

➤ Executive Summary

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Emerging powers are playing an increasingly consequential role in Africa, and are set to deepen their impact upon political, economic and security dynamics across the continent in coming years. In many respects this is an expression of wider global trends characterised by the shifting balance of wealth and power away from the US and Europe to the rapidly growing economies. In Africa, the impact of these emerging – or in some cases, re-emerging – actors is becoming more substantial and more complex almost by the day.

Emerging power activism takes a number of different forms, both in terms of the goals pursued and the means used. FDI, aid and trade agreements are the more familiar forms of interaction by which emerging powers engage the continent, from the expansion of Indian mining companies into Zambia and DRC to the infrastructure construction undertaken by Chinese firms across the continent. Less heralded, perhaps, has been the activism of Turkish diplomacy and NGOs in Somalia, and Brazil's solidarity discourse rooted in cultural and ethnic ties. Emerging powers are therefore bringing financial capital, business acumen and new models of development and diplomacy to the continent. In doing so they see in Africa a resource partner, an export market, and a relatively uninhabited geopolitical space in which they can leverage their growing influence. Assessing this dynamic is crucial to developing an understanding of Africa's growing importance in the global supply chain, its growing relevance as a market and its centrality to the new international order in the making.

Yet, the implications for Africa itself should not be overlooked. Africa may be back in the limelight, but the continent's history is one of false dawns and unfulfilled potential: the danger is that African states will be unable to capitalise on the attention currently being lavished upon them and the possibilities of the commodities boom to recast the continent's development and forge a new role for Africa in the international system. As this report highlights, so far African responses to the activism of emerging powers have been predictable, either seeking to emulate the means to success of the emerging powers that are now so interested in them, or to react to that interest with concerns of a renewed colonialism. The challenge for African states is to transcend such tropes and realise the opportunities to become significant multilateral actors, able to leverage their particular assets and potential to formulate and pursue their own interests. The extent to which Africa is able to build its own independent diplomatic and economic identity, distinct from either its old colonial masters or its new emerging power suitors, will determine whether its relationship to the shifting global economic order is a productive one. ■