Understanding China’s Geoeconomic Maneuver Against Ethiopia Through an Energy Geopolitical Perspective

Aurel Dionius Christopher

Affiliation : Center for ASEAN Energy Research
City : Jakarta
Country : Indonesia
Email : aureldion61@gmail.com

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Abstract
Departing from the need for energy supply which increases every year, China’s foreign policy through the Belt Road Initiative (BRI) is trying to maneuver against areas in the world, including Africa. The African region is one of the regions in that China has given various kinds of assistance to trigger economic growth for countries in the region. Where one of the countries that China is aiming for is Ethiopia as a landlocked country, this research will provide an analytical description of China's interests in geoeconomic maneuvering against Ethiopia through the perspective of energy geopolitics. This study uses descriptive qualitative research methods in data collection, the material of which is sourced from the existing literature. Research on China's geoeconomic maneuvers against Ethiopia shows that China needs Ethiopia as an access point for energy transportation to be channeled to the State of Djibouti, where the country has one of the largest ports in the world and is strategically located in the world’s trade routes.

Key Words: China, Ethiopia, Geoeconomic, Geopolitic Energy, Belt and Road Initiative

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INTRODUCTION

China is an emerging country with dominance in the economic field. The emergence of China’s state domination in the economic field is inseparable from a long history. Starting from the era of Deng Xiaoping’s government, which revolutionized the Chinese economy by liberalizing the previously closed market. This new face of the Chinese economy will be maintained until the change of leader. The election of President Xi Jinping has made this country experience a more advanced era. In 2013 Xi Jinping had the ambition to build a mega-project connected to 60 countries in Asia, Europe, and Africa. This ambition was initiated on the basis of an initiative to build a land and maritime silk route, which is known as One Belt, One Road. This policy is a reflection of China’s efforts to open trade routes that have been carried out for thousands of years. In addition to opening trade routes through the Belt Road Initiative (BRI) policy, China has also intensified foreign investment between countries in the world, which signifies China as a country that upholds peace, cooperation, and openness. This policy is projected to provide an opportunity for China to improve policy coordination, cultural exchange, financial integration, investment, and trade, as well as cooperation in the area covered by this policy (Imomnazar, 2018).

BRI itself is a large project that has a fairly ambitious vision of connecting countries in the world, especially in Asia, to the African region. In carrying out this policy, BRI requires a fairly high cost. Annually, BRI spending is estimated at $100 billion per year (Marbler & Shan, 2017). In carrying out this policy, China made several instruments, including the New Development Bank, Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), Silk Road Fund, and Free Trade Area (Callaghan & Hubbard, 2016), as well as other instruments in the field of funding. The Chinese state hopes that with the enactment of BRI as its foreign policy, it will be able to have an impact in helping to increase trade and investment (Imomnazar, 2018). This makes this policy one of the greatest development plans in modern history (Cai, 2017). China, through the mainland, is trying to integrate the regions of Central Asia, Europe, and Africa through ports and railroads.

Africa is a very attractive region for the world because of its abundant natural resources and politically weak, and very open to international exploitation (Klare, 2008). Starting from mineral resources such as bauxite, uranium, platinum, titanium, and cobalt to gas and oil available on this continent. World countries such as the United States and China flocked to control this region, especially in East Africa. This makes the African Region seen with geopolitical significance by these two countries. Countries such as Algeria, Sudan, Angola, Libya, and Nigeria are the largest oil-producing countries, with a total of 105 billion barrels or 90% of existing
reserves (Klare, 2008). In addition, there is Djibouti which has the largest port and will become the hub of South Sudan, Ethiopia, and China. The rise of China has become an integral part of East Africa, and the development of other African regions and countries in the world project power by rivaling the "US hegemony" (Osman, 2019). This is because the East African Region is the most politically dynamic region in Africa and is one of the most vital shipping lanes in the world.

Over the past two decades, China has become the largest trading partner for the entire African continent. Through the Belt and Road Initiative program, the African region has become one of China's strategic targets where there is an official discourse that promises "win-win" development outcomes (Padraig et al., 2021). Through the China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) forum, it is estimated that China will invest in the African region with a total of $170 billion in 2017 to build infrastructure (Chien-peng, 2019). This is evidenced by China's exporting to the African region by as much as 15-16% and China being a source of imports for Africa (Yalew & Changgang, 2020). Africa's exports to China include minerals, fuels, and agricultural products, while Africa imports a wide variety of machinery, transport, communications equipment, and manufactured goods from China. The relationship between China and Africa certainly involves various countries in the region. This is because the African region, especially East Africa, is located in a strategic location on the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, and the Indian Ocean.

Infrastructure development in East Africa is made a priority issue to facilitate sustainable regional development. For the East African region, infrastructure is critical to achieving the sustainable development goals of the African Union Agenda (2063) and the five high goals of the African development bank (AfDB) in Africa (yalew & Changgang, 2020). In the 2015 Johannesburg Action Plan, China promised to undertake massive infrastructure development in Africa (Oqubay, 2015). This infrastructure development includes energy, transportation, information, telecommunications, and transboundary water resources. As an implication of China's promise to the African region, China has built rail infrastructure, airports, and ports in Djibouti, Kenya, and Ethiopia (Renwick & Gong, 2018).

In addition to the close diplomatic relations between Ethiopia and China, the increasing economic growth in Ethiopia was also caused by the BRI policy, which assisted Ethiopia in the construction of the Addis Ababa - Djibouti railroad infrastructure. The country of Djibouti itself has a multipurpose port facility located in Doraleh to meet economic growth in Ethiopia. This is because Ethiopia is a landlocked country in East Africa, and Ethiopia's economic growth has been highly dependent on the port of Djibouti since 1998 (Wuhibegezer, 2014). The Addis Ababa-Djibouti railway is connected to this port as an easy mobilization for goods
and energy shipments. The project is planned to expand its infrastructure development from the Dakar port in West Africa to all landlocked countries in Africa.

For China, its presence in Ethiopia is due to its dependence on oil and mineral resources in mainland Africa which continues to increase every year. In addition to the construction of rail infrastructure, China is also building a gas pipeline connecting Ethiopia with Djibouti. This is because the country is surrounded by China's oil and gas supplying countries, such as Sudan, South Sudan, Kenya, and Somalia. It is reported that Ethiopia and Djibouti also signed a memorandum of understanding for the construction of a $4 billion 767 km natural gas pipeline that will transport extracted gas in the Ogaden region of southern Ethiopia and in the Regional State of Somalia (SRS) (Maasho & Potter, 2019). The MoU confirms that Ethiopia's nascent oil and gas sector is finally on the rise. It also underscores China's growing influence in Djibouti and Ethiopia. The pipeline will be built by the Chinese company GCL-Poly, which is also developing the gas field (Xinhua, 2019).

Departing from the need for natural resources and this research will later seek to see how the BRI Geoeconomic maneuvers carried out by China against Ethiopia in the East Africa region through the perspective of energy geopolitics. China's interest in meeting its energy and economic needs makes this country must be able to open access to countries in South Africa, such as South Sudan, Sudan, and Djibouti. These countries have a useful energy supply to achieve China's BRI program. So, Ethiopia was chosen as the liaison between these countries. As a landlocked country, Ethiopia has a strategic location to achieve the interests of the Chinese state. The research question posed by the author in this study is based on the introduction described earlier, namely "What is China's interest in carrying out geoeconomic maneuvers against Ethiopia, which is a landlocked country and lacks natural resources?"

**Literature Review**

Referring to the literature written by Yalew MT regarding "China's 'Belt and Road Initiative': Implication for Land Locked Ethiopia," he said that the implementation of BRI policies in the Ethiopian Region had quite good opportunities in the fields of trade, investment, tourism (Yalew & Changgang, 2020). From the article written by Yalew MT, it can be seen that China's relationship with Ethiopia is very close. This is reinforced by the relationship between China and Ethiopia, which continued to improve from 2006 to 2017.

Furthermore, the second article, entitled "The Maritime Silk Road Initiative and Ethiopia: Transforming Policies, Institutions, and Politics in Expected and
Unexpected Ways," discusses the Maritime Silk Road (MSR) in Africa, and Ethiopia is one of the earliest African countries to sign the working document. With the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The second article written by Jean-Marc F. Blanchard and Edson Zico has similarities in terms of discussion, whereas the first article discusses the benefits of Ethiopia from the BRI policy.

The third article discusses the Maritime Silk Road, which has the aim of connecting China to the African region. In his research article, Mboya tries to explain the progress of the MSRI project in East Africa in various fields (Mboya, 2021). In this regard, Mboya provides extensive information on MSRI in Kenya, Ethiopia, and Djibouti, looking at various rail projects, seaports, and others, as well as these policies having various political and economic challenges.

The fourth article, written by Ana Cristina Alves, discusses China's use of capital loans to build infrastructure in Africa as a tool for mutually beneficial economic cooperation (Alves, 2013). This formula, offering cheap loans for infrastructure in exchange for access to resources, has largely emerged as a tool for China's cooperation with the African Region. On the one hand, the provision of infrastructure makes a strong contribution to the economic take-off of a large number of African countries and arguably improves the lives of millions of people across Africa. However, on the other hand, the shortcomings shown in this study may, in the long term, offset the direct impact on the economies of countries in the African Region.

The last article written by Aleksi Ylonen, it was found that the closeness of China and countries in Africa was caused by investment and capital loans (Ylonen, 2020). This creates a profit for economic growth in general. Chinese investment has benefited Africa in terms of infrastructure and production facilities through the introduction of new technologies. However, at the same time, China's economic expansion in Africa will have an impact on several economic challenges, such as the weakening of local producers due to very cheap imports of goods from China.

**THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

According to Per Hogselius (2019), energy geopolitics is not only about the energy contained in the earth, such as fossil fuels, uranium, wind, and water. Rather energy geopolitics is the movement of energy through the tankers, pipelines, and transmission lines necessary for the energy trade to be viable and about the places where energy in its various forms is produced, purified, stored, and consumed. As time goes by, energy infrastructure continues to play a very important role and shape the internationalization and world energy systems such as oil and gas tankers, pipelines, and power transmission lines (Hogselius, 2019). In his book, "Energy, and..."
geopolitics (2019), Hogselius explains that there are several phases. One of them is the phase in the development of the energy system, which is characterized by material growth and geographical expansion, which results in an interrelated integration process through long-distance transportation systems. In this integration process, the government usually goes through the foreign policy of a country by manipulating system-building through investment in gas pipeline infrastructure by utilizing transit countries to influence state politics which will later affect foreign policy. This can be seen from the case of an energy system based on a natural gas pipeline network where a country does not have a viable alternative route. (Hogselius, 2019).

Through the approach of Per Hogselius, Governments can manipulate system-building activities for foreign policy purposes. In fact, foreign policymakers rarely start building new energy systems or new components or links to such systems. However, it is common for them to intervene in such activities, encourage or prevent various projects, and try to reshape them to serve their interests. Perhaps the most typical situation here is when the Prime Minister or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs hears about a project proposed by an energy company or equipment supplier. The government sees the benefits of the project in terms of foreign policy, and sometimes with great enthusiasm, to improve diplomatic relations with the countries concerned and to improve the country's general position to strengthen the world stage. You may decide to support the project, believing that it will help. Alternatively, we may reject the proposed project based on the perceived political risks. These considerations clearly shape the world's energy geography. In addition, many governments have attempted to mobilize energy-related activities as a tool to support territorial disputes and gain political influence abroad. It builds on a long historical tradition established during the era of empire expansion, where evidence of economic or industrial activity was widely regarded as a prerequisite for international recognition of territorial claims.

This study will only focus on the country of Ethiopia as the main source of discussion, as well as alluding to countries in the East African region, such as Djibouti, South Sudan, and Sudan, which have links with Ethiopia as a "landlocked country". The objectives of this research are as follows; the author tries to describe China's geoeconomic manoeuvres against Ethiopia through the Belt Road Initiative policy and associated with China's energy geopolitics. In addition, the author will also identify China’s interests in the country of Ethiopia.

According to Rajasekar (2006), research is a logical and systematic search for new and valuable information about a particular topic. Research must focus on conducting investigations or explaining scientifically through objective and systematic analysis so that research is expected to produce new contributions to
existing knowledge in advancing a field. The method used by the author in answering research questions is a qualitative research method. The qualitative research method is a type of research used by the author to rely on observations and descriptions in research. This method is used to assess attitudes, behaviours, and opinions from other points of view in a particular study.

RESEARCH METHODS

Creswell (2013) argues that qualitative research is a valuable approach to exploring, understanding, or interpreting phenomena in the context of the meanings carried by the subject or object involved in the phenomenon. The data collected in qualitative research methods include a description of the object, unlike quantitative, which rely on numbers. That way, the qualitative research method has descriptive and narrative properties so that the author can analyze the description and interpretation of the Sino-Russian military cooperation in dealing with security instability in the Asia Pacific region.

The data collection technique is one of the stages carried out by researchers, which includes tracing, searching, to collecting data from authentic sources. In conducting his research, the author used internet-based data collection techniques (Bakry, 2016). Data collection can also be internet-based which can be said as searching for data through information sourced from the internet by browsing and selecting books, journals, government websites, and various trusted media. It can also search multiple keywords automatically; literature can be found in various credible sources, thus helping research as a supporting reference in the research process stage.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Though China’s BRI geoeconomics, the government can manipulate system-building activities for foreign policy purposes. According to Hagselius (2019) that, system-building manipulation is rarely seen by foreign policy actors who take the initiative to build a new energy system or a new link in the system. But usually, the State intervenes in various activities to encourage the fulfillment of their interests. In this case, it is illustrated that China is carrying out system development manipulation activities through BRI policies that aim to encourage various projects through investment and trade to achieve geopolitical energy interests in Ethiopia.

China’s BRI geoeconomic maneuver against Ethiopia is based on its strategic geographical position in the Horn of Africa. In this regard, the Horn of Africa has several important member states, which include Djibouti, Eritrea, and Somalia, as
well as the Great Horn region, which includes Kenya, Sudan, South Sudan, Uganda, and Yemen, which traverses the Bab el-Mandeb Strait in the Red Sea. The Bab el-Mandeb Strait, which connects the Red Sea and the Arabian Sea, is an important waterway for maritime traffic and trade between Europe, Asia, and Africa. More than 20,000 ships pass through it every year, making it one of the most important and busiest straits (Xiao et al., 2020).

China needs Ethiopia as a liaison country to Djibouti. Through the Addis Ababa-Djibouti rail project in 2015, it became one of the pillars of a broad network in the Horn of Africa designed to eventually connect the ports of Berbera, in Somalia, Kenya (in Lamu), and Tanzania (in Bagamoyo). Much deeper, the construction of the Addis Ababa-Djibouti railway is seen as the beginning of a trans-African railway project connecting Djibouti to the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, which is expected to be able to improve relations with China at the continental level (Zhou, 2017). This railway project is very important for Ethiopia, which is a landlocked country and depends on the state of Djibouti, which is adjacent to the Red Sea coast, because Djibouti is the main gateway for Ethiopian exports and imports. For China, the completion of the Addis Ababa–Djibouti Railway is a symbolic achievement of the Belt and Road Initiative and stands as an important project for China-Africa cooperation in building the “three main networks” (railways, highways, regional aviation) to enable industrialization. Railways will be a catalyst for development in Ethiopia and Djibouti (Lu, 2017).

From this, it can be seen that China's manipulation of the building system against Ethiopia is in the form of infrastructure investment used to mobilize energy supplies. This is also in accordance with the statement in Hogsellus' book where the activities carried out in the manipulation of the building system (system-building) as a geopolitical energy tool to mobilize energy-related activities as a tool to support territorial claims and gain political influence abroad (Hogsellus, 2019). Of course, this statement is in line with the BRI maneuvers carried out by China against Ethiopia with infrastructure projects financed by China in order to support energy mobilization to gain influence in the Horn of Africa.

China uses the BRI as a tool to invest in Ethiopia, which aims to achieve geopolitical energy instruments in the form of system-building manipulation. The example of the case in Ethiopia shows the geopolitical move of energy from China through the application of geoeconomic instruments in the form of infrastructure development, such as a gas pipeline connecting Ogaden to Djibouti, South Sudan to Ethiopia, and the construction of the Addis Ababa-Djibouti railway which will later facilitate China's energy geopolitics. In the East African Region. This means that China is manipulating this system-building for the sake of energy supply security and facilitating the mobilization of energy trade to China against Ethiopia as a buffer
state, which has implications for BRI cooperation (Mosley, 2020). China sees this as an opportunity to build beneficial diplomatic relations, spread models of social and economic development, and shape the political future of Africa (Hogselius, 2019).

When viewed geographically, the location of the country of Ethiopia, which is in the Horn of Africa region, provides an opportunity for China to open a new energy system to the country of Djibouti. Even though Ethiopia is a landlocked country, China is still investing heavily. The construction of the Addis Ababa - Djibouti railway and the construction of a gas pipeline in Ogaden, which is an energy transportation system, will provide a geopolitical energy measure for China. According to Hogselius (2019), the development of an energy transportation system will have an impact on an interrelated integration process through a long-distance transportation system. In this integration process, the State usually goes through BRI policies by manipulating system-building through gas pipelines by utilizing transit countries to influence state politics which will later affect foreign policy.

Reflecting on the case of China carrying out geoeconomic maneuvers on Ethiopia, which is a country that lacks natural resources and is a landlocked country, it can be seen from a geopolitical perspective. China sees Ethiopia as an important player as a connecting bridge for BRI in accessing construction in the African region (Meester, 2021). Politically, China views Ethiopia as an entry point in securing deeper access to diplomatic and economic relations with countries in the East African region. This is because Addis Ababa, which is the capital of Ethiopia, is the host of the headquarters of the African Union, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, and more deeply, it can be seen that Ethiopia presents an authoritarian model inspired by China and is the most stable country in the Horn of Africa region (Meester, 2021).

It can be interpreted as geopolitical that China's presence in Ethiopia, which is a landlocked country, is a form of mobilizing energy supplies and as a liaison country for construction access to the African region. China, through an investment policy in the form of the construction of a railroad transportation line from Addis Ababa to the port of Djibouti to assist in achieving maritime trade routes along with fuel imports (Tarrosy & Voros, 2018). China sees that Djibouti is a country that has a very strategic location because the entire Red Sea in the south, from the Suez Canal to the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, is a strategic link between the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean (Zheng, 2017). On the other hand, China also has a military base in Djibouti, which aims to exert influence in the region, and if we look further, China's interests in changing the geopolitical constellation that exists in the Indian Ocean region (Ramadhan, 2018).
This strategic location will be an arena of power for countries such as the United States, France, China, Turkey, Iran, Egypt, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Japan to protect their interests with various objectives, which have incalculable consequences for the market. Global oil (Tesfaye, 2020). Coupled with the construction of gas pipeline infrastructure from South Sudan to Ethiopia, it will have implications for China’s influence in the region. This means that the mobilization of energy distribution movements and security in energy supply will be easier for China. China’s presence in Ethiopia through energy geopolitics can be seen as a way to increase its influence in the Horn of Africa region and accelerate the integration process of BRI in Ethiopia. In addition, China sees Ethiopia as a key country in securing its influence on diplomatic and economic relations with African countries.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of the BRI policy has become a concrete form of China’s geopolitical energy and geoeconomic strategic steps in Ethiopia. China’s maneuver against Ethiopia, which is a landlocked or landlocked country, will indirectly provide access to energy resources for China. China’s increasing energy needs provide an opportunity for China to increase its country’s energy geopolitical interests. Through the State of Ethiopia, China is able to stabilize the country of South Sudan for the benefit of oil and gas energy. This is because 80% of oil reserves are in South Sudan. Through manipulative system-building as an effort from energy geopolitics, China sees Ethiopia as a transit country to open access to energy distribution from South Sudan to the Port of Djibouti which will be channeled to China and accelerate the process of integrating China’s BRI policies to countries in the Horn of Africa region. The existence of Ethiopia has a strategic location as a connecting country and supports the spread of Chinese influence in the Horn of Africa region. Thus, China can achieve its energy geopolitical interests by making Ethiopia a connecting country. Through manipulative system-building as an effort from energy geopolitics, China sees Ethiopia as a transit country to open access to energy distribution from South Sudan to the Port of Djibouti which will be channeled to China and accelerate the process of integrating China’s BRI policies to countries in the Horn of Africa region. The existence of Ethiopia has a strategic location as a connecting country and supports the spread of Chinese influence in the Horn of Africa region. Thus China can achieve its energy geopolitical interests by making Ethiopia a connecting country.
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