

DEFENSE DOSSIER

ISSUE 26

DECEMBER
2019



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AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY COUNCIL

Explaining the World. Empowering Policymakers.



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LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Welcome to the December 2019 edition of the American Foreign Policy Council's *Defense Dossier* e-journal.

In this edition, we turn our attention to African security issues and consider a set of topics that are often overlooked by experts and policymakers alike. We begin by exploring external actors, Russia and China, and their influence and investment in Africa – as well as the implications of those activities, both for African nations themselves and for the United States. Next, we focus on the rising problem of Salafism in North Africa, and the pressing challenges created by the continent's rapidly urbanizing population. We conclude with some bold suggestions for effective U.S. strategy on the African continent.

AFPC Research Fellow and Program Officer Jacob McCarty deserves special thanks for his help in conceiving of the topics and theme of this edition. As always, we hope you find the articles that follow both interesting and insightful.

Sincerely,

Ilan Berman
Chief Editor

Richard M. Harrison
Managing Editor



The Kremlin Eyes Africa

Greg Mills and Jaco-Louis du Plessis

In February 2019, in testimony before the Senate Armed Forces Committee, then-head of U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) Thomas Waldhauser noted “the harmful influence of non-African powers on the continent.” Both the General and his successor, Stephen Townsend, spoke of the “malign” influence of China and Russia.¹

In particular, Russia’s trajectory in Africa is worth exploring. Like China, it seeks to diminish global Western influence on the continent. But Russia’s presence is also based on an appetite for risk, its growing expeditionary military capabilities, and expanding intelligence cooperation with African states. None of this is likely to be good news for human rights and good governance on the continent – or for the long-term development of the continent’s rapidly growing population.

THE SHAPE OF RUSSIAN ENGAGEMENT

Russia’s presence in Africa now spans a broad range of activities, including using hard power to support African elites and suppress popular dissent, interfering in local and national elections, using private military companies to protect African leaders and key infrastructure, and sharing capabilities and intelligence with local regimes. According to leaked documents published by the London-based Dossier Center, an investigative unit funded by exiled oil tycoon Mikhail Khodorkovsky, Russia is seeking to bolster its presence in at least thirteen African countries by building relations with current and future regimes, signing military agreements, and grooming a new generation of both “leaders” and undercover “agents.”² Yet, instead of promoting greater political competition in Africa, the current Russian strategy of favoring incumbents pits them against local electorates, since polls indicate

that the overwhelming majority of Africans today prefer democracy to any other form of government.³ Naturally, Moscow’s approach benefits Africa’s authoritarians, who have an interest in any assistance which does not improve governance and helps to strengthen their grip on power.

Russia possesses an inherent advantage in its outreach. Many among the current crop of African leaders – such as President Joao Lourenço of Angola – studied in the Eastern Bloc during the Cold War. Indeed, the Soviet contribution to liberation struggles on the continent is still celebrated in some African capitals.⁴ Russia already has military relationships with some 20 African countries centering on arms sales, intelligence sharing, and police and army training (including with Mozambique and the Central African Republic). Such state dealings are often beefed up by the presence of Russian “consultants,” allegedly including the presence of the increasingly ubiquitous Wagner Group. Moreover, the wars in Chechnya, Syria, and Ukraine have not only provided the Russians with a certain set of skills, but also with a renewed interest in old-fashioned defense diplomacy. In November 2019, a Slava-class missile cruiser, along with its two support ships, arrived in Cape Town for a week-long joint exercise with the South African Navy. The visit followed five months at sea for the vessel, entailing stops in Algeria, Egypt, Cape Verde and Equatorial Guinea.⁵

Russia’s renewed interest in Africa serves a range of objectives. It is designed, at least in part, to mitigate the sanctions imposed by Western countries as a result of its 2014 annexation of Crimea, and goes hand-in-hand with Russian attempts to secure African backing for its international diplomatic efforts, including African votes on strategic issues in international fora. General



Waldhauser also testified before Congress that, in the Central African Republic (CAR), “Russia has bolstered its influence with increased military co-operation including donations of arms, with which it has gained access to markets and mineral extraction rights.”⁶

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These activities are perhaps most pronounced in the defense-industrial realm. ROSOBORONEXPORT, Russia’s state-owned arms seller, declared 2019 to be the “year of Africa.”⁷ According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Russia supplies some 35% of Africa’s materiel needs, ahead of China (17%), the United States (9.6%) and France (6.9%). There have also been attempts to conclude nuclear power deals with regional nations, notwithstanding an unexpected setback in South Africa, where the collapse of the Zuma administration upended a plan between Moscow and Cape Town for Russia to build eight plants for \$76 billion.⁸

Russia’s outreach, moreover, is intensifying. In October 2019, 43 of Africa’s 54 heads of state attended the Russia-Africa summit in Sochi, a meeting that was co-chaired by Vladimir Putin and Egypt’s president, Abdel Fatah al-Sisi.⁹ In his speech at the summit’s plenary session, the Russian president told his guests that the current level of trade between Moscow

and the continent was “not enough” and that “[i]n the next four to five years I think we should be able to double this trade, at least.” Putin touted Russia’s “debt-for-development swap” programs which were not “contingent,” he said, “upon... preconditions”

that shackled a country’s “trade and economic preferences.”¹⁰ The Kremlin is acting on this imperative; Moscow’s trade with Africa has tripled from \$5.7 billion in 2009 to \$17.4 billion in 2017. Russian investment on the continent, too, is steadily growing, now totalling more than \$17 billion.¹¹

LEARNING FROM CHINA

Russia is also learning from China how to shape narratives in Africa in its favor. The number of Chinese government-sponsored Confucius Institutes, which promote Chinese language and culture (as well as Beijing’s political worldview), rose from zero in 2004 to 48 in 2018, spread across twenty African countries.¹² The Russian equivalent, the Russkiy Mir (Russian World) Foundation, is now active in at least seven African nations.¹³ Anti-Western sentiment, meanwhile, is whipped up through media outlets such as the multilingual Russia Today (RT) TV, and through sponsoring African NGOs, websites, and news services, where the narrative aims to discredit pro-democracy and anti-corruption campaigners as foreign agents.

One of the leaked papers published by the Dossier Center recommends collecting a database of Africans living in the West as the basis for grooming “future leaders” and “agents of influence” with an eventual goal of creating a “loyal chain of representatives across African territory.” France is a particular target, with Moscow keen to exploit tensions with Paris’s traditional allies, including CAR and the Comoros. Africa Intelligence has reported that Russian nuclear conglomerate ROSATOM is seeking to fill the space left by France’s Orano (formerly Areva) after the latter’s cutbacks to its uranium mining.¹⁴



Further up the spectrum, Russia is also believed to be orchestrating “pro-Western” uprisings to turn public opinion in the opposite direction. In Sudan, “one ploy was to use fake news and videos to portray demonstrators in Khartoum and other Sudanese cities as ‘anti-Islam,’ ‘pro-Israel’ and ‘pro-LGBT.’” The Sudanese government was also advised to increase the price of newsprint to make it harder for critics to get their message out, “and to discover ‘foreigners’ at anti-government rallies.”¹⁵ Andry Rajoelina won the bitterly contested November 2018 presidential election in Madagascar with the support of Kremlin ally Yevgeny Prigozhin (who also happens to be the founder of Wagner Group), the leaked documents allege, with Russia producing and distributing “the island’s biggest newspaper, with two million copies a month.” Rajoelina has denied receiving such help.¹⁶

WAKING UP THE WEST

The Kremlin’s strategy towards Africa works, Russian expert Edward Lucas reminds, as a result of the West’s neglect and lack of strategic vision.¹⁷ The UK is increasingly diplomatically invisible on the continent, except for its attempts to hastily complete post-Brexit trade deals. Meanwhile, the U.S. approach, often inconsistent in its support of local partners, risks making local conflicts, which are driven by intricate domestic problems, into international issues. The American withdrawal from Libya in 2014 in the aftermath of the second Libyan election provides a case in point. And lest we forget: Russia’s foreign policy direction is often in tune with the views of many African leaders, who still hate to be bullied by “suits” visiting the continent on two-day expeditions.

If they seek more sustainable, effective influence on the continent, Western countries need to actually formulate a strategy and identify the tools by which to achieve it. This might include support for parliamentary opposition factions and better monitoring of often-rigged electoral processes. Further, there should be more to African engagement than counterterrorism

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and traditional development assistance. While Moscow rewards loyalty by propping up dictators, meddling in elections, and selling arms, the West has a more powerful tool in aligning the support it provides to democratic principles and values.

Rather than go on the defensive, a successful Western strategy will need to play to its strengths and values, make tough choices about priorities and partners, make support contingent on African performance on these shared values and interests and, fundamentally, develop a positive and consistent narrative. This, however, requires something that has so far been sorely lacking: sustained Western engagement.

ENDNOTES

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China in Africa

David H. Shinn

China has historically shied away from engaging in African security issues except for modest military support of African liberation movements beginning in the 1950s and subsequently serving as a major arms provider for independent African countries. Military exchange visits have been a consistent feature of the security relationship. In the 1990s, China began to participate in UN peacekeeping operations in Africa, a practice that continues today. Since 2008, China has been actively engaged in the Somali anti-piracy operation in the Gulf of Aden.

Security concerns increased significantly as China's growing physical presence and interests in Africa came under threat and occasional attack. The 21st century has witnessed increasing numbers of kidnappings and attacks on Chinese personnel in Africa. Most of these events occurred because Chinese nationals were in the wrong place at the wrong time, but in several cases Chinese were targeted for economic or political reasons. Kidnappings of Chinese business persons in the Niger Delta, targeted attacks against oil and construction company personnel in Sudan by Darfur rebel groups, the death of nine energy prospection employees in a cross-fire in Ethiopia's Ogaden region, the kidnapping of ten construction workers in northern Cameroon by Boko Haram, and the death of two Chinese peacekeepers assigned to the UN mission in South Sudan raised alarms in Beijing.

The tipping point occurred, however, in 2011 with the overthrow of Libyan President Muammar al-Qaddafi and the collapse of order in the country. China quickly had to evacuate almost 36,000 nationals from Libya. This was a shock for China, which has focused more closely on African security issues ever since. These developments have had important security implications for Africa and the United States.

CHINA EXPANDS IN AFRICA

China's engagement in Africa has increased exponentially since the late 1990s. China has diplomatic ties with 53 of 54 African countries and has an embassy in every one. (Eswatini recognizes Taiwan.) All 53 African countries have an embassy in China. Traditionally, China has emphasized the state-to-state relationship and exchange of high-level visitors. For example, every year since 1991, the Chinese foreign minister has made his first overseas visit to an African country. The Communist Party of China is also reaching out to African ruling political parties and its senior personnel are an important part of exchange visits. In an effort to improve coordination, China and Africa created in 2000 the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, which meets every three years at the summit or ministerial level alternating between Beijing and an African city.

As China industrialized, it required ever larger quantities of oil and minerals; Africa is a good source of both. Africa's 54 countries, constituting more than a quarter of the membership of the United Nations, are important for political support as China seeks to expand its global influence. By 2009, China had become Africa's most significant trading partner, passing the United States in dollar value of trade. China is the largest bilateral source of loans for Africa and the second largest, after Russia, seller of arms to Africa. Its OECD-equivalent aid in recent years is estimated to be running at about \$3 billion annually, compared to \$8 billion for the United States. China's foreign direct investment stock in Africa is growing impressively but remains a modest percentage of the global total, almost certainly in the single digits. At any given time, there are an estimated one million Chinese nationals living and/or working in Africa and as many as 10,000 Chinese companies.¹

In the past several years, China has stepped up its soft power effort in Africa. The official Chinese news

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service, Xinhua, has more than 20 bureaus in Africa and regional centers in Nairobi and Cairo. China Radio International has expanded its outreach and China Global Television Network has a production center in Kenya. China makes a special effort to cultivate African journalists and have them visit China. It finances a large scholarship program for BA degrees. By 2015, about 50,000 Africans were studying in China compared to about 40,000 in the United States and the gap continues to grow.² China has sponsored 61 Confucius Institutes on African university campuses and 13 Confucius classrooms in high schools in 45 countries.³

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President Xi Jinping's hallmark Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) launched in 2013 has accelerated the focus on Africa, or at least those countries in northeast Africa close to the Gulf of Aden, Red Sea and Suez Canal and others along the Mediterranean where the Maritime Silk Road comes into play. In fact, 40 African countries have already signed a BRI memorandum of understanding with China and others will likely follow.⁴

SECURITY IMPLICATIONS FOR AFRICA AND CHINA

China has consistently argued that it does not engage in the internal affairs of other countries, supports state

sovereignty, and opposes the establishment of military bases outside China. Security challenges in Africa have resulted in China's rethinking of these principles, although officially it insists there has been no change in its position. This shift began with the Darfur crisis in Sudan. Under pressure from western countries and concerned about international attendance at the 2008 summer Olympic Games in Beijing, China began to alter its strong backing of Sudan's efforts to eliminate Darfur opposition groups. China has considerable leverage with the Sudanese government, including a 40 percent ownership stake in the oil sector. While insisting that China supported the non-interference principle, President Hu Jintao convinced Sudan, contrary to its wishes, to accept the UN-African Union peacekeeping force in Darfur.⁵

Following the 2011 independence of South Sudan, where China also has a 40 percent stake in the oil sector, and subsequent civil war there, Chinese interests came under threat. At the political level, China took steps to resolve the differences between the government of South Sudan and the major opposition group, called for the immediate end of hostilities, and urged international powers to back the Ethiopian-led mediation effort. These steps raised questions about China's adherence to the non-interference principle

and what African countries should expect from China in the future.⁶

Leadership turmoil in Zimbabwe posed a more delicate challenge to China's non-interference principle. Late in 2017, former Zimbabwe Vice President Emmerson Mnangagwa went to China after his long-time ally and friend of China, President Robert Mugabe, removed him from office. Zimbabwe Defense Forces commander, Constantino Chiwenga, was visiting China at the same time. Chiwenga appears to have received a green light from China that it would not object if the military removed the aging Mugabe and took temporary control of Zimbabwe. Chiwenga and the army orchestrated



the removal of Mugabe from office and arranged for the return from China of Mwangagwa who was elected president in 2018.⁷

Growing threats to China's interests in Africa also led to changes in its approach to UN peacekeeping operations. China had traditionally limited military personnel contributions for UN peacekeeping missions to the engineering, construction, medical, and logistics fields. In 2014, for the first time, China assigned a small combat unit to the UN mission in Mali. More significantly, the same year it sent an infantry battalion to the mission in South Sudan where its civilian personnel and interests were directly threatened. China also requested that the mandate for the mission allow it to protect Chinese personnel in South Sudan but had to settle for a mandate that permitted the peacekeepers to protect all civilian personnel.

China's participation in the anti-piracy operation in the Gulf of Aden, which was welcomed by African countries and the United States, was a direct response to pirate attacks on Chinese ships and crews. Although China did not participate in one of the international task forces, it did join and at one point co-chaired the anti-piracy Shared Awareness and Deconfliction meetings. China continues to send on a regular basis two frigates and a supply ship to the Gulf of Aden and says it will continue the contribution indefinitely. This has resulted in a huge increase in visits to African and Gulf State ports by People's Liberation Army Navy vessels.⁸

As it becomes apparent that African security forces often cannot protect Chinese nationals and interests in Africa, China is looking increasingly to the use of private security companies. While it prefers Chinese security companies, which are proliferating, their use in Africa is problematic as they have limited African experience and local language ability and they are prohibited from carrying arms. As a result, Chinese companies often team up with African security companies, off duty African security personnel or even

international companies that are prepared to respond more robustly to armed threats. This is new territory for China in Africa.

The most significant change for China's security relationship with Africa was the establishment in 2017 of a military base in Djibouti, its first outside China. Although China insists it is a "support" or "logistics" base, it clearly qualifies as a full-fledged military base. It probably hosts about 2,000 military personnel but has housing that could accommodate up to 10,000. It has a marine company with armored vehicles, hangers for helicopters and unmanned aerial vehicles, and docking facilities for ships. People's Liberation Army (PLA) personnel subsequently conducted live fire exercises in Djibouti. This facility provides an opportunity to test its military personnel and equipment under harsh conditions, help protect Chinese interests in the wider

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SECURITY IMPLICATIONS FOR THE UNITED STATES

The Trump administration's Africa policy emphasizes countering China's "predatory practices," which it says "pose a significant threat to U.S. national security interests."⁹ The totality of China's engagement in Africa today does pose a challenge to U.S. interests, but one that should not be overstated. The challenge is greater in the economic than the security sphere and much of China's economic support for Africa does not threaten U.S. interests. Some of China's exports to Africa compete with American products, but so do German, French, and Indian exports. China is different only in that it is Africa's largest trading partner.

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There is no significant competition for foreign direct investment (FDI). Africa is a huge continent and needs FDI from any source that can provide it. In better times, this is actually an area for potential U.S.-China collaboration. China's OECD-equivalent aid to Africa lags far behind that from the United States and constitutes only a minor sum when measured against total western aid. China is providing a huge amount of loan financing, mainly for large infrastructure projects, but

this money is rarely available at equally attractive terms in the United States or western countries generally. Africans argue they have no choice.

Senior U.S. officials have made a major issue of China's debt trap diplomacy in Africa. This is an area of legitimate concern but the United States has been careless in making a blanket condemnation of China's role, which undermines its argument. China is the largest bilateral holder of external debt in African countries, but the best estimate for its continent-wide exposure is 20 percent of all external debt.¹⁰ This means, of course, that 80 percent of the debt is held by others, which are mainly private non-Chinese commercial banks, international financial institutions, and a modest number of other countries.

The debt situation varies enormously from country to country. According to the International Monetary Fund, six African countries are in debt distress and 11 are at high risk of debt distress.¹¹ China holds 20 percent or more of the debt for two or three of those in debt distress—Mozambique and Sudan and possibly Zimbabwe. Of the 11 countries at high risk of debt distress, it holds 20 percent or more of the debt for Cameroon, Djibouti, Ethiopia, and Zambia. Djibouti is an extreme case where China's loan exposure ranges between an estimated 68 and 82 percent. For most countries in Africa—debt distressed or not—China is responsible for a negligible percent of their debt. So far, China has not tried to seize assets from any African country that has failed to repay loans.

China's new military base in Djibouti, located a short distance from the larger American military base, is the reason for most of Washington's concern about China's current engagement in Africa. This was especially the case in 2018 when over several weeks industrial grade lasers from the Chinese base were used against American pilots who were flying in and out of the Djibouti airport. This practice has ended, but China's long-term military goals in Africa are up for debate. Most analysts, myself included, believe there



will be more Chinese bases along the northern rim of the Indian Ocean and in Africa. PLA Navy ship visits, military exercises, arms sales, and training of African military personnel will also increase. This will require close monitoring.

This is not, however, the time to panic. The U.S. military presence in Africa and the Indian Ocean region is much larger than China's. The United States has about 7,000 military personnel in Africa and a substantially greater air and naval presence in the nearby Gulf States and western Indian Ocean. The U.S. Navy remains the most powerful one in the Indian Ocean. U.S. forces are also engaged in kinetic activity in Somalia and Libya, something that Chinese forces have so far shown no interest in pursuing.

To the extent that competition with China remains a key component of the Trump administration's Africa policy, this is the time to support American investment in Africa as the administration is doing with the new International Development Finance Corporation. It is not, however, the occasion to be cutting back on foreign aid or reducing the U.S. security presence in Africa as the administration has proposed. Nor should the United States assume that exhortatory statements by senior government officials will result in significantly more trade; the private sector will only increase trade when it sees a profit to be made either through exporting to Africa or importing from Africa. In brief, the United States should engage more with Africa across the political, economic, and security spectrum.

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The Challenge of North African Salafism

Emily Estelle

Salafis have become more active in the regional public sphere in North Africa over the past several years. Their rise to prominence is just one result of the revolutionary wave that toppled dictators in Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya as part of the “Arab Spring” which swept over the region beginning in late 2010. Nearly a decade on, North African governance is still in profound flux amid regional turmoil (encompassing both the ongoing Libyan civil war and Algerian political transition).

This instability has yielded a series of policy challenges that now confront both the U.S. and Europe. Chief among them has been the spread of Salafi-*jihadi* militancy—exemplified most notably through the formation of the Islamic State terrorist group—and the increase of irregular mass migration to Europe. In recent years, counterterrorism efforts have weakened Salafi-*jihadi* groups in North Africa and mass migration to Europe has waned. These gains are likely temporary, however, as political instability continues, both in North Africa and among the neighboring sub-Saharan states from which the majority of migrants originate.

Related to, but distinct, from the rise of Salafi-*jihadi* militancy is the rise of Salafism, an ultra-conservative form of Islam that has gained influence across North Africa in the past decade. Salafism's growth as a social and political force brings its own challenges, ranging from the Salafi persecution of other religious groups to the participation of the ideology's adherents in the region's civil wars and unrest.

DEFINING SALAFISM

Salafism is a “literalist, revivalist”¹ form of Islam whose adherents seek authentic faith by following the “lived example”² of the earliest Muslims from the time of the Prophet Mohammed (the *Salaf*). Salafis are ultra-conservative on social and cultural issues, and strongly condemn groups—including Sufis, Shia, Christians, and more liberal Muslims—that do not share their views.³ They emphasize the practices of the *Salaf* and are distinctive in appearance and dress. Salafis generally denounce the use of violence. They typically avoid participating in democracy, which they reject as man-made

rather than divinely-directed, and preach loyalty to the sitting political authority, for which they are (sometimes accurately) seen as agents of the state.

The proliferation of Salafism is closely tied to the Saudi-funded spread of Wahhabism. The Salafi trend in North Africa predates Gulf influence and retains local variants,⁴ but many Salafi groups in North Africa nonetheless remain a vector for Saudi influence.

Salafis are rivals of mainstream political Islam, such as that typified by the Muslim Brotherhood. The Muslim Brotherhood and Salafis alike are averse to violence, but the Brotherhood is more willing than most Salafis to work within democratic systems to establish Islamic law or values as the basis for public life.⁵ Put differently, the Muslim Brotherhood has a top-down, politics-and-policy-based approach to reforming society, while Salafis take a bottom-up approach focused on preaching and grassroots social transformation. Political Islamists also allow more varied interpretations of Islamic doctrine than do Salafis.

However, *Salafis* are distinct from Salafi-*jihadis*, who are exemplified by the Islamic State and al-Qaeda. Salafi-*jihadis* believe that it is the duty of individual Muslims to take up arms to establish a true Muslim polity.⁶ Salafi beliefs do not, per se, lead directly to Salafi-*jihadi* radicalization and should not be blamed for the formation of such groups.⁷ Nevertheless, it is correct to say that Salafi education can lay the groundwork for an individual's radicalization.

SALAFISM IN NORTH AFRICA

Since 2011, political turmoil in North Africa has complicated these definitions as Salafis have adapted to local political circumstances. “Quietist” Salafis, who long eschewed political activity, have entered the political sphere to defend and advance their interests in several North African states. Quietist Salafis have also taken up arms in Libya, where they are fighting a civil war in the name of a recognized political authority, adopting moral policing and counterterrorism duties, and sometimes attacking other religious groups.

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At the same time, the perceived failure of the Arab Spring in some countries—particularly the collapse of Libya and the counter-revolution in Egypt—has helped to increase Salafism’s appeal.⁸ (This turmoil and disillusionment have similarly benefitted Salafi-*jihadis*.) Gulf patronage, particularly from Saudi Arabia, has also enabled Salafism’s spread. States have continued to leverage Salafis to counterbalance domestic threats, but Salafis have also grown increasingly active in politics, governance, and war throughout the region:

Egypt. Over the past decade, Egyptian Salafis have entered national politics in order to defend their interests. Before the ouster of longtime President Hosni Mubarak in 2011, the dominant Egyptian Salafi organization (*al Da’wa al Salafiyya*) was apolitical and activist.⁹ After Mubarak’s ouster, however, Da’wa members changed their strategy and formed the al Nour party.¹⁰ The party’s subsequent political concessions—including aligning with the rival Muslim Brotherhood, and later with the Egyptian army¹¹—are best understood as pragmatic actions to protect the interests of Da’wa, rather than real changes in its principles.

Nour has managed to survive since in an increasingly repressive environment under current President Abdel Fatah al Sisi. However, it has suffered major electoral losses and made large concessions, including admitting Christian candidates under a 2015 electoral law.¹² Should Egypt’s political situation shift again—as the anti-Sisi protests that erupted in September 2019 suggest is possible¹³—Egypt’s Salafis will need to adapt once more.

Libya. A quietist Salafi current has emerged as a powerful force in Libya since the fall of Muammar al Qaddafi in 2011 and the country’s subsequent descent into civil war. The rise of Libyan Salafis as fighting and policing forces reflects the fragmentation of society, a search for identity and stability amid chaos,¹⁴ and the intrusion of foreign interests into the Libya conflict. Qaddafi supported the spread of Salafism in Libya as an outlet for religious conservatism that would strengthen his regime through its doctrine of “political obedience.”¹⁵ The primary strain of quietism in Libya is the Madkhali current, which follows the teachings of a Saudi sheikh and reflects a degree of Saudi influence.

Since 2014, Salafi militias have become major players on the Libyan security scene. Salafis fought alongside U.S.-backed forces against the Islamic State in 2016 and, since April 2019, are fighting on both sides of the battle for Tripoli, raising the possibility that Tripoli-based Salafis could become a fifth column for aspiring strongman Khalifa Haftar in his attempt to seize the capital.¹⁶ Salafis have played a useful counterterrorism and policing role in some contexts, but also inspire fear, particularly for their anti-democratic agenda and record of violence and threats against religious minorities, liberal activists, and political Islamists.¹⁷

Salafis are distinct from Salafi-jihadis, who are exemplified by the Islamic State and al-Qaeda. Salafi-jihadis believe that it is the duty of individual Muslims to take up arms to establish a true Muslim polity. Salafi beliefs do not, *per se*, lead directly to Salafi-jihadi radicalization and should not be blamed for the formation of such groups. Nevertheless, it is correct to say that Salafi education can lay the groundwork for an individual’s radicalization.

Tunisia. Salafi political parties are marginal in Tunisia, where an Islamist party has taken and held power by distancing itself from more conservative positions. The Ben Ali regime’s repression of Salafi currents empowered Salafi-jihadi recruitment networks throughout the early 2000s.¹⁸ Ben Ali’s fall in 2011 enabled clandestine Salafis to emerge in the first days of Tunisia’s democratic transition. Salafi-jihadi recruitment was supercharged, with Tunisia supplying among the highest per capita rates of foreign fighters to Syria. Non-jihadi Salafis mobilized also, with some forming



political parties to compete with and attempt to influence the more powerful Islamist Ennahda party.

The 2011 formation of *Ansar al Sharia* reflected a merger of Salafi and Salafi-*jihadi* positions.¹⁹ The group acknowledged a role for democracy while also pursuing violence, and its enmeshment with global Salafi-*jihadi* organizations ultimately contributed to its dismantlement. Today, the Salafi Reform Front party and other smaller Salafi parties have embraced pluralistic democracy while still espousing the Salafist goal of a Muslim polity.²⁰

Algeria. Today, quietist Salafism is growing in Algeria. Salafis have increased their influence by supporting the state since the civil war of the 1990s and throughout the 2011 Arab Spring protests, thereby providing an alternative to more threatening Islamist and Salafi-*jihadi* currents.²¹ Algerian Salafism is split between an apolitical majority and a “firebrand” reformist minority, which is causing increasing discontent within Algerian society, along with the perception that the state is stoking a Salafi “bogeyman.”²² The failure of both mainstream political Islam and Salafi-*ihadism* in Algeria has allowed a grassroots Salafi movement to gain support.²³ Salafi leaders may have an opportunity to expand their influence amid ongoing anti-government unrest, which ousted longtime President Abdelaziz Bouteflika in April 2019. Major Salafi leaders have remained silent regarding the protests amid an uncertain political situation.²⁴

Morocco. Morocco’s Salafis are divided by their response to state pressure, as well as by the lessons they have learned

from disruptive events in the past two decades. The Moroccan state permitted Salafism’s growth in the 1970s to counter other opposition groups.²⁵ The 2003 Casablanca bombings ruptured the state’s relationship with Salafis, leading to a crackdown. Mass protests in 2011 challenged Salafis’ perception of activism and pushed them toward political action to defend their interests.²⁶ They did not form a political party, as in Egypt, but struck a limited alliance with Morocco’s leading Islamist party. A renewed state crackdown caused Salafis to split, with many moving closer to the regime for protection and a younger cadre taking a more political and reformist position.²⁷ The state has shifted its response over time from marginalizing Salafis to integrating them in an attempt to keep its opposition divided and defang its critics.²⁸

COMPETING WITH SALAFISM

The U.S. policy objective in North Africa should be to support the establishment of legitimate and responsive governance. Legitimate governance requires inclusivity and the protection of minority rights. Salafis must therefore be viewed as competitors whose right to religious freedom should be protected, but whose values and actions nonetheless run counter to liberal democracy and human rights. Peaceful Salafis should not be viewed through a counterterrorism lens, because cracking down on them in turn helps to strengthen the appeal of Salafi-*jihadis*.

Salafis are part of an illiberal trend—both religious and political—in North Africa that threatens long-term American interests. A number of North African leaders and Middle Eastern powers seek to utilize Salafism to strengthen their own regimes and close political space to political Islamists and liberal democrats alike. Growing Russian and Chinese influence in Africa is similarly bolstering autocracies.

The U.S. should increase its diplomatic engagement in North Africa to counter these trends and advance American objectives, which should include limiting Gulf meddling in the region and achieving diplomatic solutions to regional crises, particularly the Libyan civil war. An American policy for North Africa should have a near-term focus as well as a long-term one. Most immediately, Washington should focus on preventing near-term crises with acute implications for terrorism and migration. Beyond that, support for the

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gradual improvement of governance over time serves U.S. objectives by elevating its core principles and diminishing those of others, like the region's Salafis.

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The Promise And Peril Of Africa's Cities

Jacob McCarty

Africa's cities are growing at a near-unprecedented rate,¹ creating new challenges and opportunities for the continent along the way. According to the World Bank, 472 million people lived in Africa's cities as of February 2017, and that number is expected to nearly triple by 2050.² Prominent cities on the continent, such as Antananarivo, Lagos, Kinshasa, Nairobi, and Cairo, are growing at rates as high as five percent annually, and will stay that way for years to come, with dozens of new inhabitants every hour.³ Even so, these urban centers are being outpaced by Mbouda, Cameroon, which is currently growing by a staggering 7.8 percent annually.⁴

These cities represent the economic engines of their host countries, as well as of the continent as a whole. According to Kenya's official National Bureau of Statistics, Nairobi contributed nearly 22% of the country's total GDP between 2013 and 2017.⁵ Similarly, Johannesburg is responsible for \$248 billion – or roughly 38% – of South Africa's annual GDP of \$649 billion. And Lagos, the origin city for roughly 80% of all Nigerian commercial exports, has a larger concentration of wealth among its residents and companies than all but four African countries.⁶

Africa's inevitable urbanization holds out huge potential boons, both economic and political, for the continent and its sub regions. Yet Africa's cities also face significant challenges to their prosperity and stability. These stressors – from overpopulation to resource shortages to climate change – will go a long way toward predicting their success or failure, and by extension that of their host nations.

THE APPEAL OF THE URBAN CENTER

The drivers of African urban population growth are myriad, and subject to much debate. Natural population growth trends, rural-to-urban migration, and the draw of technological developments and globalization have

all been identified as important contributing factors.⁷ So have environmental conditions, with “[d]rought, environmental degradation, rural poverty and wars... push[ing] many young villagers toward the cities.”⁸ The effects are pronounced. Between 2000 and 2011, for example, extreme drought created political and economic crisis in Zimbabwe that “contributed to the migration of between 1.5 million and 2 million Zimbabweans to South Africa.”⁹

African cities also hold significant appeal to the continent's youth. As youth development expert Marc Sommers has noted, “[m]igrating to cities can shear away, or at least provide some respite from, the daunting adulthood expectations that envelop many youth lives in villages. Urban anonymity thus provides young people with opportunities to pivot past traditional mandates and fashion new identities.”¹⁰

Yet the ability of Africa's cities to absorb the resulting influx varies, and depends heavily on infrastructure. Throughout the continent, the gap between existing resources and projected need is wide – and growing. According to the African Development Bank's 2018 African Economic Outlook, despite significant commitments by foreign donors (like the U.S. and China), between \$67.6 and \$107.5 billion in annual funding is still required to keep pace with future need.¹¹

PRESSING PROBLEMS

Low infrastructure connectivity may inhibit the goals of individual cities, the countries in which those cities reside, and the continent as a whole. As of mid 2019, 53 African nations and the Western Sahara territory had signed on to the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA), which ultimately hopes to generate upward of \$3.4 trillion in economic activity.¹² However, because much of Africa's economic activity is a result of what happens in cities, how infrastructure actually gets

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built is critical to meeting those projections.

Complicating the conversation over urban infrastructure is the presence of a significant informal economy in those places. A May 2018 working paper from the World Resources Institute noted that the overwhelming majority of people working in the study's selected African cities – roughly 76 percent – do so in fields like trade and sales, construction, transportation, and manufacturing, which habitually have significant informal sectors.¹³ What is more, the size of these informal economies is only expected to grow.¹⁴ And because it is more difficult for a government to collect taxes on wages that do not formally exist, generating the necessary revenue to maintain a city's infrastructure may become a growing challenge.

Due to the inherent concentration of people and goods in cities, their systems are functionally supported by basic resources – like food and water – sourced from surrounding, increasingly vacated and increasingly elderly, rural and peri-urban environments. The continent's consumer expenditure, meanwhile, is growing rapidly – “expected to reach \$2.1 trillion by 2025 and \$2.5 trillion by 2030” – amid a burgeoning of Africa's middle class.¹⁵ Yet, given that a country's middle class is also usually its largest consumer of goods, this trend could worsen strain on, and competition over, already-scarce resources.¹⁶

More rural-urban migration likewise increases the demand for housing, and hastily developed, informal settlements that demand more land (colloquially known as “urban sprawl”) often overtake farming settlements and compound resource insecurity.¹⁷ These areas function as slums wherein the majority of new arrivals live, reliable access to resources may not exist, and inhabitants “suffer disproportionately from communicable and non-communicable diseases.”¹⁸

Additionally, some major cities in Africa will be disrupted – perhaps fundamentally – by the consequences of climate change. Lagos, for example, is “located in the delta and coastal floodplain” of Africa's Horn, and the livelihood of its inhabitants (projected

at more than 30 million by 2050) may be permanently altered or disrupted by as soon as mid-century.¹⁹ Nor is Lagos unique. According to the World Bank's most recent report on disaster reduction and recovery, an estimated 100 million people on the African continent will be living in low-elevation coastal zones by 2060 and are therefore vulnerable to the effects of rising sea levels.²⁰

Inefficient resource management also represents a critical shortfall. In July 2019, roughly half of the citizens of Harare, Zimbabwe – more than two million people – did not have access to running water as a result of the fact that droughts have become more intense as average national temperatures increase.²¹

Planning for these changes and resource constraints, given the other compounding factors already mentioned, will be crucial.

Africa's inevitable urbanization holds out huge potential boons, both economic and political, for the continent and its sub regions. Yet Africa's cities also face significant challenges to their prosperity and stability. These stressors – from overpopulation to resource shortages to climate change – will go a long way toward predicting their success or failure, and by extension that of their host nations.

THE YOUTH FACTOR

Additionally, much of the conversation about urbanization in Africa revolves around the idea of a “youth bulge” and its attendant propensity for violence – that



is, the general idea that when a significant portion of a country's population is below a certain age, its society is less likely to be, and remain, stable. Increased urbanization is often cited as a factor that exacerbates this tendency toward violence.

The issue is hardly semantic. As the Brookings Institution points out, the cohort that will populate Africa's cities of tomorrow will be overwhelmingly young.²² This has raised fears in some corners that urban growth will result in political instability if it is not matched by economic growth.²³ Other observers, however, have taken a more measured view. Sommers, for instance, notes that "nearly all recent civil conflicts in Africa have rural, not urban, roots." Moreover, according to him, "many nations with youth bulge demographics have remained stable. Others have emerged from war and never returned to it."²⁴

Yet, given the size of Africa's current and projected future youth cohort – with sixty percent of Africa's 1.25 billion people currently under age 25 – the relationship between a youth bulge and instability need to be understood, and its stressors addressed.

Given the size of Africa's current and projected future youth cohort – with sixty percent of Africa's 1.25 billion people currently under age 25 – the relationship between a youth bulge and instability need to be understood, and its stressors addressed.

OPPORTUNITIES AND PITFALLS

The future of Africa's cities is bright. A growing young urban population could represent a political and financial boon for those cities, their host countries, and the continent as a whole. Yet that future is by no means secured. Policy planners at the local, national, regional, continental, and international levels will all need to plan

for the inevitable consequences of the changes now underway in Africa, ranging from resource scarcity to housing shortages to spikes in urban violence. How these factors are managed will go a long way toward determining whether Africa's cities become engines or growth, or emerge as pockets of instability.

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Competing for Africa: A Strategy for Partnerships against Predators

Blaise Misztal

For three decades, U.S. presidents have issued Africa strategies that have aspired to the same goals: promoting trade, driving economic growth, and delivering peace. Yet, all have advanced them only falteringly. A new strategy from the Trump administration that keeps the same ambitions but recasts them in a new strategic context—competition with authoritarian great powers—provides an opportunity to build on the most effective U.S. initiatives on the continent and learn from past failures. But its success will depend on responsible partnerships that share U.S. objectives and values.

CONTINUITY, NOT CHANGE

Each U.S. administration in the post-Cold War period has articulated a strikingly similar approach to Africa. Security and prosperity are recurring themes. Promoting trade and investment has been a bipartisan ambition. President Bill Clinton planned to “assist African nations to implement economic reforms, create favorable climates for trade and investment, and achieve sustainable development.”¹ President George W. Bush sought “liberty, peace, stability, and increasing prosperity” for Africa.² The “New Policy Toward Sub-Saharan Africa” put forward by President Obama was not quite so new; it too sought to “strengthen democratic institutions,” “spur economic growth, trade, and investment,” “advance peace and security,” and “promote opportunity and development.”³ Most recently, the Africa Strategy unveiled by the Trump administration largely follows the same path, pursuing enhanced U.S. economic ties with the region, countering serious threats, and using U.S. aid efficiently to “advance peace, stability, independence, and prosperity in the region.”⁴

To be sure, when it comes to implementation, differences have emerged. Previous administrations have emphasized different aspects of these common strategies or sought to

achieve similar objectives by varying means. The signature achievement of the Clinton era was the African Growth and Opportunity Act; the Bush administration made significant investments in battling AIDS and malaria; Obama had Power and Feed Africa; now, Prosper Africa is Trump’s primary effort on the continent.

But the greatest commonality has been that, whatever their ambitions, American presidents have more often pursued U.S. strategic objectives in Africa than implemented a strategy for Africa. That is to say, Africa has too often been treated as a passive backdrop against which the United States has sought to achieve its own interest, rather than a diverse array of actors with whom the United States seeks shared goals.

CONVOLUTED COUNTERTERRORISM

For much of the recent past, it has been the counterterrorism mission that has dominated U.S. engagement on the continent. The need to disrupt terrorist activity has created pressure on the United States to maintain good relations with those governments whose permission and cooperation are needed to conduct counter-terrorist operations. In turn, this dependency limits U.S. willingness to engage these same governments on difficult issues—like rule of law, human rights, corruption, or economic reform—that inhibit progress on non-security-related U.S. strategic objectives.

Yet this engagement has not improved the regional security environment. The U.S. maintains a significant presence on the continent; in 2018, nearly 17 percent of all U.S. commandos operating overseas were in Africa (compared to just one percent in 2006), operating out of some 42 sites there. However, the State Department reported that the number of terrorist attacks in Africa in 2018 almost doubled over the preceding year.⁵

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Worse, the growing emphasis on a “by, with, and through” model in which the United States trains local forces to conduct counter-terrorist missions themselves, thereby ideally limiting the U.S. expenditure of blood and treasure, could in fact be contributing to the violence. In one United Nations study, 70 percent of African violent extremists interviewed by the organization attributed their radicalization to security force abuse.⁶ The training provided by U.S. forces is not responsible for causing such abuse, but U.S.-trained forces have committed human rights violations in the past.⁷ Moreover, America’s dependence on local counter-terrorism partners complicates its ability, or desire, to pressure governments to rein in such abuse when it does occur. This, in turn, generates further radicalization, creating a greater need for counter-terrorism partnerships. A vicious cycle is thereby perpetuated.

THINKING BEYOND HARD SECURITY

Increasingly, economists and development experts are converging on the conclusion that a fundamental precondition for growth and investment—continually recurring U.S. strategic objectives in Africa—is good governance. At the same time, the often ambiguous concept of “good governance” is shifting away from institutional definitions, either the technical capacity to run government agencies (e.g., to gather taxes and compose a budget) or the processes of democratic selection of elected officials, and coalescing around a set of problems based on the relationship between the government (state) and the governed (society).⁸ These include an emphasis on inclusive decision-making processes, transparent and predictable enactment of government policies, and government accountability.⁹ Without legitimate, inclusive government, states struggle to develop the capacity to deliver basic services and generate economic opportunities.¹⁰ Without transparent and accountable legal processes and institutions, foreign capital will be loath to invest.¹¹

Yet, conflict, violence, and extremism all frustrate attempts at improving governance and U.S. security partnerships meant to stem the violence can cement the political *status quo*. Addressing these political challenges requires pushing governing elites, who may benefit from corruption or see

patronage, repression, or even violence as necessary to staying in power, to make difficult reforms. It can be hard to bring such pressure to bear while also maintaining the good relations needed to pursue security objectives “by, with, and through” local partners.

American presidents have more often pursued U.S. strategic objectives *in* Africa than implemented a strategy *for* Africa. That is to say, Africa has too often been treated as a passive backdrop against which the United States has sought to achieve its own interest, rather than a diverse array of actors with whom the United States seeks shared goals.

The most successful U.S. policy initiatives in Africa have thus been those that avoid falling into the trap of dependency on bad partners. The President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), created by President Bush in 2003, has provided treatment to more than 14 million people. Because of the critical assistance it provides, governments want PEPFAR in their countries, giving the United States leverage. But the program provides more than just medicine; just as importantly, it has built capable public institutions, healthier—and therefore wealthier—societies, and greater goodwill toward the United States.¹² The Millennium Challenge Corporation invented a new model for development assistance that required countries to meet detailed criteria related to governance and economic freedom before receiving aid and then held them accountable to use that aid efficiently. President Obama’s Young African Leadership Initiative (YALI) bypasses governments to engage African society directly. It brings hundreds of



African youth to the United States each year to develop leadership and professional skills, who are then introduced to a broad network of alumni. Such initiatives advance the U.S. vision of a free, stable, and prosperous Africa because they ultimately provide Africans with tools to pursue those objectives themselves.

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AFRICA AND “GREAT POWER COMPETITION”

President Trump’s Africa Strategy still aspires to the same goals as his predecessors, but in a new strategic context: the growing presence of China in Africa. As then-National Security Advisor John Bolton argued in a December 2018 speech unveiling the Strategy, “They are deliberately and aggressively targeting their investments in the region to gain a competitive advantage over the United States... China uses bribes, opaque agreements, and the strategic use of debt to hold states in Africa captive to Beijing’s wishes and demands.”¹³

This reframing of U.S. interests in Africa provides a crucial opportunity to reorient policy and avoid the challenges that bedeviled the counterterrorism-centric approach and undermined past strategies. Early indications suggest that the

Trump administration is treading gingerly and making some progress, but challenges remain. To begin with, it is critical that the U.S. policy be based on a realistic view of what strategic competition—and victory—means in Africa.

Fundamentally, the conditions that will allow autocratic external powers, like China, to exploit African countries are the same as those that enable the spread of extremism: the breakdown of political processes, rampant corruption, and spreading conflict. Bribery convinces elites to sign over access to natural resources or incur staggering debt to China without concern for their national interest. The desire to remain in power at all costs leads regimes to adopt Chinese technology to spy on and control their own people.

The United States will not succeed, therefore, in countering Beijing merely by encouraging U.S. investment to compete with Chinese tenders. On a level playing field, U.S. firms will always offer a better value, but the problem is precisely that the field is not level. Nor can the United States keep Russian arms and mercenaries off the continent simply by being more generous with its security assistance. The less scrupulous a regime, or the more desperate an insurgency, the more likely it will be to rely on arms or aid supplied with no strings attached.

A U.S. strategy that seeks to thwart the “predatory practices pursued by China and Russia” in Africa cannot simply try to either stop their activities or mimic them. It must

address the political conditions that make African regimes willing partners in Chinese and Russian predation. Nor should the new, and appropriate, focus on great power competition in Africa come at the cost of overlooking the continued, and growing, threat of radical Islamist terrorism, particularly as the Islamic State spreads into West Africa.¹⁴ The United States would do well to take on both challenges simultaneously through a singular approach of finding, supporting, and empowering local, reliable partners that contribute, or hope to contribute, to a free, stable, and prosperous future Africa.

RETHINKING OUR APPROACH

In his December 2018 address, Bolton promised that the United States would target its “economic efforts on



African governments that act with us as strategic partners, and, which are striving toward improved governance and transparent business practices.” The strategy also recognizes the obverse of this principle, that the United States should not support corrupt, oppressive, and unaccountable regimes or contribute in any way to the persistence of these conditions. Thus, it will “ensure that bilateral U.S. security assistance targets nations that act as responsible regional stakeholders” as well as “insist on accountable, robust, and effective peacekeeping operations.”

Some of these principles have since been translated into action. The Trump administration has withheld security assistance from Cameroon because of human rights abuses perpetrated by that country’s troops. It has increased scrutiny of the peacekeeping mission in Western Sahara amid allegations of sexual abuse. It has supported demands for democratic change in Algeria and Sudan, engaged in international efforts to stop a new Ebola epidemic in Congo, and encouraged positive political reforms in Ethiopia.

Yet still more needs to be done to deepen U.S. engagement with, and support for, local actors in Africa who share the commitment to building free, prosperous, inclusive, accountable, and just polities. Programs that seek to empower women, like the Women Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative and the Women’s Global Development and Prosperity Initiative, are a promising start. The signature Prosper Africa effort and revamped International Development Finance Corporation seek to inject foreign capital to unleash the potential of Africa’s business and youth. But greater investments in building vibrant civil society, free media, and cohesive communities are nonetheless needed. Tibor Nagy, the Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, captured the essence of this approach: “We must continually reinforce America’s steadfast commitment to the people of Africa. Our relationship has evolved over decades to one of cooperation, mutual respect, and transparency.”¹⁵

This is not a matter of spending more money, but reprioritizing how current U.S. foreign assistance is used and developing the right tools to deliver it. In 2018, almost 40 percent of U.S. aid to Africa went to either responding to humanitarian crises or conflicts. Comparatively, only 10 percent went to improving governance.¹⁶ Yet a U.S.

A U.S. strategy focused on empowering responsible leaders from the bottom up, starting in local villages and neighborhoods, could build the resilience and capabilities necessary for these communities to prevent conflict and better respond to crises themselves—obviating the need for much of the emergency response assistance currently provided by the United States.

strategy focused on empowering responsible leaders from the bottom up, starting in local villages and neighborhoods, could build the resilience and capabilities necessary for these communities to prevent conflict and better respond to crises themselves—obviating the need for much of the emergency response assistance currently provided by the United States. Such a strategy would require a political commitment from policymakers to not allow short-term exigencies to crowd out long-term objectives, developing new capabilities at civilian agencies to engage local communities far outside of U.S. embassies, and appropriating flexible funding that gives on-the-ground experts the ability to design innovative programming. The passage, at the end of 2018, of the Global Fragility Act, which requires the State Department to develop a strategy to “encourage and empower local and national actors to address the concerns of their citizens, including those in vulnerable communities, and build community resilience against violence and extremism,” is an important step in developing the capabilities need to implement an effective political strategy in Africa.¹⁷

As the United States pivots from counterterrorism to great power competition as its primary geopolitical concern, it has an opportunity to recognize that Africa wants the same outcome—for freedom and prosperity to prevail. To compete



successfully against global predators in Africa, the United States needs a strategy that empowers Africans to compete for their continent.

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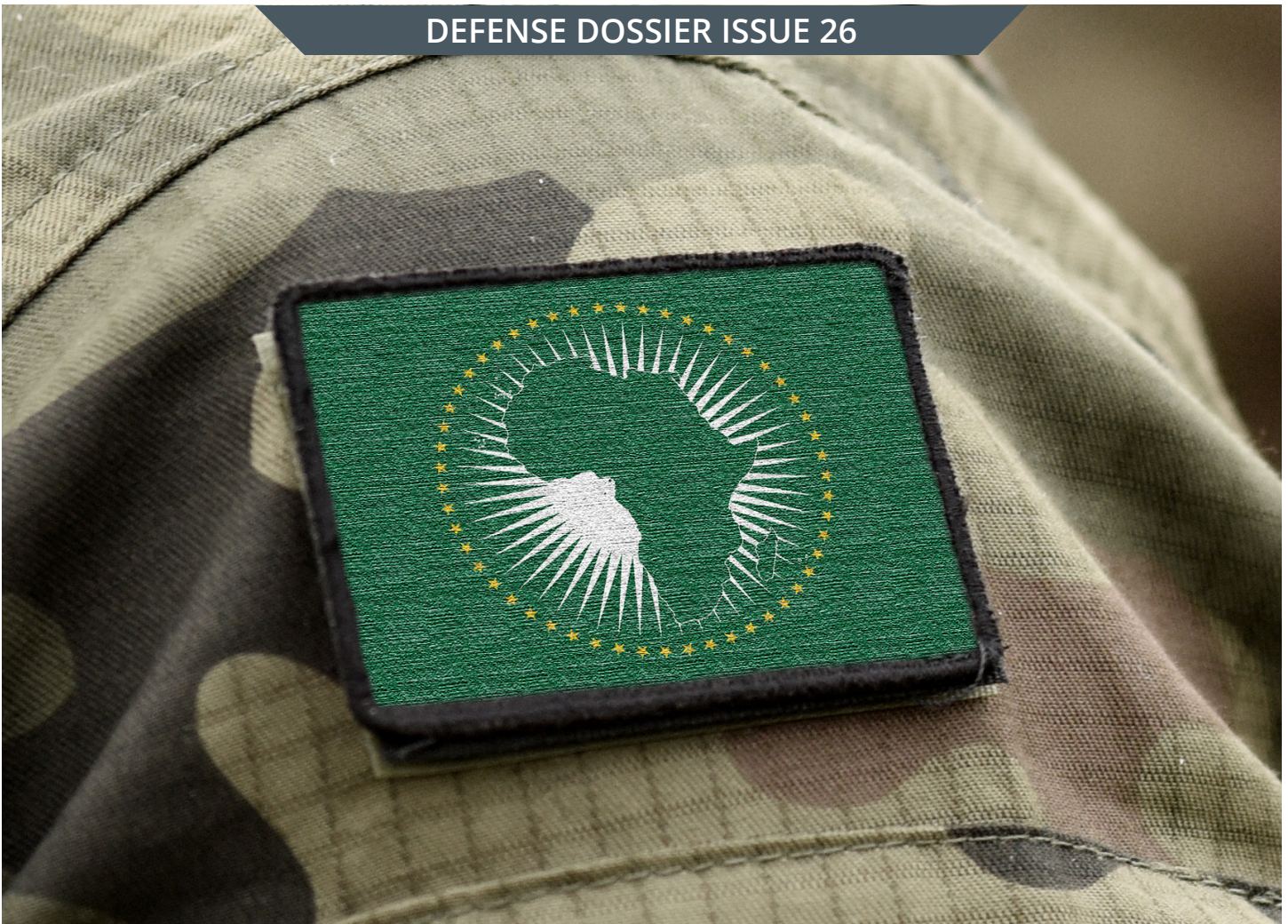
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EDITOR'S NOTE: The opinions expressed in the *Defense Dossier* (ISSN 2165-1841) are those of the author(s) alone and do not necessarily represent the opinions of the American Foreign Policy Council.

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