



## U.S. Strategy toward Africa and Trump's Rivalry Competition: A Neo-Classical Approach

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### Abstract

This article illustrates the fact that the U.S. administration's behavior toward Africa has always been shaped by the conception of rivalries' presence, rather than the potentials of the continent. In recent years, with the emergence of America's rivals, such as China and Russia in Africa in the continent, who have invested not only in the African economy, but also in its security and military sectors, the notion of rivalries' limitation has been exaggerated in U.S. decision making toward Africa. Using a neoclassical approach, by analyzing the dynamism of the U.S. foreign policies toward Africa and Trump's rivalry-based policies, this article concludes that Trumps' African policy has not been different from that of his predecessors, and that the U.S. has always adopted a neo-classical realism approach toward Africa, which has been invigorated by the presidency of Trump.

**Keywords:** Africa, China, Neo-classical Realism, Rivalry, Russia, Trump, US Strategy

## 1. Introduction

The U.S. engagement in Africa has had considerable ups and downs over the past years. During the Cold War, the African continent was used by the two leading powers, the United States and the Soviet Union. In the struggle between these two powers, Africa was mainly the means through which these two countries gained ideological superiority in the war. In the post-Cold War era, US-African relations did not improve much because U.S. foreign policy did not see Africa as one of the top priorities in pursuing its national interests. U.S. policy toward Africa has not been encouraging since, and has been determined by different issues such as politicians and policymakers' views, domestic problems in the U.S., and international order. Africa had always been a temporary tool for the United States to pursue its goals and has never been a serious ally. However, its partners have a different idea about Africa.

The population of Africa is growing. The growth of internet penetration in Africa is 11,481 %, while the average global increase is 1,157 % (Miniwatts Marketing Group, 2019). The rapid expansion of mobile telephones and internet usage growth rates in Africa has been five times the global averages over the last decade (Miniwatts Marketing Group, 2019). Africa is increasingly "rising [its] geopolitical importance and burgeoning economic dynamism—the latter drove, in part, by political reform and improvements in governance" (Pham, 2016, p. 2). Therefore, the world's major economic powers seek to find strategies to guarantee their interests in this emerging economy. Due to the new changes in Africa and the presence of rivals such as Russia and China in the economic section of Africa, the U.S. has also sought to consolidate its presence in Africa.

This article investigates the dynamics of U.S. strategies toward Africa, especially during the Trump administration, through the principles of neoclassical theory. The U.S. policies toward Africa have been classified by different themes of neo-classical realism. Neoclassicism argues that foreign policy is the product of limitations from the international system and an amalgam of the domestic forces inside. Based on neoclassical realism, the intervening variables in the U.S. decision making policy toward Africa, such as power capabilities in the international order, cognitive variables like the perception and misperception of systemic pressures, other states' intentions or threats, and domestic variables like lobbies or U.S. values have been analyzed. Struggle among nations' overpower, security, and prestige are products of perception and limitation imposed by rivalries alongside nationalism, which fuel rivalry. The combination of nationalism and power trajectory lead to differences in foreign policies of various countries<sup>1</sup>. This article investigates the U.S. policies toward Africa, as presented through the two images of Trump's nationalism and the perception of great power competition under increasingly multipolar conditions. The fear of rivalries that threatens U.S. interests in the international sphere is also an important element in the U.S. foreign policy, which is another component of nationalism. Because of rivalries, the United States has increased its military presence in Africa; the number of U.S. troops stationed in Africa has tripled in the past few years. In addition, in recent years, U.S. companies have been more active in Africa, and different engagements have happened in the economic sections of the United States and Africa. Based on the above-mentioned observations, The main question discussed in this research is as follows: What are the main trends in

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1. See "Opposite but Compatible Nationalisms: A Neoclassical Realist Approach to the Future of US-China Relations" by Schweller (2018)

the United States' policies toward Africa, based on the neoclassical approach?

Based on this question, the following sub-question will also be investigated in this paper: Has the Trump administration modified or maintained the existing US policies toward Africa?

The assumed hypothesis is that the United States had a continuous neoclassical approach toward Africa, formed by the limitations of international relations, perceptions, and domestic boundaries. The neo-classical realism has therefore been used as the theoretical basis.

### **1. 1. Literature review**

Literature is full of scholars admitting the U.S.'s lack of suitable attention to Africa. Almost all academic papers on U.S. strategy toward Africa begin with the remark that Africa was never a priority in the U.S. foreign policy. They admit that Africa has always received less attention than other places in allocating time and resources in formal U.S. policy circles (Schraeder, 1993). Clough and Sievense (1992) admitted that the U.S. policy toward Africa was hardly influenced by the Cold War. Cold War policy made the U.S. support authoritarian regimes inside Africa and repress liberal groups, but they hoped that it would change by the end of the Cold War. Their hope for change was not fulfilled, and Rothchild and Keller also stated in 2006 that Africa has never played a pivotal role in the U.S. foreign policy, and that America has pursued a policy of indifference toward Africa and the U.S. administration was similar in having low profile attention to Africa (Rothchild & Keller, 2006). Even in 2016, the research indicated this unattractiveness of U.S. politicians to Africa; in 2016, the Atlantic Council assured that the U.S. was changing its relations

with Africa, but these changes were not suited to the profound changes of Africa (Pham, 2016).

Most of the scholars who have researched the history of US-Africa relations acknowledge the lack of dynamism in these relations and attempt to find the reason for this maintenance in the status quo. Olsen believes that U.S. politicians' decision-making toward Africa was to a significant degree made by bureaucrats (Olsen, 2017). He believes that the decision making in the U.S. is usually made by three layers, but, because of the lack of attention of presidents and Congress throughout the recent US history, the decision making for Africa has been taken over by only one layer, which is composed of bureaucrats who tend to keep the status quo. Olsen's paper is particularly important to this paper's discussion, since he has referred to the neoclassical realism of U.S. decision making toward Africa (Olsen, 2017).

Mesfin (2009) acknowledges that the problem regarding lack of adequate attention to Africa in the US foreign policy resides in the U.S. presidents' interim approach to Africa. When the new president is appointed in the US, he changes all the principles of foreign policy officials in Africa, from the secretary of state and national security adviser to the deputy secretary of state for African affairs. This change of officials means that U.S. interests in Africa are once again defined; as a result, each of the presidents implement different levels of engagement with Africa, almost all of which share indifference to Africa (Mesfin, 2009). Westcott worked on Trump's policy in Africa and elaborated that Trump's approach is the continuation of his predecessors (Westcott, 2019)

Ayam (2010) agrees that while the United States' policy on Africa has a tedious process, it has minor ups and downs, and indicates that this dynamic is due to two different basic positions

that exist in U.S. policy toward Africa. The first position argues that Africa's importance and value are insignificant for the U.S.; as a result, it is wrong to tie the U.S. to countries with weak economies or unstable governments. Another view, known as "liberal interventionist," considers Africa's importance beyond strategic and economic interests and places ethical and humanitarian concerns at the heart of the issue. Proponents of this position believe that although Africa's value is less significant than the rest of the world for the United States, if both parties well nourish the US-Africa relationship, it has considerable political and economic values.

One of the most acknowledged studies regarding the U.S. decision making on Africa is Herman Cohen's "U.S. Policy toward Africa: Eight Decades of Realpolitik," which investigates the U.S. policy toward Africa. Cohen uses the documentary record and his years of experience to provide a uniquely comprehensive survey. He traces the U.S. policies toward Africa from President Franklin D. Roosevelt's third term in office to President Trump's presidency. He concludes that presidents' personalities were to a high degree significant in the formation and execution of the various US foreign policies (Cohen, 2020a).

This research is different from similar studies, since first, it adopts a different perspective by analyzing the variables affecting U.S. foreign policy toward Africa. In addition, the change in U.S. policies toward this continent by the emergence of U.S. rivals, China and Russia, as well as the recent presidency of Trump are subjects that have received little attention and therefore need more investigation.

## 1. 2. Theory

This article uses neoclassical realism as the basis of its investigation. Neoclassical realism believes that the foreign policy of a country is derived from “its place in the international system and its material power capabilities”, which explains the reason for which it is called “realist” (Rose, 1998, p. 52). Neoclassicals believe that using such power and capability in foreign policy is complex because "systemic pressures must be translated through intervening variables at the unit level" (Rose, 1998, p. 146), which explains why they are named neoclassical realists. These variables are both internal and external and consist of intervening variables (such as power capabilities), cognitive variables (such as the perception and misperception of systemic pressures, other states' intentions, or threats) (Reichwein, 2012), and domestic variables (such as state institutions, elites, societal actors within society, and local norms and values) (Toje & Kunz, 2012). The theory therefore refers to the norms and ideas forming foreign policy alongside international limitations (Kitchen, 2010; Rose, 1998; Taliaferro et al., 2009). This means that politicians may pursue aims and goals that are influenced by normative and moral concerns. Furthermore, neoclassical realism claims that foreign policy is a product of politician's perceptions of its international limitation, threats, and opportunities, and domestic norms and values (Reichwein, 2012; Toje & Kunz, 2012).

Neoclassical realism argues that the scope and ambition of a country's foreign policy is driven primarily by the country's relative material power. Yet, it contends that the impact of power capabilities on foreign policy is indirect and complex, because systemic pressures must be translated through intervening unit-level variables such as decision-makers' perceptions and state

structure. Understanding the links between power and policy thus requires a close examination of both international and domestic contexts within which foreign policy is formulated and implemented.

Neo classical approach asserts that countries with the same material capabilities but different structures do not behave in the same way. The structure of the international system, domestic actors, and values of the country forms therefore the decisions of the states. As a result, for analyzing the foreign policy in the realm of neoclassical approach, we need a close measure of the context in which foreign policy is formed. Through these explanations, the article has divided the analysis into three different categories: power capability, cognitive variables such as nationalism and security, and domestic variables.

## **2. Cognitive Variables and Power Capabilities**

### **2. 1. Commercial Rivalry Competition**

For expanding America's material power capabilities due to Africa's strategic position, Clinton originated the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), which aimed at increasing the scope of the US-African market (*African Growth and Opportunity Act*, 2000). Banjo (2010) claims that the necessary provisions of this law included several cases. The first was to remove the existing quota of textile and clothing products from sub-Saharan Africa to enter the U.S. market. The second was the removal of customs duties on goods made from yarn and fabric that were not available in the United States. The third was the removal of customs duties on African garments made of American yarn and fabric. This law led to the importation of African clothing into the United States at a rate of over \$ 5 million (Francis, 2010; Lake et al., 2006, p. 6; Iyob



& Keller, 2006). Critics believe that AGOA is a policy to secure the African market for the United States. Bush administration expanded this policy and eliminated African export barriers to the U.S. (Francis, 2010).

For Africans, Obama's presidency made hopes for the start of a new era in trades between the United States and Africa because of his African heritage (Van de Walle, 2010). Despite promising speeches in different parts of Africa, especially in Ghana in 2009, President Obama's limited commitment to the continent during his first four years left many disappointed. Obama continued the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) (Harris, 2017). He created the Trade Africa Program to promote and support young Africans by the Young African Leaders Initiative. He also made US-African leaders' summit for "commercial diplomacy" (Pelz, 2017). He tried to bring African and American businesses together on different occasions. These actions had actual results; from 2008 to 2015, U.S. direct investment in Africa increased by more than 70% (Harris, 2017). However, his efforts were mostly the aspiration of African youth for making changes in their lives, not a real strategic shift.

U.S. actions in Africa are mainly shaped by the perceptions of leaders regarding security threats and economic interests. These perceptions became more serious when China became involved in the competition. Through these perceptions, the issues of trade and military presence in Africa were always under the United States' attention. Trump initiated Proper Africa, which seeks to marshal the resources and capabilities of various U.S. trade promotion agencies, such as the Export-Import (Ex-Im) Bank, the Trade and Development Agency (TDA), the Small Business Administration (SBA), and the new U.S. International Development Finance

Corporation (Husted et al., 2020). This act was a response to the commercial competition of great powers such as China, that the Trump administration, especially Bolton, believed was happening (Schneidman, 2020). However, this act had numerous problems. Sixteen U.S. government bureaucratic agencies dealing with this policy - including State, Commerce, USAID, the new DFC – were involved in this act; it was not clear which one had to host the policy and how these agencies had to activate Prosper Africa and work together to help U.S. companies compete in Africa (Levinson, 2019). In addition, the travel ban on Nigeria mostly affected U.S. businesses inside Nigeria and increased the risk of investment inside Africa. Apart from convening business meetings in Kenya and Tunisia, the Trump administration could not transform this idea into an effective policy instrument (USAID, 2019).

The Development the Finance Corporation (DFC) of the United States doubled the amount of U.S. investment in countries with low and middle incomes, which are mostly located in Africa (Nagy, 2020). Critics assure that one of the crucial reasons for this investment is the alternative investments proposed by China (Forde, 2019). The Trump administration initiated talks for a free-trade deal with Kenya, partly designed to counter China's influence in Africa (Swanson, 2020). This policy is unlikely to have much impact on the American economy; as a result, it seems that Trump perceives this investment as a geopolitical move (Swanson, 2020).

The emergence of U.S. rivalries in Africa has changed much of US foreign policy regarding this continent. China has been Africa's most important trading partner over the past decade (Forde, 2019). In addition, it has been the largest lender to African countries in the past decade, its loans constitute 5% of Africa's total debt (Olander, 2020). Although China's FDI level in Africa is relatively low, only 2% of the entire Africa's FDI in two years, the bilateral trade has

increased by 40% over the past five years and now stands at more than 5 billion dollars (Forde, 2019). China has heavily invested in agricultural, health, and security projects in Africa, which has increased Africans' reliance on China (French, 2020). Cheap Chinese products have also brought prosperity to Africans. Africa is the focus of many investors around the world (Pigato & Tang, 2015); for example, at a recent Chinese summit with African administrations, Chinese President Xi Jinping promised 60 billion dollars of investments in the continent (Shepard, 2019). India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi also loaded several energy and trade agreements in his recent trip to Africa. The European Union, too, is locking in trade agreements. Although foreign direct investment (FDI) is lowered worldwide for the third continuous year, Africa received 46 billion dollars in FDI in 2018, 11% higher than in 2017, according to figures from the United Nations (Forde, 2019).

Russia has also entered the economic, military, as well as the technical realm of Africa (Balestrieri, 2020). Several agreements have been signed to establish the Eritrean economic zone, military, as well as technical cooperation with the continent (European Union, 2019). Moscow is looking to develop a critical strategic waterway site's logistic center in Eritrea (Adibe, 2019). Russia's trade with Africa has increased between two and three to five times, although it still accounts for less than 1% of Africa's total business (Forde, 2019). Russia also holds an economic summit. In addition to these competitors, the European Union has also signed trade agreements with four African countries that will inevitably reduce the U.S. trade with Africa. Emmanuel Macron ended the CFA Franc in a bid to reset France's relations with West Africa; even the United Kingdom, amid Brexit, hosted 15 African heads of state for an investment summit (Forde, 2019).

China's engagement with Africa is also long-standing (Taylor, 2009). Indeed, China's military and economic presence in Africa and the constant rivalry between these two superpowers have prompted the U.S. to make profound changes in its strategy towards Africa. America has for example started to make certain limitations on China's actions in Africa. Trump's policies have challenged China's presence in Africa. They call China and Russia's policies in Africa a threat to U.S. national interests. Bolton admitted that Russia uses its political and economic connections throughout Africa with no attention to the existing laws. He assured that Russia exports weapons to the region instead of voting for African nations at the United Nations, "votes that keep troops in government"; he claimed that Russians are destroying the peace and security of Africa and threatening the core interests of the African nations (Bolton, 2018).

Trump's Administration presented a harsh discourse on China's presence in Africa. According to Bolton, "We see the negative impact of China's influence in Africa and their entry into corrupt transactions. Beijing is trying to penetrate Zambia through commercial projects." Pompeo also warned African countries to be wary of 'empty promises' by authoritarian regimes" (Cohen, 2020b). He also asserted that in Djibouti, heavy debt burdens on infrastructure projects from years 1 to 4 have plagued the government. China has set up a military base within a few miles from the U.S. army base in Djibouti and seized control of the Red Sea port of Djibouti. America assumes this action as a threat to the U.S. security interests in the region. Trump accused China and Russia of corruption in their security policies toward Africa. According to Bolton, Russia "continues to sell arms and energy in exchange for votes at the United Nations — votes that keep strongmen in power, undermine peace and security and run counter

to the best interests of the African people" (Garmone, 2018). Bolton also accused China and Russia of corruption in African investment. He assured that China's "investment ventures are riddled with corruption and do not meet the same ethical or environmental standards as U.S. developmental programs" (Garmone, 2018).

America's concern in losing its market share in Africa is irrelevant. It is true that despite the expansion of the U.S. military presence in various African countries, the U.S. trade in Africa has declined over the recent years. However, it seems that the U.S. concern is not about losing its business share; the United States is the continent's largest investor with 5 billion dollars in direct foreign investment and it is continuing its investment. The number of U.S. companies in terms of service and production is higher than any other investing country in the continent. The U.S. administration, along with other aspects of the U.S. foreign policy, enjoy considerable opportunities for U.S. companies (raising U.S. share of investment). It therefore seems that Trump has entered a policy of the Cold War regarding Africa, a policy that is a combination of rivalry politics and nationalism. The U.S. is trapped in the Cold War policy, in which helping one country would entail a commitment of that state to fulfill the national interests of the United States and not its rivals. African states therefore have to decide whether they are with the United States or with Russia and China, which would mean that they are deprived of help from the United States. In 2019, Trump asked the Congress to pass a law that reorients the U.S. aid to prioritize friendly countries. In the draft, Trump refers to his perception that the U.S. is facing a "great power competition" - referring to rivalry for geopolitical influence among the U.S., Russia, and China (Toosi, 2019).

At the core policy of Trump lies the prevention of China and Russia's presence in the African continent. The U.S. competitive strategy and approach to limit China's presence may have a negative impact on Africa's growth and development. Sub-Saharan African countries are facing economic downturns as a result of the U.S.-China trade war (Gramer & Lynch, 2019). Trump is targeting programs aimed at addressing the influence of Russia and China in developing countries (Gramer & Lynch, 2019).

## 2. 2. Nationalism

Nationalism, on the other hand, is a product of a neo-classical approach to foreign policy. In recent years, the rising nationalism of the U.S. has made the U.S. adopt an inward-looking behavior (Schweller, 2018). This nationalism sentiment is the result of a neo-classical foreign policy, which has emerged in the U.S. African policy. Trump used nationalism to cut humanitarian actions toward Africa. The nationalistic sentiment, which is used as a justification for this cut, claims that "the United States should focus its federal budget instead on investments at home" (Gramer & Lynch, 2019). Trump acclaimed that a certain amount of foreign aid money is spent wastefully or funneled to ineffective and inefficient programs. Trump is against humanitarian actions. He is suspicious of these acts and acclaims that he will cut funds for these policies globally since America must be first. Its Administration has proposed sharp reductions in U.S. assistance to Africa, which had been established during Clinton's presidency, expanded by Bush, and continued by Obama. Congressional consideration of the Administration's FY2021 budget had a 28% drop from FY2019 allocations (*FY2020 Budget and U.S.-Africa Relations*, 2019). Congress has not enacted similar proposed cuts in the past

appropriations measures. Trump claimed that he would execute a 30% decline in U.S. foreign aid, which undoubtedly affected Africa.

In his speech at the Heritage Foundation in Washington on December 13, 2018, Bolton explained that the United States intends to reserve security assistance for "responsible regional stakeholders" and to cut support for "unproductive, unsuccessful, and unaccountable" United Nations peacekeeping missions (Bolton, 2018). In confirmation of this extreme nationalistic viewpoint, Trump admitted that the U.S. should manage its donations and channel money to "friends and allies" and prioritize countries that "support" America's goals (Toosi, 2019). This plan means that countries aligning themselves with China or other U.S. rivalries should not expect humanitarian funding from the United States. In 2019, Trump asked Congress to pass a law that reorients the U.S. aid to prioritize friendly countries. The draft document stresses that the U.S. faces a renewal of "great power competition," which means Russia and China (Toosi, 2019). The sentiment of "America first" changed Trump's policies.

### **2. 3. Security**

A neoclassical approach to international politics stresses that the scope and ambition of a country's foreign policy are driven first and foremost by its place in the international system and specifically by its relative material power capabilities. The U.S., during the Cold War, was faced with a shaky global system. It felt the need to secure its footsteps in the strategic corners of the world. Africa is known as one of those corners since according to the US foreign policy, it is geopolitically located in a strategic place, which has

drawn the attention of many great powers at different times and for various purposes. Africa is close to the Gulf of Aden and the Bab El Mandeb Strait, which connects the Indian Ocean, the Red Sea, the Suez Canal, and the Mediterranean Sea. The Strait is a global strategic point that connects the markets of three continents - Europe, Africa, and Asia - with 5% of world trade going through the region. This strategic position has attracted the attention of many countries around the world. Africa is now playing a significant role in supplying energy to the world and is home to vast natural resources (Lake et al., 2006, p. 3). It is therefore natural for the United States to consider such a strategic place for exploitation.

The United States supported African dictators who violated human rights to prevail over the Soviet Union during the Cold War. For strategic reasons, the United States held Mobutu in power until the mid-90s (Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2013) and remained in the Horn of Africa (Iyob & Keller, 2006). By the onset of the Cold War, the significant American presence in Sub-Saharan Africa declined (Edozie et al., 2016). By the time of the presidency of Clinton, who was not worried about the Soviet presence in Africa, new strategies regarding this continent started (Lawson, 2007; Rothchild & Emmanuel, 2005; Lawson, 2007; Mesfin, 2009). In Somalia, eighteen U.S. soldiers were killed in Mogadishu, which came to be known in America as Solami Syndrom (Edozie et al., 2016). This led to the termination of U.S. engagement with different African countries (Lawson, 2007; Husted et al., 2020).

The notion of security has made significant changes in U.S. foreign policies. The Bush cabinet published a report, which argued that "the only way to maintain American prosperity was to ensure that the United States had reliable access to increasing quantities of oil and natural gas from both domestic and foreign sources"



(National Energy Policy Development report, 2001a). This report indicated the policy challenge for the "concentration of world oil production in any one area of the world," which specifically meant the Persian Gulf (National Energy Policy, 2001b, p. 132). The report's suggestion for resolving this challenge was making a more diversified energy market, that is, the sub-Saharan Africa, which held "7% of world oil reserves and 11% of world oil production and is expected to be one of the fastest-growing sources of oil and gas for the American market" (National Energy Policy, 2001b, p. 137). This policy changed the concentration of the US oil imports from the Persian Gulf to Africa. Data indicate that in the last year of Bush's presidency, African countries accounted for more of America's petroleum imports than the states of the Persian Gulf region. The amount of U.S. oil imports from Africa decreased during the Obama presidency because of the Shale Oil revolution (Pham, 2014). The establishment of military command was intended to secure U.S. national interests in Africa, including its geopolitical interests, drug trafficking control (The Global Commission on Drug Policy, 2017), energy supply, and counterterrorism (Lake et al., 2006). President George W. Bush therefore announced the United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) to:

enhance [American] efforts to bring peace and security to the people of Africa and promote our common goals of development, health, education, democracy, and economic growth in Africa by fortification of multilateral security cooperation with Africa and booster African capabilities in health, education, democracy, and economic growth (Bush, 2007).

The establishment of the United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) was the most significant change in U.S. and Africa

relations after almost half a century. The Obama administration took the leadership of AFRICOM after Bush (Bachmann, 2010). Still, he believed that African countries should rely on themselves for their security concerns and handle their affairs (Franke, 2009); the U.S. therefore only had to "help, train and equip local forces" (Obama & Hollande, 2014). This sentiment was echoed by AFRICOM's second commander, Carter Ham, in his 2013 posture statement, when he stated that "in support of advancing regional peace and security, U.S. Africa Command focuses on priority countries, regional organizations, and programs and initiatives that build defense institutional and operational capabilities and strengthen strategic partnerships" (*United States Africa Command*, n.d.).

Obama was facing two main obstacles regarding indirect involvement in military presence in Africa: first, because of the Iraq and Afghanistan ongoing wars, the public sphere was very reluctant about direct participation in Africa. The second obstacle concerned the shrinking of the U.S. defense budget. Obama did not, however, lose the ground to China. He adopted two strategies regarding Africa: one was strengthening African institutions for becoming independent in obtaining security, and the second was encouraging other partners to enter into this sphere (Obama & Hollande, 2014). In a controversial action against his liberal talks, Obama "boosted the presence of U.S. special operations forces on the ground and increased the airstrikes against suspected terrorists" (Gass, 2019).

Trump's strategy on military presence was to increase the amount of U.S. military presence in Africa. This process would make Africa increasingly dependent on the U.S. insecurity, which is a counter policy of Obama. Trump believes that his predecessors' policy for security in Africa was not useful and should therefore

change (Garmone, 2018). This policy is mainly due to the military presence of China and Russia in Africa. China's presence in security issues in Africa started in 2009, when China's People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) was operating in the Gulf of Aden and waters of Somalia to counter Somali piracy. These missions expanded China's military capabilities and helped to develop China's interests in East Africa Coast. In 2015, China's first overseas military installation was in Djibouti, which is a strategically-located country in the Horn of Africa (Pham, 2013).

The core policy of Trump administration is to prevent Beijing and Moscow to get to prosperity in Africa. Bolton, in the description of U.S. policies, tried to emphasize that the U.S. should not assist nations working against U.S. interests. This policy sounds similar to a return to the Cold War, "when allies were based on their opposition to communism or the Soviet Union rather than good governance, human rights, economic prosperity and so forth" (Solomon, 2018). Trump administration also accused China and Russia of corruption in their security policies toward Africa; Bolton claimed that Russia "continues to sell arms and energy in exchange for votes at the United Nations — votes that keep strongmen in power, undermine peace and security and run counter to the best interests of the African people" (Garmone, 2018). Trump's Administration marked great military movements across the continent, especially in Somalia. In Somalia, U.S. forces conducted forty-seven airstrikes against al-Shabaab in 2018, which is a 200% increase from 2016 (Gass, 2019). The United States has increased its military presence in the form of military training and support operations in this rivalry competition. The number of U.S. troops stationed in Africa has tripled in the past few years under "training and organizing African nations' armies and participating in the fight against terrorist groups" (Harsch, 2009).

### 3. Domestic variables

Domestic variables such as state institutions, elites, societal actors within society, and local norms and values have been influential in the foreign policy of the United States. Indeed, humanitarian actions are not a U.S. interest in the realm of realism analysis. However, as Mead (2001) indicates, the United States' foreign policies reflect a specific type of idealism, which has been part of the country's foreign policy in history; it was a reflection of American values. America started to have humanitarian intervention in the post-Cold War era. In 2002, the National Security Strategy of the United States of America indicated that:

Weak states...can pose as great a danger to our national interests as strong states. Poverty does not make poor people into terrorists and murderers. Yet poverty, weak institutions, and corruption can make weak states vulnerable to terrorist networks and drug cartels within their borders (*National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, 2002).

Through this analysis, Bush claimed that he wanted to encourage countries to have good governance by giving investment to countries with better records of human rights (Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: George W. Bush (2008- 2009), 2012; Rothchild & Keller, 2006). During Bush and Obama, 70-75% of the U.S. humanitarian aid to Africa was aimed at health challenges, such as President Bush's initiatives in the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and the President's Malaria Initiative (PMI) (Edozie et al., 2016; Husted et al., 2020). Many hoped that Obama, with an African and American background, would expand humanitarian aid to Africa, but it did not happen. Obama's attitude was mostly inspiring African youth. He acclaimed his changing dynamic in America's relationship with Africa: "For decades, American engagement with Africa was

defined by aid to help Africans reduce insecurity, famine, and disease. In contrast, the partnerships we are forging today and will expand in the coming years, aim to build upon the aspirations of Africans" (National Security Strategy of the United States of America, 2015, p. 27). Trump discontinued all America's so-called humanitarian actions.

Africa does not have a powerful lobbying system in the U.S. During the Trump administration, Africans were searching for lobbying personnel in the U.S. to make a more positive image of Africa in the White House, but they were not successful (Gramer & O'Donnell, 2019). However, American companies are rather vigorous in expanding their profits in Africa through lobbying. For example, the American Chemistry Council has lobbied the U.S. government during the COVID-19 pandemic to use a US-Kenya trade deal to expand the plastics industry's footprint across Africa (Industry Lobby the U.S. Government to Make Africa Backslide on Plastics, 2020).

#### **4. Continuity or Change**

After the Webster-Ashburton Treaty, Africa was largely disappeared from the strategic calculus of the U.S. policymakers. This continued until the Cold War, when two superpowers tried to secure their footsteps in the continent. The United States supported African dictators who violated human rights to prevail over the Soviet Union during the Cold War (Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2013; Iyob & Keller, 2006; Edozie et al., 2016). After the Cold War, both Clinton and Bush declared that Africa does not have a strategic importance for the U.S. Clinton indicated that the "very little traditional strategic interest in Africa" and that "America's security interests in Africa are very limited" (*United States Strategy for*

*Sub-Saharan Africa*, 1995). During this time, the U.S. pursued a selective engagement policy with Africa in its best interests. This policy of indifference continued. George W. Bush asserted in an interview, "while Africa may be important, it doesn't fit into the national strategic interests as far as I can see them" (Bush, 2000). Obama changed the rhetoric and said that "Africa is more important than ever to the security and prosperity of the international community, and to the United States in particular," in his Administration's 2012 policy guidance on Sub-Saharan Africa (*2016 Democratic Party Platform*, 2016); yet in practice, Obama practiced the same indifference toward Africa. Obama's election in 2012 with an African and American background created high hopes and expectations in African countries to improve U.S. relations with the African continent. However, Obama did far less than people expected. His fear of his accusation of sympathizing with his African ancestors led him away from Afrocentrism (Austin, 2009; Prendergast & Norris, 2009; Obama, 2004).

Because of Trump's ignorance and his lack of attention to Africa, the bureaucracy and Congress continued the traditional policies during the first two years of Trump's presidency. Trump had a long delay in nominating an Assistant Secretary for Africa at the State Department. Trump has a Twitter presidency. However, in all his tweets, he mentioned Africa only five times. In one of his tweets, Trump referred to the undesirability of receiving more immigrants from 'shithole countries' like Haiti and Africa (Trump, 2018a); even when the comment provoked many protests, he did not deny the mindset. Trump visited few African presidents, and missed to refer to any of the previous American policies, such as human rights or democracy (King, 2018). The subjects he referred to in his meeting with Africans could be summarized into security, immigration, and trade (Trump, 2018b).

Washington's commitment to "promoting human rights and democracy abroad has always been shaky" (Baker & Fortin, 2015). Former presidents occasionally criticized African dictators for arresting journalists and manipulating elections. While they have ignored such problems when they served U.S. security interests (Epstein, 2018), both Obama and Bush sent arsenals and funding to the Ugandan president, Yoweri Museveni, who manipulated his country's constitution to stay in power for life (Solomon, 2018). Both American presidents silenced in facing Museveni's human rights abuses. Ethiopia had parallel protection from U.S. criticism due to its role in the "war on terrorism." Obama praised the "democratically elected" government of Ethiopia "just months after the ruling party suspiciously won 100 percent of the seats in parliament and made a brutal suppression of Muslims and journalists" (Baker & Fortin, 2015). While U.S. humanitarian actions in African countries were deceptive and superficial, this trend has been cut to a significant degree by the Trump administration.

Analyzing one of Trump's meetings with the president of Nigeria better reflects the president's mindset. Trump reversed the U.S. arms sales policy: for example, Nigeria was previously banned from buying arms since it had violated human rights in combatting Boko Haram, but Trump promised to sell the country 12 aircrafts. He urged Nigeria to open its markets to U.S. agricultural exports. Trump also described Kenya as "a wonderful country we do a lot of business with" (*BBC NEWS*, 2018). In all his meetings, the president revealed insignificant real grasp of the issues facing African countries, since he was rather occupied with domestic interests.

In practice, all former presidents were similar to Trump in this

sense; they only had discourse and gesture of human rights proponents, which Trump does not care about, therefore boldly supporting African dictators. In his speech, Trump was indifferent toward exporting "American values" and "human right promotion" to Africa, which existed in the former presidents' speeches. The U.S. presidents' concern for human rights in Africa is designed to appeal to America's political base; Trump is therefore not different from other US presidents. Some of his speeches harm the United States, but in practice, the difference between Trump and Obama on this issue is just rhetorical. The peacebuilding missions of the United States and the United Nations in Africa, as Trump says, are "unproductive, unsuccessful, and unaccountable" (Gass, 2019). The policies of Trump are a continuation of its predecessors with minor changes in rhetoric. China's emergence in Africa also made the existing rivalry competition in Africa more severe for Trump.

## 5. Conclusion

The first question of this research addresses the neoclassical trend of U.S. policies toward Africa. As mentioned, the neo-classical approach indicates that perceptions, threats, misperceptions, norms, and values shape a country's foreign policy. This article looked into the brief systems of the U.S. in history. It concluded that the elements that shaped U.S. strategy toward Africa were the international position of the U.S., threat perception, nationalism, and power competition perception, which have continued in Trump's presidency. Struggle among nations overpower, security and prestige are products of nationalism, and nationalism is a component of structural realist theory. Nationalism fuels rivalry and deepens perceived limitations and threats. The combination of nationalism and power trajectory for the Trump administration led



to power competition in Africa. The self-interest of the U.S. in its policies toward Africa is a product of the neo-classical approach. The most critical angle of Trump's foreign policy toward Africa is trade and investment competition with China.

During the Cold War, concentration on Africa for the U.S. was mainly for preventing African countries from falling in the communist hand. It was based on the perception of rivalry competition. The Trump administration's Africa strategy was also designed to counter Chinese influence on the continent. Trump's strategy is formed on the perception of competition of rivalries. Trump's strategy, "Prosper Africa," is a goal for high power competition" with Russia and China. Africa has always been a battlefield of great powers: during the Cold War, for security issues, and for trade competitions. African policies of the United States have always happened in the context of a cold war among great superpowers. In recent years, U.S. companies have been more active in Africa, and different engagements have happened in the economic sections of the United States and Africa.

The dynamics of US-African relations have changed due to the emergence of perceived threats and rivalries. International actors have become increasingly aware of the importance of Africa and have taken more essential steps for economic and military interaction. Trump therefore fears the competitors in Africa and his country's international failures to diminish their presence in Africa. Trump's perception of geopolitical threats makes him take action in Africa. The United States has increased its military presence in military training and support operations in this competition with China and Russia as the U.S.'s main geopolitical threats.

The U.S. actions in Africa are mainly shaped by the perceptions of leaders regarding security threats and economic interests.

Similar to Obama and Bush, American military activities on the continent concentrated on counterterrorism, stabilization efforts and training, and counterpiracy. U.S. foreign policy toward Africa has been largely driven by geopolitical considerations, but the governments' reasons and motivations have remained the same from Bush to Trump. Tracing how U.S. policy has evolved across the years illustrates the way in which policy toward Africa has been affected over the years by U.S. relations with Europe, the Soviet Union, the Middle East, China, and Russia.

The minor question discussed in this research focused on whether Trump has changed or maintained the existing U.S. policies toward Africa. The research presented in this paper indicates that there is a continuity in the policies of the U.S. toward Africa during Trump administration. Similar to Trump, none of the U.S. presidents has cared about African countries on their own merit, but rather as a field of competition for influence and economic opportunity with other superpowers. Similar to Bush and Obama, Africa is not a priority for the Trump administration. There have been two continuous strategies in U.S. policies toward Africa; Americans tried to have a minimal footprint, no direct engagement and leadership with the help of partners and behind the scene in Africa. In addition, African solutions for African problems continued by the Trump administration. History had shown that the United States noticed the continent when it had strategic or direct economic interests in Africa. In general, U.S. policy toward Africa has not been encouraging; it has been determined by the different views of politicians and policymakers in the United States.

The most distinguishing aspect of Trump's Africa policy was the competition with China, which became an important center for fulfilling the U.S. interests in the wider region. This article therefore argues that the United States had a continuous

neoclassical approach toward Africa, formed by the limitations of international relations, perceptions, and domestic boundaries. The core policy of Trump is the prevention of China and Russia's presence. The U.S. competitive strategy and approach to limit China's presence may have a negative impact on Africa's growth and development.

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