

General Assembly 4: Special Political and Decolonization

*The Question of Removing Large Foreign Influencing
Local Politics of Developing Nations in Africa*

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Model United Nations 2024

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Introduction

As the superpowers continue to attempt to spread their influence in various areas of the world, Africa nations, with abundant natural resources and of great geopolitical importance, are becoming more susceptible to subjugation or neocolonialism. Given the economic state and low stability, with many nations affected by corruption, ethno-religious conflicts and civil wars, foreign powers may utilize this fact to exploit and influence various African nation's local activities.

Being home to over 70 percent of the least developed countries (LDCs) in the world, Africa is largely dependent on foreign aid to function and provide civilians with the simplest needs. In recent years, concerns have been raised about foreign countries financing infrastructure projects, providing aids and loans to Africa with the intention of influencing various sectors of the continent, including trade, primary resources, and politics, threatening their autonomy. A country's sovereignty is a paramount to any form of political stability, and if a foreign nation threatens this stability, it is imperative that an international body (such as the United Nations) come together to suggest a multilateral policy to combat this.

Definition of Key Terms

Debt-trap diplomacy

Involves a powerful country or institution extending debt to a borrowing nation with the intention to increase its political leverage.

Subordinate Political Power

Political power that is often limited, subject to external control, and carried out with the influence of an exterior, more powerful body.

Sovereignty

A government's possession of control over affairs within a territorial area or limit; this includes authority over actors and the activities within the country's borders.

Neocolonialism

Involves a larger, more established country subtly propagating socio-economic and political activity of a less developed country, usually with the intention to have control over them.

Subjugation

The act of oppressing and controlling a country or its people in a way that allows them no freedom or rights.

Client State

A country that heavily relies on a larger and more powerful country for support, aid and protection.

Good Governance

Refers to the political and institutional processes carried out by countries to guarantee the realization of human rights in a manner that is free of abuse and corruption.

Hegemony

The position of being the strongest and most powerful, therefore having the authority to influence or control others.

Background Information

The Scramble for Africa in the late 19th century for example saw multiple European powers (Britain, France, Germany, Belgium and Portugal) seeking to colonize African territories, viewing the continent as a means of expanding their political ideals. Africa's colonizers imposed colonial boundaries, exploited resources and established colonial administrations, influencing Africa's political landscape and gaining direct control of the African economy and politics in the process. Furthermore, European powers saw colonialism as an opening for them to find a market for their goods, often binding their client states to unfair trade practices that mostly cater to the European powers. In addition to this, the African economy was only further debilitated as colonists restricted Africa to the confines of being a means of raw materials and tied them down to only producing primary goods as opposed to manufacturing products. To this day, Africa largely consists of consumer countries that rely on foreign goods, making them susceptible to exploitation.

Due to colonists, most of the politics in Africa became a projection of the politics displayed in the countries colonizing them. Many African countries were subjected to colonial powers imposing their own political system on African societies by either modifying or completely replacing their existing political systems. This typically involved repressive laws which enabled the government to censor media, ban public meetings and detain political leaders. In the event that a colonial regime came under threat, their response would be intimidation or violence.

Multiple countries, such as Kenya and Nigeria, saw colonial governments, particularly those from Britain and France, attempting to rig or manipulate elections to ensure that preferred candidates emerged victorious. Furthermore, to this day, a number of African countries still practice the colonial-era legislation written in their statute books, the same ones which restricted basic freedom and limited the rights of civilians.

However, even after Africa had gained independence, countries that sought to exploit the continent still prevailed and began to rear their heads during the wake of the Cold War. In the midst of the Cold War, numerous African nations became battlegrounds for ideological and geopolitical competition between the US and the Soviet Union. Both parties utilized proxy wars in order to weaken their opposing nations, and majority of the African continent became the superpowers' own makeshift battlefield, wherein the US and the Soviet Union played kingmakers, financing and overseeing coups in order to install biddable rulers that aligns with their respective ideologies, in addition to bribing local strongmen with a military background and authoritarian instincts to carry out their interests. This was the case in the Angolan Civil War (1975-2022), which involved the Soviet Union and the US supporting opposing parties (the Soviet Union supporting the MPLA and USA the UNITA).

The superpowers never fought head-on but sponsored wars between their client states in Africa, essentially reducing the continent to war zones, disrupting food production, causing famines, and resulting in millions of deaths in the proxy wars. Havoc was wreaked upon African politics, the process of decolonization was skewed, and potential democracies were snuffed out. Any prior impetus for Africa to recover subsequent to their colonial period was extinguished and African development was set back multiple years.

The previously stated Angolan Civil war had destabilized southern Africa, causing almost one million deaths, displacing four million and leaving the country in ruins. Being one of the more prolonged proxy wars of the Cold War (twenty-seven years), the casualties were severe, and reparations were costly. Even after the conflict subsided, the Soviet-backed de facto government (MPLA) was criticized for allegedly being involved with human rights abuses and corrupt practices.

Current situation:

It is more urgent to improve nuclear security measures and international collaboration considering the ongoing threat of nuclear terrorism by non-state actors. Currently in Iran, the international deal known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) is designed to stop Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. Concerns have been expressed regarding the future of nuclear security in the region, nevertheless, due to the United States' recent withdrawal from the deal and the difficulties that followed in putting it into practice. The complexity of the scenario is further increased by insider threats, the difficulties associated with decommissioning ageing nuclear sites, and the disposal of waste.

The People's Republic of China, along with Russia seeks to upend Western democracy and rattle their geopolitical rivals, conversely, Western powers are adamant in fostering democracy in African countries, all the while attempting to halt China's and Russia's influence, as they play a big role in putting democracy in Africa under threat.

External powers utilize multiple means of gaining control of countries in Africa, and this includes financing infrastructure projects, lending loans, and becoming indulging in trade. One of the most significant players in Africa is China. Chinese influence has been expanding, particularly in the context of the Belt and Road Initiative, and this has implications for the economic and political landscape in Africa. Having been a holder of 21 percent of Africa's debt as of 2021, and serving as Africa's biggest trading partner, concerns have been raised regarding the possibility of China inculcating authoritarianism in institutions, including political parties and the police. Furthermore, there is also the issue of China potentially putting African countries in a debt trap, and in this way, China would be able to exercise their powers further, whether it be stationing military bases in African countries or threatening to remove Chinese investors or aid in the event that something undesirable happens, such as in the case of the 2006 Zambia election.

When it comes to resource exploitation, Africa, being a country rich in resources naturally became susceptible to foreign resource-grabbing. July 2023 saw a coup in Niger in response to the Nigerian government doing little to nothing while France plundered Nigerian resources, specifically Uranium. In the process of the coup, the Nigerian president, his family and supporting parties were detained, and the US, France as well as multiple other EU nations halted supplying the country with aid.

In addition to this, recently, allegations of foreign powers manipulating and interfering with elections have been reported in various African countries, involving support for specific candidates, usually ones that align with their political ideals, disinformation campaigns and attempts to manipulate electoral processes. For one, the 2018 Madagascar election saw one of Russia's most overt attempts of influencing elections, involving the spread of propaganda, disinformation campaigns, paying young people to attend rallies as well as attending campaign offices with armed bodyguards to bribe challengers to drop out of the election in order to clear their candidate's path. The influencing of elections, whether it be through direct or indirect means is a pressing issue that may contribute to political instability and governance challenges.

Major Parties involved and their views

United States of America:

Historically, the United States have supported authoritarian regimes, such as those in the Cold War, to combat Soviet Influence. This contributed to political instability and oppressive regimes in the nation. Recently, although the US have provided Africa with a substantial amount of aid, there have been concerns raised in regard to them selling arms to African governments, including those with a poor human rights record.

The People's Republic of China

Being Africa's largest sponsor, biggest trading partner, bilateral lender and holder of 21 percent of Africa's debt, China has undoubtedly aided in the infrastructures built and the technological developments in the African continent. However, many concerns (most of which raised by Western powers) arose in concern of them potentially putting African nations in a sort of debt-trap diplomacy, subjecting their client states to economic and political exploitation. This is largely due to the fact that China provides little transparency in Chinese projects in Africa.

African Union (AU)

Being Africa's continental union, the AU promotes growth and economic development within the country, establishing frameworks ranging from those that encourage independence and reduction of overdependence on foreign aid, to anti-corruption measures that are to be practice in member states.

Russian Federation

Compared to China and the US, Russia's economic engagement in Africa were limited, however, in recent years, Russia have been accused of interfering in elections, as well as supporting authoritarian regimes within the African continent, such as those in Sudan and Libya.

French Republic

As a member state of the European Union, France, as well as several other European nations have provided Africa with a substantial amount of aid. France, however, have faced mass criticism from the civilians of Niger for allegedly exploiting the country's Uranium. As such, an oppositional force rose and replaced the French-leaning government of Niger, which resulted in France, the US and other EU countries to withdraw their aid.

Djibouti

Being in close relations with China, Djibouti acts as a strategic location in terms of geopolitics for China's trade and economic interests. Recently, concerns have been raised when China opened their first overseas military overseas base, as it is seen as an effort to protect their interests and further gain influence in Djibouti.

Sudan

Sudan's authoritarian government, which have been accused of human rights abuses, have been reported to be supported by Russia, who had allegedly been providing the regime with diplomatic and military support, prolonging the conflicts within the country.

International Monetary Fund (IMF)

The IMF introduced the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) to various African countries. The program entailed policy conditions including privatization and trade liberalization which were intended to reduce inflation, stimulate economic growth and balance the government budget. However, the SAPs have been criticized for having further plunged the countries into poverty, debt and social unrest.

United Nations (UN)

Having been involved in aiding Africa on many occasions, the United Nations has established multiple frameworks such as the UNCAC, to combat corruption, aid programs, and debt-relieving initiatives, which were created with the intent to support and assist developing nations, including African nations, in their development, as well as reduce their dependency on external actors.

Timeline of Relevant Events

Date	Description
1885	<p>The Scramble for Africa</p> <p>In the mid-1880s, European countries sought to occupy and establish control over various parts of Africa. Over the course of the colonial era, various countries, especially those under the rule of Great Britain and Belgium, were largely or completely stripped of their independence, and were controlled by a single-party state, with the colonizer as the overseer. Colonial governments were oppressive and would often use violent means to achieve their goals. Attempts to challenge the government were either dismissed or met with violence. Furthermore, colonizers were attracted to Africa’s mineral-rich lands and resources, deeming the place optimal to produce primary resources and plantations. Throughout the colonial period, African resources were plundered, and Africans received little to no compensation for their resources. African countries also engaged in trade with their European colonizers, but the terms of trade were often unfair and exploitive. Furthermore, the first electoral voting interferences in Africa happened during its colonial period, wherein countries such as France or Britain attempted to influence elections.</p>
1945-1960	<p>Decolonization of Africa</p> <p>Subsequent to the Second World War, African countries received independence from their European rulers. The process of decolonization varied from peaceful dismantling to revolution.</p>

<p>12 Mar 1947 – 25 Dec 1991</p>	<p>Cold War The Cold War saw foreign superpowers seeking to spread their influence in various countries across the world, eventually leading to proxy wars and ideological conflicts, most of which were fueled by the Soviet Union and the US. A number of African countries were affected.</p>
<p>1960 - 1965</p>	<p>Congo Crisis This proxy conflict saw the Soviet Union and the United States supporting opposing belligerents, supplying them with weapons and military advises, prolonging the conflict and resulting in over 100,000 deaths.</p>
<p>1975 - 2002</p>	<p>Angolan Civil War This proxy war was yet another conflict in which the US and the Soviet Union was directly involved in. The US believed that should Angola fall into communism, this would lead to a ‘domino effect’, threatening democracy in the rest of southern Africa. The war was fought between capitalist and communist-leaning parties and was continuously being supplied by the two superpowers.</p>
<p>1980</p>	<p>Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) established Established by the IMF and the World Bank, SAPs were introduced in multiple developing countries to promote economic growth. In Africa’s case however, it was believed to have backfired and put African Countries into further economic turmoil.</p>
<p>2013 - present</p>	<p>African countries sign China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) After it was introduced to them, several African countries, such as Angola, Gabon and Ethiopia, signed the BRI in hopes of gaining economic growth within their respective nations.</p>
<p>1 August 2017</p>	<p>China opens military base in Djibouti The People’s Liberation Support Base in Djibouti, operated by China’s People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) was their first overseas military base, established with the intention of increasing China’s power projection in the Horn of Africa and in the Indian Ocean.</p>

21 March 2018	<p>The African Continental Free Trade Area signed</p> <p>Established to reduce dependency on exports, the AFCFTA was expected to boost intra-African trade by 52 percent, lift 30 million Africans out of poverty and generate \$450 billion income in 2035.</p>
2018	<p>Russia intervenes 2018 Madagascar election</p> <p>In the process of the 2018 Madagascar election, it was reported that Russia had attempted to influence the outcome. Russian political operatives were allegedly offered money to presidential candidates and spread propaganda in hopes of their preferred candidate winning.</p>

Related UN Treaties and Events

- **United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC):** The UNCAC was established to combat corruption, including international and domestic cases. The convention involves preventative measures, international cooperation, criminalization and law enforcement.
- **The African Continental Free Trade Area (AFCFTA) Agreement** is a framework that aims to foster intra-African trading, reducing the countries dependency on foreign exports and therefore reducing foreign influence.
- **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI):** Subsequent to its adoption, several African countries has signed the BRI in hopes of receiving loans, filling infrastructure gaps and boosting their economy. It has a stated objective of “[constructing] a unified large market and make full use of both international and domestic markets, through cultural exchange and integration.” The BRI raised concerns in its lack of transparency and was believed to serve to facilitate China’s export of its authoritarian model.
- The **African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM)** sought to assess and review governance in its member states to promote political stability, economic growth and good governance. This mechanism reviews democracy, political governance, economic management and socio-economic development within member nations.

- **Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs):** The SAPs were established by the International Monetary Fund and The World Bank to give loans to countries facing economic crisis. It was aimed to adjust the country's economic structure and foster international competitiveness. It was criticized, however, for putting Africa into further debt and economic crisis.

Previous Attempts to solve the issue

Several organizations have recognized the importance of reducing foreign influence in African politics, and a lot of related policies promote domestic trade of goods to limit the amount of foreign influence and exploitative trading terms proposed by external actors. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AFCFTA), signed in March 2018 by members of the African Union, was, for example, designed to reduce dependency on external markets, providing member states with more economic autonomy.

In addition to this, the AU has also taken several actions to encourage transparency and conformity within the continent, involving political, economic and corporate governance values. The mandate of the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) for example, entails that member states are to be reviewed periodically to detect early signs of pending political or economic crises and political instability. In recent years, the APRM has spurred government reform, strengthened government institutions and held governments accountable for pledges and promises.

Other than the AU, the United Nations also initiated the Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) in October 2003, which criminalizes corruption-related offenses, including bribery of national or foreign public officials. The UNCAC addresses cross-border corruption of all sorts and seeks to enhance the facilitation of trends involving corruption on a multilateral level, which is imperative in maintaining political stability within nations.

Possible Solutions

One of the biggest reasons why larger, more powerful foreign entities can influence African countries is because of their dependence on foreign aid and exports. As such, reducing dependence on foreign countries is a surefire way to remove their influence on the continent itself. There are multiple ways to go about this, one of which involves creating a framework dedicated to further encouraging intra-African trade to promote self-sufficiency, all the while strengthening local businesses and the domestic economy. In addition to this, policymakers should consider delegating their funds to strong and resilient domestic institutions that can govern and address the needs of their civilians effectively. Robust institutions factor into political stability, which reduces vulnerability to external influence.

Suggested Reading

- *Neocolonialism* | *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. <https://iep.utm.edu/neocolon/>

This article gives further context on neocolonialism in Africa, including its history as well modern events relating to it.

- Scott, Caitlin Dearing, and Caitlin Dearing Scott. “Does China’s Involvement in African Elections and Politics Hurt Democracy? | Democracy in Africa.” *Democracy in Africa | a Resource for the Study of Democracy in Africa*, 27 Sept. 2021, <https://democracyinafrica.org/does-chinas-involvement-in-african-elections-and-politics-hurt-democracy/>

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This article goes in to detail multiple different ways in which foreign dependency in African countries can be reduced.

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