciones en materia de derechos humanos que puede tener esta instrumentalización

armamentística de la migración, o “weaponization of migration”.

En otra demostración de la relevancia de la cuestión migratoria en el Magreb y cómo se presentan los esfuerzos europeos para contener el fenómeno, Túnez, en 2023, experimentó un aumento del flujo migratorio desde su territorio hacia las costas italianas, convirtiéndose así en la salida más numerosa desde la ruta del Mediterráneo Central para ese año (Ghione, 2024). Debido a este crecimiento, la Unión Europea inicia el trámite para la firma de un Memorando de Entendimiento (MoU por sus siglas en inglés) entre la UE y Túnez para julio de 2023, que abarca dentro de sus temáticas una sección concerniente a migración y movilidad, en la que la UE se compromete a proveer fondos, entrenamiento y apoyo técnico para el control fronterizo en el país.

Este Memorando de Entendimiento ha sido puesto bajo investigación por el defensor del pueblo europeo, que pocos meses después de la firma de este documento presenta una cuestión a la Comisión Europea sobre la ausencia de una correcta evaluación de impacto en los derechos humanos (Human Rights Impact Assessment), previa a la implementación del Memorando (Defensor del Pueblo Europeo, 2023). Esta evaluación es clave para identificar las posibles afectaciones sobre la población que podrían tener las medidas comprendidas en el acuerdo, de manera que se encuentren acciones para la mitigación y eliminación de riesgos en materia de derechos humanos, y con el

propósito de facilitar el monitoreo de que este control fronterizo no resulte en perjuicios para los migrantes. Si bien Túnez se ve beneficiado económica y técnicamente por este acuerdo, endurecer las regulaciones fronterizas en su territorio en favor de los intereses de la Unión Europea lo deja en una posición de dependencia, por lo que representa un desafío para su posicionamiento internacional en materia de defensa de los derechos humanos.

A partir de estos dos casos es imperativo señalar que, desde un punto de vista pragmático, si bien la cuestión migratoria funciona para los países del Magreb como un elemento que aumenta su capacidad de negociación con actores de relevancia en el sistema internacional—a saber, la Unión Europea y sus países de manera individual—, esta práctica también representa un desafío tanto para los países magrebíes como para la población migrante que es sometida a una multiplicidad de riesgos a manera de estrategia diplomática.

Ahora bien, tanto Marruecos como Túnez cuentan con casos de estudio efectivos para observar el estado y abordaje de la migración intrarregional en el Magreb. En primer lugar, la utilización de la misma por parte de Marruecos para posicionarse como líder en el Sur global y el continente africano como un país de puertas abiertas hacia la migración subsahariana (Abourabi, 2022). Esto se materializa mediante diversos instrumentos diplomáticos, principalmente aprovechando el potencial de crecimiento que significa la

migración hacia el país. A partir de 2013, el Reino de Marruecos se ha situado en una posición de acogida hacia los migrantes de origen subsahariano y ha adoptado medidas que van desde la regularización de migrantes hasta la apertura de becas de estudio para estudiantes extranjeros (Benjelloun, 2020). Asimismo, se ha posicionado ya no solo como país de origen o tránsito migratorio, sino también como destino; en efecto de 2013 a 2022 han aumentado significativamente los estudiantes internacionales pasando de 10.000 a 23.600 (OIM, 2022). De acuerdo con Abourabi (2022), Marruecos ha iniciado un proceso de explorar la integración con Estados africanos distintos a sus vecinos inmediatos del Magreb, de manera que reivindique su “africanidad”, después de ser percibido tradicionalmente como un país principalmente Árabe. Esto ha marcado su visión respecto a la migración como una fuente de desarrollo.

En contraste con esta visión marroquí de apertura, el ejemplo tunecino ha establecido una narrativa contraria hacia la migración proveniente de África Subsahariana. El presidente de Túnez, Kais Saied, ha promovido una retórica que antagoniza estos flujos migratorios. Es claro que la política migratoria del país magrebí se ve atravesada por los intereses de la Unión Europea, pues esto es una tendencia evidente en la región del Magreb, como se señaló previamente. Sin embargo, el control fronterizo de Túnez incorpora y utiliza esta

firmeza hacia los migrantes como una suerte de instrumento gubernamental.

Saied, en su discurso de gobierno, ha clasificado la llegada de migrantes subsaharianos al territorio tunecino como una amenaza inminente, y su narrativa está profundamente permeada por la cooperación europea –especialmente italiana– que recibe para endurecer su control fronterizo. De esta manera, Saied ha incrementado el uso de medidas represivas contra la llegada de migrantes a su territorio y las ha implementado como una herramienta de legitimación de su gobierno; de manera que el control fronterizo se ha convertido también en un instrumento de política interna en Túnez. Así, el presidente ha utilizado en su favor la cuestión migratoria de dos formas: en primer lugar, como un elemento de negociación mediante el cual obtiene recursos económicos por medio de acuerdos con los actores europeos; en segundo lugar, como un medio para justificar el aumento de medidas represivas en el país, con la excusa de enfrentar la “inseguridad generada por los inmigrantes subsaharianos” (Ghione, 2024).

Así pues, este primer elemento que concierne a la migración en el Magreb es un área decisoria tanto para la proyección internacional de los países de la región como para la definición del involucramiento y los intereses que tienen los actores europeos sobre este territorio, y además es una cuestión que moldea las lógicas internas de los

países del Magreb, como se pudo observar con el ejemplo tunecino.

LOS RECURSOS Y EL MAGREB

Uno de los elementos centrales de la relevancia de la región del Magreb en la actualidad es la abundancia de recursos que ostenta, lo que hace su territorio geopolíticamente estratégico para el comercio de materias esenciales como el gas, el crudo, los minerales y las tierras raras. Dos Estados magrebíes que destacan por su participación en el sector de combustibles fósiles son Argelia y Libia, ambos con una economía principalmente enfocada en la exportación de combustibles y productos derivados, siendo el sector más lucrativo para el comercio en sus territorios. De acuerdo con los datos más actualizados de la OMC (2023), para Argelia, la exportación de combustibles y productos derivados de la minería generó en 2023 alrededor de 51.613 millones de dólares, y el mismo sector para Libia significó 24.629 millones de dólares en ese mismo año; por lo que ambas economías dependen en mayor medida de estos productos. Las exportaciones de productos provenientes de la minería y los combustibles también son las mayores para su economía, y alcanzaron para 2023 1.566 millones de dólares; mientras que las economías de Marruecos y Túnez están principalmente enfocadas en la exportación de manufacturas.

La integración económica en el Magreb es tema bastante relegado, teniendo en cuenta que, pese a ser países

vecinos, el comercio entre sí es bastante limitado. De acuerdo con estadísticas de la OMC, analizando los perfiles comerciales de Túnez, Marruecos y Mauritania, sus miembros magrebíes, se evidencia que entre los principales socios económicos de estos Estados no figura ningún país vecino del Magreb, mientras que la Unión Europea ocupa un papel central para la economía de estos países (OMC, 2023).

De esta manera, el análisis respecto a los recursos relacionados con los combustibles fósiles estará encabezado por Argelia, que además de ser abundante en petróleo, tiene una economía que es liderada principalmente por el mercado de los hidrocarburos, también exportando gas hacia la Unión Europea. Este mercado cobra especial relevancia en la actualidad, teniendo en cuenta que Europa, desde la invasión Rusa a territorio ucraniano, ha buscado expandir sus proveedores de gas por fuera del proveedor ruso. Argelia ha tomado provecho de esta ventana de oportunidad para extender su influencia en los mercados del continente vecino, y para España actúa como el principal proveedor de gas natural, proveyendo en 2021 el 47% del gas hacia el país, y el 12% del gas en Europa (Moreno, 2021).

En este año, el sector del gas lleva a un pulso diplomático entre Argelia y Marruecos. A partir del episodio del masivo flujo fronterizo de Marruecos hacia España que se mencionó con anterioridad, y la carta emitida por el gobierno español donde se le otorgaba

legitimación a la propuesta alauí concerniente al Sahara Occidental, la relación entre Argelia y España se debilitó considerablemente, teniendo en cuenta que el Estado argelino es el principal intercesor por la autonomía saharauí en el Magreb. La tensión generada en este momento impulsó a Argelia a cerrar el gasoducto Magreb-Europa, en funcionamiento desde 1996 por un acuerdo intergubernamental entre los tres países (Argelia, Marruecos y España) y que tenía paso por territorio marroquí (Blanco, 2023).

Los efectos de esto se evidencian de manera inmediata y con repercusiones para todas las partes involucradas. En primer lugar, es una flagrante demostración de la rivalidad dominante en el Magreb, donde los dos Estados más influyentes de la región se encuentran en constante hostilidad en todos los terrenos. Para Argelia, las pérdidas económicas por esta maniobra se ven compensadas en cierta medida por el gas que puede exportar mediante el gasoducto directo que tiene hacia España desde 2011, el Medgaz; así como a través del comercio de gas natural licuado. Por otro lado, para Marruecos este cierre representa un desafío, de manera que pierde las retribuciones económicas que obtenía por permitir el paso del gasoducto por su territorio y el gas para su propio territorio que compraba a precio inferior al del mercado. Para España, las consecuencias se observan en el incremento de sus costes en este sector, al compensar por otros medios el gas que ahora solo llega por un

gasoducto, pasando de una conexión que podía transportar 13,5 bcm de gas, a la menor capacidad que transporta el Medgaz, 8 bcm (Moreno, 2021).

Otra cuestión de especial relevancia que cabe mencionar en esta sección relacionada con los recursos naturales de la región –que además está transversalizada por la cuestión del Sahara Occidental– es la reciente anulación por parte del Tribunal de Justicia de la Unión Europea del Acuerdo de Asociación de Pesca Sostenible entre la Unión Europea y el Reino de Marruecos, que se celebró en 2019, así como uno en materia de agricultura, debido a que en estos acuerdos se incluía parte del territorio que comprende al Sahara Occidental y la población saharauí no otorgó su consentimiento para la aplicación de los acuerdos (Curia, 2024). Esta decisión del Tribunal se traduce en consecuencias negativas para la actividad económica pesquera marroquí y sus relaciones en este sector con España, país que se veía beneficiado también por la implementación de estos acuerdos.

Ahora bien, las economías magrebíes de los países con importantes reservas de petróleo deben hacer un esfuerzo superior para diversificar sus fuentes de ingresos, y el sector energético, a pesar de ser propicio en esta región y representar una oportunidad de crecimiento, encuentra limitaciones por la falta de integración que caracteriza al conjunto de países. La integración en materia energética lograría “optimizar el uso de los recursos

energéticos de una región entre algunos o todos sus miembros, para obtener mayores resultados económicos” (Lambert *et al.*, 2023).

A continuación, se estudiará uno de los sectores en crecimiento en el Magreb en materia de recursos, que promete una apertura económica en los próximos años y está tomando fuerza en la actualidad.

PROSPECTIVAS DE ENERGÍA RENOVABLE E HIDRÓGENO VERDE

Posterior al establecimiento de la Agenda 2030, y en línea con la acción para contrarrestar la crisis climática, la búsqueda de fuentes energéticas renovables ha sido un tema de esencial relevancia en la actualidad, y los Estados magrebíes han explorado el sector con avidez; en efecto, han encontrado ventajas comparativas en las que resulta benéfica la inversión e investigación. Estas oportunidades provienen de la energía de fuentes renovables, fundamentalmente, la energía eólica y la energía fotovoltaica.

Actualmente, el costo de instalar infraestructura para la producción de combustibles fósiles es equiparable al de la instalación de paneles solares fotovoltaicos o turbinas de viento (Nouasria *et al.*, 2024), por ello, a los Estados de economías que se encuentran en crecimiento, como las del Magreb, puede parecerles llamativa la inversión en construir un sistema energético híbrido, de manera que puedan marchar al ritmo de la agenda climática global y,

al mismo tiempo, conseguir un crecimiento en un sector esencial como lo es la energía.

Argelia se ha posicionado como uno de los líderes en la región en promover la inversión en energías verdes. Esto en vista de que su economía, como se mencionó anteriormente, está fuertemente relacionada con el comercio de hidrocarburos; mientras que es un sector ampliamente lucrativo, también es cierto que los mercados europeos –socios por excelencia del país magrebí– están mirando cada vez más hacia la energía renovable, y su demanda energética interna se ha elevado considerablemente los últimos años (Nouasria *et al.*, 2024). Tal y como exploran los mismos autores en su estudio, Argelia tiene una ventaja comparativa y oportunidad superior para desarrollar estas energías ya que tiene el mayor potencial de energía solar en el mundo, el cual representa “ $5,2 \times 10^{15}$ kWh al año, lo que equivale a 430 veces todas las reservas probadas de petróleo” (Nouasria *et al.*, 2024).

El Estado argelino ha identificado este potencial desde los años ochenta, y ha robustecido un marco normativo y de políticas públicas en torno a las energías renovables, creando incluso un Centro de Desarrollo de Energías Renovables en 1988, que funciona como entidad de investigación científica. También desarrolla el Programa Nacional para el Desarrollo de Energías Renovables y Eficiencia Energética (2011-2030) que, en línea con el Acuerdo de París, busca ambiciosamente

alcanzar un 40% de la producción de electricidad a partir de fuentes renovables (Benkhaled *et al.*, 2024). Este sector tiene la capacidad no solo de posicionar al país en la región, sino como un referente en el Sur global en materia de transición energética, y aumentar su desarrollo económico con aliados estratégicos y la diversificación de su economía.

La región del Magreb también cuenta con otras iniciativas innovadoras de posicionamiento en energías renovables, provenientes en este caso de Marruecos, lo que implica una especial novedad en la región, pues este país ha sido tradicionalmente dependiente de economías externas para la cuestión energética (El Hadri *et al.*, 2024), y, además, ha tenido un desarrollo considerable en esta materia, pues en 1995 solo el 20% de la población rural dentro de su territorio tenía acceso a electricidad, y para 2023 el acceso es prácticamente universal, llegando al 100% (Banco Mundial, 2023). Incluso, la cooperación del país magrebí fue fundamental para la recuperación de la conectividad de España después del apagón en abril de 2025.

Para Marruecos, a diferencia del caso argelino, el potencial más rentable económicamente proviene de su capacidad eólica. Posee condiciones climáticas propicias para parques eólicos en las regiones al sur del territorio que actualmente ocupa, específicamente en El Aaiún y Dajla (El Hadri *et al.*, 2024), esto genera especial controversia, considerando que estas dos son ciudades

que componen el territorio no autónomo del Sahara Occidental. Si Marruecos desarrolla este potencial energético, podría incluso posicionarse como país exportador de energía.

En línea con la transición energética, en la región magrebí –y en todo el continente africano–, se ha suscitado además el interés por la producción de hidrógeno verde.

En términos sencillos,

El hidrógeno es un gas no venenoso, incoloro e inodoro altamente inflamable; y la manera de producir hidrógeno es mediante la separación de agua limpia en oxígeno e hidrógeno en un proceso llamado electrólisis, para el que se requiere electricidad. Para el hidrógeno verde, esta electricidad debe ser generada por fuentes renovables tales como fotovoltaica, geotérmica, eólica, entre otras. (Sadik-Zada *et al.*, 2025)

Este mercado ha encontrado afinidad con los dos Estados magrebíes expuestos previamente, además de Mauritania, que en años recientes ha sido protagonista de varios estudios y proyectos de inversión con compañías especializadas en la producción de hidrógeno verde (O'Farrell, 2022), lo que podría significar una enorme ventana de oportunidad para la región en términos de posicionamiento internacional. Vale la pena plantear, no obstante, que existen dos desafíos comunes ante el desarrollo del hidrógeno verde a los que se enfrentan los países magrebíes; en primer lugar, es imprescindible el uso del agua en el procedimiento (Sadik-Zada *et al.*, 2025), y debido a

los efectos del cambio climático y las condiciones áridas de la región, que le representan importantes sequías (Tuel y Eltahir, 2020), esto puede presentar una complejidad significativa que los Estados deben abordar de manera precavida. En segundo lugar, puesto que en cierta medida es necesaria la inversión del Norte global –y también tienen intereses en materia de energías renovables– para la infraestructura de producción y transporte del hidrógeno verde, el desarrollo de este recurso significa una injerencia directa de potencias económicas sobre el territorio de los Estados magrebíes que la desarrollen. Así, esta relación debe entonces manejarse con cautela, para evitar perpetuar dinámicas extractivistas o de “neocolonialismo verde” (Bhambra y Newell, 2023).

Adicionalmente, Argelia, que lleva la delantera normativamente en esta materia, también posee la ventaja de que el transporte de este recurso –con miras a exportar este hidrógeno en el futuro– se puede llevar a cabo mediante la adaptación de los gasoductos ya existentes, lo que le implicaría menos costos logísticos (Sadik-Zada *et al.*, 2025).

En definitiva, en materia de recursos el Magreb tiene una multiplicidad de oportunidades que le abren al mundo para un posicionamiento efectivo, y los Estados de la región han conseguido hasta ahora sacarle provecho a este elemento para garantizar su inserción en el sistema internacional actual.

LA SEGURIDAD EN EL MAGREB, ENTRE EL SAHARA OCCIDENTAL Y LA AMENAZA DE TERRORISMO

El abordaje de las cuestiones securitarias en el Magreb es determinante para el posicionamiento de sus Estados en el orden internacional y la morfología de las dinámicas intrarregionales. Las relaciones de poder en el Magreb se han definido históricamente por las rivalidades entre los Estados de Argelia y Marruecos desde la época de la descolonización (Sour, 2022). Estos dos países han sido protagonistas de acciones beligerantes y enfrentamientos que se remontan al siglo anterior –la guerra de las arenas en 1963, inmediatamente después de la independencia de Argelia–, y que no parecen dar tregua, aun si la intensidad de estos conflictos es baja. Uno de los motivos principales por los que se enfrentan estos dos países es por sus posiciones opuestas respecto al territorio del Sahara Occidental.

Vigente hasta el día de hoy, la cuestión del Sahara Occidental permea cada esfera de relacionamiento en materia de seguridad en la región; en la historia reciente, esto se ha dilatado desde que en 2020 se pone fin al alto al fuego establecido entre el Frente Polisario –la facción armada por la defensa de la República Saharaui Árabe Democrática– y Marruecos desde 1991 (Sour, 2022). Este alto al fuego encuentra su fin a raíz de un ataque por parte de Marruecos a la zona de El Guerguerat, un área de amortiguación al suroeste del Sahara, en la frontera con Mauritania.

La descolonización del Sahara Occidental es un asunto pendiente en la agenda global y cuenta con un estatus de Territorio No Autónomo desde 1963 de acuerdo con Naciones Unidas. Este conflicto ha sido utilizado tanto por Argelia como por Marruecos para marcar su dominancia en la región. Para Marruecos es una cuestión esencial de política exterior, cubriendo cada esfera de acción y relacionamiento externo, por ello la obtención de legitimidad en su soberanía sobre el territorio saharauí es la línea base de su actuación internacional.

Con base en esto, en 2020, el Reino de Marruecos ratifica los Acuerdos de Abraham, que versan sobre la normalización de relaciones con el Estado de Israel. Este tratado le otorga una posición de ventaja respecto al Sahara Occidental en dos cuestiones principales: en primera instancia, con ánimos negociar esta ratificación, el presidente de los Estados Unidos, Donald Trump, reconoció la soberanía marroquí sobre el territorio del Sahara Occidental, dándole una legitimación importante considerando la posición de este país en el sistema internacional (Casani y Colin, 2023); por otra parte, abriéndole la puerta a la cooperación con Israel oficialmente, en especial en materia de seguridad, inteligencia y material militar. (González del Miño, 2024).

La normalización de relaciones con Israel por parte del Reino de Marruecos inserta en la región un importante cambio en el *statu quo* en materia de seguridad, pues si bien Marruecos

siempre ha mantenido relaciones con Israel “no oficiales, pero sí oficiosas” (Fons, 2023), contando ahora con la plena cooperación israelí, sumado a un progresivo aumento en gasto de seguridad, el reino alauí alcanza a equilibrar su posición militar con su vecino y rival Argelia, que cuenta con el tercer ejército más poderoso entre los países árabes (González del Miño, 2024).

Ahora bien, en el caso de Argelia, este tiene un rol esencial en el apoyo del Sahara Occidental, debido a que un principio que rige las relaciones exteriores argelinas es la autodeterminación y la no intervención en asuntos externos, estos dos fundamentos instaurados constitucionalmente (Dworkin, 2020); también es cierto que el Estado argelino utiliza el conflicto como una manera de “contener la expansión territorial marroquí, que podría amenazar la integridad territorial de Argelia” (Sour, 2022). Adicionalmente, podría analizarse que el involucramiento argelino en esta disputa está intrínsecamente relacionado con el objetivo de mantener su histórica hegemonía en el Magreb, en vista del crecimiento progresivo de Marruecos en la región y el sistema internacional.

Si bien el conflicto del Sahara Occidental no parece tener un final en el futuro próximo y se está generando un cambio de balances en el Magreb respecto a esta cuestión, es poco probable la escalada del conflicto a un enfrentamiento bilateral entre Marruecos y Argelia (González del Miño, 2024).

La perspectiva de Mauritania en esta pugna es también un asunto que se debe reconocer, principalmente por la extensa frontera que comparte con el territorio del Sahara Occidental y la proximidad que tiene con estas tensiones, sumadas a la caótica situación del Sahel, región a la que pertenece geográficamente este Estado. Mauritania es cercana al Sahara Occidental tanto geográfica como culturalmente, e incluso el Frente Polisario conoce sus inicios en los límites territoriales mauritanos; sin embargo, su aproximación respecto a la cuestión ha adquirido un carácter pragmático a través de los años, buscando gestionar sus alianzas de manera estratégica e iniciar un proceso de crecimiento después de su agitada historia interna (Kłosowicz, 2022).

La creciente inestabilidad en el Sahel es, en efecto, una amenaza para los Estados magrebíes, y es también un foco de discordia en materia de integración para la región, debido a que tampoco hay un consenso sobre el abordaje securitario que se debe adoptar respecto a los crecientes desafíos que se presentan. El principal peligro relacionado con el Sahel, que también concierne a los Estados magrebíes en materia de seguridad, es la proliferación de grupos terroristas; de acuerdo con el Índice Global de Terrorismo en 2024, elaborado por la organización Vision of Humanity, del *ranking* de diez países más impactados por el terrorismo a través de los años, cuatro hacen parte de la región del Sahel –dos de

ellos, Níger y Mali, con frontera directa con países magrebíes–.

Asimismo, esta región próxima al Magreb es una piedra angular a la hora de analizar los desafíos que afrontan en la actualidad sus Estados, especialmente debido a la reciente retirada de los esfuerzos de Francia y la Misión Multidimensional Integrada de Estabilización de las Naciones Unidas en Malí (Minusma) en el Sahel (Zhu y Gao, 2024), lo que debilita el sistema securitario regional y podría conllevar un reto para las fronteras magrebíes.

Adicionalmente, dentro de la región del Magreb hay una cuestión en materia de seguridad que se precisa comprender como elemento para el posicionamiento de los Estados magrebíes en el ámbito de la seguridad, siendo esta la situación interna de Libia. Allí colindan diferentes intereses de una multiplicidad de actores internacionales, y en sus fronteras, en combinación con la inestabilidad política y la ausencia del Estado de derecho, también se genera el crecimiento de grupos terroristas que amenazan la región.

Desde la caída de Muammar al-Gaddafi, a partir de las revoluciones árabes, el país magrebí ha experimentado un deterioro importante en su situación política y su proyección externa. Durante el régimen, Libia se caracterizaba por tener una visión de política exterior pan-arabista y pan-africanista, lo que le dio un estatus de una suerte de epicentro para la integración africana (Raineri, 2022). Esto, sumado

con su privilegiada posición geográfica y abundancia de recursos naturales convertía a Libia en un prometedor líder regional, aun cuando las sanciones impuestas hacia el país durante el régimen significaran limitaciones para el crecimiento exterior libio.

A partir de 2011, Libia se vio sumergida en una lucha de poderes internos que generó una ausencia de gobernabilidad propiciando la proliferación de grupos armados al interior del país (Ali, 2025). Tras la caída del régimen de Muammar al-Gaddafi, muchos combatientes tuareg que habían estado vinculados a Libia retornaron a Malí, donde canalizaron sus demandas políticas y territoriales en la creación del Mouvement National pour la Libération de l'Azawad (MNLA). En 2012, este movimiento llegó incluso a proclamar unilateralmente la independencia del Estado de Azawad, generando un foco adicional de inestabilidad en la región y marcando un punto de inflexión en la crisis del Sahel. Para Argelia y Mauritania, la cuestión tuareg constituye un desafío securitario directo, dada la proximidad geográfica y los vínculos transfronterizos de estas comunidades (Alvarado, 2012).

Después de varios intentos de establecer un gobierno democrático en Libia, así como de celebrar elecciones con garantías, se han encontrado constantes falencias y trabas impuestas por grupos armados no estatales, por lo que aún no se ha logrado una transición política, así como tampoco hay vestigios de reconciliación nacional

(Saidin y Storm, 2024; Ali, 2025). Libia atraviesa una fragmentación interna en la que diversos actores se han propuesto intervenir, ya sea con mediaciones que no prosperan y compiten entre sí, o con apoyo a las facciones internas libias en materia de seguridad y armamento, convirtiendo el conflicto del territorio libio en una suerte de guerra subsidiaria (Apuuli, 2021). Un ejemplo evidente de esto es la intervención de Turquía a manera de imponer sus intereses de política exterior sobre el Mediterráneo, donde además busca extender su influencia en el sector energético, teniendo en cuenta la abundancia de gas en el territorio (Ozsahin y Cakmak, 2024).

Las intervenciones de los países del Magreb no ha sido significativa en comparación con las actuaciones de Francia, Alemania o Rusia, y tampoco se han hallado convergencias alrededor de cómo enfrentar los apremios securitarios que trae consigo la conflictiva situación libia. Esto, en definitiva, representa un desafío hacia la región del Magreb, pues la administración eficiente de las amenazas provenientes de las zonas contiguas garantizaría la estabilidad para los países magrebíes. Principalmente teniendo en cuenta que los países del Magreb, sobre todo Marruecos y Argelia, se han caracterizado por tener un aparato desarrollado para la lucha contra el terrorismo. Grupos terroristas como Al-Qaeda en el Magreb islámico y DAESH han utilizado el territorio libio “como base para entrenar a los combatientes y como escenario para lanzar ataques contra países vecinos” (Apuuli,

2021), sin embargo, al no encontrar una aproximación común o una cooperación en materia de seguridad, es posible que esta amenaza no sea abordada efectivamente generando consecuencias que impacten de manera directa en el resto de países magrebíes.

EL MAGREB EN EL MUNDO: RADIOGRAFÍA

La última esfera de análisis se propone observar el lugar de los países del Magreb respecto a las relaciones con los actores relevantes del sistema internacional, a manera de estudio sobre hacia dónde se proyectan en su política exterior.

Es indiscutible que los Estados protagonistas de las dinámicas regionales e internacionales del Magreb son Argelia y Marruecos, y que su pulso para establecerse cada uno como hegemon en la zona va acompañado con un relacionamiento estratégico con diferentes actores. Para Marruecos, es evidente su posicionamiento y priorización de las relaciones con Estados Unidos e Israel. La reciente normalización de relaciones entre estos actores a partir de los Acuerdos de Abraham no llegó sin causar controversias dentro de la sociedad marroquí, tradicionalmente cercana a la causa palestina.

El análisis previo ofrecía una mirada hacia las oportunidades que representa esta nueva alianza, sin embargo, cabe destacar que también le acompañan retos clave a esta decisión de política exterior. En principio, este acto suscitó

rechazo social y resultó en la creación del Frente Marroquí para Apoyar a Palestina y Contra la Normalización, que combina diversas organizaciones en defensa de los derechos humanos y sectores de la sociedad civil en general, que ha ejercido como un contrapeso a la ahora generalizada aceptación política de la normalización de relaciones israelí-marroquíes (Casani y Colin, 2023). Cabe aclarar que Marruecos ha cooperado con Israel en numerosas ocasiones de manera previa a la ratificación de los Acuerdos de Abraham, principalmente en materia de armamento e inteligencia militar; de hecho, “en 2014 un reporte del gobierno británico afirmaba que, en 2013, Israel, por medio de Francia, había vendido a Rabat tres drones Heron equipados con sofisticada tecnología” (Levi, 2018; Fons, 2023).

Ahora bien, Marruecos no solo está buscando expandir su rango de alianzas en esa dirección, sino que también recientemente Mohammed VI, quien es el tomador de decisiones definitivo sobre la estrategia de política exterior marroquí, ha buscado un mayor posicionamiento en el Sur global, y establecer al país como líder continental.

La mirada hacia África Subsahariana surge de la rotunda falencia que ha tenido el Magreb en buscar una integración entre sí, por lo que la tendencia a reivindicar la africanidad de los países del Magreb es un fenómeno compartido. Marruecos empieza este camino adentrándose en las relaciones con la Unión Africana, adhiriéndose a ella en 2017, después de 33 años sin hacer

parte (Dworkin, 2020). Ha aumentado sus inversiones, promovido la cooperación Sur-Sur a través de la Agencia Marroquí de Cooperación Internacional (AMCI), e incluso se ha posicionado a través de la diplomacia religiosa –que además usa como *soft power* para contrarrestar la radicalización islámica en la región– (Dworkin, 2020).

Adicionalmente, Marruecos está ahora preparando su participación como uno de los anfitriones para la próxima Copa del Mundo de fútbol, lo que implica una inversión en desarrollo de infraestructura y una importante oportunidad de posicionamiento internacional, teniendo en cuenta la relevancia de la diplomacia cultural como elemento de poder blando (Arabi, 2024).

Seguido de Marruecos, Argelia se ha propuesto no quedarse atrás en esa apertura hacia el continente africano, no obstante, en definitiva ha perdido la influencia que tradicionalmente tenía sobre las cuestiones africanas desde la salida de Bouteflika del poder. De acuerdo con el mismo Arabi, Argelia es un Estado referente en materia de seguridad, y ha liderado en la Unión Africana las iniciativas contra el terrorismo. Cuenta con el Centro Africano para Estudios e Investigación sobre el Terrorismo, y creó un comité de inteligencia para cuestiones sobre el Sahel, sin embargo, su política de no intervención ha limitado su involucramiento en las cuestiones securitarias en esta región.

Por fuera de esta mirada al Sur global, Argelia actualmente cuenta con complejas relaciones con uno de los

países con que más estrechamente se ha relacionado históricamente, España. Esto a partir de la nueva posición del gobierno español respecto a la cuestión del Sahara Occidental, que generó tensiones entre ambos Estados lo que se tradujo en la finalización del Tratado de Amistad que tuvo inicio en la década de los 2000 (Blanco, 2023).

Ahora bien, otro actor que se ha tornado clave en la región es China. Principalmente para Argelia, esta es una relación estrecha y beneficiosa, que representa oportunidades de crecimiento, pues Marruecos tradicionalmente se ha alineado con el bloque occidental. Como indica Echeverría (2022), “Argelia se ha ido convirtiendo en socio central para China, no solo en el ámbito tradicional de la energía, sino también en las infraestructuras y en la seguridad y la defensa, [...] además de convertirse en 2022 en el quinto socio comercial de China en África”. Un punto de convergencia importante es que ambos países comparten una visión similar respecto a la no intervención en los asuntos internos de terceros países. No obstante, a pesar de mantener relaciones cercanas con Argelia, China también ha dado cuenta del crecimiento marroquí y ha generado relaciones comerciales bilaterales, principalmente en relación con el proyecto de la nueva ruta de la seda (Echeverría Jesús, 2022).

Ahora bien, las relaciones exteriores en el caso tunecino contrastan con las de sus vecinos magrebíes, pues tradicionalmente ha tenido una línea de política exterior enfocada hacia el norte

del Mediterráneo, relegando el papel de África Subsahariana. Sin embargo, ha acrecentado su participación adhiriéndose al Mercado Común para África Oriental y Occidental (Comesa) en 2018, y tiene un papel de observador en la Comunidad Económica de los Estados de África Occidental (Ecowas) desde 2017 (Dworkin, 2020). Además, la posición de rechazo hacia la migración subsahariana hacia su territorio acentúa las brechas para la integración con el resto del continente.

Respecto a la integración entre los países del Magreb; pese a no contar con una estrategia de integración regional efectiva, se han realizado estudios que indican el elevado potencial de comercio intrarregional, en ellos se identifican sectores productivos en los que el intercambio de bienes y servicios se viable entre los países magrebíes. Este análisis, además, permite evidenciar que Marruecos es el país más competitivo de la región, pues podría incrementar significativamente su exportación de productos hacia los otros países de la región; en concreto “36 productos más a Argelia, 22 a Túnez, 10 a Mauritania y 8 productos a Libia” (FMI, s. f.).

CONCLUSIÓN

A partir de los casos expuestos, bajo la pretensión de explorar los actuales elementos que impactan y determinan el posicionamiento de los países del Magreb en las dinámicas de poder globales, es clave reconocer que cada sector al que se ha hecho referencia

es significativo para la inserción de los países de esta región al sistema internacional. En primer lugar, claro está, las migraciones y su gestión son de vital importancia en la medida que los intereses de la Unión Europea –el socio más tradicional para los Estados magrebíes– se ven involucrados de manera directa, por lo que es un indudable desafío que los Estados de la región tengan un abordaje hacia la migración por fuera de la dependencia hacia la UE.

En efecto, la reciente “diplomacia migratoria” o instrumentalización armamentística de las migraciones ha funcionado –si se ve desde un punto de vista pragmático– para equilibrar las relaciones de poder entre los Estados del Norte y el Sur global. No obstante, las implicaciones en materia de derechos humanos resultan también un elemento que se debe incorporar al evaluar el posicionamiento de los Estados magrebíes.

Asimismo, se comprende que uno de los desafíos más tradicionales que enfrentan los países de la región lo constituye la cuestión de la seguridad, ya sea en materia de la rivalidad entre los dos principales Estados magrebíes, o en relación con la lucha contra el terrorismo, que en la historia de la región ha sido un eje transversal de política exterior e interna de sus países.

También entre las oportunidades de posicionamiento se encuentra la cuestión de los recursos naturales y el sector energético, por lo que se puede considerar la posibilidad del aumento de la importancia de esta región en el

futuro próximo, teniendo en cuenta el potencial de inversión en energías renovables que allí se encuentra. Todo esto, además, si se tiene en cuenta la inmensa oportunidad que representaría la cooperación e integración regional, deja dar cuenta de la relevancia que tiene el Magreb en las esferas globales de poder, y cómo en definitiva sus países están aprovechando en cierta medida las ventajas que se les presentan para defender sus intereses, pero no consiguen dejar atrás las brechas que les separan entre sí.

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The [I]Liberal Overton Window of the Rules-based International Order and its Counter-Policiescapes in African Regionalism: Patterns of Fusion, Fission and Diffusion

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ABSTRACT

The “Overton Window,” originally developed to map the normative structure of acceptable domestic policy, is used in this study to highlight the patterns of fusion, fission, and diffusion that define the engagement of African International Organisations (AIOs) with the rules-based international order (RBIO). While fusion captures the uneven uptake of RBIO norms, fission depicts rupture,

and diffusion depicts their selective incorporation into regional integration agendas. The study notes that the rising influence of non-Western revisionist states has disrupted the regulatory dominance of the RBIO, weakened the policy hegemony of the West, and enabled new pathways for AIO normative re-engineering. These dynamics have intersected with the sovereignty-affirming inclinations of African governments to shape how AIOs pursue their

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Received: June 20th 2025 / Modified: October 13th 2025 / Accepted: October 15th 2025

To cite this article:

Kuditchar, N. L. (2025). The [I]Liberal Overton Window of the Rules-based International Order and its Counter-Policiescapes in African Regionalism: Patterns of Fusion, Fission and Diffusion. *Oasis*, 43, 351-380.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18601/16577558.n43.15>

democratic mandates. Anchored on a qualitative, interpretive method, the study analyses policy communiqués and legal texts of the African Union (AU), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)/ Alliance of Sahel States (ASS), and the Tripartite Free Trade Area (TFTA). Findings suggest that AIOs are sites of normative experimentation that do not passively mimic RBIO principles. The AU's hybrid governance regime combines liberal norms. In West Africa, while the ECOWAS shows quasi-fission due to its wavering commitment to its RBIO-inspired norms, the Alliance of Sahel States symbolizes an explicit rupture with liberal internationalism. Having selectively framed itself with WTO-style principles, the TFTA demonstrates diffusion. In conclusion, the study notes that AIOs, as active domains embedded in dialectical processes of normative transactions, serve as co-constitutive arenas where African actors are reconfiguring the normative parameters of the RBIO Overton Window. Hence, any sympathetic analysis of AIOs ought to account for their nuanced interactions with the value system of liberal internationalism.

Keywords: Overton window; rules-based international order; African regionalism.

La ventana [i]liberal de Overton del orden internacional basado en normas, y sus contrapaisajes políticos en el regionalismo africano: patrones de fusión, fisión y difusión

RESUMEN

La Ventana de Overton, originalmente desarrollada para mapear la estructura normativa de las políticas internas aceptables, se utiliza en este estudio para resaltar los patrones de fusión, fisión y difusión que definen la interacción de las organizaciones internacionales africanas (AIO – African International Organizations) con el orden internacional basado en normas (RBIO – rules-based international order). Mientras la fusión refleja la adopción desigual de las normas del RBIO, la fisión representa la ruptura y la difusión describe su incorporación selectiva en las agendas de integración regional. El estudio señala que la creciente influencia de los Estados revisionistas no occidentales ha alterado la dominación regulatoria del RBIO, ha debilitado la hegemonía política de Occidente y ha

posibilitado nuevas vías para la reinjerencia normativa de las AIO. Estas dinámicas se han entrelazado con las inclinaciones soberanistas de los gobiernos africanos, moldeando la forma en que las AIO persiguen sus mandatos democráticos.

Basado en un método cualitativo e interpretativo, el estudio analiza comunicados políticos y textos jurídicos de la Unión Africana (UA), la Comunidad Económica de Estados de África Occidental (Cedeao)/Alianza de Estados del Sahel (AES) y el Área de Libre Comercio Tripartita (TFTA). Los hallazgos sugieren que las AIO son espacios de experimentación normativa que no imitan pasivamente los principios del RBIO. El régimen de gobernanza híbrido de la UA combina normas liberales. En África Occidental, mientras la Cedeao muestra una cuasi-fisión debido a su compromiso vacilante con las normas inspiradas en el RBIO, la AES simboliza una ruptura explícita con el internacionalismo liberal. Habiéndose enmarcado selectivamente en principios al estilo de la Organización Mundial del Comercio (OMC), la TFTA demuestra un proceso de difusión.

En conclusión, el estudio observa que las AIO, como dominios activos insertos en procesos dialécticos de transacciones normativas, funcionan como espacios coconstitutivos, donde los actores africanos están reconfigurando los parámetros normativos de la Ventana de Overton del RBIO. Por tanto, cualquier análisis comprensivo de las

AIO debe considerar sus interacciones matizadas con el sistema de valores del internacionalismo liberal.

Palabras clave: Ventana de Overton; orden internacional basado en normas; regionalismo africano.

INTRODUCTION

The rules-based international order (RBIO), historically framed and dominated by US-led Western liberal democracies, is facing a profound legitimacy crisis, particularly in the Global South (Zakaria, 2008; pp. 49-53; Kupchan, 2012, pp. 13-15; Ikenberry, 2024). In Africa, this crisis manifests distinctly through the continent's AIOs and the assertive sovereigntist posture of their member states (Murithi, 2023), rendering them as critical sites of the contestation and reconfiguration of the RBIO by way of increasingly questioning, reinterpreting, or outrightly rejecting the normative prescriptions that have shaped the post-colonial conditions of the continent. This inclination is evident in the African Union's (AU) clarification call of "African solutions to African problems" (Ani, 2018), the exit of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger from the International Criminal Court (ICC) (Reuters, 2025) and their termination of strategic partnerships with their Western allies, and the formation of new alliances with revisionist states such as Russia, China, Iran, and Türkiye (de León Cobo, 2024).

This study employs the concept of the "Overton Window", initially

developed by Joseph Overton, to map the normative spectrum of politically acceptable policies in domestic governance (Russell, 2006). It is adapted to examine the contradictions generated between the RBIO's claims of universal validity and applicability and the sovereign aspirations of African states as enacted within AIOs. While Western governments, often acting through international organizations, advocate and coercively impose liberal norms in Africa (Mamdani, 2004; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013; Benabdallah, 2024), AIOs actively reconfigure the parameters of such external values by diluting their prescriptive power despite the continent's subordinate position in the global power pecking order (Söderbaum, 2004; Taylor, 2010). This reconfiguration, as articulated in this paper, occurs through the three processes of fusion, fission, and diffusion. Fusion involves the selective adoption and adaptation of RBIO principles, as shown by the AU's human rights regime, which paradoxically blends "non-indifference" with a staunch defense of state sovereignty (Williams, 2009). Fission is the quasi or complete rejection of RBIO values, as can be detected in wavering commitment of the ECOWAS to its RBIO-inspired norms and the ASS repudiation of liberal internationalism. Diffusion takes the form of a calibrated structural emulation of RBIO values, with the TFTA being a prime example.

This tripartite conceptual framework, depicting AIOs as crucial counter-sites of normative experimentation,

tersely illustrates Africa's contentious history with liberal internationalism, its navigation of contemporary geopolitical rivalries, and the inherent contradictions between collective action and egoistic national inclinations.

The relationship between African states and the Western proprietors of liberal governance has been fraught since the era of independence dawned on the African continent. During the Cold War, African governments used the OAU as an institutional vanguard to engage the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade liberal order through what Amitav Acharya (2011) terms "norm subsidiarity." Within the bipolar world system at the time, African states were able to transact, for instance, with the European Economic Community (EEC) in the context of the Yaoundé Free Trade Conventions (Cosgrove, 1972; Sakr, 2021) and while simultaneously pursuing statist development agendas and trade protectionism (Kumssa & Jones, 2015). The Soviet Union's retreat from its global hegemonic ambitions and support for its African allies after Gorbachev launched the glasnost and perestroika reforms created a geopolitical vacuum from the early 1980s (Webber, 1992; Keita, 1991) which the US, right up to the end of the Cold War and its immediate "post-Cold War unipolar moment" (Mastanduno, 1997, p. 60), leveraged to impose the Washington Consensus-inspired Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) on Africa (Rodrik, 2006; Riddell, 1992). In the process, the US compelled African states through

the Bretton Woods Institutions to abandon state-led developmentalism and embrace political and economic liberalization and laissez-faire international trade relations, thereby inaugurating, on Western terms, the dawn of the RBIO in full-blown normative rigor on the continent. Now, the OAU, constrained by its iron-clad founding principles of non-interference and institutional rigidity, proved incapable of resisting these pressures, revealing the limits of Pan-African mobilization and solidarity at the time.

As the disciplinary normative power of the RBIO waned amid renewed great power rivalry between revisionist states and the West (Mearsheimer, 2019; Adler-Nissen & Zarakol, 2021), AIOs have (re)gained strategic influence as actors wooed by competing global actors. Consequently, the agency and the scope of AIOs and their member states to engage in normative experimentation have expanded. Unlike the singular choice at hand, especially during the “uni-polar moment”, African governments can now simultaneously transact with the West, China (for commodity backed conditionality-free infrastructure loans and grants) as well as with Russia for hybrid deals made up of economic and security investments (Boas *et al.*, 2010; Lahtinen, 2018; Neethling, 2020). Even so, the enhanced normative agency and scope of African states have led to a profound contradiction: while it has enabled greater AIO normative assertiveness (Cornelissen, 2009; Shaw *et al.*, 2009), it has also

sharpened the tension between national sovereigntist aspirations and regional integration mandates such as the defense of democratic values. As a result, AIOs have had to manage this tension, while seeking a stable position (Kornegay & Landsberg, 2009; Vickers, 2013).

This paper interrogates this state of affairs through three analytical pathways: first, it adapts the Overton Window concept to frame the RBIO as a politically contested value system; second, it illustrates the fusion, fission, and diffusion dynamics in AIOs’ engagement with the RBIO; and third, it suggests that understanding Africa’s geopolitical experiences with the RBIO requires accounting for the nuanced dynamic normative patterns taking into consideration the pluriversal world context of value fragmentation (Eklund, 2020).

The rest of this study is structured as follows: First, a theoretical depiction of the RBIO is presented as a hegemonic Overton Window, illustrating how it ideationally sets the parameters of permissible governance in international affairs. Second, it outlines the patterns of fusion, fission, and diffusion as enacted in the experiential context of AIOs. Third, the study examines the importance and impact of non-Western revisionist actors in the reconfiguration of African policy settings. Fourth, the paper interrogates how the contradiction between sovereignty affirmation and regionalism structures the experiences of AIOs against the background

of the previously shown ambitions of the study. Finally, the analysis makes a case for a “nuanced engagement” with AIOs, situated beyond perspectives that designate African regional integration schemes as subpar examples of external paradigms.

THEORETICAL NOTE: FRAMING THE RBIO AS AN OVERTON WINDOW

Recalling Antonio Gramsci (Fontana, 2008; see also Benabdallah, 2024), the RBIO functions as an ideational “hegemonic project”: a normative apparatus of institutions designed to displace alternative models by normalizing, naturalizing, and universalizing the governance paradigm of Western liberalism. The logic of this hegemonic apparatus defines the Overton Window parameters for a legitimate and appropriate code of conduct in international affairs (Parmar, 2018). For the greater part of the post-colonial era in Africa, this Overton Window delineated the policy imperatives of AIOs within a narrow band of options: multilateralism ideationally structured through sanitized historical experiences of Western institutions, depoliticized development agendas, free-market principles, and liberal democratic politics. The illiberal undertones of this Overton Window are discernible from the sanctions triggered and imposed on states that attempt to pivot away from and operate in contravention of its normative bandwidth. Such punitive measures

range from latent economic sanctions to diplomatic pressure and, in extreme cases, military intervention (Larmour, 2022; Corwin, 2023; Soederberg, 2004; Patrick, 2016).

The application of the Overton Window concept in the context of international affairs, given its initial epistemic framing in domestic contexts, necessitates a theoretical adjustment. Unlike domestic settings, with traits, such as election outcomes and public opinion that may directly shape policy, it is hardly the case in respect of global governance dynamics, where complex scenarios mediated by pressures such as material power asymmetries and discursive contestations, directly dictate the nature of actions and outcomes. Here, akin to Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall’s (2005) “productive power”, commercial interests, often in coordination but sometimes in contention with global agencies such as the World Trade Organisation and the Bretton Woods Institutions, impose the normative designs of the RBIO to delineate the meaning-making structures of international transactions. For African states, this tendency had historically implied two things: On one hand, defection from the RBIO, either by way of statist development, socialist inclinations, non-alignment, or developmental authoritarianism, resulted in being edged out from significant sources of foreign aid, investment, or diplomatic deference. On the other hand, compliance led to restrictive, conditionality

encased neoliberal technical and financial assistance (Grauvogel & von Soest, 2014; Capasso, 2023).

The post-Cold War multipolarity of the global order, marked by the ideational and material ascendancy of revisionist powers, disrupted the “productive power” structuring capability of the Euro-American anchored RBIO (Stephen, 2014). A definitive feature of this shift, states’ access to conditionality-free economic exchanges (Woods, 2008), widened the hitherto narrow RBIO Overton Window within which AIOs functioned, leading to the emergence of what I term ‘counter-policy-scapes’: (enacted) activist plans of strategic selectivity born out of the quest for policy programming autonomy.

To elucidate how African integration schemes ideationally operate in this emergent multipolar normative milieu, the following section sketches the nature of AIO patterns of fusion, fission, and diffusion in relation to the RBIO.

By way of reiteration, fusion, the selective adoption, and adaptation of the RIBO, manifests in, for example, the AU’s Peace and Security Architecture, conventionally codified as the “Responsibility to Protect” notion of liberal interventionism in the quest for “African solutions to African problems” (Derso, 2012, pp. 11-13). Normative fusion patterns of this sort enable AIOs to tap into and mobilize the material and symbolic benefits of RBIO values while concurrently asserting a posture

of normative vigilance and political autonomy. The African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) is also a classic exemplar of RBIO fusion. Although ideationally inspired by the governance principles of the OECD (the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development), the APRM is conditioned by Afrocentric values, such as voluntary participation (Mangu, 2014).

Fission, the defection from RBIO prescriptions, typically occurs when the perceived liability of its uptake exceeds its mobilizational benefits. Normative ruptures of this kind render alternative values attractive. The 2023 establishment of the ASS by Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, and the 2025 exit of the trio from the International Criminal Court (ICC), is precisely a result of this perception. Motivated by the belief that ECOWAS has deviated from the purist Pan-African norms with which it was commissioned in 1975, the three countries have broken ranks with the Euro-American paradigm of liberal democratic governance and opted for military-led sovereigntist activism. With this, they parted ways with their Western allies and closed ranks with the leading states of RIBIO revisionism, such as Russia, in a quest for security through military and economic partnerships (Horak *et al.*, 2024). Fission indicates the mobilizational and structuring limits of the RBIO and indicates the pathway to the acquisition of an autonomous agency with which to shape regional integration with alternative values.

The diffusion of the RBIO in AIOs is evident in the architecture of the TFTA with its institutional character defined by WTO-compatible trade regimes infused with transformative regionalism (Erasmus & Hartzenberg, 2018; Mevel, 2019). The dynamics of diffusion are not to be understood as a process of incremental infusion of RBIO principles, but rather the emergence of complementary norm clusters in the form of interconnected nodes of dissimilar scales and capacities, oriented by the same value and aspirational intent. What emerges here is a complex normative ecology comprising contradictory governance regimes that move, unevenly, in the same teleological direction (Winston, 2018).

The foregoing indicates the dialectical contradiction of AIOs: the tension between sacrosanct sovereignty and mobilization for co-creation. This paper foregrounds the cited dialectical contradiction and, as such, has implications for conventional perspectives that dominate discussions on AIOs. First, the study situates itself beyond binary assessments, which rely on indicators such as liberal or illiberal integration processes, and highlights the normative complexities of regionalism in Africa. Secondly, the paper privileges the ideational agency and dexterity of AIO architects by showing how they (re)configure, and flexibly so, the parameters of legitimate conduct which structure the dominant norms of international affairs. Lastly, the study offers a dynamic perspective relevant in

the context of an increasingly decentralized, multipolar world with shifting normative boundaries, wherein the consequences of competitive rivalry present alternative visions and versions of international exchange (Katzenstein, 2019). By designating the RBIO as a contested Overton Window, this study creates an epistemic space within which AIOs, and their regional integration schemes can be reimagined as natural experiments driven by strategic selectivity (Wiener, 2004) and thereby capturing the complexities of Africa's engagement with the RBIO.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative, interpretive method, grounded in post-colonial international relations theory. It examines how AIOs negotiate, contest, transcend and traverse contradictions inherent in the normative contours of the RBIO, understood as an Overton Window. Focusing on the AU, the West African systems of the ECOWAS and the ASS, and the TFTA, the research design is a comparative multi-case study, with its interrogative sites purposively selected for their varied geopolitical makeup, institutional scales, and disparate mandates. This strategy enables a cross-sectional depiction of the patterns of AIO normative engagement with the RBIO.

By way of, admittedly, a crude operationalization of how norms are tracked and indexed, the study's analytical process is structured as a two-step

endeavor. First, the conduct of a qualitative content analysis of key AIO policy communiqués, legal texts, and treaty provisions. This involves the systematic drawing of subjective inferences from texts explicitly related to core RBIO values, such as democratic governance, human rights guarantee, laissez-faire trade relations, and multilateral dispute settlement regimes. Second, to situate the study beyond formal narratives, the paper conducts a critical discourse analysis of texts to highlight the discursive strategies employed by AIOs and/or their member states to justify, reframe, omit, and/or resist RBIO values. For instance, to illustrate the process of fusion, the paper cites the AU's code of "Responsibility to Protect" not as the mere uptake of an RBIO value but discursively reframed and analyzed as a "right to intervene" sanctioned by the principle of "sovereignty as responsibility" contingent upon the approval of the AU (Deng *et al.*, 1996).

Being aware that they empirically overlap and are separated only for discursive convenience, this paper's analytical heuristic, the notional triad of fusion, fission, and diffusion, are operationalized as follows:

Fusion, evident in the OECD-inspired, voluntary, and non-punitive African Peer Review Mechanism, is the selective uptake and adaptation of RBIO principles, leading to hybrid institutions.

Fission is the repudiation of RBIO norms, leading to inaction and/or the adoption of antithetical values, as well

as strategic partnerships with revisionist actors. The ECOWAS is a moderate case and the ASS an extreme example.

Diffusion manifests as the widespread, structural mimicry of RBIO values and institutional paradigms conditioned by regional imperatives. The institutional formula of the TAFTA, which draws on the normative template of the WTO but infused with positive discrimination and solidaristic 'special and differential treatment' to protect small vulnerable economies, is a classic example.

By way of reiteration, the cited patterns are not fixed and mutually exclusive but overlap in both empirical and logical respects. This paper's analysis is sensitive to this fluidity. An AIO may vary its normative character across several domains and functions, and a single action, such as the AU's establishment of the African Court of Justice and Human Rights, may exhibit dynamics of both fusion and diffusion.

At the risk of overinterpretation, I acknowledge that the issues of reflexivity and positionality suggest that the use of post-colonial international relations inevitably impacts explanation by foregrounding the relationality of power, asymmetry, and agency. To mitigate this risk, this paper's claims are embedded in empirical evidence adduced from documentary data explicitly demonstrating the discursive and institutional processes through which fusion, fission, and diffusion occur. Far from seeking to impose a

pre-determined narrative, the study uses its theoretical framework to highlight the nuanced agency that a positive or liberal institutionalist perspective may conventionally discount or overlook.

Even though it is not fatal, the method is weak because it relies on secondary data and official documents. This comes at the cost of informal insights and firsthand, undocumented, behind-the-scenes diplomatic experiences that may be gained from interviews.

AFRICAN STATES AND THE RBIO

The normative contact between AIOs and the RBIO is simultaneously fraught and foundational. Fraught in the sense that AIOs have historically been embedded in the RBIO as vulnerable entities because of asymmetric power dynamics and normative dependency (Zartman, 1967; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). The RBIO promoted by the West as the normative blueprint of liberal internationalism to enhance the quest for democracy, human rights, and free-market multilateralism is institutionalized in settings such as the WTO and the Bretton Woods Institutions, as well as in multilateral accords and conventions. For its proprietors and advocates, the RBIO ensures predictability and peaceful cooperation in international affairs (Lake, 2010).

However, critics contend that the RBIO is a problematic construct for Global South. They contend it is a value

system specifically designed to underpin the global hegemonic aspirations of the West in the immediate aftermath of WWII, throughout the Cold War, and after (Ikenberry, 2010; Adler-Nissen & Zarakol, 2021).

From the perspective of African post-coloniality, the RBIO functions as a disciplinary regime which locks in and perpetuates the continent's vulnerability to foreign manipulation and exploitation. This is because the pattern of Africa's incorporation into the regulatory logic of the RBIO results from its colonial domination and internal disruption (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015). The fact that most African states, after independence, remain vulnerable to external pressures is primarily because of disorderly decolonization processes, which were acutely entangled with the disruptions of Cold War geopolitics and conditionality-based donor dependency (O'Sullivan, 2005). Given this, and considering that it serves as the foundational import of the RBIO in African affairs, AIOs have persistently agitated for African states to have a voice and, as such, have functioned as the activist institutional vanguards of African governments in their calls for fair and inclusive global economic relations (Brooke-Holland, 2024; Murithi, 2023; Aka, 2001). It is in this context that the engagement of AIOs, with the values of the RBIO, has been one of persistent agitation, negotiation, and tension.

Against this background, African states established the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in 1963, following

the dissolution of the rival blocs of Brazzaville, Casablanca, and Monrovia. Despite deep-seated differences on the pace and depth of unification, the OAU member states agreed on the need to unite behind the organization and grant it a mandate to lead and complete the continent's decolonization and rejuvenation. One gets a sense of the OAU's depth of unity from the status of its Liberation Committee, which was second in rank only to its highest unit, the Assembly of Heads of State and Government (Cervenka, 1977).

Barely a year after the emergence of the OAU, the EEC purposively constituted the *Associated African States and Madagascar* for the conclusion of a reciprocal free trade agreement which came to be known as the Yaoundé Convention. This imperative resulted from a decision taken by the architects of EEC, at its inception in 1958, with the signing of the *Treaty of Rome* to lock newly independent African states into a free trade area centered on Europe (Hansen & Jonsson, 2011).

In 1975, against the backdrop of crippling oil sanctions imposed on Western economies by the *Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries*, an act which emboldened Global South states to demand a *New International Economic Order* (Spaskovska, 2021), the OAU assumed activist leadership of the African, Caribbean, and Pacific Group of States. This posture led to what Christopher Clapham noted as a rare feat during which "African states were able to bargain with

external powers on something approaching equality" (Clapham, 1996, p. 99). Resulting from this, the Yaoundé Convention was reversed by the 1975 non-reciprocal Lomé I Convention marking a watershed moment in the history of Africa's normative exchanges with the RBIO (McCann, 2020). This reversal, among others, provided the impetus for two historically significant developments. First, the establishment of the ECOWAS, an event which partially reversed the colonial-era fragmentation of West Africa, as France broke up the *Afrique Occidentale Française* (AOF) in 1958. The AOF was a federation made up of thirteen colonial territories. The first unsuccessful attempt by West African governments to reverse the fragmentation of the region after France dismantled the AOF was in 1959 (Adedeji, 2002, p. 14). Second, in what Keet (2002, p. 14) refers to as "tactical leapfrogs", Washington revamped and ideationally repurposed the IMF and the World Bank with a mandate to normatively undercut Pan-African policy initiatives. Incapacitated by the 1971 Nixon shock announcement which withdrew Washington's support, the Bretton Woods system (Gray, 2007), was rejuvenated with neoliberal philosophy experimentally developed and tested in Chile by the *Chicago Boys*: Chilean economists trained at the University of Chicago by Milton Friedman, Arnold Harberger, and George Stigler (Clark, 2017).

Oriented with their new neoliberal philosophy, the Bretton Woods

Institutions, ideationally outflanked and displaced the policy initiatives of African states and AIOs in the following pattern. When the OAU unveiled its 1980 state-led *Lagos Plan of Action* (LPA), which cited the imperial legacies of Europe as the reason for Africa's underdevelopment and laid the groundwork for the continent's self-reliance through a reduction in its dependence on the West, the IMF countered with the publication of its 1981 *Accelerated Development in Sub-Saharan Africa: An Agenda for Action* (also known as the Berg Report). Unlike the LPA, the Berg Report cited internal conditions in Africa as reasons for the continent's weak position in the global economy. The Berg Report turned to the IMF/World Bank's blueprint for implementing neoliberal Structural Adjustment Programs across the African continent (Parfitt, 1990).

In 1986, the OAU and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) unveiled the *UN Programme for Accelerated African Recovery and Development*, followed by the 1989 *African Alternative Framework to Structural Adjustment Programme for Socioeconomic Recovery and Transformation*. These were promptly countered in the same year (i.e., 1989) by the World Bank with its publication of *Sub-Saharan Africa: From Crisis to Sustainable Development, A Long-Term Perspectives Study*. Further, when the OAU unveiled its 1990 *Charter for Popular Participation in Development* and its complementary plan of action, the

1991 *New Agenda for Development in Africa*, the World Bank also issued a 1991 document titled *The Challenges of Development*. In addition to these, with the OAU's publication of its 1991 blueprint for the six-stage *African Economic Community*, i.e., *Treaty of Abuja for African Integration and Development*, the World Bank published its *Intra-Regional Trade in Sub-Saharan Africa* report in the same year (see Keet, 2002, pp. 14-15).

In all of this, the OAU took assertive steps to advance the collective interest of African states in international fora in ways beyond the capacities of individual states (Abate & Brunn, 1977; Endeley, 2009). Acting as a coordinating front in settings such as the United Nations and the G77, it functioned as a normative activist in the quest to bring forth a global economic order sensitive to the transformational development and security imperatives of its vulnerable member states (Zang, 1998; Atta-Mills, 1976; Červenka, 1976). Nevertheless, its efforts were constrained by its lack of an enduring systemic capacity to sustain and overwhelmingly increase the tempo and effectiveness of its activist initiatives. Consequently, the Bretton Woods Institutions, through a uniform, continent-wide conditionality-based neoliberal economic re-engineering, undercut the domestic state-led policy interventions of African governments by dismantling both efficient and inefficient state-owned enterprises, government-sponsored social services, and downgraded public sector

institutions, while enforcing democratization (Schoenholtz, 1987). At this stage, African governments became passive recipients of programs designed and operationalized within the normative framework of the RBIO (Riddell, 1992). The Cold War Neoliberal era in Africa, therefore, became one of RBIO normative saturation and policy constraints (Robinson, 1993; Uvin, 2013).

The end of the Cold War, with the transformation of the world order from bipolarity to multipolarity and its attendant flourishing of normative plurality (Schuppert, 2017, pp. 137-193), removed the normative constraints of RBIO saturation in Africa. Hence, institutional (re)configurations rooted in normative assertiveness became viable options (Darkwa & Attuquayefio, 2014). The 2000 transformation of the OAU into the AU is a classic example of institutional re-engineering based on normative audacity and confidence. For one, the Constitutive Act of the AU provided for historically unprecedented firm commitments to uphold and defend human rights and democratic governance (Gerenge, 2023; Elvy, 2013). As a symbol of the newly found normative valor of AIOs, the AU beat the UN to the adoption of the principles enshrined in the 2005 *Responsibility to Protect* (Gumedze, 2010). Informed by the grave lessons from the nonchalance of the UN during the 1994 Rwanda genocide, the AU assumed the moral right to intervene in crises on the continent (Sarkin, 2010). The establishment of

the AU, therefore, marked a historically significant normative recalibration that infused RBIO values in the context of African aspirations as the guiding principles of governance.

Regardless, the African Union's uptake of RBIO values is strategically relative rather than absolute. This inclination, given the continent's history of vulnerability to external pressures stemming from its peripheral status in global affairs, reflects a posture of post-colonial pragmatism. Consequently, institutions such as the ACDEC (*African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance*) and the APRM (*African Peer Review Mechanism*), conditioned with Pan-African values of voluntary, mutual accountability and non-coercive macro-level oversight (African Union, 2012; African Union, n.d.), count as hybrid covenants calibrated to ensure that principles of global governance serve the continent's development aspirations and political realities, rather than uncritically reinforcing a Western-centric, hegemonic, normative framework.

The same holds for the 2018 *African Continental Free Trade Area* (AfCFTA) agreement, which aims to facilitate intracontinental trade using WTO norms adjusted to reduce vulnerability to and disrupt dependence on external markets. Consequently, although the AfCFTA is globally oriented and aligned with *laissez-faire* principles, it also serves as a site of Pan-African economic vigilance and self-determination, structured to

insulate African polities from the ravages of global capitalism (Ngang, 2021; Chidozie *et al.*, 2025).

Meanwhile, the ECOWAS and the SADC (the Southern African Development Community) conducted a normative trial run of interventionist assertiveness in Africa before its adoption by the AU (Tavares, 2011). The ECOWAS set up the ECOMOG (*Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group*) to restore order in the interlinked uncivil wars of Liberia and Sierra Leone, between 1989 and 1997. It also established and operationalized the ECOMIL (*ECOWAS Mission in Liberia*) following Liberia's second collapse from 1999 to 2003 (Aboagye, 2018, pp. 69-100; 265-281; 233-238; Iwilade & Agbo, 2012). The SADC took the form of the 1998 intervention of the *Combined Task Force* in Lesotho. It aimed to stop a coup d'état staged by dissident forces of the *Royal Lesotho Defense Force*. Even though the cited interventions set historical precedents, they highlighted the limitations of principles inspired by the RBIO in the context of AIOs (Abass, 2000; Sampson, 2021; Corda, 2024).

The sketched patterns signify, albeit superficially, the deep-seated undercurrents of AIO interaction with the RBIO. This suggests an engagement logic that is non-linear or non-docile, but rather one of strategic 'self-reflexive' navigation. The outcome is hybrid political orders that blur the distinction between liberal, illiberal, and post-liberal governance. As a result of a strategic synthesis in which adopted

liberal paradigms are conditioned by post-colonial aspirations, governance models that defy clear-cut categorization emerge. Here, AIOs simultaneously embody traits of multilateral cooperation, assertive state sovereignty, and the taming of universalist pretensions. This generates a unique political landscape where conventional epistemic boundaries become porous and eventually inseparable.

The subsequent sections illustrate these tendencies as they manifest themselves in patterns of fusion, fission, and diffusion.

THE AU AND ITS POLICYSCAPE OF RBIO FUSION

The AU, since its inception in 2002, has developed a complex normative balancing posture through its concurrent adoption of RBIO values and attenuation of aspects that contravene the sovereign interests and political imperatives of its member states. Specifically, to the extent that it upholds the norms of electoral democracy and constitutional governance, it discounts the practice of regime-change interventions and the pursuit of the "shock therapy" treatment favored by Western advocates of liberal internationalism (Nair, 2013). This posture enables the AU to maintain its legitimacy by assuming the role of a norm advocate sensitive to the realities of its members and vigilant against the corrosive effects of external governance models.

For instance, the AU's ACDEG (*African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance*) is premised on RBIO inspired principles of political liberalism as articulated with provisions on free and fair elections (Article 3) (African Union, 2012), institutional counterchecks (Article 14) (African Union, 2012), and civil liberties (Article 12) (African Union, 2012). However, the ACDEG is based on a gradualist strategy of incremental intensification and the conviction that governments and polities ought to be allowed to create and operationalize their own liberal governance systems at their own pace.

Furthermore, the AU operationalizes its mandate of democratic advocacy as an elite-driven process of inclusion rather than as strictly enforced pluralism. Even though the standard normative fare of the RBIO is constitutionalism, competitive multiparty democracy, and presidential term limits (Gill, 2007), the AU is inclined toward constitutionality and is lenient on hegemonic-party governance, if elections are conducted, even if in a nominal sense. The AU sanctions unconstitutional regime changes, but it also accommodates constitutional coup d'états, presidential third termism, and indefinite incumbency. Constitutional coup d'états are achieved through manipulation of legal loopholes, unilateral constitutional amendments, or rigged public referendums (Mbaku, 2018). A classic example is Togo's recent constitutional reform, which was engineered by its government and approved by the National Assembly. Under

this new constitutional dispensation, the executive branch is headed by two incumbents: the President of the Republic (Head of State), mandated with symbolic powers, and the *President of the Council of Ministers* (Head of government), who functions as the country's policy architect and leader of the majority party in its National Assembly. Although critics of the constitutional reform contend that it is a calculated tactic by Faure Gnassingbé, the current democratically elected President in power since 2005, to extend his tenure in office until 2025 (Adaba, 2024), the AU has been silent.

The AU has also not consistently upheld its principle of sanctioning coups d'états (Souaré, 2014; Vilmer, 2016). The protocols for actions mandated in the event of unconstitutional changes in government, as outlined in the 2000 *Lomé Declaration* (African Union, 2022), were not operationalized, for instance, in the aftermath of the 2013 coup d'état in Egypt (Sallam, 2024). The AU's halfhearted pattern of upholding its anti-coup sanctions regime is also evident in its inclination to opt for informal dialogues and promotion of transitional power-sharing agreements in the event of unconstitutional changes in government. As in the case of the 2019, coup d'état in Sudan which toppled the government of Omar al-Bashir, the AU suspended the country but quickly adopted a mediatory role between the Transitional Military Council junta and civilian groups. In 2021, following the outbreak of another

coup, the AU suspended Sudan again; however, it quickly softened its stance by commencing negotiations with the transitional government. The same pattern was evident in the aftermath of a 2008 coup in Zimbabwe (Phakathi, 2018; Damman & Day, 2022).

The tempo of the AU's relations with the ICC is another classic indicator of the AU's RBIO norm fusion characteristics. Although many African governments were early enthusiastic signatories of the Rome Statute, they soon developed apprehensions due to their perception that the ICC seemed overly interested in prosecuting African Heads of State. This perception culminated in concerted calls by African governments for ICC reforms or the creation of an African alternative. They served notice to leave the ICC *en masse* if their demands were not met (Vilmer, 2016; Gichuki, 2014). Meanwhile, in 2004, in the pursuit of *African solutions to African problems*, the AU set up the ICC modelled *African Court of Justice and Human Rights* (ACJH) with two subagencies: a section for general affairs and a human rights unit. After a decade, the AU adopted the Malabo Protocol mandating the creation of a third section of the ACJH with a limited mandate in international criminal law. Unlike the ICC, it cannot try sitting presidents and incumbent senior government officials (African Union, 2019). These AU transactions represent a pragmatic, middle way norm diffusion strategy that prioritizes vigilance over strict adherence to liberal

internationalism. This approach adapts the RBIO by incorporating sovereign immunity for incumbents, thus shielding the AU and its member states from its most corrosive effects (Nyinevi & Fosu, 2023).

THE ECOWAS/ASS FISSION POLICYSCAPE

The ECOWAS and the ASS are a compelling illustration of the pattern AIOs' disengagement with RBIO principles. The ECOWAS' commitment to democratic governance and constitutional order, as stipulated in its 2001 *Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance*, gives it the mandate to intervene in West African political crises (Cowell, 2021). However, in recent years, especially after 2020, a discernible inconsistency has developed between its normative mandate and enforcement. The ECOWAS's reaction to the concurrent military coups in Mali (2020 and 2021), Guinea (2021), Burkina Faso (2022), and Niger (2023) vividly illustrate reluctance in pursuit of its mandate (Suleiman & Onapajo, 2022). In sharp contrast to its reputation as a confident enforcer of democratic governance anchored on the principle of 'sovereignty as responsible stewardship' (Onapajo & Babalola, 2024; Francis, 2000), the ECOWAS rescinded its decision to sanction the three countries after it imposed suspensions, economic sanctions and threatened military intervention to restore democratic rule in Niger. Indeed, it resorted to reconciliation with the juntas, promising to

reinstate their membership and assist in combating extremist and violent organizations active in the Sahel (Lawal, 2023; O'Kane, 2024; North Africa Post, 2025).

In the end, the three countries left the ECOWAS, accusing it of being an imperialist stooge of Western governments and formed the ASS, a military cum development bloc. They severed ties with Western governments and forged close partnerships with Russia, Iran, China, and Türkiye (Wabwireh, 2022; Donelli & Cannon, 2023; Wilén, 2025; de León Cobo, 2024; Laessing, 2024; Sputnik Africa, 2024). In 2025, they also withdrew from the ICC, citing it as a politicized instrument of Western control (Reuters, 2025).

The liberal normative faltering of the ECOWAS, which can be interpreted as a pragmatic-fission with the RBIO, occurred along a dual axis: first, in the specific instances of its reaction to the coups in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, the ECOWAS, suspended its fidelity to liberal values with respect to the juntas and succumbed to their anti-RBIO resistance. This, given its historic reputation as an assertive actor, is a downgrade of its status as the paragon of liberalism in West Africa; second, the ASS, symbolizing a relatively explicit fissure, emerged as an anti-RBIO coalition against both the ECOWAS, with the exit of the three juntas, and international organizations and states professing the political virtues of liberal ordering. It is worth noting that the normative fissure between the ECOWAS and the RBIO,

beyond the inconsistent enforcement of protocols, is also accounted for by the ECOWAS member states who have explicitly rejected its liberal framework.

However, for one to read the ASS initiative as a mere repudiation of the RBIO is to miss the nuances of its analytical essence and implications. The actions of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger are not geared to counteract international liberal order(ing) but to challenge its specific, hegemonic liberal instantiation. In this respect, the ASS, as a normative institutional buffer, does not imply an anarchic or knee jerk retreat from the RBIO but a sovereignty-maximization scheme enacted through the active construction of a normative counter-order. The very move of creating the ASS is itself a rules-based endeavor, only that it is predicated on a different value proposition and imperative: the primacy of unfettered national sovereignty and collective military autonomy. The initiatives of the trio prioritize security and economic development unencumbered by externally imposed political conditionalities, reflecting a conscious choice for an alternative model of statecraft. Therefore, the posture of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger reflects a nuanced rejection of liberal internationalism. They are not merely withdrawing from the RBIO system but actively aiming to establish a new, parallel regional cooperation framework that clashes with the liberal ethos of the ECOWAS. While renouncing the normative hegemony of the West, the juntas operate within the

pragmatic reality of a multipolar world, strategically partnering with revisionist powers. This pursuit of a staunchly sovereigntist path has, without doubt, compelled the ECOWAS to moderate its liberal stance.

THE RBIO DIFFUSION POLICYSCAPE OF THE TFTA

The TFTA is the most vivid example of the RBIO diffusion dynamics within AIOs. The TFTA is comprised of three regional blocs: the EAC (*East African Community*), SADC (*Southern African Development Community*), and COMESA (the *Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa*). Even though it is a trade liberalization agenda modeled like the WTO (Babatunde & Odularu, 2017; African Union, 1991; Angwenyi, 2016), there are instances where the two institutions normatively diverge, creating a condition of paradigmatic ambivalence. In such cases, the TFTA appears as a hybrid institution that concurrently absorbs and refracts the values of liberal internationalism through its imperatives. Consequently, its policy architecture suggests that diffusion, other than being a unidirectional global-regional transfer of norms, is a dialectical process of translation and domestication.

One can detect the pattern of explicit diffusion in the TFTA's mimicry of the WTO's procedural grammar, as evident in its tariff reduction protocols, non-discrimination regime, and dispute resolution procedures (Babatunde

& Odularu, 2017; Angwenyi, 2016). Additionally, the TFTA's protocol on the phased liberalization of trade in goods, services, and dispute settlement mirrors the multistage negotiation process of the WTO, as enacted in the Uruguay and Doha Rounds. Just as the WTO, the TFTA has adopted regular, institutionalized consultations, technical committees, and ministerial oversight, all embedded in predictable procedural norms, to enhance dialogue and promote the convergence of rule interpretation horizons (Akinkugbe, 2020, p. 139).

Nonetheless, the TFTA's structurally emulates the WTO. However, it is adjusted to account for the TFTA's technocrats' awareness of the asymmetric and vulnerability outcomes of world trade liberalization schemes under the auspices of the WTO. Hence, the TFTA's protocols reflect historically informed regional imperatives, such as industrial autonomy and transformation, food sovereignty, and infrastructure interoperability.

Normative selective adaptation, as a mode of diffusion, is also evident in the character of the TFTA. The commitment of its member states to the principles of liberal internationalism is tempered by protective schemes to accommodate infrastructural deficits, infant industries, and asymmetric economic capacities. The same can be said about its phased liberalization schedules, special and differential treatment provisions, and safeguarding clauses. These institutional formats signify a

pragmatic convergence to ensure external credibility and regional legitimacy.

Having said this, the very dynamic of selective adaptation also animates normative divergence. What the members of the TFTA procedurally commit to, they substantively resist based on their national proclivities. Additionally, their pledge to economic liberalization often appears as either rhetorical flourishes or nonchalance. Further, the TFTA's member states rarely utilize their dispute settlement process, instead preferring unilateral actions that often induce conflict (Desta & Gérout, 2018; Oloruntoba, 2018). Hence, from the experiences of the TFTA, diffusion and divergence are interconnected, with each dynamic animated by its refractive and hybridized character.

The TFTA's normative policyscape is one of refracted diffusion in the form of ongoing negotiation between the contradictions of global norm conformity and the imperative of regional self-determination. The dynamics of its selective adaptation functions enable both incorporation and differentiation, allowing it to inhabit the RBIO while subtly redrawing its normative parameters. The TFTA, therefore, illustrates the strategic recalibration of liberal internationalism via hybrid and contextually selective processes (Oloruntoba, 2018), illustrating how AIOs reconfigure the Overton Window of the RBIO from within.

ANALYSIS: THE AIO-RBIO INTERFACE-REFLEXIVITY AND DIALECTICAL SYNTHESIS

The profound normative transactions that occur at the AIO-RBIO interface transcend the mere perspectives of passive mimicry or outright objection. The dynamics also do not fit neatly into the fixed categories of liberal or illiberal. Rather, the value exchanges depict a turbulent process of normative titration enacted through co-constitution, where the conventional parameters of liberal internationalism are continuously negotiated and reconfigured in a post-colonial context. The essence of this state of affairs lies in a dialectical contradiction: the imperative of AIOs to meaningfully tap into the norms of the RBIO contrasts with the fidelity required to assert their mandate of defending regional autonomy and the quest for self-reliance, given the lessons of the continent's imperial past (Mentan, 2010). This study, drawing on the experiences of the AU, the ECOWAS and ASS in West Africa, and TFTA, demonstrates that the said dialectical contradiction animates a praxis of self-reflexivity that challenges and tames the RBIO's universalizing, one-size-fits-all hegemonic claims and intent.

This self-reflexivity is critical. AIOs engage with Western normative paradigms not to reify a monolithic "African" position or perspective, but to avert the

reification of Western worldviews on the continent. AIOs, as a result, open the norms of liberal internationalism for contestation and co-constitution through interaction. The experiences of the AIOs highlighted indicate that international norms acquire meaning in the context of peripherality by being channeled through concrete, ongoing processes of (re)interpretation and institutionalization, rather than through abstract validation or affirmation (Mohanthy, 1989). This dynamic temporality, where colonial-era legacies are repurposed in the pursuit of contemporary aspirations, requires analytical frameworks situated beyond hierarchy and/or fragmentation, and that can accommodate contingency, fluidity, and creativity (Acharya, 2016).

Even so, the empirical patterns of fusion, fission, and diffusion, as outlined, are more than descriptions. They provide the very basis from which one can plausibly systematically project future scenarios of the AIO-RBIO normative interface. The trajectory incremental convergence, evident in the TFTA's pattern of diffusion demonstrates that in technical, non-political domains like trade regulation, a significant convergence with RBIO-compatible economic structures is not only likely but can be actively pursued. This suggests that where member state's material interests in economic integration and institutional efficiency converge, on condition that their sovereignty is less directly threatened with corrosion, AIOs may incrementally

synchronize their protocols with the RBIO, leading to phased, sector-specific convergence.

Conversely, the scenario of fission, as suggested in the normative rupture of the ECOWAS and the ASS, suggests that when the perceived liabilities of adhering to the values of the of RBIO, in terms of undermined sovereignty and hegemonic external political conditionalities, outweigh the benefits, and viable alternative strategic partners exist, a definitive normative defection becomes a rational strategy. This template of forging sovereigntist, counter-hegemonic alliances is likely to be replicated in other contexts where similar pressures of regime insecurity and revisionist geopolitical opportunity converge. This may lead to a relatively acute, fragmented, and multipolar African normative landscape.

Nevertheless, the AU's fusion complex seems to be the most consistent and institutionally embedded pattern in Africa. Its pragmatic balancing postures, demonstrated by its hybrid architecture and calibrated stance on coup d'états shows that the most likely overarching normative trajectory is one of recurrent dialectical intensification in the form of dynamic unstable transactions of compromise underpinning protocols of mutual constitution. All in all, the RBIO in the context of AIOs is not simply adopted or rejected but is perpetually contested, disrupted, and recalibrated through its encounter with assertive African agency. The tenacity of this hybridized dynamic across the

core political spaces of governance, security, and justice affirms that the fundamental dialectic between universalist norms and particularist sovereignist imperatives will mature. In the process, it will define the character of AIOs, and ensure that the RBIO Overton Window remains a contested and fluid space for the foreseeable future.

CONCLUSION

Finally, after reflecting on the nuanced normative transactions between AIOs and the RBIO, this study culminates with a philosophical illustration that transcends conservative classifications of norm compliance, rejection, or mimicry, articulating the RBIO global normative architecture as a flexible, multipolar site of interaction. Within this space, AIOs are neither docile actors nor outright dissidents, but self-reflexive co-creators of emergent international governance frameworks. This perspective is anchored on the recognition that AIOs, defined by their unique historical legacies and the logic of postcolonial trajectories, engage with the values of the RBIO through strategic norm innovation. This innovation is deeply embedded in the tension between the defense of sovereignty and integration, autonomy, and interdependence.

The empirically sketched documented patterns of fusion, fission, and diffusion provide an evidence-based outlook for projecting the future trajectory of this relationship. The pathway

of incremental alignment is driven by the widespread diffusion of RBIO-compatible structures, as seen in the TFTA Tripartite Free Trade Area, indicating functional convergence in technical, non-political domains. Conversely, the trajectory of acute norm fragmentation is prefigured by the ECOWAS/ASS fission, setting a precedent for the Alliance of Sahel States and providing a clear template for other states chafing, anxious, and under pressure from the perceived impositions of liberal internationalism. However, the most probable and defining future scenario pathway is continuous and recurrent dialectical intensification. This is the logical outcome of the persistent AU embodied fusion embodied by the African Union, creating a permanent, dynamic tension where the RBIO Overton Window is neither adopted nor repudiated but is perpetually stretched, contested, reconfigured, and opened for renegotiation. The future of the AIO-RBIO interface, therefore, is not a final resolution. Instead, it signals an enduring and generative praxis of mutual adaptation, where African agency ensures the global order is relentlessly altered from the perceived low perch of Africa in the international pecking order of geopolitical prominence.

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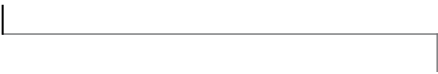
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RESEÑA



Counterterrorism in Africa - New Approaches to Old Problems

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Book review: J. Besenyő, M. B. Khanyile, D. Vogel (eds.) 2024. *Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism in Modern Sub-Saharan Africa*. Palgrave Macmillan. 300 p.

The editors of the book set out to tackle an actual, relevant, and multifaceted topic in all its complexity. The volume also pledges to cover a vast geographical area—Sub-Saharan Africa. With thirteen chapters, including an introduction and a strategic outlook at the end, this is an ambitious task to achieve. A look at the chapter titles reveals a slight focus on West Africa, with four chapters devoted to the region. This is balanced by four chapters with a continental approach and one chapter each on East and Southern Africa. The geographical division, however,

is not the only organizing principle of the book. While the first part of the volume introduces the root causes of terrorism—a traditional topic viewed from less traditional angles—the second part focuses on technology and its connection to terrorism.

The introductory chapter acknowledges that the objective suggested in the title cannot be fully achieved within the length limitations of the volume. To balance out these technical constraints, the chapter directs the readers' attention to the new approaches offered by the twelve subsequent parts.

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Received: October 16 th 2025 / Accepted: October 17 th 2025

To cite this review:

Tánczos, M. (2025). J. Besenyő, M. B. Khanyile, D. Vogel (eds.) 2024. *Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism in Modern Sub-Saharan Africa*. Palgrave Macmillan. 300 p. *Oasis*, 43, 383-387.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18601/16577558.n43.16>

The second chapter sets out to tackle general questions of terrorism, including the ever-recurring debate on the unsettled nature of its definition. The author states that, despite a degree of consensus on the definition within Africa, controversies have not been eliminated along the concepts of: terrorist organizations and insurgent movements. The chapter also sheds light on the diversity of terrorist organizations operating on the continent; stating that while most organizations operate within a single country and do not necessarily swear allegiance to ISIS or al-Qaeda, they often share similar *modi operandi*. The chapter also explores the connection between terrorism and development, stating that terrorist activities and government responses to them create a vicious circle of underdevelopment and unrest. The chapter provides a sound theoretical framework for the volume through its clear, accessible language and its ability to highlight matters of importance.

The third chapter provides the case study of Ambazonian struggle for independence, which resonates well with the introduced dilemma on the definition of terrorism, and the difference from insurgency. This section introduces a topic, largely absent from academic literature, which is both one of its greatest strengths and weaknesses. The lack of academic sources in the references is evident in its policy-paper writing style, and the chapter occasionally disregards elements of academic writing. But even together with this

minor shortfall, the chapter provides to the body of academic literature on Ambazonia.

The fourth chapter offers a deeper understanding and comparative analysis on how Ghana and Nigeria address terrorism. While Nigeria tends to over-militarize the issue, Ghana relies more on civil society vigilance and on legislation that provides concrete counterterrorism (CT) tools (e.g., search and preventive-detention powers). The chapter certainly adds an important element to the academic thinking on terrorism in West Africa, particularly through its focus on Ghana, and the country's way of preventing and tackling terrorism.

The fifth chapter turns to Mozambique's Cabo Delgado, analysing the conflict through a deprivation lens. The authors introduce the current situation as the result of decades of neglect, and draw disturbing parallels between colonial era corporate colonizers and modern day company activities in the region. Again, despite the country's visibility through the operating EU mission on the ground, Mozambique is still neglected in the academic literature. The chapter draws attention to the unique case of colonization practices in Mozambique and its consequences in a reader friendly manner.

The following sixth chapter ventures back to the territory of terminological disputes, employing terms like terrorism and insurgency to depict the situation in Mali. It also reveals the differences with which the two

phenomena are treated; pointing out that CT tends to privilege military solutions, which are cheaper and politically more appealing than whole-of-government counterinsurgency. The chapter is very informative and makes effective use of its case-study format to demonstrate differences in CT and counterinsurgency operations.

After exploring CT on land, the volume turns to the maritime domain. In the seventh chapter, the author explores the treaty framework of maritime CT, and again as the recurrent topic of the whole volume, the definition of terrorism vis-à-vis piracy, which is a prevalent security challenge at the shores of Africa, especially in the Gulf of Guinea and at the Horn of Africa. While the chapter provides a well-constructed overview on maritime CT activities, it fails to include European Union efforts to safeguard maritime security at the shores of Africa, which includes both Coordinated Maritime Presences and Common Security and Defence Policy operations (Hornýák & Vecsey, M. (2023). The author of the chapter not only identifies the sectors most affected by maritime terrorism, but also makes recommendations for each of them in order to respond more effectively to the threat.

The following chapter explores terrorist attacks on critical infrastructure, introducing the topic through the case of al-Shabaab activities in Kenya. The authors identified three sectors in which the attacks had been conducted; communications, transportation

and energy. They call for changes to be implemented in all three sectors to respond to the growing number of attacks, considering the vulnerability of the energy sector to be the greatest. The chapter offers a fresh approach on how terrorist groups might exploit their notoriousness, porous borders and corporate greed in their favor to maximize the impact of their attacks on critical infrastructure. The topic is so understudied, that a Web of Science search did not provide any research articles in similar subjects, but its interdisciplinary nature ensures that despite this, the chapter can have sound theoretical foundation.

Chapter nine explores intelligence collection considering information operations and cyber security from a military and national security approach. The author introduces the principles of (military style) intelligence analysis to the reader, and seeks to promote its use in academic research too. The subchapters on information operations and cyber security are not met with the readers' expectations, as they are (very exhaustive) lists on the characteristics of the two challenges. While this chapter is one of the rare examples to theorize and introduce military intelligence, a rather understudied area (Scheffler & Dietrich, 2023), the author did not provide a literature review to the chapter to support their statement. Research in this area is very important, but the claims made in the chapter that military intelligence and academic research are mutually exclusive practices

are debatable; even so because the aims of the two are fundamentally different. Notwithstanding these issues, the chapter certainly achieves its aim to introduce and theorize military intelligence.

The following chapter delves deeper into technology, introducing the Internet of Things (IoT) in an African context. The chapter claims that the health sector would be the main beneficiary of technology in the continent. The authors also mentioned the security challenges of such systems, and offered recommendations how to address them. Chapter ten also offers a unique approach to the utilization of IoT. Even though it draws attention to challenges related to the employment of smart things in Africa, the authors seem to downplay the scale of IoT vulnerability. While they might have African terrorist organizations and their capabilities in mind when assessing vulnerabilities, IoT is globally reachable, and according to Hypponen's Law, vulnerable (Hypponen & Nyman, 2017). A clearer connection to the overall theme of the volume, terrorism and CT, is also missing from the chapter. The relevance and actuality of the chapter's subject is unquestionable, and further investigation would be really beneficial.

Chapter eleven guides the reader through a case study, which proposes the use of Geospatial Intelligence (GEOINT) to counter terrorism in Nigeria. It takes into consideration previous and current approaches to fight terrorism, and finds that Nigeria could

successfully utilize this method to address the challenge. The chapter offers a logical, well written explanation why GEOINT could be utilized successfully in CT. The true uniqueness of the chapter lies exactly in this topic. While GEOINT is a widely researched area, its utilization in CT operations is understudied in such a scale that a Web of Science search only provides one article altogether in the subject.

Chapter twelve analyses the question of immunization in conflict areas, stating that different insurgent and terrorist groups cooperate or resist in different levels. The authors conclude that no matter what the attitude of the armed group, immunization always falls behind during an armed conflict even when the warring parties support vaccination campaigns. The chapter thus explores a relevant interdisciplinary topic. The title of the chapter reads rather self-explanatory at first, indicating that vaccination is indeed more difficult in zones of armed conflict, the authors built up a logical argument about a contradictory practice too. They argue that some terrorist or insurgent groups welcome vaccination campaigns to make themselves more acceptable on the international stage. Besides this, the different practices of terrorist groups with various religious backgrounds are also researched. The result shows that Islamist groups are more likely to reject vaccination campaigns. The chapter thus offers a unique knowledge in a niche topic,

which is however very important from the human security point of view.

The thirteenth and last chapter provides an overview and strategic outlook on terrorism and CT in Africa. The future trajectories look grim according to the author, since growing young populations paired with weak economies are a fertile ground for frustration and radicalization. This outlook is juxtaposed with the slow reaction times and structural limitations of peacekeeping, which results in a very slowly changing security landscape according to the author. The chapter provides the reader with a realistic outlook based on demographic, economic and radicalization data, describing the connection between these variables clearly, in a reader friendly style.

The volume is a well-written and complex work that lives up to expectations, successfully tackling multiple topics and case studies to introduce the diverse and challenging realities of terrorism and CT in Sub-Saharan Africa. It offers a multifaceted view of regional security issues, local insurgencies, and the political and technological dynamics that shape responses to violent extremism. However, the diverse subjects covered could have been organized more cohesively; for instance, chapters focusing on Nigeria would flow more naturally if positioned consecutively, allowing readers to build a more comprehensive understanding of the country's CT landscape. Given the wide range of themes and regions addressed, achieving a clear and

consistent structure must have posed a significant editorial challenge. Nonetheless, the inclusion of several innovative and underexplored topics—such as the utilization of GEOINT in CT, assessing IoT vulnerabilities, and terrorist attacks against critical infrastructures among others—adds great value and opens promising avenues for further academic inquiry in CT studies.

This volume is recommended for readers who already possess foundational knowledge of terrorism and CT from traditional perspectives and wish to broaden their understanding through new and emerging approaches.

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Revista Oasis

Normas para autores

La revista OASIS es una publicación académica del Observatorio de Análisis de los Sistemas Internacionales (OASIS) de la Escuela de Relaciones Internacionales de la Facultad de Finanzas, Gobierno y Relaciones Internacionales de la Universidad Externado de Colombia. Fundada en 1995, tiene circulación nacional e internacional y una periodicidad semestral, con números publicados en los meses de enero y julio. Su propósito es promover la reflexión crítica, el debate interdisciplinario y la difusión de investigaciones de alta calidad sobre los fenómenos internacionales contemporáneos, las transformaciones del sistema mundial y las dinámicas del Sur Global.

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Revista Oasis

Guidelines for authors

The OASIS Journal is an academic publication of the Observatory for the Analysis of International Systems (OASIS) of the School of International Relations of the Faculty of Finance, Government and International Relations of the Universidad Externado de Colombia. Established in 1995, the journal has both national and international circulation and is published twice a year, in January and July. Its purpose is to promote critical reflection, interdisciplinary debate, and the dissemination of high-quality research on contemporary international phenomena, transformations in the global system, and the dynamics of the Global South.

OASIS publishes research, reflection, and review articles that make original and substantive contributions to the field of international relations. Preference is given to works that combine conceptual depth, methodological rigour, and analytical relevance, and engage constructively with current global debates. The publication of an article does not imply that the Editorial Committee endorses the views expressed therein; responsibility for the content lies solely with the author(s).

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Each submission must include a separate title page listing the article title in Spanish and English; the full names of the author(s); institutional affiliation; postal address; e-mail address; and ORCID number (available at <https://orcid.org/>). The manuscript must also include an abstract of no more than 150 words in both Spanish and English, along with four to six keywords in both languages.

Tables, figures, and graphs must be numbered consecutively, embedded in the text, and accompanied by a title and source beneath each. They should also be submitted as separate editable files of sufficient quality for reproduction. Authors are solely responsible for ensuring the accuracy of data and the clarity of all visual materials.

References must be placed at the end of the article and formatted in accordance with the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA), 7th edition. Authors are encouraged to include a comprehensive list of relevant and recent scholarly references, preferably from the last five years. In-text citations should appear as (Surname, Year, p. xx) or be integrated narratively, e.g. "As Pérez (2023) notes...". Explanatory notes should be presented as footnotes, numbered consecutively and written succinctly.

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Editado por el Departamento de Publicaciones
de la Universidad Externado de Colombia
en diciembre de 2025

Se compuso en caracteres Adobe Garamond Pro de 11 puntos
y se imprimió sobre propalibros de 70 gramos
Bogotá, Colombia

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