

# THE EU, CHINA AND AFRICA: COOPERATION IN THE SPHERE OF SECURITY

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**Abstract:** One of the trends currently observed in world politics is the growing global influence of China and African countries. These actors are beginning to make an ever greater contribution to the formation of a new – multipolar – world. This trend is of particular importance in relation to Africa – a continent that is experiencing permanent political instability and an associated lag in economic development. The main security problems in Africa include armed conflicts between certain groups of the population for access to natural resources; clashes between tribal and confessional communities; the proliferation of Islamic and Christian terrorist groups; electoral crises; piracy. While the EU retains its role as the main trade and economic partner of African countries and also cooperates with the latter in the field of security much more than other international players, China's aspiration to become a global power prompts Beijing to participate more actively in solving security problems of the continent. Although most agreements signed between the PRC and African countries focus on trade, economic and social relations, the growing interdependence between national interests of China and domestic African politics encourages Beijing to reconsider its approaches to interaction with particular African regions. Moreover, since the participation of European states in peacekeeping missions has been gradually decreasing since the mid-1990s, the role of developing countries, including China, in ensuring security on the African continent has steadily increased. Expanding security cooperation in the EU-China-Africa format is a European initiative, but trilateral cooperation is still limited, primarily due to a noticeable difference in the approaches of China and the EU to Africa. Nevertheless, it is gradually being established in the format of joint participation in peacekeeping operations, as well as in the context of the fight against piracy and terrorism.

**Keywords:** *Africa, China, European Union, peacekeeping operations, trilateral cooperation*

## INTRODUCTION

One of the trends characterizing the formation of the modern world order is a noticeable increase in the influence of the so-called. rising powers, especially China, in the international arena, including in the field of security. Meanwhile, meeting the challenges of ensuring security, peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction, due to their complexity, requires the participation of multiple parties. Africa for many decades was considered one of the main zones of instability on our planet. Howev-

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er, countries of this continent are extremely rich in minerals that other states are in dire need of, and that is why it has become a place of intersection of the interests of EU states and countries with rapidly developing economies – China, India, Turkey, Indonesia, Brazil, etc.

Since the beginning of this century, governments of both Western and rising powers have increasingly come to understand that, firstly, their economic well-being largely depends on overcoming “African instability” that hinders the exploitation of natural resources on the continent; secondly, peaceful cooperation in resolving security issues is more productive than confrontation, and, thirdly, the pooling of material and human resources will help increase the effectiveness of peacekeeping operations and build long-term peace. A result of this understanding has been the expansion of security cooperation between the EU, China and Africa.

The EU was the initiator of interaction between itself and China in Africa, but it was the PRC, being formally a developing country and therefore respecting the interests and sovereignty of the Third World states more than the West, that became the driving force of the transformation of the bilateral format into a trilateral one – “EU – China – Africa”.

The present paper offers an analysis of the nature of interaction between the EU and China in Africa in the field of security.

## **COOPERATION IN BILATERAL FORMATS “EU - AFRICA” AND “CHINA - AFRICA”**

Due to geographical proximity, Africa has not only a rich history of relations with European states, but also common values and interests. The COVID-19 pandemic, climate cataclysms and the migration crisis have shown how interconnected Europe and the Dark Continent are. European politicians perceive many of Africa’s security problems – ranging from the spread of jihadism in the Sahel to uncontrolled migration – as a threat to European stability.

The EU, represented in particular by the former colonial powers (the UK, France, etc.), is Africa’s traditional largest trade, economic and political partner. The key documents defining cooperation between the EU and Africa are the Agenda 2030 (adopted in 2015), Agenda 2063 (2013), and the EU Global Strategy – Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe (2016), containing provisions for cooperation in five areas: peace and security; democracy, good governance and human rights; human development; sustainable development; global problems (“The EU and China in Africa,” 2016, p. 11).

In terms of achieving peace, Africa has a difficult relationship with the EU, as for more than two decades the EU has tried to replace the format of direct military intervention in armed conflicts with greater participation in “democracy building”, stressing the link between EU policies on development and on security.

Since 2004, the EU has contributed to African Union (AU) conflict prevention efforts through its African Peace Facility (APF), a fund that provided financing to peacekeeping operations and AU conflict prevention initiatives. Through the APF the EU provided the AU with €2.7 billion for the AU’s conflict prevention efforts. More than 90% of APF funds were spent on funding 16 missions with various AU mandates, from monitoring the ceasefire in South Sudan to fighting Boko Haram in the Lake

Chad Basin. The APF covered the missions' expenses for transport, communications, housing, and medical care, but did not pay for soldiers' salaries, weapons, ammunition, or training. The APF was a stable and relatively predictable source of funding, but in 2021 it was replaced by a new entity, the European Peace Facility (EPF) with a budget of €5 billion for the period from 2021 to 2027, roughly twice what the APF spent between 2004 and 2019. Under the EPF statute, the EU is now able to directly fund African military coalitions and national armies, which had previously been either difficult or impossible due to legal restrictions placed on the APF. The changes in funding arrangements are primarily motivated by Brussels' desire to play a more active role in global politics. In addition, the EU experience in funding peacekeeping missions such as the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) in the Lake Chad Basin, and the G5 Sahel Joint Force has shown the need for greater flexibility in the selection of beneficiaries. For instance, it took months for funds allocated to the MNJTF to reach the mission as the money had to go through the AU headquarters in Addis Ababa, and this hindered the effectiveness of the operation. Despite the allocation of €55 million to the MNJTF over the 5-year period, starting from the beginning of 2016, there were difficulties with procurement, which the EU attributed to the slowness of the AU, while the AU blamed the bureaucracy in Brussels. As a result, at the beginning of the deployment, in 2015, the MNJTF was left without funds and lacked ammunition, medicines and food ("How to Spend It," 2021). Since 2021, EPF has begun to provide support to the MNJTF bypassing the AU, which not only has sped up the financing process, but also prevented funds from sinking into the pockets of intermediaries.

However, the new approach also has a serious drawback: it could weaken the AU's role in maintaining peace on the continent. In addition, since a significant part of the funds will now bypass the AU, potential beneficiaries outside the control of Addis Ababa may well become tough rivals in the struggle for financial resources.

Meanwhile, when an EU Commission delegation arrived at the AU Convention Center in Addis Ababa in February 2020 to reset their relationship with Africa, the delegates found themselves in a building funded by the People's Republic of China. Indeed, China is an important factor in the EU's Africa policy, and increasingly in the field of security. Recently, EU politicians have faced a new reality – the expansion of the participation of China and Russia in ensuring security in Africa against the backdrop of the withdrawal of a significant part of American troops from the continent. Undoubtedly, African political elites have an interest in ensuring that the continent does not become a battlefield between major powers. But when the EU obstructs their freedom of action by demanding that "democratic" principles and human rights be respected even in times of instability, African states try to use China as leverage to encourage the EU to cooperate in the field of development (Duggan & Hastrup, 2020).

Security issues were at the heart of the EU-Africa Summit held in Brussels on 17–18 February 2022. The focus was primarily on redefining defense efforts, as of the 18 missions and operations deployed by the EU around the world, 11 are in Africa, but the security situation on the continent is becoming increasingly fragile (Brzozowski, 2022).

In turn, China's cooperation with African countries, until recently characterized as "decisive non-interference in the internal affairs of partner countries while maintaining the economic interests of China" (Stahl, 2018; Bartel, 2017), is experiencing a grad-

ual shift towards Beijing's greater involvement in security and peacebuilding issues on the African continent. While the agreements signed by China with African countries remain predominantly economic, the growing dependence of China's success in implementing its trade and economic interests on the vicissitudes of African and, in general, world politics encourages Beijing to step up its activities on a global scale.

In fairness, it should be recalled that China's involvement in the affairs of the Dark Continent has a long history: during the years of the anti-colonial struggle in Africa, China helped many national liberation movements (see, for example: Denisova, 2018; Denisova & Kostelyanets, 2020). However, the modern expansion of the PRC in Africa is largely due to the changing perception of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) of its interests at the global level. The shift from the ideological politics of the Maoist era to the development strategy formulated by Deng Xiaoping (1904–1997) led to an evolution of Beijing's Africa strategy towards mutually beneficial cooperation. This approach was reinforced by the introduction in 1998 of the "openness" policy, under which, inter alia, public resources were used to invest in key sectors of the African economy and to gradually move hundreds of thousands of Chinese labor migrants to Africa. To date, their number has exceeded 1 million ("Europe, China and Africa," 2016, p. 79).

China's current intense interaction with African countries has been provoked by Beijing's search for the resources needed for its booming economy and for markets for its goods. The expansion of predominantly bilateral economic ties began with the provision by China of multimillion-dollar concessional loans to African countries rich in minerals and energy resources for the implementation of infrastructure projects, as well as for the development of trade and agriculture. The loans were followed by public and private investments in oil production, mining of metals and minerals, etc. While Western investors have avoided investing in the economies of countries experiencing political instability, China has readily seized the opportunity to gain access to resources and markets. Currently, more than 10,000 Chinese firms operate in Africa, and the volume of China's investment in the continent's economy reaches \$300 billion ("What China Is Really Up To," 2019).

However, despite the large-scale provision of assistance to African countries, China has faced a number of threats to its presence on the continent: image risks due to close ties with political regimes whose leaders had a reputation in the eyes of the Western community as rigidly authoritarian and incapable of proper governance (among them, for example, were former presidents of Sudan – Omar al Bashir (1993–2019) – and of Zimbabwe – Robert Mugabe (1987–2017)); business risks arising from political instability; risks faced by Chinese citizens working on the continent in an insecure environment.

The need to protect its economic interests prompted China to increasingly closely cooperate with the AU in ensuring security, both through participation in multilateral peacekeeping operations and through the organization of military-technical training for African peacekeepers. This direction of Chinese foreign policy received an impetus after the adoption in 2012 of the China-Africa Cooperative Partnership for Peace and Security, which provided for the inclusion of security issues in the activities of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) that had been established in 2000. (Since then 6 ministerial conferences and 8 meetings of the FOCAC have been held, the last one took place in November 2021). True, linking the declared commitment to

ensuring security with the practical participation of China in peacekeeping remains problematic due to Beijing's ambiguous attitude towards some norms adopted by the AU as part of the concept of the African Peace and Security Architecture.

At the 6th FOCAC Ministerial Conference in December 2015, China and Africa committed themselves to implementing the Initiative on China-Africa Cooperative Partnership for Peace and Security, according to which the parties began to develop a collective security mechanism and jointly address non-traditional (for example, anti-piracy) security issues. As part of the partnership, in 2016 China provided AMISOM with \$1.2 million worth of equipment and materials – primarily for use in the fight against the terrorist organization Al-Shabaab. In the late 2010s, China began to actively cooperate with the AU in establishing a conflict early warning system, which contributes to more effective protection of Chinese citizens in Africa, and allocated \$60 million in military assistance to the AU (Alden et al., 2018, p. 53).

The PRC is also interested in the arms trade, the volume of which has been increasing due, for example, to the fact that Beijing has occupied a dominant position in the training of military pilots from Tanzania, the Republic of the Congo and South Africa. Particularly close military cooperation has been established between China and Sudan, South Sudan, Angola and Zimbabwe.

In the case of Zimbabwe, the peculiarities of the Chinese military presence were particularly visible: here Beijing cooperated with the regime of Robert Mugabe in protecting its own and local commercial interests. The expulsion of Zimbabwe from the British Commonwealth in 2002 and Western sanctions against the odious Mugabe regime prompted the Zimbabwean government to turn to Beijing for economic assistance. The Zimbabwean military, which previously had been firmly oriented towards the UK, did the same. With the help of China, which provided \$98 million, Zimbabwe completed the construction of the National Defense College in 2012; Beijing later provided \$4.2 million in grants for other military projects. Currently, China is the leading supplier of weapons to Zimbabwe, having supplied 139 military transport aircraft, 24 combat aircraft, ground-based radar systems to this country, not counting small arms, ammunition and equipment (Alden et al., 2018, p. 58).

## **CHINA'S PARTICIPATION IN MULTILATERAL PEACEKEEPING MISSIONS**

In addition to the need to protect own economic interests and Chinese citizens, there are other reasons for China's increasing involvement in solving problems of peace and security in Africa. Since many issues discussed in the late 2010s at meetings of the UN Security Council (UNSC) concerned Africa, China, as a permanent member of the UNSC, could not regularly abstain without being criticized either by the West or by Africa. As a result, China's policy has evolved from non-interventionism to supporting UNSC resolutions establishing peacekeeping missions, and then to direct participation in UN missions in Liberia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Sudan, although China's peacekeeping activities were initially limited to non-combat functions – provision of technical staff, doctors, engineers and materiel. The situation changed in 2013, when Beijing sent 395 elite military personnel to participate in the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA); the number of Chinese personnel increased to 403 by 2019 ("MINUSMA," 2019).

In 2015, China sent a 700-strong infantry contingent to conflict-ridden South Sudan to participate in a UN peacekeeping mission. The belief that great power status, the pursuit of which has intensified since Xi Jinping came to power in 2013, requires a revision of foreign policy has become widespread in Chinese society. The PRC has increased its material contribution to UN peacekeeping missions 20-fold since 2000 by providing military, technical and medical personnel for missions in Burundi, the DRC, Western Sahara, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Mozambique, Sudan, Sierra Leone, Eritrea, Ethiopia and South Sudan. The number of Chinese peacekeepers in Africa reached approximately 3,000 by the end of the 2010s (Alden et al., 2018, p. 55).

In the 2000s – 2010s, China took consistent steps to build up its peacekeeping capability and further integrate its armed and police forces into the multinational peacekeeping system. In 2001, the Peacekeeping Office was established in the Ministry of National Defense of China. Since its first participation in UN peacekeeping operations, China has provided a total (not only for Africa) of more than 30,000 peacekeepers for 29 peacekeeping missions. China sends the largest number of military personnel for engineering, transport and medical assistance among all 115 supplier countries. The growing involvement of Beijing in ensuring international security has reached a new level due to the policy of Xi Jinping, who intends to promote “great power diplomacy with Chinese characteristics” (Alden et al., 2018, p. 51). On 28 September 2015, the Chinese leader surprised the UN General Assembly participants with a promise to create a permanent Chinese peacekeeping force of 8,000 soldiers and officers and provide the AU with \$100 million worth of military assistance to create an African reserve force (Lahtinen, 2018, p. 28).

The growth in the number of Chinese companies and Chinese workers in Africa has exacerbated the security problem and prompted the PRC leadership to move closer to solving this issue in partnership with Western and local partners who had sufficient capabilities and experience in solving it. The death of Chinese peacekeepers in Mali and South Sudan and the kidnapping of Chinese workers in Cameroon also encouraged China to follow this path (Lahtinen, 2018, p. 27). African countries and the EU began to be perceived by China as allies in conducting military operations, providing humanitarian aid and assistance in cases of natural disasters. The restructuring of China's armed forces and a rapid military build-up had previously allowed Beijing to provide security in the “near seas” and create footholds for Chinese naval and air forces away from home. It should be noted, however, that the implementation of some Chinese economic projects may fuel conflicts and exacerbate disputes over access to natural resources – minerals, water, land, etc. – between local communities and between them and foreign, including Chinese, companies involved in corruption and environmental degradation.

One of the factors that pushed China to become more actively involved in peacekeeping was the growth of piracy in the Gulf of Aden, through which Chinese ships reach the African continent. In 2008, China became part of a multinational naval task force off the coast of Somalia, and the regional focus of China's maritime strategy on East and Southeast Asia was superseded by a “far-distance maritime defense” strategy. Dependence on access to natural resources and the need to expand foreign trade have predetermined the growing need to ensure the safety of sea routes on a global scale, which has become especially important in connection with the launch of the One Belt, One Road project, the idea of which was formulated in 2013.

China's participation in late 2008 and in 2009 in a multilateral anti-piracy naval operation in the Gulf of Aden provides insight into the evolution of its defense strategy. A special naval group was sent to the coast of Africa, consisting of three ships of the Chinese Navy, which performed the functions of escorting commercial ships. At first they cooperated with the Russian Navy, but then they participated in anti-piracy exercises with NATO and EU navies. Since December 2008, Chinese ships have carried out about 900 operations to escort more than 6.5 thousand ships, half of which were foreign, and rescued more than 60 ("Chinese navy," 2018).

Due to the lack of agreements with coastal states in the region, ships of the Chinese Navy could not dock for refueling and crew rest. This was one of the main motives for the establishment of the Chinese People's Liberation Army Naval Support Base in Djibouti, which began operating in 2017 and is located at a strategically important point in the Horn of Africa between the Suez Canal and the Gulf of Aden. The base is adjacent to the port of Doraleh, which is owned and operated by China Merchants Holding; its area is 0.5 sq. km, it has the capacity to repair ships and helicopters; about 2,000 servicemen are stationed at the base (Kostelyanets & Okeke, 2018, p. 188-189).

The establishment of Chinese bases in other parts of Africa is also possible, for example, on the coast of the Gulf of Guinea, where pirate activities do not stop and where China has extensive economic interests. At the same time, illegal fishing by the Chinese off the coast of West Africa, to a certain extent, contributes to the spread of piracy in the region (Bund & Makocki, 2016).

Beijing's growing role as a major security player in Africa is certainly linked to its mercantilist policy of protecting its economic assets on the continent. However, China's desire to form for itself an image of a great power acting in the interests of the entire world community can be seen as another factor in expanding China's participation in international peacekeeping. In addition, as China's 2019 White Paper on Defense points out, ensuring international security corresponds to China's national interest ("China's growing role," 2019, p. 7).

## **THE NATURE OF THE EU-CHINA INTERACTION IN AFRICA**

The rapid expansion of China's presence in Africa and its constant efforts to modernize the national army began to noticeably disturb the West. The EU was faced with the question: should it try to oust the PRC from Africa or, on the contrary, involve it in resolving security issues on the continent? The second decision was taken, and in response to the growing Chinese expansion, the EU formed a foreign policy strategy aimed at deepening cooperation with China in solving problems of the African continent. Correspondingly, EU policymakers in the mid-2000s initiated concrete interaction between the two sides. A special structure – the EU-China Strategic Partnership – was created. Beijing came under pressure from the West, which called on the Chinese leadership to play a more active role in ensuring peace and security. As a result, the PRC was forced to adjust its policy of non-interventionism and its international status underwent a noticeable transformation. What is particularly noteworthy is China's growing interest in international peace and security mediation. For example, in 2007 Beijing was able to persuade Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir to allow EU and AU peacekeeping forces to deploy in the conflict-ridden Sudanese region of Darfur (Kostelyanets, 2014).

The participation of Western countries in peacekeeping operations has declined significantly since the mid-1990s, especially on the African continent. The immediate result was a shortage of military personnel, resources, equipment and aircraft, especially transport helicopters, which markedly reduced the effectiveness of peacekeeping operations. Against this background, the growing participation in peacekeeping of developing countries – China, Brazil, South Africa, Nigeria, Ethiopia, etc. – has become increasingly important.

In 2008, the European Commission presented its first communication on trilateral cooperation between the EU, China and Africa. However, even a decade and a half later, despite the rapidly expanding commercial and military presence of China in Africa, tangible results of trilateral cooperation on the continent are still not visible, although the importance of economic development and maintaining stability in Africa has increased for both the EU and China.

The effectiveness of interaction between China, the EU and Africa in various fields is largely due to the ability of the parties to adapt to each other's values and interests. Since Africa's dependence on foreign partners in the field of security is obvious, since it is Western governments that mainly finance the needs of peacekeeping missions, the problem of adaptation primarily concerns China and Europe, in whose African policies there are points of both convergence and noticeable divergence. For instance, both the PRC and the EU are striving, at least in their statements, to reduce poverty, to create new jobs, to accelerate the socio-economic development of Africa, to establish peace, security and stability, to promote regional integration, etc. However, discrepancies exist primarily due to differences in approaches to achieving these goals. While the EU conditions its assistance to Africa, including military assistance, on democratization, the protection of human rights, and the establishment of proper governance, China does not set any conditions in its relations with the countries of the continent. The principle of non-interventionism was indeed attractive to Africans and therefore turned into an effective component of China's soft power. In addition, China's relations with Africa can be defined as South-South cooperation.

Meanwhile, the AU has long been considered a "natural" partner of the EU due to the similarity of their administrative structures. However, just as Africa has not reached agreement on many issues among the AU member countries, which are inclined to prioritize national interests, so the EU countries have different positions on the development of the Dark Continent. In addition, Paris, for example, has such a strong influence in French-speaking West and Central Africa that it is not only difficult for China, but also for other European states to operate in these territories. Therefore, it is not surprising that China continues to prefer bilateral relations with member countries of the European Union and the African Union to those with the EU and the AU as a whole, despite the global trend toward regional integration.

The United Kingdom continues to pursue an African policy independent of the EU and adheres to its own approach to maintaining peace, seeking to promote security through funding and training programs for the military. Nevertheless, despite the fundamental and practical differences, London and Beijing have been cooperating on security issues for many years. At the government level, the UK has provided technical and language training for Chinese peacekeepers and police officers at the Chinese Langfang Training Centre. The British non-governmental organization Saf-



erworld and the Shanghai Institute of International Studies, a key center for China's foreign policy, also cooperate closely ("The EU and China in Africa," 2016, p. 23).

While Europe and the West in general pay lip service to the trilateral cooperation between Africa, China and Europe in Africa, forcedly adhering to the principle "if you can't defeat it, join it", in reality they have launched a large-scale media campaign against the Chinese presence on the continent. However, the so-called "tripartite dialogue" established by the European Commission loses its significance against the backdrop of the anti-Chinese agenda of the West, which increasingly qualifies China's presence in Africa as a "new form of colonization" (Bodomo, 2019, p. 117). This is partly facilitated by Beijing's demand from the governments of African countries to behave loyally in the international arena and recognize "one China". The latter in 2022 acquired particular importance due to the aggravation of the military-political situation around Taiwan.

## CONCLUSION

The trilateral cooperation between Africa, China and the EU represents a unique opportunity for the development of Africa as long as interests of all parties are taken into account. At the same time, EU assistance to Africa is mainly aimed at supporting healthcare programs, democratization efforts, cooperation in the fight against terrorism, etc. In turn, China does not impose ideological demands on African countries, and this makes it an attractive donor and partner.

The EU and China have committed themselves to promoting peace and security in Africa and have agreed on potential areas of cooperation that include joint efforts to combat organized crime and counter terrorism. However, despite numerous joint statements, interaction at a practical level remains limited and mainly focuses on maritime security. For instance, since 2011, Chinese naval ships have been accompanying deliveries of humanitarian aid from Europe to Somalia. The exchange of information and coordination between China and the EU is carried out within the framework of the joint initiative to combat piracy – Shared Awareness and Deconfliction (SHADE).

Meanwhile, the lack of a clear Africa security policy in both China and the EU hinders the development of mutual understanding and trust needed to build an effective partnership. China's foreign policy formulation and implementation lacks the transparency needed to make its intentions clear to EU leaders. As for the EU, constant tensions among its members on security and defense issues hinder the coherence of its actions (Maher, 2016, p. 966).

So far, the partnership between the EU and China is not sufficiently developed and is being implemented not so much in the format of "the EU – China", but "EU member states – China". China prefers partnerships with individual countries in part because the EU is not a strong peacemaker in Africa. However, as the EU, China and the AU expand their international influence, they begin to make an increasing contribution to the creation of a new multipolar world and the growth of the global economy. In addition, as China expands its presence in Africa and continues to follow a pragmatic approach in foreign policy, practical cooperation between China, the EU and Africa will certainly expand.

The development of trilateral cooperation is hampered by conceptual differences between the EU and China on the protection of human rights and sovereignty, as well as the growing level of competition in the struggle for access to natural re-

sources. Therefore, cooperation between the EU and China in the field of security in Africa remains at the level of aspirations and planning with little tangible results.

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