

Africa's development trajectory."<sup>53</sup> China tries not to act like a 'grab-it-all' power, but rather like a trade partner exclusively interested in conducting business. Furthermore, as Taylor underlines, "China's renewed interest in Africa coincided with an upsurge of western interest in promoting liberal democracy and human rights,"<sup>54</sup> a measure perceived as neo-imperialism by developing countries, especially authoritarian regimes. China took advantage of this context and re-assured many of its African trade partners that its sole interest is in business transactions. Beijing has also avoided framing its approach from a human rights standpoint and preferred emphasizing "economic rights" and "rights of subsistence" of developing countries.<sup>55</sup> Consequently, many African powers view China's presence as a chance to disengage from the West and its constant political demands, leaving China to balance its need for resources with "diplomacy to court African leaders."<sup>56</sup>

The advantage of not being associated with colonialism and imperialism could have been a double-edged sword and disadvantaged China because it does not possess the historical linkages with strategic oil-exporting countries like European powers. However, China made the best of it by approaching its African partners as an independent business relationship. In the same vein, China has had access to countries where American and European companies are absent due to political instability and human rights violations. Some North African countries like Libya and Sudan have been isolated by American foreign policy; yet, as

with the Iranian case, China has tremendously benefited from this vacuum to seize important deals and gain assets<sup>57</sup>. Unlike the Middle East, oil upstream markets are wide open for foreign investments in North Africa. As exploration is more risky, China has seized opportunities to invest in upstream markets, often becoming the most important investor<sup>58</sup>. Indeed, North Africa is particularly in need of investment. Unlike its Middle Eastern counterpart where the oil sector is saturated, Africa has mostly been enthusiastic, and welcomed Chinese foreign direct investment to invigorate its neglected sectors, especially oil.

Given the uniqueness of the Middle East in relation to oil sustainability, geographical proximity, and strategic location, it is difficult for China to move away from the Middle East. The Beijing Consensus is especially appealing to developing states because it does not involve immediate political change. Unlike the Cold War era, current Chinese foreign policy is more concerned with economic development than ideology.<sup>59</sup> Both China and the Middle East have a clear preference for "a faster pace of economic reform compared to political change,"<sup>60</sup> which creates space for increasing cooperation.

In addition to oil, both economies complement each other because Persian Gulf states are huge markets with medium populations, striving for articles of production and daily use, which China produces cheaply and efficiently. The oil states are major consumers of Chinese

<sup>53</sup> Naidu and Davies, 'Who was the real winner in China?' China Monitor 13, Centre for Chinese Studies, University of Stellenbosch, 2006, pp. 70.

<sup>54</sup> Taylor (2006), pp. 939.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, p. 939.

<sup>56</sup> Naidu and Davies, China fuels its future with African riches, South African Journal of International Affairs 13(2). 2006, Pp 80.

<sup>57</sup> Salman, M., Moritz, P., and Gustaaf Geeraerts. "Hedging in the Middle East and China-U.S. Competition." *Asian Politics & Policy* 7, 4: 575–596. (2015)

<sup>58</sup> Zhao (2007)

<sup>59</sup> Hontu (2010)

<sup>60</sup> Sager, Abdulaziz. 2010. 'GCC-China Relations: Looking beyond Oil-risks and Rewards', in Abdulaziz, Sager, Geoffrey, Kemp (eds), China's Growing Role in the Middle East. Washington, DC: Nixon Center, 2010, Pp.21.