



## ARTICLE

# China, Other BRIC Nations, and Africa's Natural Resources: Continuation in the Politics of Allies as Rivals

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## Abstract

Since their establishment, many studies have looked at the activities of the so-called BRIC countries, i.e., Brazil, Russia, India, and China. While most of these have focused on their impacts on a changing world, others have looked into how they have confronted (or are confronting) the existing global hegemony. Not many, however, have investigated the intense rivalries that sometimes characterise their relationship. An aspect of this is what this article intends to address, focusing attention specifically on how Africa's natural resources have been at the centre of hidden and open controversies between them. The central argument the article advances is that individual national interests of specific BRIC nations, rather than the prestige of the superficial membership of an informal group, plays a very major factor in determining the relationship between China and other BRIC countries as they relate to Africa's natural resource politics. The article also argues that, in the long run, China runs the risk of losing out in the rivalry with other BRIC countries in Africa, especially against the background of increasing anti-Chinese sentiments on the continent.

**Keywords:** BRIC, China, Natural Resource, Nigeria, India, Brazil

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Undoubtedly, one of the most important developments of the post-Cold-War era is the "recognition" given to the emergence of Brazil, Russia, Indian and China. Intentionally, this article has used the word "recognition", instead of "emergence" because the countries had long "emerged" as global actors before

Jim O'Neil's famous article drew global attention to them with the coinage of the acronym "BRIC".<sup>1</sup> While not going into the nature and politics of their evolutions as strong global actors, subjects that have been covered by other scholars,<sup>2</sup> at least four considerations qualify the countries for the recognition they have been accorded in recent years. These are: the significant ways through which they have transformed their respective

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<sup>1</sup> Oneil, Jim (2001), "[Building Better Global Economic BRICs, Global Economics](#)", *Paper No: 66* (Goldman Sachs), November

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Shahrokhi, Manuchehr, Krishnan Dandapani and Yochanan Shachmurove (2017), "The evolution and future of the BRICS: Unbundling politics from economics", *Global Finance Journal*, March 2017

national economics; the role they are playing in their respective regions – where they are now sometimes more respected than the previous super-powers; the extent of their abilities to reach out to other regions outside their own; and their comparative military strengths. Ironically, however, beyond the fact that they have all been able to transform their national economies, BRIC countries, indeed, have very little in common. For example, some underwent colonialism, others did not; some had socialist or communist economic ideologies at one time or another in their histories, others never did; some have variance of Western democracies, others do not; and some, like China and Russia, were historically powerful countries that only attained new positions through the massive turn around in their economies, while others, like India and Brazil, were new actors who just emerged without much post World War II historical antecedents of being great. It should be noted that this current article is specifically interested in this original BRIC grouping, rather than the BRICS that included South Africa (referred to briefly in section one below). This is due to the article's primary interest in rivalries between global actors and their impacts in Africa; rather than the role and/or impact of regional African powers within the continent.

Increasingly, the divergence in the activities of BRIC nations are now becoming more prominent into the focus of international attention.<sup>3</sup> This article follows this trend by focusing attention on how the most prominent of the group, China, has been engaged in rivalries and competitions with other members over access to, and exploitation of Africa's rich natural resources endowment. Discussion in the article comes in six broad sections. In the first, is a discussion of how, despite open exhibition of friendship, BRIC countries have grounds of fundamental disagreement, while in the second is an exposition of China as a dominant player in relation to other BRIC. The nature of Africa's natural resources as they relate to BRIC countries forms the basis of the discussion in the third section, while the fourth interrogates the competition between China and other BRIC countries over Africa's resource. The fifth section concentrates attention on how African countries have reacted to the controversies while the sixth concludes discussions. The central conclusion this article asserts is

that China has always found itself engaged in an unending controversy with other BRIC countries over access to Africa's natural resources, with African countries - in the effort to benefit from these rivalries - often ending up losing out. The article also argues that there are now growing anti-China attitudes in Africa, and this can, in future, redress the balance in favour of China's opponents on the continent.

## 2. BRIC: BROAD GROUNDS OF DISAGREEMENTS AND RIVALRIES AMIDST BOISTEROUS DISPLAY OF SUPERFICIAL CAMARADERIE

Although the BRIC share common broad worldviews supporting a greater representation of the developing world in the international community, they have fundamental differences, geopolitical rivalries, and competition that deeply undermine their cooperation and partnership. Despite the progress they have made in the global economy and in their own national developments, and despite the closeness they often try to portray, there are often intense rivalries that are rooted in history, geo-politics and engrained national interests. There is also great mistrust and tensions in the bilateral relations within the BRIC alignment as they view each other as potential threats and competitors. The intensity of the rivalries and the apparent display of friendship between them have made some to coin the phrase *Fre-enemies* (combination of friends and enemies) to describe the complex relationship between them.<sup>4</sup> The divergence of their attitude to the membership of the informal group has been well-captured in Ian Brenner's famous quote that "Brazil wants to be a player; India wants to catch up; Russia wants to be a bully; China wants to be the boss"<sup>5</sup>.

Broadly, the roots of divergence between and among the BRIC countries are rooted to at least five considerations. First, they "were brought together"; not that "they came together". Before Jim O'Neil's recognition of their importance and combined potentials, the countries never saw the need to come together as a bloc. Consequently, it was after they came together that they started looking for factors that united them, and they realised that beyond the external

<sup>3</sup> See, Bordachev, Timofei, Victoria Panova and Dmitry Suslov (2020), "BRICS and the Rivalry Pandemic", Valdai Discussion Club Report. Available <https://valdaiclub.com/files/29815/> (Accessed 21/10/2021)

<sup>4</sup> "Despite the happy photos and handshakes, the BRICS are frenemies in trade", Quartz India, 09/07/2015.

Available <https://qz.com/india/447898/despite-the-happy-photos-and-handshakes-the-brics-are-frenemies-in-trade/> (Accessed 10/06/2019)

<sup>5</sup> Brenner, Ian (2013) The underappreciated tensions between China and Brazil, Reuters, May 28. Available <https://www.reuters.com/article/column-brenner-india-china-brazil-idINDEE94R0GT20130528> (Accessed 10/06/2019)

realisation of their economic potentials, the grounds for convergence were actually limited. Second, they all attained their current positions because they had stayed loyal to an economic pattern which they were not ready to depart from. This thus meant that no amount of peer pressure from any other member of the informal BRIC alliance would make any of them jettison an economic formulae that has brought fame and progress. As will be shown later, this has become a factor for divergence between them. The third factor is the ideological divisions. China and Russia are authoritarian countries that practice variants of state capitalism, while India and Brazil are large, fractious democracies. These differences in political values among the BRIC countries already made the democratic India, Brazil and a latter addition to the group, South Africa, to “differentiate themselves from the authoritarian China and Russia by using their own separate trilateral group, the IBSA Dialogue Forum, since 2003 as a platform for coordinating positions on several major diplomatic issues”.<sup>6</sup> The fourth factor, is the differences in economic strategies which makes the countries to have different approaches to economic management. With these fundamental political and economic differences, the grouping of these countries does not appear to be an obvious one.

But apart from the above divisions across the board, the fifth consideration here is that there are also a range of bilateral disagreements. Although various forms of rivalries exist among all the countries, the two countries where there are most concerns are India and China. This, in a way, can be understood because these are the two strongest economies, the two most populous and the two that have a string of zero-sum considerations in their relationship. The causes of the rivalries and tensions are broad, but they include: rivalries for Regional Leadership, with both sides wanting to ensure controls of affairs in the South Asian region, Pan-Asian leadership, and contestation is the Strait of Malacca, among others; tensions over Natural Resources; Skewed Trade, with India complaining that China is flooding its market with products that can affect local production but, more importantly, goods that are of poor and of unsafe quality; Unsettled borders; Extent of external

involvement in regional affairs; Military rivalry; and Geo-Strategic rivalry, among others.<sup>7</sup>

Both sides came into the rivalry with advantages and disadvantages. Although China presently has the larger population, it is expected that India’s will surpass it by 2028, thanks to the population control mechanisms of China.<sup>8</sup> Again, China has advantages in science, technology, and national defence capabilities, however, India’s more open and flexible political and economic systems provide the country with increased opportunities for better political performance and economic growth. Also, while China has incorporated its minorities into the Chinese state so that internal security is manageable and its external borders largely secured, India, on the other hand, is bedevilled by long and insecure borders not only with troubled Pakistan, but also with Nepal and Bangladesh, both of which are weak states that create refugee problems for India. Geography has also been a factor in their rivalries and here China seems to have advantages. India cannot match China’s economic and international status with UN Security Council Veto. A rivalry with China in and of itself raises the stature of India because China is a great power with which India can now be compared. Indian elites hate it when India is considered with Pakistan; they much prefer to be hyphenated with China.<sup>9</sup>

There are also *Common Crucial Tests*. Just as a crucial test for India remains the future of Afghanistan, a crucial test for China remains the fate of North Korea. Both Afghanistan and North Korea have the capacity to drain energy and resources away from India and China respectively, though here India may have the upper hand because India has no land border with Afghanistan, whereas China has a land border with North Korea.<sup>10</sup> Thus, “a chaotic, post-American Afghanistan is less troublesome for India than an unravelling regime in North Korea would be for China, which faces the possibility of millions of refugees streaming into Chinese Manchuria”.<sup>11</sup> The two countries have now taken their rivalries to other parts of the world where they are sometimes bitter rivals for markets. In recent years, however, Beijing and New Delhi have mostly managed to compartmentalise their differences.

<sup>6</sup> Mottet, Laetitia (2013), “Cooperation and Competition among the BRICS Countries and Other Emerging Powers”, *French Centre for Research on Contemporary China (CEFC), Interim Report*. Available <https://www.cefc.com.hk/uf/file/researchpapers/BRICS%20report/BRICS%20report.pdf> (Accessed 21/10/2021)

<sup>7</sup> Madan, Tanvi (2020), “Managing China: Competitive Engagement, With Indian Characteristics”, *Brookings Institute: Global China: Regional Influence and Strategy*. Available

[https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/FP\\_202002\\_china\\_india\\_madan.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/FP_202002_china_india_madan.pdf) (Accessed 21/10/2021)

<sup>8</sup> Feng, John (2021), “When Will India Overtake China in Population?”, *Newsweek*, 5<sup>th</sup> November

<sup>9</sup> Kaplan, Robert D. (2021) “India-China Rivalry”, *Daily Star*, April 28

<sup>10</sup> *ibid*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*

The relationship has matured to the point that, while they can jointly advocate for the interests of emerging economies through forums such as the Group of 20 and climate talks, India has the confidence to attend the Nobel Peace Prize awarding ceremony for a jailed Chinese dissident.

Russia and China too have great areas of rivalry, but this has been more in the area of trade, although there are other areas of subtle tension along other lines. Russia has tried to stay out of the rivalry between China and India and quite strategically would want any opportunity to benefit from the friction. The main cause of rivalry between Russia and China has been the desire of China to penetrate into the economy of Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Russia knows that there is no way it can compete with China, so it has made effort to form greater bonds between the CIS in the hope that this would minimise China's influence. In 2010 a Custom Union was established between Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan. This was a geo-political response to China's position in Central Asian trade. There are still difficult negotiations over Chinese imports of weapons from Russia and over the construction of an oil pipeline from Russia to China, which show a certain mistrust in their military and energy cooperation. Russia feels threatened by the economic and military growth of China and it fears being left as a provider of raw materials fuelling Chinese growth.<sup>12</sup>

Even the relationship between China and Brazil has found its own testing moments, especially as to what should be the relationship with the United States. While China recognised that the location of Brazil makes some form of friendship and closeness with the United States inevitable, Beijing also feels that Brazil should recall that "during the periods when it (Brazil) sought international autonomy, it had found in China an attractive partner in criticizing the liberal international order fostered by the United States in the wake of World War II".<sup>13</sup> Although a measure of friendship still remained, the relationship between Brazil and China has been affected, especially since President Jair Bolsonaro assumed office in January 2019. Bolsonaro and his foreign policy team have adopted a strongly pro-U.S. (specifically pro-President Donald Trump) agenda

internationally, including engaging in frequent critiques of China. Domestically:

"the partnership with China has been controversial with some sectors. Specifically, the partnership is criticized by the Brazilian manufacturing sector, which faces strong competition from Chinese products and lacks reciprocal access to Chinese markets, and by nationalist-populist voters who support Bolsonaro. Agricultural export interests, by contrast, favour a strong relationship with Beijing because China is a major market for their products".<sup>14</sup>

From all the above, it can be seen that the common feature in all the discussion is China. This calls for a closer look on how the place of China as an antecedent for the discussion on the rivalries between China and other BRIC nations in the politics of Africa's natural resource endowments.

### 3. THE PRIMACY OF CHINA

"The Chinese have managed to accomplish at least one impressive thing in Africa – they have made everyone else uncomfortable. The Americans are uneasy, worried about (and perhaps jealous of) China's rapid and profitable investments throughout the continent ... Europeans have only to look at trade figures: the share of Africa's exports that China receives has shot from one to fifteen per cent over the past decade, while the European Union's share fell from thirty-six to twenty-three per cent ... Some Africans [too] have become ... unhappy with unbalanced relationships in which China has taken proprietorship of African natural resources using Chinese labour and equipment without transferring skills and technology."<sup>15</sup>

There is no doubt at all that China has attained the position of one of the world's most important actors. Indeed, as of the present times, the three most common words in the world are "Made in China", with some

<sup>12</sup> Alexeeva, Olga, and Frédéric Lasserre (2018), "The evolution of Sino-Russian relations as seen from Moscow: the limits of strategic rapprochement." *China Perspectives* 2018, no. 2018/3, pp. 69-77

<sup>13</sup> Trinkunas, Harold (2020), "Testing the limits of China and Brazil's partnership," *Brookings Institute: Global China: Regional Influence and Strategy*, July 20, 2020. Available

<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/testing-the-limits-of-china-and-brazils-partnership/> (Accessed 10/09/2020)

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

<sup>15</sup> Okeowo A (2013), 'China in Africa: The new imperialists', *The New Yorker*, 12 June

even arguing that in the next few decades to come, these may be replaced by another three words: “Owned by China”. Within BRIC, China is the most important and most controversial country. The perceived aggression with which it is engaging the world is seen by many other countries as calling for disquiet. Indeed, many see BRIC as “China plus others”.

China’s dominance further increased at the time when other BRIC countries faced challenges. For example, Brazil was wracked by corruption scandals and stagnating output during the Petrobras scandal; Russia almost went into recession, owing largely to Western sanctions imposed in response to its intervention in Ukraine; India suffered from a depreciating currency and soaring public debts. China further capitalised on all this to further ensure its grip over BRIC. Indeed, China has seen BRIC as the tool for engaging the world and it is using it with maximum effect. The most important thing about China is that the country has made the whole world uncomfortable: the traditional powers are uncomfortable because of China’s massive aggression across the world; other BRIC countries are uncomfortable because of China’s infiltration into areas traditionally considered their areas of influences; countries in the developing world are uncomfortable because of China’s deep involvement in the politics of their natural resource endowment; and China itself is uncomfortable because the world is not comfortable with its actions.

Whether in global politics, security or economics, China has dictated the affairs of BRIC, even if this is sometimes challenged by other members. Its main rival in the BRIC structure is India and that explains why China is doing everything to keep India in check. India’s close relationship with the United States also explains some of China’s anti-Indian position, including the increasing closeness with Pakistan. What is, however, causing considerable concern is China’s involvement and activities in developing countries, especially Africa in relation to the continent’s natural resources. There can be no doubt that the intentions and activities here are sometimes questionable. There is also no doubt that China is engaging in human rights violations in some countries across the continent.

#### **4. CHINESE ECONOMIC INVESTMENTS AND TRADE RELATIONS WITH NIGERIA SINCE 1999**

Although BRIC countries often have the practice of operating largely in their respective regions, Africa is the region where all the four countries have operated largely (and freely) when it comes to the politics of natural resource extraction. There are, at least, four reasons for this. The first is because of the continent’s enormous natural resource endowment. Africa is extremely rich in solid minerals, especially uranium, used to produce nuclear energy; platinum, used in jewellery and industrial applications; nickel, used in stainless steel, magnets, coins, and rechargeable batteries; bauxite, a main aluminium ore; and cobalt, used in colour pigments. Africa’s two most profitable mineral resources are gold and diamonds. In 2008, Africa produced about 483 tons of gold, or 22 percent of the world’s total production. South Africa accounts for almost half of Africa’s gold production. Ghana, Guinea, Mali, and Tanzania are other major producers of gold.

The continent has about 30% of the world’s known reserves of minerals, about 10% of oil and 8% of gas resources and the largest cobalt, diamond, platinum, and uranium reserves. Diamond producing countries are Botswana, South Africa, Sierra Leone, DRC, Angola, Namibia and Zimbabwe. Africa is also home to select deposits of oil and natural gas, which are drilled for energy and fuel. Key oil producers in the continent include Nigeria, Libya, Algeria, Egypt, and Angola. In the last few years, oil exploration has significantly increased on the continent, and many countries are looking to become first-time producers. Also, the continent has many great rivers, including Nile, the longest in the world, Niger, Benue, Congo, Orange, Limpopo, and Zambezi among others. There are also many great Lakes on the continent. Fishing is the most important relevance of rivers in Africa. Africa’s fishing industry provides income to more than 10 million people and has an annual export value of \$2.7 billion. West Africa is one of the most economically important fishing zones in the world, producing 4.5 million tons of fish in 2000. Namibia and South Africa are also major players in the marine fish market, exporting between 80 and 90 percent of their fish annually. The Eastern African countries of Eritrea, Djibouti, Somalia, and Kenya have well-established fisheries in the Red Sea and Indian Ocean. Despite this enormous endowment, which ordinarily should be a great source of African power and agency, mismanagement and conflicts have underlined the politics of these resources.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> For more of my work on this and related issues around Africa’s natural resource endowment, see, Alao,

Abiodun (2007), *Natural Resources and Conflict in Africa: The Tragedy of Endowment* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press)

The second reason why Africa is of interest to BRIC countries is that these increasingly recognised global actors found in Africa a set of countries that were willing to test a set of collaborative partners. Having tried the Western countries from the period of independence, most African countries are now looking for new external partners. The need for and interest in these alternate partners became all the more pressing when the Western world came up with democratic conditionalities after the end of the Cold War. African countries thus felt the need to seek non-Western allies. The closeness to the set of countries was further justified by African countries on the grounds that the BRIC countries had not participated in historical injustices like slavery and colonialism that had been identified as sources of Africa's retrogression.<sup>17</sup> In short, BRIC countries are looking all over the world for partners but African country's active and deliberate search for new partners has made them particularly appealing.

A third factor in explaining Africa as a source of interest and attraction to the BRIC countries is the weakness of structures in the continent which make its countries vulnerable to external manipulation. Across Africa, governance institutions are weak.<sup>18</sup> The roots of the weakness here can be traced to the nature of the emergence of many of the countries as independent nations, the activities of its inheritance elites (i.e. those who took over the countries at the time of independence), corruption on the part of contemporary political elites, and other considerations. Because of all these, BRIC countries see the African continent as a place where they can quickly exploit the weakness and make huge economic profit. As will be shown later in this paper, this has been an opportunity that all BRIC countries have exploited to their individual advantages. This can also be seen as a major deficit in African agency that has made the continent open to exploitation.

The desire and eagerness of African countries to use their natural resource endowments to get infrastructural developments they believe that they lack constitutes the fourth reason for the deep relationship between BRIC countries and Africa. Realising the lack of capital to undertake development, especially rail transportation and power generation, many African countries have devised ways of exchanging their natural resources for infrastructural development. BRIC countries, especially

China and, to an extent, India have seized this opportunity to get more involved in Africa. As will be shown later in this article, this has been sources of controversies between African countries and key BRIC countries and also among BRIC members contesting for Africa's natural resources. This is somewhat connected to the first point raised above, in that it underlines the possible positive role that Africa's natural resources can play if properly handled.

All the BRIC countries have very close links with Africa. In the case of Brazil, this grew significantly under President Lula da Silva, manifesting in the country opening 17 new embassies in Africa, a step which made Brazil the country with the highest number of embassies on the Continent. Brazil has focused on the extraction of natural resources from Africa and has also relied on Africa's market. Of particular interest to Brazil is the growing interest of Africa's middle class in the meat and poultry materials coming from Brazil. This has accounted for the special interest of Brazil in promoting Africa as a place of business. What is, however, noticeable is that many of the Brazilian companies operating in Africa are state-supported. Indeed, not many private Brazilian companies have ventured to come into the African market. Brazil has been involved in a number of solid mineral resources in Africa. Vale in Guinea's iron ore seems to be one of the most controversial. Vale is also in Mozambique. Brazil is also involved in countries such as Tanzania, Libya, Equatorial Guinea, Mozambique, Senegal, Nigeria, Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, and Togo

Nigeria presents a case that reflects most of the intricacies involved in trading with Brazil as well as other BRIC countries. Attention here is focused on Nigeria because of its importance as the most populous country in Africa and the continent's largest economy. The bulk of Nigeria's trade with Brazil is oil and gas and Nigeria is the largest source of petroleum to Brazil. In the relationship with Brazil (as indeed the relationship with other BRIC) Nigeria has tried to tie its oil trade with Brazil with infrastructural development. Brazil has expressed interest in completing the development of the Zungeru hydropower plant and financing the Mambilla hydropower project under a partnership that would allow the country to help develop Nigeria's power

<sup>17</sup> Khanna, Kartikeya Khanna (2013), "BRICS in Africa: A development dream?" *Overseas Research Foundation (ORF)*, 26<sup>th</sup> March. Available <https://www.orfonline.org/research/brics-in-africa-a-development-dream/> (Accessed 15/05/2018)

<sup>18</sup> This has been discussed at length in a widely circulated World Bank Document titled, "Africa's Pulse: Global

Economic Weakness Continues to be a Drag on Africa's Economic Growth". Available <https://www.worldbank.org/en/region/afr/publication/africas-pulse-an-analysis-issues-shaping-africas-economic-future-april-2016> (Accessed 20/03/20)

industry.<sup>19</sup> In return, Nigeria granted Brazil access to its oil and gas industry in return for the South American country's participation in two hydropower projects. This was particularly important to Nigeria, especially as the government had earlier failed in its promise to double electricity output

On the part of Russia, the country has not been as aggressive as China in pursuing opportunities in Africa, largely because Russia has natural resources and markets in Eastern Europe, and Southwest Asia. Although Russia exports to Africa, it rarely sets up businesses. Specifically, again focusing on Nigeria as something of a case study for the continent, the Soviets were interested in projects related to the development of the country's infrastructures, the ferrous and nonferrous metals industry, electric power generation, including nuclear energy, and the extraction of hydrocarbon and other raw mineral. On its part, Nigeria was interested in such areas as electricity, light industry, and, in fact, across all spectra of bilateral economic cooperation. Russia now seems to be getting uncomfortable at the lower fiddle position it is playing in relationships with other countries and it has decried the low trade volume with Nigeria. As of July 2011, the trade volume between the two countries amounted to \$110 million. Russia exports metals, fertilizers and oil consumables to Nigeria while Nigeria exports agricultural products to Russia. Russian companies such as OAO GMK Norilsk Nickel, Gazprom OAO and Severstal OAO already have operations in Africa. New investments may increasingly focus on the energy industries, with Africa accounting for about 9.7 percent of the world's 1.2 trillion barrels of proven oil reserves and about 7.8 per cent of global gas deposits of 181.5 trillion cubic feet. A string of Russian companies now operating in Natural resources in Africa include: Norilsk Nickel looking into Gold in South Africa and Nickel in Botswana; Sintez in South Africa, Namibia and Angola looking into oil and gas, diamonds and Copper; Lukoil operating in Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana looking into oil, Rusal in Nigeria focusing on Alluminium; Severstal in Liberia operating in Iron, Gazprom in Algeria looking at Natural Gas, Alrosa in Angola looking at Diamonds

On the part of India, the country has been deeply involved in Africa's natural resources and, in particular, it has been involved in the Nigerian Oil sector. The Nigerian Oil and Gas sector is a complex sector to understand and the nature, contents and complexities of external involvement in the sector are all the more difficult to contextualise. While, of course, it is widely

known that oil is at the centre of Nigeria's economy, there have historically been problems with the management of the resource, especially as there have been persistent protests from the oil producing region of the Niger Delta. Over the decades, policies by successive Nigerian governments have also been confusing - with institutions created and disbanded in the endless pursuit to find a workable structure that will satisfy local claim and national interest.

While it is impossible to discuss the complex structure of the Nigerian oil and Gas sector, two issues are discussed here. The first is the efforts that have been made by the immediate past and the present government to ensure that Nigeria's oil export is free from sabotage and protests from the oil producing communities. After decades of protests which also took the form of kidnapping, the government reached a form of agreement with the militants in the Niger Delta region. Two steps taken by the government turned round the form of protests in the region, at least initially. These are the granting of an Amnesty Program and the establishment of a special Federal Ministry dedicated to the development of the region. This Ministry, known as the Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs (MNDA) was established. Although this has not addressed all the problems, as there continues to be unrest in the region, it has, however, become easier for Nigeria to meet up with its obligations to its external clients. The second development worth noting is the opening up of Nigerian oil blocks to foreign investors. In this sector, India is trying to make a decisive entrance, even if this is still at the elementary stages.

India has been deeply interested in Nigeria's oil and the connection between the two countries in the oil and gas sector, in fact, has become is the most important one between them in recent times. Below are figures of the oil trade between the two countries:

Table 1 India's Import of Crude Oil from Nigeria

Year	Quantity (Million Barrels)
1994	23,424
1995	34,179
1996	69,295
1997	56,678
1998	67,142

<sup>19</sup> Okoro, Paul Okoro (2010) "Brazil May Access Nigeria Oil Project Under Hydropower Accord, *Bloomberg News*, August 2010. Available

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2010-08-31/nigeria-may-give-brazil-access-to-oil-gas-deposits-under-hydropower-deal> (Accessed 20/03/2019)

Table 2 India's Import of Crude Oil from Nigeria

Year	Quantity	Value in US\$ Million
1999-2000	15.450	2597.7
2000-2001	12.570	2140.4
2001-2002	11.320	2001.9
2002-2003	11.578	2389.0

To understand the nature and extent of India's interest in Nigeria's oil, it may be necessary to consider the Asian's country's wider interest in the politics of oil in the entire West African sub-region. Against the background of China's wide involvement in Africa (discussed later) India has shown considerable interest in the continent and the oil rich West Africa is topmost in its consideration, including Francophone countries that were hitherto neglected.

Indeed, it is envisaged that India's energy demand is expected to increase by over 40 per cent during the next decade but supply from its ageing oil-fields is expected to increase by around 12 per cent. Presently, India imports about 13 MMT of crude oil from Nigeria annually. Nigeria planned to increase its crude oil production to 4 million barrels per day from 2.7 million barrels per day by 2012.<sup>20</sup> China is, however, the key actor. Between 2001-2012, its:

"Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in sub-Saharan Africa grew by 53 percent annually (compared to 16 percent annual growth for the EU, 29 percent for Japan and just 14 percent in the case of the United States). By 2012, Chinese FDI had risen from about \$27 billion around 2001 to about \$133 billion. Some scholars were already asserting that, as far as large-scale private sector manufacturing was concerned, scant Western involvement in Africa had left China the lone, dominant actor."<sup>21</sup>

Although China now has a major presence in the African resource sector, its investments are unevenly distributed across the continent. The key sectors of Chinese trade with and investment in Africa reflect the dominance of commodities driving Beijing's interests. Leading these is oil, with 80% of the total export value in Sino-African trade, followed by iron ore (5%), timber (5%), manganese, cobalt, copper and chromium (all 0.5-

1%)<sup>22</sup>. Nigeria again plays an important role in this equation because of its dominance as the continent's largest oil producer and also one that has a significant deposits of Iron ore.

While China's import strategy is necessarily global, such that Latin America provides more copper and iron ore exports to the country than Africa, in certain cases China has become dependent on African mineral exports. These include manganese from Gabon, South Africa, Ghana and Zambia, which provides 40% of Chinese import needs, and cobalt from the DRC and other African sources, which currently supplies 80% of China's needs.

## 5. NATURE AND MANIFESTATIONS OF RIVALRIES

It is now widely recognised that there are intense rivalries between the BRIC countries, quite similar to the rivalry that existed during the Cold War period, and the ways the rivalries are manifesting in Africa give some wider cause for concerns. In Nigeria, there were rivalries between India and China over Oil blocks. But apart from China and India, and Russia and China, other BRIC too have major rivalries but because of the spread of the countries, most of these take place in Africa - a neutral region to all the countries.

Although both India and China are involved in extensive trading links with Nigeria, there are very few areas where both are involved in similar enterprises. For example, China has not been deeply involved in enterprises like Fishery, Banking and the Movie and Entertainment business. Even in the crucial area of telecommunication, China is not known to be a major actor. These, as noted earlier are areas of India's major strength. On its part, India too has not been deeply involved in enterprises like Satellite cooperation and agricultural cooperation - areas where the Chinese have considerable advantage. Indeed, it would seem that the only areas where both countries have shown similar levels of commitment are oil and gas and manufacturing. But before discussing the approaches of the two countries to these areas, there is the need to

<sup>20</sup> "Nigeria willing to raise oil exports to India: Deora", The Economic Times, 04/11/14. Available <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/foreign-trade/nigeria-willing-to-raise-oil-exports-to-india-deora/articleshow/6868432.cms> (Accessed 14/11/20)

<sup>21</sup> Onoja, Adagbo (2020), "How China Lost Nigeria", *The Diplomat*, August 25

<sup>22</sup> Alden, Chris and Alves, Ana Cristina (2009), China and Africa's Natural Resources: The Challenges and Implications for Development and Governance, South African Institute of International Affairs, OCCASIONAL PAPER NO 41, September 2009.

discuss the comparative advantage each has over the other in capturing Nigerian business.<sup>23</sup>

Broadly, India has two major advantages over China. The first is that of language. Being an English-speaking country, it is much easier for the Indians to penetrate Nigeria's local market than the Chinese who, often, do not speak the language. The second advantage India has over China in business dealings with Nigeria is the longevity of their relations with Nigeria. Since India has been trading with Nigeria for more than a century, they seem to have mastered the tricks of survival in the murky business of relating with Nigerians, compared to China, whose history of contact with Nigeria is comparatively very recent. China's advantage over India arises from the massive extent of the involvement of the country in Nigeria and the amount of money the country is pumping into business in Nigeria. The entrance of China into the Nigerian market was extensive and strong to intimidate India's financial dealing with the African country in terms of the enormous amount of investment. The second is the advantage China has of being well entrenched in many African countries especially in strategic resources like oil.

It would seem that India realises its limitations of trying to compete with China in Africa, especially as it has not got the financial muscle and diplomatic powers Beijing has. What India thus seems to have done is to target specific areas of interest in Nigeria and remain focused on it without engaging in any outright competition with China. India also seems to have tried taking the diplomatic high ground by trying to avoid the kind of controversy China seems to have courted by dealing with some African leaders with questionable credentials.

A contract Nigeria has signed with both India and China is on the railway business. The agreement signed by the government of Nigeria with the China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation (CCECC) was for \$6 billion. The Chinese experts were expected to rehabilitate the existing rail network, supply 50 locomotives, 150 coaches, 400 wagons and 20 rail buses, and provide technical training for the NRC staff.<sup>24</sup>

But it is also believed that there is one thing both India and China have in common in their link with Nigeria. This is the suspicion that both countries are now becoming havens for Nigeria's stolen money by the country's political elites. With Western banks becoming more critical over foreign lodgements of money, the more permissive Indian and Chinese banks now seem to be the haven for looted treasury money.

## 6. CHINA VERSUS OTHER BRIC IN AFRICA: THE CHANGING NARRATIVE AGAINST CHINA

In looking at the rivalry between China and other BRIC countries in Africa, it seems other BRIC countries may have an advantage over China in relation to local Africans ongoing reactions to the Chinese presence, even if, sometimes, all of them are viewed with suspicion. China's deep involvement in Africa has generated a lot of controversies, some of which are worth recording. First, there are concerns in many African countries that too many concessions are being given to the Chinese, especially on the issue of land. It is worth noting that for Africa, land is the most important natural resource. This is largely because in some societies it has spiritual, political and social importance and also because it is the abode of other natural resources. It is the birthplace; it is where the ancestors are buried; it is where the creator has designated to be passed down to successive generations and the final resting place = for every child born on its surface. So, it is a resource held in trust for future generations. To now see their governments giving land indiscriminately to foreigners is something Africans find disturbing.

There are also issues about the poor treatment of their African staff. This, indeed, has been the subject of Human Rights Watch discussion.<sup>25</sup> In 2006, a Zambian Minister cried on national television when talking about the treatment meted out by Chinese nationals to Zambian workers. Apart from physical beatings, they are being made to work without safety equipment. In 2010, protests by Zambians were met by indiscriminate shooting. There are also allegations that Chinese

<sup>23</sup> Pons, Juan (2020), "India and China are competing in Nigeria for Africa's important space market", Atalaya, 19<sup>th</sup> August. Available <https://atalayar.com/en/content/india-and-china-are-competing-nigeria-africas-important-space-market> (Accessed 02/12/21)

<sup>24</sup> China Firm Signs \$12 Billion Deal To Build A Railway Along Nigeria's Coast, Business Insider, 20/11/14. Available <https://www.businessinsider.com/afp-china-firm-signs-12-bn-deal-to-build-nigerian-railway-2014-11?r=US&IR=T>

(Accessed 02/12/21); Odeleye, Joshua Adetunji (2000), Public-Private Participation to Rescue Railway Development in Nigeria, Japan Railway & Transport Review No.23, March  
<sup>25</sup> Human Rights Watch (2011) "You will be fired if you refuse". Available <https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/zambia1111ForWebUpload.pdf> (Accessed 20/05/2019)

personnel are exploiting the system through corruption, including the bribing of crucial institutions like the police, banking, custom and excise, and defence institutions.

Again, examples across Africa can be summarised through the sentiments being expressed in Nigeria. In the country the sentiment was triggered in late July 2020 by what has become known as the “sovereignty clause” controversy in loan agreements between Nigeria and China. Under this clause the borrower (i.e., the state of Nigeria):

“irrevocably waives any immunity on the grounds of sovereign or otherwise for itself and its property in connection with any arbitration proceeding pursuant to Article 8(5), thereof with the enforcement of any arbitral award pursuant thereto, except for the military assets and diplomatic assets”.<sup>26</sup>

But according to Adagbo Onoja, the discontent has a longer history, drawing on “anger over the timeline of the COVID-19 pandemic in Wuhan, China; questions about Huawei’s participation in 5G networks; claims of uniquely Chinese racial practices against Nigerians; and the image of “China in Africa” more broadly. Various anti-Chinese sentiments were expressed in newspapers talk about “Nigeria’s Abusive Marriage With China and Slave Agreements”. Adagbo quoted a commentator saying: “it is unacceptable that our forefathers fought the White Man to liberate our continent only for our generation to hand over our hard-won liberties to barbarian hordes from Asia”.<sup>27</sup>

The association of China with the outbreak of COVID-19 has also brought its own impact on the way the country is being perceived in Africa, and it has, in a way, reflected the fragility of the country in Africa. The opportunity the United States and the West have made to ensure that the virus is pinned down to China in global discourse have further weakened the “China as African saviour” narrative, and further underlined the possibility of predatoriness in Chinese diplomacy.

Indeed, many African countries are beginning to see more clearly what some now see as the deceit in China’s Africa policy. Indeed, as Adeagbo Onoja has again noted:

“scholars of critical geopolitics such as Marcus Power and Giles Mohan have consistently drawn attention to China’s mastery of the ‘charm offensive,’ invoking powerful narratives

such as non-interference in the internal affairs of other nations; making essentialist reference to sovereignty; refraining from practices that could be (mis) understood as imperialism; and perpetually declaring solidarity with ex-colonial polities. According to these scholars, China has so successfully revised her dominant discourse of ‘peaceful rise’ (later ‘peaceful development’) into the ‘win-win’ framework to legitimate ‘China in Africa’ that Beijing is now a global player in what was hitherto a Western sphere of influence.”<sup>28</sup>

Indeed, the former Governor of Nigeria’s Central Bank, who was later to become a major Traditional ruler in the country, Sanusi Lamido Sanusi, wrote an Op-ed in which he argued that China’s involvement in Africa has a whiff of colonialism. Many African countries are beginning to have a different view of China beyond the Saviour mentality, even though most of them are seemingly incapable, at least as yet, to do anything about it. In summary, having been broadly successful in co-opting African elites and political leaders into seeing China as a friendly ally, the reactions from and agency of local African actors is proving increasingly problematic for Beijing. This could become especially troublesome as that reaction is strongly tied to the mistrust locals often have with those politicians and elites which China has chosen to build their relationship around.

## 7. CONCLUSION

Africa, always at the receiving end of global vicissitudes, has now found itself confronting a new set of external actors, deeply interested in extracting its natural resources. The “traditional” powers that have exploited the take-off advantages they had in the continent as a result of colonialism are still determined to continue their exploitation of the continent’s resources. But now, in addition, a new set of emerging powers, led by China, are making audacious incursions into the continent. Indeed, the pressures on Africa from both traditional and emerging powers now seem to be forcing the continent to make a choice between bad and awful.

This article has focused on the peculiar position of China in relation to other BRIC countries in Africa. Indeed, Africa has significantly opened itself up to BRIC countries because of two inter-connected reasons: first,

<sup>26</sup> Deron, Laure (2020) “Did Nigeria Really Cede Its Sovereignty to China in a Loan Agreement? A legal review of the public debate sparked by a Nigeria-China commercial loan agreement”, *The Diplomat*. 12 August

<sup>27</sup> Onoja, Adagbo “How China Lost Nigeria”, *The Diplomat*, August 25, 2020

<sup>28</sup> Ibid

BRIC countries offered solutions to most of the developmental challenges that African countries are facing; and second, the continent finds many of the BRIC countries' bilateral trading policies more acceptable than those of the traditional allies in the West. It is the attempt by China to ensure that it maintains its upper hand against other BRIC countries that is at the centre of China's subtle rivalries with other BRIC countries in Africa.

China and other BRIC countries have found in Africa a continent that should be handled with tact: while wanting to maximise opportunities from the continent's enormous resources, they also want to give the impression of "partners" who sympathise with the historical injustices that have been perpetrated against Africa, and want to be seen as allies in the continent's determination to chart a new course for itself. Consequently, maximising opportunities, while showing demonstrative understanding of the handicaps of the continent has been the strategy adopted by BRIC countries towards Africa, and this has been at the centre of the rivalries among them. Striking this balance has not always been easy.

Currently, the impression most African people across the continent have is that the deals involving BRIC, and particularly China, is unfairly skewed against them. They believe that they can get better deals from their natural resource endowments if things are better negotiated. Many of the countries are now raising fundamental questions about the arrangements they have made with China, and are beginning to see beyond the façade that had launched them on the path of conceptualising China as something of a saviour. Indeed, taking a short peep into the long future of BRIC's relationship with Africa, African countries are now beginning to raise fundamental question about the relationship between the continent and BRIC countries, and China is at the forefront here. If, indeed, "Owned by China" does become the most common three-words in the world at a future date, the desire of most Africans is that hopefully the continent and its resources would not be at the top of the list of Chinese acquisitions.

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