

The New Cold War? Strategic Competition and the Future World Order: Evidence from the Horn of Africa

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Four points frame my thoughts on strategic competition for Africa and the emergence of a new Cold War. Firstly, a bird's-eye view of the historical context of strategic competition for Africa would reveal three key aspects: colonialism, the rivalries of the Cold War era, and the current dynamics of attraction towards Africa from the West – as well as from the East – mainly for its rich raw materials, including precious gems, e.g. gold, diamonds, etc. and shaping the continent's role in geopolitical tensions. Secondly, a very brief discussion on Africa's significance as not only the cradle of humanity but also a pivotal player in shaping the emerging New World Order would highlight the potential implications for global leadership. That includes the geopolitical, economic, and historical factors of the region. Thirdly, on the basis of that information, I intend to deconstruct the transnational security threats of Africa. Finally, I highlight the implications of this strategic competition for the future world order.

ONE: OVERVIEW OF STRATEGIC COMPETITION

One can easily observe the colonization of Africa spanning from 1885 to 1914 in Figure 1 below. By simply scanning the map, you can notice that the areas marked in green denote French influence, while those in red represent British imperialism. Other colonial powers such as Belgium – light green; Germany – dark brown; Italy – yellow, Portugal – orange; and Spain – dark red. The only independent countries by then were Ethiopia and Liberia designated in grey colors in the map.

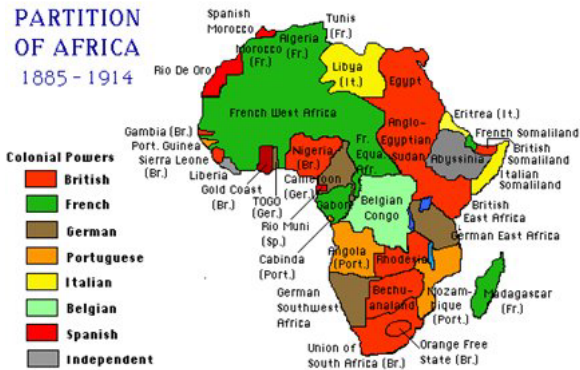


Figure 1. *Partition of Africa: 1885-1914*. Source:

<https://multimedialearningllc.wordpress.com/2010/08/30/imperialism-in-africa-map-1885-1914/>

Moving forward to the period from 1945 to 1989, a similar scenario persisted. Consider the map in Figure 2: NATO and the Warsaw Pact illustrates the division of alliances. In Africa, areas aligned with the United States are marked in blue, while those associated with the Warsaw Pact represent Soviet allies during the first Cold War. The very essence of the Cold War lies in its name. Though the term may suggest a lack of direct conflict, for those of us experiencing its consequences, it is far from “cold.” The beneficiaries dictate the terms, determining who becomes a satellite, who follows, and who facilitates the exploitation of resources. This perpetuates a colonial mentality, continuing the legacy of subjugation and exploitation, the most serious being mental enslavement and colonialism. Thus, decolonization extends beyond physical liberation to include the liberation of minds and hearts from oppressive ideologies.

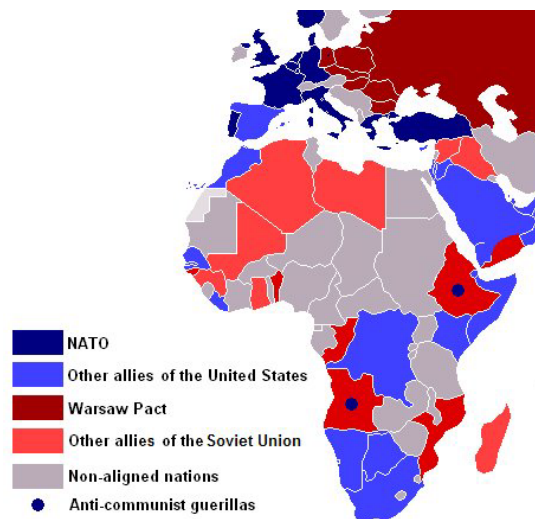


Figure 2. *Strategic Political Competition for Africa*. Source:

https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Cold_War_Africa_1980.PNG

As we read this piece, do we discern and feel a resurgence of such dynamics in the contemporary world? Consider this: solely within the Horn of Africa, there are approximately 11 foreign military bases. Glance through the region, and you will find 13 countries with established presences across Africa, serving various purposes. Moreover, there are 34 known U.S. outposts spread across Northern, Western, and other parts of Africa. In the 21st century, the echoes of the Cold War reverberate unmistakably. It is worth pondering further, as my aim is to ignite discussions and stimulate ideas rather than simply provide facts on the ground in the sub-region, as I have been tasked to do.

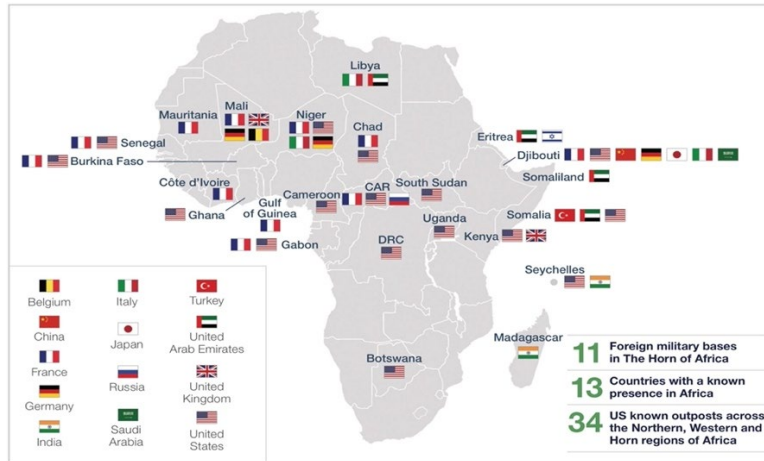


Figure 3. Military Bases in the Horn of Africa. Source: collected from various sources and collated by the author (Adeto, 2019¹) and his assistant (Hussein, 2023²)

TWO: GEOPOLITICAL, ECONOMIC, AND HISTORICAL FACTORS

Geopolitical, economic, and historical facts on the ground in the continent act as a center of gravity for the great power players of the new Cold War era. Take, for instance, the Horn of Africa, where these forces converge. The Horn of Africa is the only sub-region of the African continent where two new independent states, Eritrea and South Sudan, emerged in the post-Cold War era, alongside a *de facto* independent state: Somaliland. Moreover, some of the countries in the Horn, such as Sudan, are in all-out civil war at the time of writing; while others are struggling with state fragility and decay.

In terms of historical aspects, the colonial legacy looms large once again. Take, for example, Somalia, or Kenya. If we focus on Somalia alone, consider the Somali ethnic group, which spread across Ethiopia, Somalia, Kenya, and Djibouti – one ethnic group divided among four sovereign states. This division of the same identity group across the sub region has led to a phenomenon, known as irredentism. This has brought about enduring consequences and continues to fuel tensions and conflicts at present, taking a different shape, i.e. violent extremism led mainly by al Shabaab, an affiliate of al Qaeda. Such divisions contribute to state fragility and security concerns, exacerbated by issues like piracy on the Indian Ocean, the Red Sea as well as the Gulf of Aden. Globally, the sub-region is closely watched for its

abundant resources, particularly in the Blue Economy, fertile agricultural land, petroleum, and hydrocarbon reserves. Spillover effects from and influence of the Middle East, the United States, Russia, and China underscore significance of Africa in general and the Horn of Africa in particular as a hotbed of resource competition.

THREE: TRANSNATIONAL SECURITY THREATS

Political trends, as evident from a multitude of summits – the U.S.-Africa Summit, Russia-Africa Summit, China-Africa Summit, Turkey-Africa Summit, UK-Africa Summit, and India-Africa Summit – underscore the continent’s strategic significance. Furthermore, these forums focused on development aid at surface-level, highlighting Africa’s importance on the global stage. Cultural, social, and economic factors also wield substantial influence, with climate-induced crises, conflicts, terrorism, and violent extremism breeding transnational security challenges. The entanglement of various nations in regional conflicts underscores the complex dynamics of alignment and competition within Africa.

The reverberations of the Russia-Ukraine conflict underscore Africa’s positioning as perceived by Western powers. Looking ahead, Africa emerges as a crucible in the shaping of the new Cold War, given its economic prowess and strategic resource wealth. The ebb and flow of great powers, historical precedents, and internal conflicts all contribute to Africa's pivotal role in global alliances and conflicts.

FOUR: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE WORLD ORDER

The current realities of pandemics, exemplified by COVID-19, necessitate strategic cooperation rather than confrontation. The far-reaching consequences of climate-related challenges, compounded with global poverty and hunger, underscore the need for innovative technological and economic solutions. However, reliance solely on strategic competition, often showcased through displays of military prowess, has proved insufficient in addressing global inequalities. An alternative approach is imperative, one that embraces the African philosophy of Ubuntu, which is deeply rooted in the principles of Pan-Africanism, embodying the African ethos of peace – “I am because you are” – celebrating diversity and interconnectedness.

Finally, the strategic competition for the future world order needs to focus on advocating for and promoting the celebration of diversity and the resolution of deep and structural differences through inclusive dialogues so as to safeguard humanity and our planet from the looming threats of extinction, calamity, and catastrophe as we observe in the world today. It is my sincere hope that we draw a lesson from our past, i.e. colonialism and its devastating effects on the peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America; the two World Wars and the use and/or threat to use atomic and or nuclear weapons; and the old

Cold War and its unhealthy rivalries. So as to avert the new Cold War, what might be inferred from the above analysis is cooperation, peaceful interaction, and celebration of diversity as the linchpin for ensuring not just survival of our planet and human race, but global peace and prosperity for all.

NOTES

1. Yonas A. Adeto, "State Fragility and Conflict Nexus: Contemporary Security Issues in the Horn of Africa," *African Journal on Conflict Resolution* 19/1 (2019):11-37.
2. Mossa N. Hussien, "Back to Bases: Ethiopia's Security and the Geopolitics of Foreign Military Bases in the Horn of Africa." Unpublished PhD diss., Bahir Dar University, Ethiopia.