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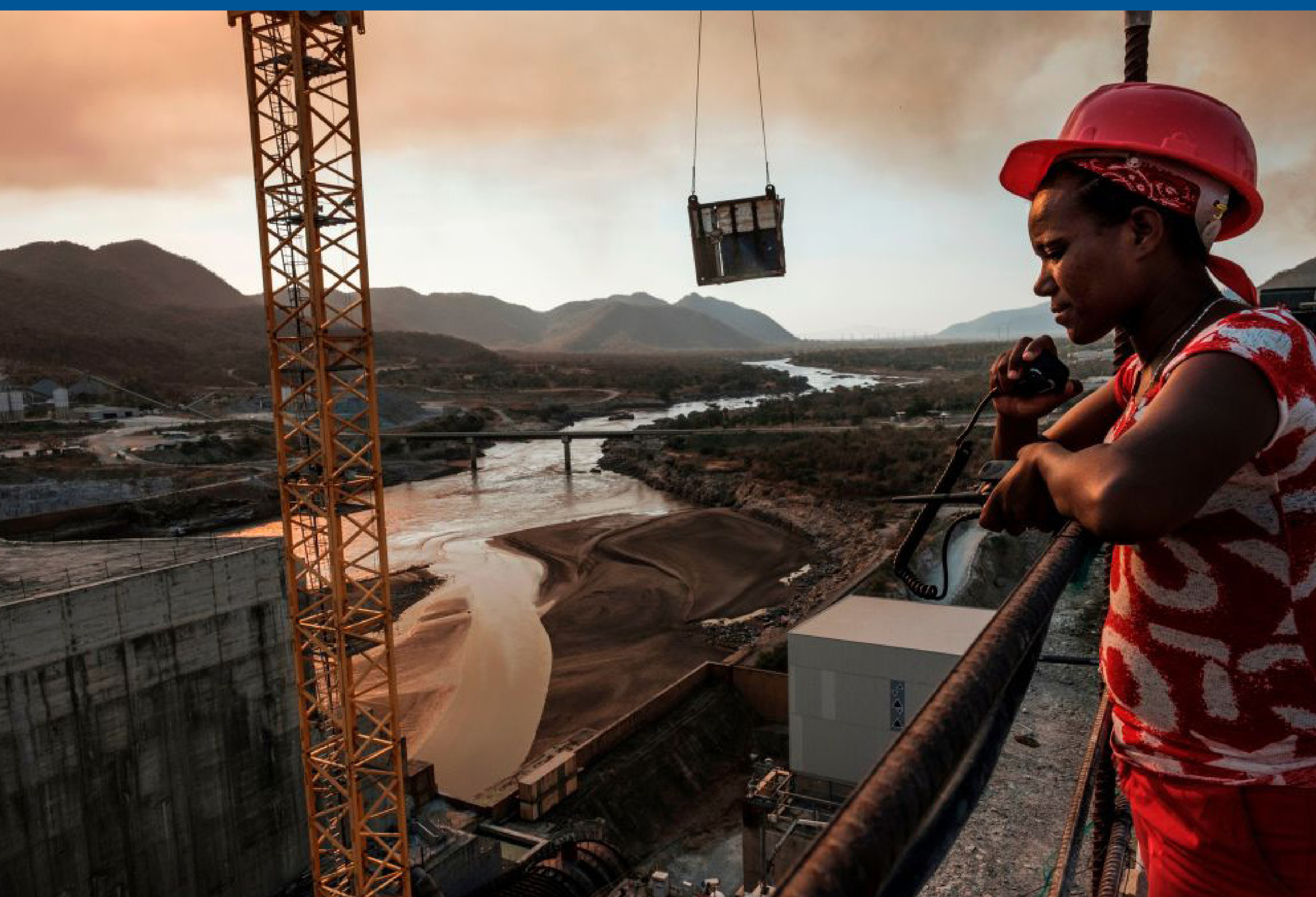
African Agency in the New Cold War:

Traditional Power Competition in the Post-COVID-19 African Landscape

Bronwyn Bruton



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Cover: Workey Tadele, a radio operator, at the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), near Guba in Ethiopia, on December 26, 2019. *Credit:* Eduardo Soteras/AFP via Getty

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Executive Summary

Since the end of the Cold War, a handful of powers have been able to exert influence across the whole of the African continent: the United States, China, the European Union (EU), and India.[1] These external powers have rarely competed directly against each other, as they have exercised influence in well-defined, separate spheres: The United States has held the soft power advantage for its aid and security assistance; China in infrastructure and increasing trade; India in the mercantilist activities of its diaspora; and Europe as an ally of the United States focused on countering irregular migration.

The resource-scarce post-COVID environment will accelerate competition between these powers and lead them into intersecting spheres of influence. Even with an incoming Joseph Biden administration, the United States is set for declining influence on the continent, creating a vacuum for Europe and China to either willingly or begrudgingly fill. Budget constraints on aid and defense, complemented by a shifting strategic emphasis toward great power competition, will lead the United States to scale down its security and development assistance in nonstrategic nations, instead urging American businesses to compete head on with Chinese firms in the marketplace. China, in turn, will be faced with an opportunity to ramp up its security assistance and will try to forge a new soft power advantage. This will be meant to overcome growing reputational concerns over debt relief and as a means to maintain the support of the African voting bloc in the United Nations as China faces enhanced global scrutiny. Europe may diverge more from the United States as it, too, is forced to carry a greater counterterrorism burden and seeks to combat a new surge of irregular migration, possibly nudging NATO to expand its footprint as well. And India will emerge from COVID-19 with a compelling value proposition for African nations seeking new economic partnerships.

Some African nations will find themselves in the crosshairs of a new Cold War mentality that could threaten regionalization and the blooming ethos of pan-Africanism. Key countries that will be implicated include Kenya, Ethiopia, Nigeria, South Africa, Senegal, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Their pursuit of bilateral versus pan-African interests will be decisive in setting the continent's trajectory—toward a new African Century, or another period of thwarted ambitions.

This paper explores the shifting roles of Africa's traditional external powers: China, the United States, the EU, and India. Section 1 introduces the evolving postures and colliding interests of these powers. Section 2 maps out the competitive post-COVID landscape and outlines economic and security flashpoints. Finally, Section 3 identifies opportunities for African nations to pursue their own ambitions while resisting the imposition of a new Cold War–style competition on the continent. These opportunities include the following:

- Building off collaborative pan-African initiatives created in response to COVID-19
- Advancing trade integration through the African Continental Free Trade Area
- Competing for select supply chains as countries seek diversification from China
- Promoting self-sufficiency by prioritizing agribusiness
- Taking advantage of South-South cooperation to boost trade and investment
- Realizing African leverage in debt negotiations with China
- Managing tech competition to avoid alienating the United States or China

A twin analysis by the Policy Center for the New South explores the repositioning of the *emerging* powers in Africa in the wake of COVID-19.[2]

1 For the purposes of this report, analysis of the European Union–Africa relationship will also include discussion of the bilateral interests and relations of the EU's member states, as well as former member the United Kingdom.

2 See *Emerging Powers in Africa: Key Drivers, Differing Interests, and Future Perspectives*, Policy Center for the New South, November 2020, https://www.policycenter.ma/publications/emerging-powers-africa-key-drivers-differing-interests-and-future-perspectives.

Section 1: Evolving Postures and Colliding Interests

Africa's long-term prospects are bright. It has the fastest-growing consumer class in the world, unparalleled mineral resources, and more unused arable land than any other continent. Africa is young and entrepreneurial, and as technology seeds development—especially in the agricultural and financial technology (fintech) arenas—African nations will become global breadbaskets and destination markets for the world's hottest firms.

But devastation associated with the COVID-19 pandemic threatens to knock this glowing trajectory off course. The pandemic has wrecked the global economy, and its worst effects are being felt in Africa, which will experience its first negative growth rates in decades (the World Bank predicts a gross domestic product [GDP] contraction of anywhere between 2 and 5 percent).[3] These economic shocks will be concentrated in South Africa, Angola, and Nigeria, but will be felt across the continent, and will have tragic knock-on effects in the form of increased political and food insecurity. Nonstate actors and external powers will in turn seek to capitalize on any instability that the pandemic creates.

COVID-19 has also revealed the vulnerabilities associated with a reliance on transnational supply chains, accelerating a long-term trend toward deglobalization, and kicking the long-simmering trade and ideological battles between the United States and China into high gear. The United States is now rushing to decouple its economy and technology from China and is trying to force its allies to do so, too. (See Box 6 on page 34 for analysis on tech competition, written by Aleksandra Gadzala.) In this new Cold War competition, European and Asian countries are the prime chess pieces, but some key African nations—the ones possessing vital mineral resources or sitting at key geostrategic chokepoints—will also be placed on the board.

In the world before COVID-19, there were four powers whose engagement with Africa was broad enough to exert a pan-continental influence: the United States, China, the European Union (EU), and India (see the appendix on page 36 for full write-ups of these powers' traditional postures toward Africa). But these powers rarely competed directly with one another: The United States possessed the soft power edge but engaged mostly in aid and security assistance; the EU was holistically aligned with the United States to counter irregular migration; China dominated in the trade and infrastructure spheres; and India pursued mercantilist ambitions through its large diaspora on the continent. Now, the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the arrival of a new era of great power competition that is increasingly being characterized as a new Cold War. And in this new era, the formerly separate spheres of influence will collide.

United States

Budgetary pressures and fatigue with its global policeman role will cause the United States to step back from security assistance, counterterrorism efforts, and aid to countries that are deemed to be of less strategic relevance in the conflict with China. The United States maintains structural soft power based on the export of culture, but long-standing efforts at democracy promotion, counterterrorism, and peacekeeping have a checkered history, sometimes purchasing short-term stability by shoring up authoritarian regimes. To compound this, US soft power has already experienced a rapid decline under the Donald Trump administration, as racialized commentary that has leaked out from the White House and images of police violence against Black American citizens have sullied the United States' reputation across Africa.[4] The US failure to surround its coronavirus relief efforts with a public relations campaign is characteristic of the US tradition of treating aid as separate from diplomacy, but has left many unaware of US generosity and, as a consequence, the contrast between Chinese and American caring seems stark and unflattering. COVID-19 will also erode the ability to fund such soft power initiatives, as well as harder military objectives that were already under review pre-COVID: notably, a military drawdown from the Sahel.[5] With aid and defense

3 Payce Madden, "Figures of the Week: The Macroeconomic Impact of COVID-19 in Africa," *Africa in Focus*, April 16, 2020, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2020/04/16/figures-of-the-week-the-macroeconomic-impact-of-covid-19-in-africa/.

4 Colum Lynch and Robbie Gramer, "With Scenes of Police Brutality, America's Beacon to the World Winks Out," *Foreign Policy*, June 1, 2020, https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/06/01/protests-trump-soft-power-wanes-racial-injustice-police-violence-george-floyd-world-reaction-police-brutality/; Omar Wally, Alex Gitta, and Privilege Musvanhiri, "#BLM: US Cycle of Racist Violence Resonates in Africa," *Deutsche Welle*, June 3, 2020, https://www.dw.com/en/blm-us-cycle-of-racist-violence-resonates-in-africa/a-53667767.

5 Helene Cooper, Thomas Gibbons-Neff, Charlie Savage, and Eric Schmitt, "Pentagon Eyes Africa Drawdown as First Step in Global Troop Shift," *New York Times*, December 24, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/24/world/africa/esper-troops-africa-china.html.

Medical supplies donated by the People's Republic of China to South Africa to fight the COVID-19 pandemic arrive at OR Tambo International Airport in Johannesburg from Guangzhou in April 2020. *Credit:* Flickr/GCIS, Government of South Africa

budgets set to be cut or at best plateau in response to the coronavirus, the US soft power retreat from Africa appears all but assured.[6]

Instead, Washington will seek to encourage American businesses to compete aggressively with China in the trade space in a long-called-for pivot to "trade, not aid."[7] In 2019, fearing China's growing economic footprint, the United States made efforts to retool and respond by launching the US International Development Finance Corporation (DFC), which has an expanded investment cap of $60 billion.[8] The forthcoming Prosper Africa Trade and Investment (PATI) program under Prosper Africa is also expected to provide significant monetary support (upwards of $500-750 million) toward targeted commercial programming in Africa. If done correctly, these initiatives could significantly boost the volume of US investments, and while the United States will never be in a position to supplant China for economic influence in Africa, these programs could genuinely accelerate US efforts at prying market share from China on the continent. Efforts at reshoring supply chains away from China, and potentially to Africa, could also contribute to a modest erosion of Chinese economic predominance and lead to further competition between the powers. (See Box 5 on page 29 for more detailed analysis on reshoring, written by Aubrey Hruby.)

China

China, in contrast, will seek to enhance its soft power in Africa while aiming to establish a heavier military footprint. The latter will partially suit the purpose of needling US forces (as China has done to great effect in Djibouti). But it will also arise out of the necessity to protect China's thousands of businesses and infrastructure investments, as Beijing remains Africa's largest lender and trading partner,

6 Missy Ryan, "Military Faces Another Potential Coronavirus Toll: Budget Cuts," *Washington Post*, May 15, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/military-faces-another-potential-coronavirus-toll-budget-cuts/2020/05/14/ae7abbf6-906b-11ea-8df0-ee33c3f5b0d6_story.html.

7 Alex Vines, "Trade Not Aid: Obama's Africa Legacy," Chatham House, September 20, 2016, https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/trade-not-aid-obama-s-africa-legacy.

8 US International Development Finance Corporation, "DFC Approves Nearly $900 Million for Global Development Projects," press release, March 12, 2020, https://www.dfc.gov/media/press-releases/dfc-approves-nearly-900-million-global-development-projects.

as well as foreign jobs creator and source of foreign direct investment.[9] China has leveraged the pandemic to assert itself as a global peer and ally, with timely "donation diplomacy" that has earned top marks compared with the other powers.[10] This comes on the heels of an existing push into Africa's media space that has underscored China's interest in broader soft power influence.[11]

The shift to soft power also comes as the pandemic provides China with troubling headwinds on the economic front. Claims that Beijing is setting a "debt trap" for African nations are overblown, as Africa's debt will inevitably be China's problem (to be discussed further in Section 3).[12] African demands for debt relief, for example, alongside an inevitable wave of defaults, will pose both reputational and economic challenges for China in the midst of the global recession. China's commercial success in Africa is also something of a double-edged sword: The omnipresence of Chinese businesses—from vast construction firms to the tiny mom-and-pop retailers that compete against African shop owners in the marketplace—is a perennial source of anxiety and resentment across the continent.

European Union

As the United States shifts its military resources out of Africa, Europe will be dragged unwillingly into providing more security and counterterrorism assistance to African states. While the European Union itself plays only a small institutional role in African affairs, member states such as Belgium, France, Germany, and Italy and former member the United Kingdom (UK) maintain robust relationships with the continent rooted in colonial ties. France maintains particularly strong bilateral relationships in West and Central Africa, where it retains the largest military footprint among the powers.[13] France also sustains economic influence through the French Treasury's guarantee of the CFA franc, along with exports totaling €27 billion. The UK has kept a more hands-off approach, but is still the second-largest bilateral aid donor to Africa.[14] It continues to have strong ties to countries like Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa, linked by its colonial past and current economic and security partnerships.[15] French and British corporates continue to hold outsized influence in African markets, and travel and educational exchange between the continents remains a staple for African diasporas.

Certain European states maintain specific focuses on Africa (e.g., France's emphasis on counterterrorism in the Sahel or Italy's interest in trans-Mediterranean trafficking), but European policy makers generally agree that irregular migration and terrorism are the key policy priorities relating to Africa. As these interests are rooted in the continent's proximity, the pandemic is unlikely to fundamentally alter the calculus of engagement. Even as the United States retreats, the EU will continue to feel the need to contribute to migration prevention and fragility mitigation efforts in the Group of Five (G5) Sahel countries—Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger—where threats of terrorism, organized crime, food insecurity, climate change, trafficking, and weak state structures will likely be exacerbated by COVID-19 pressures. In the process of filling the void left by US disengagement, the EU may find an ally in China, which will also consider African stability an imperative. The EU may also seek collaboration with autocratic regimes in the region to stem the flow of migrants, as has historically been the trend.[16]

India

Finally, India will emerge from its post-COVID slump seeking new markets and eager to compete with China in Africa. Though India has historically not played a geostrategic role in African affairs and its commercial footprint has not translated into diplomatic leverage, as the country's economy has grown so has its geopolitical, economic, and military aspirations on the continent. India has emphasized a "developing together as equals" narrative[17] and reacted swiftly

9 Wade Shepard, "What China Is Really Up To in Africa," *Forbes,* October 3, 2019, https://www.forbes.com/sites/wadeshepard/2019/10/03/what-china-is-really-up-to-in-africa/#7310fb085930; Reuben Brigety, "A Post-American Africa," *Foreign Affairs*, August 28, 2018, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/africa/2018-08-28/post-american-africa.

10 Edward Wong and Paul Mozer, "China's 'Donation Diplomacy' Raises Tensions with U.S.," *New York Times,* April 14, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/14/us/politics/coronavirus-china-trump-donation.html.

11 Aubrey Hruby, "In Africa, China Is the News," *Foreign Policy*, August 13, 2019, https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/08/13/in-africa-china-is-the-news/.

12 Eric Olander, "Deborah Brautigam Debunks the Chinese Debt Trap Theory in New Research Paper," The China Africa Project, December 18, 2019, https://chinaafricaproject.com/2019/12/18/deborah-brautigam-debunks-the-chinese-debt-trap-theory-in-new-research-paper/.

13 Landry Signe, "France-Africa Relations Challenged by China and the European Union," *Africa in Focus*, February 5, 2019, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2019/02/05/france-africa-relations-challenged-by-china-and-the-european-union/.

14 Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, *Development Aid at a Glance: Statistics by Region, 2. Africa*, June 2019, https://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-data/Africa-Development-Aid-at-a-Glance-2019.pdf, 1-16.

15 Alex Vines and Elizabeth Donnelly, "Theresa May's Focus on UK–Africa Ties Is Long Overdue," Chatham House, August 29, 2018, https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/theresa-may-s-focus-uk-africa-ties-long-overdue.

16 Shoshana Fine and Tarek Megerisi, "The Unacknowledged Cost of the EU's Migration Policy in Libya," The European Council on Foreign Relations, July 24, 2019, https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_unacknowledged_costs_of_the_eu_migration_policy_in_libya.

17 Abhishek Mishra, "How Indian and Chinese Involvement in Africa Differs in Intent, Methods and Outcomes," *Expert Speak*, September 17, 2019, https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/how-indian-and-chinese-involvement-in-africa-differs-in-intent-methods-and-outcomes-55574/.

African heads of state pose with German Chancellor Angela Merkel and other representatives at the G20 Compact with Africa Investment Summit in Berlin on November 19, 2019. *Credit:* Flickr/Paul Kagame

to the pandemic by pledging its "full support to the African continent."[18] In the sphere of development partnership, India is expanding its cotton technical assistance program to eleven African countries in its second phase.[19] Though India's $69 billion in bilateral trade remains a far cry from China's $208.7 billion, India is competitive in niche digital and health sectors.[20] Of note, India has used its flagship Pan African e-Network initiative to extend its footprint in bridging Africa's digital divide, connecting fifty-three African countries to a wireless fiber-optic network in tele-education and telecommunication.[21] And as the world's largest producer of pharmaceuticals, India has leveraged successful health diplomacy efforts that the country hopes will lead to expanded commercial ties post-pandemic.[22]

As these traditional powers maneuver for advantage in the wake of COVID-19, African nations will be faced with some stark, historic choices. Will they endure the new Cold War as they did the last one, as individual pawns, or can the rising ethos of pan-Africanism lead to new and better outcomes for the continent as a whole? African leaders will decide.

18 Press Trust of India, "Coronavirus: India Sending Medicines to 25 African Countries," *Business Insider India*, May 8, 2020, https://www.businessinsider.in/india/news/coronavirus-india-sending-medicines-to-25-african-countries/articleshow/75631714.cms.

19 Press Trust of India, "India to Expand Cotton Assistance Programme to 5 More African Nations in 2nd Phase," *Economic Times*, October 7, 2019, https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/agriculture/india-to-expand-cotton-assistance-programme-to-5-more-african-nations-in-2nd-phase/articleshow/71482649.cms?from=mdr.

20 Jevans Nyabiage, "China's Trade with Africa Grows 2.2 Percent in 2019 to US$208 Billion," *South China Morning Post*, January 18, 2020, https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3046621/chinas-trade-africa-grows-22-cent-2019-us208-billion; Mishra, "How Indian and Chinese Involvement in Africa Differs in Intent, Methods and Outcomes."

21 Abhishek Mishra, "Pan Africa e-Network: India's Africa Outreach," *Expert Speak*, Observer Research Foundation, May 4, 2018, https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/pan-africa-e-network-indias-africa-outreach/.

22 Abhishek Dadhich, "The COVID-19 Pandemic and the Indian Pharmaceutical Industry," *European Pharmaceutical Review*, April 22, 2020, https://www.europeanpharmaceuticalreview.com/article/117413/the-covid-19-pandemic-and-the-indian-pharmaceutical-industry/.

Section 2: Competition after COVID-19

Political Winners and Losers of COVID-19

In the short term, China's pandemic diplomacy is a "winner" while the United States' racism and indifference to Africa is a "loser." In the longer term, however, the United States is on track to substantially boost its investments in Africa, while Chinese spending on the continent has already flatlined and may even be set to decrease in the coming years.

In the midst of the COVID-19 crisis, Beijing has attempted to take a leadership role in coordinating and providing humanitarian assistance, asserting "donation diplomacy" to acquire political capital and legitimacy worldwide and in Africa.[23] Chinese engagement with Africa included well over $280 million through August 2020 in coronavirus-related support, coming from an uncharacteristically diverse set of Chinese actors.[24] At least half of this pandemic aid has come from the Chinese private sector, with significant donations also coming from charities, individuals, and Africa's Chinese embassies.[25]

China's success has been in terms of not only its scale, but its marketing. China has leveraged multilateral summits and the media space to broadcast the country's engagement and drum up goodwill. Chinese billionaire Jack Ma, for instance, took to Twitter to publicize his donation of personal protective equipment (PPE) to all fifty-four African countries, along with messages of Chinese solidarity.[26] Embassies, state media, and affiliated social media accounts have also consistently reported prominently on Chinese donations, whereas US donations have suffered from a relative lack of promotion. President Xi Jinping has also taken advantage of forums such as the World Health Assembly to announce popular initiatives, such as China's commitment to supply $2 billion in aid targeted at developing countries, advancing China's narrative of being a developing-country peer.[27]

Despite China's general success at leveraging the moment, the country has also received blowback for incidents of xenophobia against African migrants. Stories and videos circulated on social media showing discrimination against African citizens living in Guangzhou, leading African ambassadors to write an unprecedented joint letter to Beijing demanding answers.[28]

These complaints of xenophobia only briefly managed to divert attention from China's positive outreach, however, as they were quickly subsumed by media coverage of the Black Lives Matter protests against racism in the United States. The idea of American exceptionalism has been further tarnished by the Trump administration's ineffective domestic response to the pandemic, which continues to dominate headlines around the world.

Though the short-term politics of the pandemic have been a boon for Chinese soft power, longer-term economics may shift public opinion the other way. Firstly, though the Chinese economy is likely to be resilient and Chinese strategic interest will remain, China may be forced to scale back from its current level of lending to Africa in at least the short to medium term due to economic pressures at home. This will be compounded by demands for debt relief, as experts say a wave of defaults is inevitable, especially as many African countries including South Africa, Ethiopia, and Kenya grapple with credit downgrades in recent months.[29] Irresponsible lending by China may well be blamed.

While some of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects in Africa have already started to falter or stall, this will affect only a targeted few countries. In February, Egypt postponed Chinese-funded construction of the world's second-largest power plant; in April, Tanzania's president cancelled a $10 billion port project that would have granted China a ninety-nine-year lease and control over

23 Eric Olander, "China's COVID-19 Donation Spree Picks Up Pace in Africa," The China Africa Project, April 1, 2020, https://chinaafricaproject.com/analysis/chinas-covid-19-donation-spree-picks-up-pace-in-africa/.

24 Chiponda Chimbelu, "COVID-19 Pandemic to Transform China-Africa Relations," *Deutsche Welle*, August 6, 2020, https://www.dw.com/en/covid-19-pandemic-to-transform-china-africa-relations/a-53724530.

25 Ibid.

26 African Union, "Africa CDC Receives Third Donation of Medical Supplies from Jack Ma Foundation," press release, April 27, 2020, https://africacdc.org/news-item/africa-cdc-receives-third-donation-of-medical-supplies-from-jack-ma-foundation-co-hosts-global-medixchange-webinar-on-covid-19/.

27 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "President Xi Jinping Makes Statement at the Virtual Event of the Opening of the 73rd World Health Assembly," May 18, 2020, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1780682.shtml.

28 "African Ambassadors Write Letter of Complaint to China over 'Discrimination,'" *Reuters*, April 11, 2020, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-africa/african-ambassadors-in-china-complain-to-government-over-discrimination-idUSKCN21T0T7.

29 "The Pandemic Is Hurting China's Belt and Road Initiative," *The Economist*, June 4, 2020, https://www.economist.com/china/2020/06/04/the-pandemic-is-hurting-chinas-belt-and-road-initiative; Shashank Bengali and Neha Wadekar, "Coronavirus Threatens China's Belt and Road," *Los Angeles Times*, May 20, 2020, https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2020-05-20/coronavirus-strikes-chinas-belt-and-road-initiative.

the port in Bagamoyo; and in Nigeria, leaders have called for all projects involving Chinese loans to be reviewed, worried they may have agreed to unfavorable financing.[30] While Beijing has insisted that the initiative remains on track, scholars maintain that sustaining the present level of BRI lending will not be economically prudent.[31] Still, as economic ties anchor Sino-African relations, a downturn in support could have a severe impact on African markets and public perceptions of China. As such, China is likely to do whatever it can to keep its remaining BRI projects and other continent-wide investments afloat.

The long-term US outlook on Africa is set to improve, as the economic portfolio takes center stage. US venture capital flows to the continent are steadily rising and, as discussed above, the new US DFC brings an expanded investment cap of $60 billion to the table, while PATI stands to be the $500-750 million implementing backbone of Prosper Africa.[32] Concerns will be whether COVID-19 may impact the resourcing and structure of these programs, as the Trump administration has already redirected some DFC resources domestically, and the extent to which the current soft power deficit will linger.[33] However, over the longer term, the United States' economic initiatives should dramatically expand US investment in Africa.

The Long-Term African Landscape

The novel coronavirus pandemic has created a resource-poor environment, finance-wise, in which deglobalization, driven by hostility between China and the United States, is the overwhelming trend. There is a growing expert consensus that we face a new Cold War, and as external powers look to sharpen and assert their own interests in Africa's time of need, the continent is at risk of being carelessly buffeted by global powers, much as it was during the last round of great power competition.[34] Meanwhile, this jostling between the United States and China, and to a lesser extent between China, India, and the EU, is opening the door for other, nontraditional, actors—including Japan, Israel, and South Korea—to make meaningful forays into the continent in various sectors.[35]

In the United States, the economic downturn caused by the pandemic is likely to entrench the retreat from multilateralism embodied by the Trump administration's policy of "America First," at least as this relates to engagement with Africa. President-elect Biden will challenge Trump's view of globalism as a threat to sovereignty, and will rush to repair the NATO alliance and position the United States as a more accommodating voice in multilateral fora and the global trading system.[36] However, Washington will be facing trillions of dollars of new debt in the wake of the pandemic, and that will severely limit its ability to sustain the role of global policeman. Counterterrorism programs in Africa have always been controversial—with many analysts questioning whether African extremist groups pose any viable threat to the US homeland—and they are likely to be scaled back as more military resources are diverted toward China.[37] This will have serious implications for the countries of the Horn and the Sahel.

As US aid budgets come under pressure, Washington will not only seek to instrumentalize the aid it distributes but will likely decisively step back from countries where donor fatigue has already set in (including terrorism hotspots like Somalia and Mali). Budget hawks in the State Department have argued that the United States should concentrate its aid resources on the reform-minded democracies that are most likely to make good use of the funding, while cutting aid to persistently failed and failing states.[38] In the coming years, acute budget pressures will make this approach more attractive.

The United States is likely to try to focus the bulk of its development and security assistance on a few key anchor states, such as South Africa, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Senegal, in an effort to win them over decisively as allies in the contest against China.[39] The incoming administration is likely to seek bilateral trade deals with these countries. A free trade agreement (FTA) with Kenya is already in the

30 "The Pandemic Is Hurting China's Belt and Road Initiative," *The Economist*.

31 Shashank Bengali and Neha Wadekar, "Coronavirus Threatens China's Belt and Road"; The Pandemic Is Hurting China's Belt and Road Initiative," *The Economist*.

32 WeeTracker Research, "Cross-Border Investing: The Most Active US-Based VCs in Africa," *WeeTracker*, May 25, 2020, https://weetracker.com/2020/05/25/cross-border-investing-the-most-active-us-based-vcs-in-africa/.

33 Franco Ordonez, "Trump Redirects Foreign Aid Agency to Work on Pandemic. Congress Has Questions," *NPR*, July 17, 2020, https://www.npr.org/2020/07/17/891896361/trump-redirects-foreign-aid-agency-to-work-on-pandemic-congress-has-questions.

34 Frederick Kempe, "China Has Already Decided Cold War II Has Begun – Now It's Escalating," Atlantic Council, July 19, 2020, https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/content-series/inflection-points/china-has-already-decided-cold-war-ii-has-begun-now-it-is-escalating/.

35 See *Emerging Powers in Africa: Key Drivers, Differing Interests, and Future Perspectives*, Policy Center for the New South, November 2020, https://www.policycenter.ma/publications/emerging-powers-africa-key-drivers-differing-interests-and-future-perspectives.

36 White House, "Remarks by President Trump to the 73rd Session of the United Nations General Assembly," United States Government, September 25, 2018, https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-73rd-session-united-nations-general-assembly-new-york-ny/.

37 Peter Bergen and David Sterman, "Jihadist Terrorism 17 Years after 9/11: A Threat Assessment," *New America*, September 10, 2018, https://www.newamerica.org/international-security/reports/jihadist-terrorism-17-years-after-911/what-is-the-threat-to-the-united-states/.

38 Kiron Skinner, "The Trump Administration's Approach to Fragile States," US Department of State, March 14, 2019, https://www.state.gov/the-trump-administrations-approach-to-fragile-states/.

39 Stephanie Hanson, "Leading Africa," Council on Foreign Relations, April 22, 2009, https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/leading-africa.

African heads of state join President of China Xi Jinping for the Extraordinary China-Africa Summit on Solidarity Against COVID-19 virtually in June 2020. *Credit:* Flickr/Paul Kagame

negotiation stage and is being designed to serve as a template for other African FTAs.[40] The choice of Kenya for this model arrangement is telling, as evidence suggests the rationale is heavily strategic instead of purely economic.[41] Kenya is a key US counterterrorism ally and helps drive the East African Community, with which China has failed to reach a trade agreement, despite negotiations since 2016.[42]

African states would strongly prefer to have robust security and trade relations with both the United States and China, but their ambitions will be undercut by Washington's tendency to view its competition with Beijing as zero-sum. US rhetoric on the "clear choice" facing African nations is already integrated into PATI.[43] It is unlikely that Washington will invest extensive aid and security resources in countries that have "chosen China" by voting against US interests in the United Nations (UN) or privileging Chinese firms over American ones. Under President Trump, the United States has shown a willingness to engage in retaliatory action; in a written statement in 2018, the United States spelled out its threat to cut aid to countries based on UN voting that was perceived as oppositional to US interests, highlighting the

40 Office of the United States Trade Representative, "Joint Statement between the United States and Kenya on the Launch of Negotiations towards a Free Trade Agreement," press release, July 8, 2020, https://ustr.gov/about-us/policy-offices/press-office/press-releases/2020/july/joint-statement-between-united-states-and-kenya-launch-negotiations-towards-free-trade-agreement.

41 David Pilling, "US and Kenya to Start Talks on 'Model' Trade Deal for Africa," *Financial Times*, February 2, 2020, https://www.ft.com/content/be6b1d5a-4415-11ea-a43a-c4b328d9061c.

42 Jack Caporal, "Going Solo: What Is the Significance of a U.S.-Kenya Free Trade Agreement?" Center for Strategic and International Studies, March 18, 2020, https://www.csis.org/analysis/going-solo-what-significance-us-kenya-free-trade-agreement.

43 US Agency for International Development, "U.S. Agency for International Development Administrator Mark Green's Interview with C-Span's Host Susan Swain and Washington Post's Carol Morello and Wall Street Journal's Ben Kesling," press release, November 26, 2018, https://www.usaid.gov/news-information/press-releases/nov-26-2018-administrator-mark-green-interview-cspan-newsmakers.

Trump administration's characteristically transactional approach.[44] Countries in the Pacific like the Solomon Islands, too, have faced reduced US support and had meetings canceled with senior officials upon the renewal of ties to China or suspension of ties with Taiwan.[45]

China also has a historic preference for bilateralism in its foreign policy and trade agreements. One example of how this has manifested during the pandemic is China's preference for negotiating debt bilaterally. Instead of moving to cancel Africa's estimated $147 billion in concessional loans, President Xi announced that loan negotiations would take place on a case-by-case basis.[46] Several countries, including Nigeria and Zambia, are already in bilateral talks for debt restructuring, with Zambia recently reaching a deal on some of its loans.[47]

Security Flashpoints

COVID-19 shocks threaten to produce a landscape of rising instability in Africa. Despite UN Secretary-General António Guterres calling for a global ceasefire amidst the pandemic, conflict continues and risks have worsened.[48] Economic contraction, in stark contrast to years of sustained 4-6 percent African growth, will accentuate existing issues and put additional strain on ineffective states.[49] Much of the African continent already faces food insecurity, which World Food Programme Executive Director David Beasley claims could reach "biblical proportions" as a result of COVID-19.[50] Key regions such as the Sahel and the Horn of Africa have also been impacted by locust swarms, regional insecurity and conflict, extremism, climate change–related droughts, and flooding. The number of displaced peoples continues to rise, and as donor countries focus on domestic COVID-19 struggles, humanitarian support and peacekeeping operations in Africa are increasingly diminishing or being placed on hold.[51]

Prior to the pandemic, the US Department of Defense had already initiated a review on how to streamline operations and refocus defense priorities on China and Russia, mulling a drawdown from the Sahel.[52] With defense budgets for Africa set to be cut or at best plateau in response to COVID-19, the Pentagon may be tempted to dramatically draw down its forces in Africa—hoping, perhaps, that Europe will be forced to take on some of the burden of counterterrorism and military training exercises.[53] The Trump administration has repeatedly criticized EU countries like Germany for being "delinquent" on defense spending and recently announced the withdrawal of the United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) from Stuttgart, Germany.[54] This move is largely viewed as further evidence of American disengagement and antagonism toward both African and NATO allies. However, while the combatant command headquarters will likely be moved to another European country, the possibility of its relocation to the United States could provide increased access to policy makers and influential Defense Department institutions. However, this would require a concerted approach that the current withdrawal does not reflect.

China, too, has relied implicitly on US stabilization efforts in Africa to protect its infrastructure projects, businesses, and investments. If and as instability rises, China may be forced to deploy its own military forces to fill the void. That would breed heightened opportunities for China and the United States to come into direct conflict in the African

44 Anita Powell, "African Nations Defiant to US Aid Threat over UN Voting," *Voice of America*, May 2, 2018, https://www.voanews.com/africa/african-nations-defiant-us-aid-threat-over-un-voting.

45 Roberta Ramptin, "Exclusive: Pence Rebuffs Solomon Islands PM after Nation Cuts Ties with Taiwan," *Reuters*, September 17, 2019, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-taiwan-diplomacy-pence-exclusive/exclusive-pence-rebuffs-solomon-islands-pm-after-nation-cuts-ties-with-taiwan-idUSKBN1W22WK.

46 Deborah Brautigam, Jyhjong Hwang, Jordan Link, and Kevin Acker, "Chinese Loans to Africa Database," China Africa Research Initiative, Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, last updated July 1, 2020, https://chinaafricaloandata.org/; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "Joint Statement of the Extraordinary China-Africa Summit on Solidarity against COVID-19," June 17, 2020, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1789596.shtml.

47 Alonso Soto, "Nigeria Won't Seek Eurobond Waiver, Eyes China for Relief," *Bloomberg*, April 7, 2020, https://www.bloomberg.com/amp/news/articles/2020-04-07/nigeria-won-t-seek-eurobond-waiver-eyes-china-loans-for-relief; Elliot Smith, "Zambia's Spiraling Debt Offers Glimpse into the Future of Chinese Loan Financing in Africa," *CNBC*, January 24, 2020, https://www.cnbc.com/2020/01/14/zambias-spiraling-debt-and-the-future-of-chinese-loan-financing-in-africa.html; Jevans Nyabiage, "Zambia Agrees Debt Relief Deal with China Development Bank," *South China Morning Post*, October 29, 2020, https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3107627/zambia-agrees-debt-relief-deal-china-development-bank.

48 "COVID-19: UN Chief Calls for Global Ceasefire to Focus on 'the True Fight of Our Lives,'" *UN News*, March 23, 2020, https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/03/1059972.

49 "GDP Growth (Annual %) - Sub-Saharan Africa," The World Bank, accessed August 24, 2020, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?locations=ZG.

50 Simeon Ehui, "Protecting Food Security in Africa during COVID-19," *Africa in Focus*, May 14, 2020, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2020/05/14/protecting-food-security-in-africa-during-covid-19/; Larry Luxner, "WFP's David Beasley Warns of Dire Famines in Africa, Mideast If COVID-19 Supply Chains Damage Continues," *New Atlanticist*, Atlantic Council, May 8, 2020, https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/wfps-david-beasley-warns-of-dire-famines-in-africa-mideast-if-covid-19-supply-chains-damage-continues/.

51 Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, "Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, United Nations," United Nations, April 7, 2020, https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/db200407.doc.htm.

52 Cooper, Gibbons-Neff, Savage, and Schmitt, "Pentagon Eyes Africa Drawdown as First Step in Global Troop Shift."

53 Ryan, "Military Faces Another Potential Coronavirus Toll: Budget Cuts."

54 Jeff Seldin, "US Pulling Africa Command from Germany," *Voice of America*, July 31, 2020, https://www.voanews.com/usa/us-pulling-africa-command-germany.

theater—particularly if China seeks to needle US forces on the Atlantic side of the continent as it has done in Djibouti. And Europe, which will no doubt be eager to share the burden of peacekeeping and counterterrorism, may seek to partner with China rather than resist the militarization of its footprint in Africa. All this comes as military tensions between India and China have escalated in Kashmir, culminating in June in the worst border violence between the nations in forty-five years.[55]

Post-COVID, there are numerous potential security flashpoints that could bring the powers into conflict, including the following:

The Mediterranean Crossing

The pandemic has reinvigorated US and EU interest in protecting their borders from a new wave of migrants. While President Trump has sought to build a US-Mexico border wall, NATO has reinvigorated its southern strategy in an effort to contain the perceived security threats emanating from Africa, including terrorism and irregular migration. The southern strategy is not a wall, but as a loose conglomeration of policies intended to reduce unwanted migration, it has had a similar effect. One example of concerted efforts to close African migrant routes is evidenced through Italy's 2017 deal[56] with tribal leaders in southern Libya.

From the onset of the coronavirus crisis, the EU has taken severe measures to try to curb migration. Italy and Malta declared their ports closed to all migrants due to the pandemic and decreased search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean.[57] Malta was later accused of sabotaging a migrant boat rescue.[58] Asylum applications dropped 86 percent from February to April 2020,[59] following border closures and quarantine measures. However, as border closures increase pent-up demand for migration, and as outbreaks in Africa threaten to create food shortages, unemployment, and instability—all to be compounded by the imminent climate crisis—it is likely that there will be a significant surge in migration across the Mediterranean route, and that the EU will prioritize its own border protection in response, as it has consistently done since 2015.

The Horn of Africa

The United States and the EU welcomed China's first naval foray into the Horn of Africa during the Operation Atalanta response to the Somali piracy crisis that started in 2008.[60] Western forces hoped that it would represent a new commitment by China to carry its weight as a global peacekeeper. Now, Chinese military engagement in Africa is largely viewed as a competitive play for foreign influence. Nowhere is this more evident than in Djibouti, where in 2017 China opened its first overseas military base just a fifteen-minute drive away from Camp Lemonnier, the United States' only permanent military base in Africa.[61]

The opening of the base and its strategic location next to several European and US military bases on the Suez Canal—where 10 percent of the world's sea-borne trade passes through—has bred tension, and is largely considered to be part of Chinese efforts to gain a foothold in the Red Sea. Officially, the base has "nothing to do with an arms race or [Chinese] military expansion," constructed to "support naval missions" along Somalia and Yemen.[62] Yet, perplexingly, there have thus far been no signs of a dock amidst the twenty-three thousand–foot fortification. Even if the base was not a deliberate act of antagonism, China has certainly made inroads in this regard. China has been accused by AFRICOM of "irresponsible actions," including conducting live fire exercises within months of opening and causing flight operation interferences with its unmanned aerial vehicles.[63] In 2018, the United States accused China of directing military-grade lasers at US pilots, allegations China denies.[64]

55 Steven Lee Myers, Maria Abi-Habib, and Jeffrey Gettleman, "In China-India Clash, Two Nationalist Leaders with Little Room to Give," *New York Times*, June 17, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/17/world/asia/china-india-border.html.

56 Euractiv.com with Agence France-Presse, "Italy Brokers Deal with Libyan Tribes to Curb Migrant Influx," *Euractiv*, April 3, 2020, https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/italy-brokers-deal-with-libyan-tribes-to-curb-migrant-influx/.

57 "COVID-19 Control Measures, Gap in SaR Capacity Increases Concern about 'Invisible Shipwrecks,'" International Organization for Migration, May 12, 2020, https://www.iom.int/news/covid-19-control-measures-gap-sar-capacity-increases-concern-about-invisible-shipwrecks?utm_source=Unknown%20List&utm_campaign=bb10a2b60b-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2020_05_12_05_28&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_-bb10a2b60b-.

58 Patrick Kingsly, "Malta Accused of Sabotaging Migrant Boat," *New York Times*, April 9, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/09/world/europe/malta-migrant-boat.html.

59 Lena Masri, "Applications for Asylum in EU Plummet during Pandemic," *Reuter*s, June 9, 2002, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-eu-asylum/applications-for-asylum-in-eu-plummet-during-pandemic-idUSKBN23H0PX.

60 Cindy Cheng, "China and U.S. Anti-piracy Engagement in the Gulf of Aden and Western Indian Ocean Region," The Carter Center, April 9, 2017, https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/china/trs-05-anti-piracy-engagement.pdf.

61 Arwa Damon and Brent Swails, "China and the United States Face Off in Djibouti as the World Powers Fight for Influence in Africa," CNN, May 27, 2019, https://www.cnn.com/2019/05/26/africa/china-belt-road-initiative-djibouti-intl/index.html.

62 Lily Kuo, "China Has Officially Opened Its First Military Base in Africa," *Quartz*, August 1, 2017, https://qz.com/africa/1043185/china-has-officially-opened-its-first-overseas-military-base-in-djibouti-in-the-horn-of-africa/.

63 Said Aboubaker, "Djibouti: China, U.S. Standoff Playing Itself Out in Djibouti," *allAfrica*, June 5, 2019, https://allafrica.com/stories/201906060212.html.

64 Paul Sonne, "U.S. Accuses China of Directing Blinding Lasers at American Military Aircraft in Djibouti," *Washington Post*, May 3, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2018/05/03/u-s-accuses-china-of-directing-blinding-lasers-at-american-military-aircraft-in-djibouti/.

U.S. Navy tactical patrol boats from Camp Lemonnier boat the replenishment oiler USNS Tippecanoe (T-AO 199) as it departs the Port of Djibouti. *Credit:* Flickr/U.S. Navy/Shannon D. Barnwell

Djibouti's nationalization of its Doraleh port stoked fears of a possible transfer to China,[65] leading the United States to re-engage in East African politics and to quietly seek out new locations for a military base.[66] AFRICOM Commander Gen. Thomas Waldhauser warned that a Chinese takeover of the port could have "significant" consequences if there were restrictions on the United States' ability to use the facility.[67] These examples exemplify how African nations are being used as part of a geopolitical game of influence by global military powers,[68] especially as the United States scouts out neighboring Eritrea as a possible base location, elevating the country as a strategic rival to Djibouti.[69]

After a decade of peacekeeping efforts, Somalia remains particularly vulnerable to the pandemic.[70] Much of the country remains in the control of al-Qaeda-linked extremist movement Al-Shabaab, which may seek advantage from the government's stumbling response, and from public outrage over civilian casualties from US counterterrorism strikes.[71] (The United States has dramatically increased the tempo of airstrikes in Somalia under the Trump administration, and while decreasing some personnel and downsizing drills, AFRICOM stressed it would maintain those strikes despite the coronavirus[72] and concerns over collateral damage.[73])

In general, there is a threat that extremist groups throughout Africa will make strategic gains as African states and foreign forces alike transfer focus toward their domestic pandemic fights. Groups like al-Qaeda, Al-Shabaab, and

65 Nizar Manek, "Djibouti Nationalizes Port Company Stake in DP World Dispute," *Bloomberg*, September 10, 2018, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-09-10/djibouti-nationalizes-port-company-s-stake-in-disputed-terminal.

66 Mehari Taddele Maru, "Why the US Is Engineering Political Change in East Africa," *Al Jazeera*, October 9, 2018, https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/political-horn-africa-181009105638922.html%5C.

67 Aboubaker, "Djibouti: China, U.S. Standoff Playing Itself Out in Djibouti."

68 Wilder Alejandro Sánchez and Scott Morgan, "China Has a New Military Base in Djibouti," *International Policy Digest*, August 11, 2017, https://intpolicydigest.org/2017/08/11/china-military-base-djibouti/.

69 Mehari Taddele Maru, "A New Cold War in Africa," *Al Jazeera*, July 1, 2019, https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/cold-war-africa-190630102044847.html.

70 Subban Jama and Ayan Abdullahi, "'We Are Used to a Virus Called Bombs,'" *Foreign Policy*, May 12, 2020, https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/05/12/coronavirus-pandemic-somalia-al-shabab/.

71 Claire Felter, "The Controversy over U.S. Strikes in Somalia," Council for Foreign Relations, April 3, 2019, https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/controversy-over-us-strikes-somalia.

72 Shawn Snow, "'High-Ranking' al-Shabab Leader Killed in U.S. Strike," *Military Times*, April 7, 2020, https://www.militarytimes.com/flashpoints/2020/04/07/high-ranking-al-shabab-leader-killed-in-us-strike/.

73 Amanda Sperber, "The 'Collateral Damage' of the U.S.'s Unofficial War in Somalia," *In These Times*, December 16, 2019, https://inthesetimes.com/features/us-air-strikes-somalia-al-shabab-ISIS-pentagon-civilian-casualties.html; Amanda Sperber, "Does America Know Who Its Airstrike Victims Are?" *Foreign Policy*, May 7, 2019, https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/05/07/does-america-know-who-its-airstrike-victims-are-somalia-africom/.

the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) are distributing propaganda with claims that the pandemic is evidence of God's wrath against the West, that the virus is spread by crusader forces, and that government lockdown measures are an act of war on Muslims.[74] These groups also have the potential to provide health care or distribute food in regions that lack strong state presence, using the crisis to blame governments while gaining support and legitimacy that some communities may not be in a position to resist.

Ethiopia is also very unstable, as Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed has postponed highly anticipated elections to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Ethnic tensions there threaten to spiral out of control, with absolutely devastating consequences for the rest of the region. At the time of writing, this was particularly apparent in the Tigray region, where a military escalation in the standoff with the Tigray People's Liberation Front risked further unrest.[75] Ethiopia has long served as a bulwark against instability in the Horn. If it succumbs to widespread disorder, extremist elements from Somalia could quickly penetrate the border, and outflows of refugees could destabilize the surrounding nations. In a worst-case scenario, the collapse of Ethiopia's government could produce an arc of instability stretching from Mogadishu through the Sahel. While such a collapse would be unlikely to precipitate direct conflict between the United States, the EU, and China, strained relations between them would almost certainly prevent meaningful cooperation to mitigate the crisis.

Bab el-Mandeb Strait

At the base of the Red Sea, the Bab el-Mandeb Strait has enormous strategic importance as a key conduit for trade and particularly oil shipments, which explains why the United States, China, and France all have military bases in Djibouti,[76] while the United Arab Emirates holds control of small islands near the strait[77] (though it cancelled its construction of a planned military base in Somaliland in 2019).[78] Competition surrounding the strait remains active between several major powers: the United States, China, Iran, Turkey, Russia, and the Gulf states.[79] These emerging power players have the potential to complicate impending Cold War scenarios.

In the event of a political crisis in the Horn, the Bab el-Mandeb is a likely focus of great-power conflict. The strait is proximate to Yemen, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Somalia, and Eritrea. A primary concern is Iranian proxy activity via Yemeni Houthi rebels,[80] with the rebels attacking oil tankers in 2018 and disrupting trade flows.[81] Iran has tried to exert control over the Bab el-Mandeb Strait much as it does with the Strait of Hormuz, seeking strategic geopolitical and economic leverage.[82] Such attacks, or merely threats to shut down the strait, could drastically affect trade, raise oil prices, and destabilize the region should a confrontation between powers occur. Efforts to secure control of the territory surrounding the strait in the wake of a political collapse in Eritrea or Ethiopia could precipitate a direct conflict between any number of external powers, including the Gulf states and Iran. Even in the absence of a crisis, the strait's strategic value will elicit fierce continued external competition in the region. The specter of a Sino-Russian-Iranian alliance designed to secure control of the Red Sea is particularly alarming to the United States.

Nigeria and the Sahel

In the vast Sahel region, Islamist insurgent groups control portions of Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, and Nigeria. Terrorist attacks in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger have increased five-fold since 2016,[83] with four thousand deaths in 2019 and over 1.5 million internally displaced.[84] The ousting of Malian President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta by a group of

74 Emilia Columbo and Marielle Harris, "Extremist Groups Stepping Up Operations during the Covid-19 Outbreak in Sub-Saharan Africa," Center for Strategic and International Studies, May 1, 2020, https://www.csis.org/analysis/extremist-groups-stepping-operations-during-covid-19-outbreak-sub-saharan-africa.

75 *BBC* News, "Tigray Crisis: Ethiopia PM Abiy Ahmed Orders Military Response After Army Base Seized," BBC, November 4, 2020, www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-54805088.

76 John Irish, "As China Prevails, France's Macron Shuffles His Cards in Djibouti," *Reuters*, March 11, 2019, https://www.reuters.com/article/djibouti-france/as-china-prevails-frances-macron-shuffles-his-cards-in-djibouti-idUSL8N20Y6QQ.

77 Zach Vertin, *Red Sea Rivalries: The Gulf, The Horn, & the New Geopolitics of the Red Sea*, Brookings Doha Center, June 2019, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Red-Sea-Rivalries.-The-Gulf-The-Horn-and-the-New-Geopolitics-of-the-Red-Sea-English-pdf.pdf.

78 Abdiqani Hassan, Duncan Miriri, Elaine Hardcastle, and Emelia Sithole-Matarise, "Somaliland UAE Military Base to Be Turned into Civilian Airport," *Reuters*, September 15, 2019, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-somalia-emirates/somaliland-uae-military-base-to-be-turned-into-civilian-airport-idUSKBN1W00FI.

79 See *Emerging Powers in Africa: Key Drivers, Differing Interests, and Future Perspectives*, Policy Center for the New South, November 2020, https://www.policycenter.ma/publications/emerging-powers-africa-key-drivers-differing-interests-and-future-perspectives.

80 Keith Johnson, "Iran's Yemeni Proxies Put Oil Shipments in Crosshairs," *Foreign Policy*, July 26, 2018, https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/07/26/irans-yemeni-proxies-put-oil-shipments-in-crosshairs-saudi-bab-el-mandeb-hormuz-houthi/.

81 Javier Blas, "Saudis Suspend Oil Shipments via Bab el-Mandeb after Attack," *Bloomberg*, July 25, 2018, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-07-25/saudis-halt-oil-shipments-via-bab-el-mandeb-strait-after-attack.

82 Johnson, "Iran's Yemeni Proxies Put Oil Shipments in Crosshairs."

83 UN Security Council, 8698th Meeting (AM), "Amid Unprecedented Violence, Escalation of Terrorist Attacks in West Africa, United Nations Regional Office Needs Greater Role, Speakers Tell Security Council," SC/14069, United Nations, January 8, 2020, https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/sc14069.doc.htm.

84 Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Sahel Crisis 2020: Responding to the Urgent Needs of Refugees, Internally Displaced, Returnees and Others of Concern," *Relief Web*, June 12, 2020, https://reliefweb.int/report/burkina-faso/sahel-crisis-2020-responding-urgent-needs-refugees-internally-displaced.

Box 1. Lessons on Mediating Water Conflicts

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After a decade of negotiations on technical and legal issues, Egypt, Ethiopia, and Sudan have been unable to sign an agreement to end the hydro-political dispute unleashed by the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD). On the margins of the 2019 United Nations General Assembly, Egypt mobilized the United States to convene a new round of negotiations over the water dispute. Yet the US-observed negotiations were off to a faulty start, as the US treasury secretary, not the US secretary of state, was designated as point of contact. From the start, the US-convened talks lacked an underlying Africa strategy or defined objective and made little progress, finally being abandoned upon failing to produce a consensus document. The matter has now been referred back to the African Union (AU), and current mediations are taking place under the AU's Peace and Security Architecture framework.

Tragically, Washington missed a unique opening to promote regionalism as a negotiation framework and belligerent comments from President Trump, insinuating that Egypt would be likely to "blow up" the GERD if the deadlock could not be broken, have exacerbated the situation.[1] Presently, mediation efforts seem narrowly focused on subordinate disputes over such matters as water flow volumes, dam-filling periods, and squabbles based on entitlement and ownership. There are, however, other compelling issues that warrant focused US and international intervention:

- **Reversing the legacy of mistrust and intra-riparian competition for scarce resources**. To forge an inclusive and sustainable path forward, current negotiations must prioritize the first principle of supporting an enabling environment and anchoring regional institutions. Such structure fosters trust, confidence, and mutuality among all riparian states and coordinates their action. It also helps alleviate problems of countries unilaterally implementing national investment projects on the Nile.

- **Motivating negotiating parties and other riparian states to adopt a broad and inclusive basin-wide outlook**. At the heart of these talks is not simply an Ethio-Egyptian water dispute. A burgeoning basin-wide population of close to 550 million and a fast-urbanizing middle class are quickly demanding increased water and power resources. If not proactively managed, water-right conflicts between upper and lower riparian countries could easily escalate into a regional conflict. The current impasse is an opportunity to inspire the riparian states to focus on protecting the sustainability of the river basin and agree on a *water governance framework*: an occasion to focus less on ownership and entitlements and more on sustainable basin development, safeguarding the ecosystem, and equitable benefit-sharing among all riparian countries.

- **Unlocking the poverty paradox through basin-wide cooperation on power development and trade.** The low domestic and commercial power supply, with a 6 percent average of basin-wide power access, is a binding constraint in the fight against poverty. Within a regional water governance framework, US-mediated talks should prioritize a regional power development and trading construct, with a view to significantly improving access to sustainable and affordable supply among riparian countries. Viewed with a benefit-sharing lens, the GERD becomes less of an ownership issue and more of a transformative resource, able to advance enhanced access to predictable, affordable, and renewable energy. Power can be traded across the region via the East African Power Pool and the Nile Equatorial Lakes Subsidiary Action Program integrated grid network to meet the basin's electrification and industrialization aspirations. This can be achieved while *doing no significant harm* to downstream riparian states and their growing demand for fresh water, power trading, and irrigated agriculture.

- **Preserving the degrading ecosystem that produces the Nile River.** Riparian countries are exacerbating deforestation, soil erosion, and ecological degradation by developing their water resources in isolation. A prioritized US-sponsored discussion on the GERD should, as a matter of urgency, focus on the imperative of economic and technical cooperation between riparian countries. Focus should be on joint efforts to *preserve* the basin's ecosystem through technical cooperation that draws on Egypt's vast know-how in water sciences and on joint studies to mitigate known and emerging threats to the ecosystem.

1 Elias Meseret, "Ethiopia Blasts Trump Remark That Egypt Will 'Blow up' Dam," *The Washington Post*, October 24, 2020, www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/ethiopia-blasts-trump-remark-that-egypt-will-blow-up-dam/2020/10/24/50acf3d8-15de-11eb-a258-614acf2b906d_story.html.

mutinous military officers on August 18, 2020, has added to regional tensions. The coup was a significant setback that could threaten the battle against extremist groups in the Sahel, while potentially setting a dangerous precedent in the region,[85] especially with general elections later this year in Burkina Faso and Niger, which could pose more risks to security.

If uncontained, terrorist groups in the Sahel may spread the contagion of unrest to more secure coastal countries like Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Benin, and Togo. Recent attacks along the border of Burkina Faso, such as the May 2019 attack on tourists and their Beninese guide,[86] have alarmed countries previously untouched by Islamist extremist violence. In 2017, Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, and Togo launched the Accra Initiative in response to growing insecurity in the region,[87] aiming to prevent the spillover of terrorism and organized crime from the Sahel. However, the states have struggled to form a united response.

The counterinsurgency efforts of the G5 Sahel Joint Force—the security coalition of Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Chad, and Mauritania—is threatened by the economic devastation of the coronavirus, including the drop in oil prices affecting countries like Chad. Chad is considered a key strategic ally in the G5 Sahel, providing its own military forces and hosting headquarters for France's five thousand counterinsurgency troops in the capital city of N'Djamena. As the government shifts its focus toward pandemic response, militant violence continues; in June, Boko Haram militants killed at least ninety-two soldiers on a Lake Chad island, making it the deadliest attack ever against the Chadian military.[88]

American and French troops have been engaged in counterterrorism efforts in the Sahel for years,[89] but the Trump administration has begun weighing troop reductions in the region and has even discussed closing a recently constructed drone base in Niger.[90] The United States appears intent on trying to maintain influence, while limiting its footprint, but the reality is that the country cannot command the same respect if not active on the ground. France, on the other hand, has remained active in the Sahel even as French troops contracted the coronavirus.[91] The EU and France in particular are unlikely to scale back in the region as they place high strategic value on counterterrorism efforts as a means of preventing attacks in Europe and curbing migration. The EU approved Task Force Takuba earlier this year, a special forces initiative intended to begin operations in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger by 2021.[92]

The US and French approaches to security in the Sahel also differ over the role of peacekeeping, particularly through MINUSMA—the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali—which has been called the UN's most "dangerous mission" due to the losses of UN forces. The United States has questioned the value of the mission, claiming it is ineffective at solving the long-running crises in the region.[93] France deems the mission essential to combatting armed groups. Despite the disagreements, MINUSMA was extended for another twelve months in June 2020.[94]

EU security is threatened by the general US retreat from multilateralism, and a US withdrawal from the Sahel would put particular pressure on France, which currently has over five thousand troops stationed in West Africa fighting ISIS and al-Qaeda insurgents. The French rely on American intelligence, logistics support, and aerial refueling for their own security strategy in the region. To compensate, French officials have begun to order more transport planes and Reaper drones,[95] and European special forces have begun training African militaries. More recently, other EU member states have committed to helping France in the fight

85 Carley Petesch, "A Look at How Mali's Coup May Affect Neighboring Countries," *Washington Post*, August 20, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/a-look-at-how-malis-coup-may-affect-neighboring-countries/2020/08/20/62caef8e-e311-11ea-82d8-5e55d47e90ca_story.html.

86 Sarah Maslin Nir, "Benin Awakens to the Threat of Terrorism after Safari Ends in a Nightmare," *New York Times*, August 20, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/20/world/africa/safari-kidnapping-benin-terrorism.html.

87 Sampson Kwarkye, Ella Jeannie Abatan, and Michael Matongbada, "Can the Accra Initiative Prevent Terrorism in West African Coastal States?" Institute for Security Studies, September 30, 2019, https://issafrica.org/iss-today/can-the-accra-initiative-prevent-terrorism-in-west-african-coastal-states?utm_source=BenchmarkEmail&utm_campaign=ISS_Today&utm_medium=email.

88 Will Brown, "As the World Is Distracted, Boko Haram Terrorists Strike a Key Western Ally," *Foreign Policy*, April 1, 2020, https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/04/01/boko-haram-islamist-terrorists-strike-chad-while-world-distracted-by-coronavirus/.

89 Ruth Maclean, "Crisis in the Sahel Becomes France's Forever War," *New York Times*, March 29, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/29/world/africa/france-sahel-west-africa-.html.

90 Cooper, Gibbons-Neff, Savage, and Schmitt, "Pentagon Eyes Africa Drawdown as First Step in Global Troop Shift."

91 Agence France-Presse, "France Confirms 4 Coronavirus Cases in Anti-jihadist Africa Force," *Barron's*, April 2, 2020, https://www.barrons.com/news/france-confirms-4-coronavirus-cases-in-anti-jihadist-africa-force-01585844106.

92 "France and Allies Establish New Task Force in Sahel," *Al Jazeera*, March 28, 2020, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/03/france-allies-establish-task-force-sahel-200328075257444.html.

93 Agence France-Presse, "US Seeks Drawdown of UN Peacekeeping Force in Mali," *France 24*, March 29, 2019, https://www.france24.com/en/20190329-us-seeks-drawdown-un-peacekeeping-force-mali.

94 "UN Renews Mali Peacekeeping Force MINUSMA without Personnel Cuts," *Al Jazeera*, June 29, 2020, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/06/renews-mali-peacekeeping-force-minusma-personnel-cuts-200629202039321.html.

95 Cooper, Gibbons-Neff, Savage, and Schmitt, "Pentagon Eyes Africa Drawdown as First Step in Global Troop Shift."

Box 2. The Sahel: Opportunities beyond Containing Violence and Delegating Security

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MINUSMA, the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali; France's Opération Barkhane; the EU's Takuba Task Force and its Malian Armed Forces (EUTM) and Capacity Building Mission in Mali (EUCAP) security-forces training program; US drone bases in Burkina Faso and Niger… It appears at times as if the entire Sahel region has seen the delegation of its security to outside actors. But if the numbers are any indication, the focus on military containment of the terrorist threat in the Sahel and the preponderant role played by foreign actors in the process have not been met with success. Moreover, the continued lack of effective capacity building among Sahelian forces suggests the current approach is in need of an exit strategy. More recent attempts at developing region-wide homegrown responses, such as the G5 Sahel Joint Force, are on the right track but remain excessively focused on military containment and reliant on weak existing state structures.

The structural weakness of the former French colonies that constitute the five states of the Sahel and the capture of these states by largely unresponsive local elites, despite formally democratic institutions, lie at the core of the current regional security crisis. Sheltered from genuine accountability by the benefits of systematic outside assistance—akin to life support for their states—their elites are more focused on remaining in power than on resolving the structural crisis that their nations endure. The contrast between the shenanigans of the political classes and the despair of their populations can be shocking, and in many ways, Sahelian governments have yet to come to terms with the catastrophic upheaval they are facing. Too many of their political elites continue to hijack the state for their own benefit, and the majority of their people remain excluded both from meaningful participation and from access to power and resources. France and international counterterrorism support, focused on strengthening the state, contribute to preventing salutary evolutions.

In the middle of this, the G5 Sahel, a 2014 regional initiative to strengthen development and jointly face security challenges, has been a hopeful development as it points to local ownership of the crisis and collective action among states too weak to do much individually. However, its focus has remained too much on military action and its capacity too weak in this respect to make much of a difference. It has also been mired in procurement troubles and France's influence in it remains too broad. However, the G5 Sahel points the way toward a more integrated and more African response to the Sahelian crisis. First, it highlights that any solution will be a collective one among African states, recognizing that they share the same problems and suffer from the same postcolonial weaknesses. Some dilution of existing states into a broader Sahelian entity—and why not on a federal model?—would allow for better allocation of scarce resources, greater mobility for nomadic and semi-nomadic populations, and a reduction in parasitic elites, among others.

Second, while expanding beyond existing states, Sahel policy makers also need to reach down below the state to tap existing repositories of political legitimacy and effective local institutions. Traditional chiefs and religious leaders are no panacea and they too can be agents of violence and act in corrupt ways. However, they are representative institutions in their own ways and are often more functional than their formal state counterparts, particularly in areas of conflict from which states have largely retreated. Recent Afrobarometer data from Mali,[1] for example, show that 83 percent of respondents trust traditional institutions and 78 percent trust religious leaders, whereas only 47 percent trust the president, 37 percent the national assembly, and 36 percent the judiciary. In Niger, a 2019 study by the Clingendael Institute shows that chiefs have taken on the slack of governance in border areas where they administer, provide justice, mediate conflict, allocate land, and represent communities with outside actors.[2]

Sahel states cannot do it as post-colonial states alone—they must tap into this institutional and social wealth of their populations and of the remnants of pre-colonial institutions. Current recognition and integration of these institutions falls well short of making them genuine partners in governance. If the ongoing crisis helps the Sahel reinvent itself in ways that shed the continued post-colonial yoke and embrace the potential of its population, it might contain the seeds of a long-term solution for the region.

1 Afrobarometer, "Malians Have Less Confidence in the President of the Republic and State Institutions than in Traditional and Religious Leaders," press release, August 3, 2020, http://afrobarometer.org/press/les-maliens-ont-moins-confiance-envers-le-president-de-la-republique-et-les-institutions.

2 Fransje Molenaar, Jonathan Tossell, Anna Schmauder, Abdourahmane Idrissa, and Rida Lyammouri, "Chapter 3: Traditional Authorities in Niger: Politicization and Under-Representation" in *The Status Quo Defied: The Legitimacy of Traditional Authorities in Areas of Limited Statehood in Mali, Niger and Libya*, Clingendael, August 2019, https://www.clingendael.org/pub/2019/legitimacy_traditional_authorities_mali_niger_libya/3-traditional-authorities-in-niger-politicization-and-under-representation/.

against extremism in the Sahel,[96] presenting an opportunity for the EU to take more leadership in African security efforts as the United States withdraws.

NATO could also step in to engage further with peacekeeping and security on the continent, as the alliance has expressed support for France in the Sahel[97] and a desire to build its cooperation with the AU.[98] While NATO has substantial interest due to its concerns over security and migration, Trump's continued dismissal of the alliance may limit the organization's ability to engage.[99] However, this could change in the incoming Biden administration, where prodding from European NATO members could conceivably facilitate more palatable US re-engagement, if only indirectly. Opportunities may also exist for China, whose expanded presence in MINUSMA has been interpreted as a way to provide Chinese troops with operational experience in Africa,[100] with the potential to facilitate an expanded role as others retreat.

Potential for Direct Conflict

It is unlikely that any of these flashpoints will precipitate a direct conflict between the external powers. But the inability of Africa's traditional security partners to cooperate—due to the fraying of the NATO alliance and budgetary pressures on both the United States and Europe—is likely to do significant harm.

Biden's victory in the US election in November 2020 could have a considerable impact on US security policy toward Africa. Biden was of course vice president when President Barack Obama set out an expanded counterterrorism program, and he purportedly remains an advocate of a "counterterrorism plus" strategy that emphasizes targeted US special operations and airstrikes in lieu of larger troop deployments.[101] Thus it is unclear if a drawdown in the Sahel will go forward under Biden or if other policies would supersede it. Biden has also called NATO "the single most important military alliance in the history of the world" and pledges to redouble support for European allies.[102] Regardless of the preferences of President-elect Biden, however, public pressure to pull back from foreign military adventures in the wake of the COVID-19 recession may be too widespread to resist. Similarly, though Biden's prospective Africa team, including Ambassador Susan Rice, have voiced that "Africa should not be a pawn in a zero-sum Cold War game," their track records on counterterrorism put uncertainty on the extent to which China policy would really shift.

China's post-COVID military response is also somewhat up in the air. China has become the adversarial foil to US engagement on the continent under the Trump administration. For the past fifteen years, China has been making modest auxiliary troop contributions to peacekeeping in Sudan, South Sudan, Mali, Liberia, and the DRC, as well as funding peacekeeping equipment in Somalia and mediation efforts in South Sudan.[103] China is also now the second-largest arms supplier to Africa,[104] behind just Russia, and has a base of its own in Djibouti. If the United States is to draw down, much scrutiny will be placed on whether China increases its defense cooperation to fill the void—and protect its investments—or instead steps back to preserve its own resources.

African public opinion on the powers' security decisions will likely be mixed. Polls show that Malians are split in their satisfaction, for instance, of MINUSMA and the French Barkhane presence.[105] But a concerted, severe withdrawal could change opinions quickly, as areas like the Sahel could deteriorate rapidly in the scenario of a poorly managed international withdrawal.

Economic Flashpoints

Africa stands to suffer collateral damage in the wake of the escalating US-Sino trade war and the US effort to decouple from China. Although African nations have not

96 Ania Nussbaum, Oudaa Marouf, and Katarina Hoije, "EU Takes Over Lead Role from France in Sahel Islamist Fight," *Bloomberg*, July 1, 2020, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-06-30/eu-takes-over-lead-role-from-france-in-sahel-islamist-fight-kc2n22ge.

97 Douglass Herbert, "NATO Chief 'Optimistic' that Allies Will Support France in Sahel Region," *France 24*, November 29, 2019, https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20191129-interview-nato-chief-stoltenberg-optimistic-allies-will-support-france-sahel-france-macron-french-military-mali-operation-barkhane.

98 North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "NATO-African Union Plan Closer Collaboration," November 4, 2019, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_170512.htm#:~:text=NATO%20has%20provided%20air%20and,Force%20through%20exercises%20and%20training.&text=The%20deal%20supersedes%20an%20earlier%20NATO%2DAU%20cooperation%20agreement%20from%202014.

99 Nicholas Burns, "Trump Violates Diplomacy's Golden Rule," *The Atlantic*, December 4, 2019, https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/12/at-nato-summit-trump-abuses-americas-closest-friends/602959/.

100 "China's Role in Peacekeeping and Counter Terrorism in Mali," Netherlands Institute of International Relations - Clingendael, April 30, 2015, https://www.clingendael.org/event/chinas-role-peacekeeping-and-counter-terrorism-mali.

101 "Candidate Tracker: Joe Biden," Council on Foreign Relations, December 24, 2019, https://www.cfr.org/election2020/candidate-tracker/joe-biden.

102 Ibid.

103 Maru, "A New Cold War in Africa."

104 Martina Schwikowski, "Can Chinese Weapons Contribute to Peace in Africa?" *Deutsche Welle*, July 14, 2019, https://www.dw.com/en/can-chinese-weapons-contribute-to-peace-in-africa/a-49588144.

105 Dulcie Leimbach, "A Survey on Mali for Malians: What They Want for Their Country," *Pass Blue*, June 24, 2019, https://www.passblue.com/2019/06/24/a-survey-on-mali-for-malians-what-they-want-for-their-country/.

Box 3. US Soft Power and the Africa CDC

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The creation of the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) and the debate over who will construct its new headquarters is a prime example of the soft power–hard power tussle playing out between the United States and China across a multitude of spheres. US officials are quick to point out that the Africa CDC was modeled in form and function on the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (US CDC) in Atlanta, Georgia, and that the idea for an Africa CDC emerged from the lead role the United States played in responding to the 2015 West Africa Ebola outbreak when US doctors, scientists, and logisticians, many from the US CDC, US Agency for International Development, and Department of Defense, experienced the heavy burden of attempting to coordinate prevention and response efforts across multiple national institutions in the region.

The Africa CDC was conceived originally as a partnership between the United States and the AU, and a memorandum of cooperation was signed by then US Secretary of State John Kerry and Chairperson of the AU Commission Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma in 2015 to enable the US CDC to "provide technical expertise for the African CDC Surveillance and Response Unit, as well as advise African CDC leadership in strategic planning for future development."[1] As part of the memorandum of cooperation, two public health experts from the US CDC were co-located at the AU to serve as long-term technical advisors to the Africa CDC. Additionally, the US CDC launched a fellowship program to support the work of ten African epidemiologists to help staff the Africa CDC Coordinating and Regional Collaborating Centres. And, importantly, the Africa CDC chose as its first director Dr. John Nkengasong, a US-Cameroonian citizen who spent twenty years at the US CDC.

However, despite this deep commitment of financial support, as well as technical and strategic advice, Washington feels marginalized in its efforts to dissuade the AU from entertaining bids from China to construct the Africa CDC's new headquarters. Furthermore, Washington, despite blaming China for the spread of COVID-19, has been flummoxed by the public relations success China has enjoyed from its donations of modest amounts of PPE and other COVID response efforts. Given the overall success across Africa in containing the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, despite dire warnings at the outset of the disease, Washington is well-placed to highlight the strength of its commitment to building African institutions and investing in improved health outcomes consistent with its long-term commitments to eradicating HIV, malaria, tuberculosis, and neglected tropical diseases. Unless and until it does, Washington is likely to continue to lose out.

1 United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "African Union and U.S. CDC Partner to Launch African CDC," press release, April 13, 2015, https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2015/p0413-african-union.html.

been directly targeted in the dispute, the United States' imposition of higher tariffs has caused drops in commodity prices, stunted major stock exchanges, diminished investor confidence, and lowered the value of local currencies around the continent.[106] These tariff increases—combined with domestic and external pressures, and compounded by the coronavirus—have slowed down Chinese production and reduced Beijing's demand for raw materials from sub-Saharan Africa.[107] Another alarming possibility that may emerge as a result of China facing permanent increases in US tariffs is that Beijing will need to search aggressively for replacement markets. That could result in China dumping its products very cheaply into African markets to mitigate what it has lost in the United States.[108]

Poised to suffer the most from the trade war and a global economic decline are resource-endowed nations like South Africa, Nigeria, Botswana, the DRC, Guinea, and Sierra Leone, as experts from the African Development Bank have warned that trade tensions could cause a 2.5 percent

106 Judd Devermont and Catherine Chiang, "Innocent Bystanders: Why the U.S.-China War Hurts African Economies," Center for Strategic and International Studies, April 9, 2019, https://www.csis.org/analysis/innocent-bystanders-why-us-china-trade-war-hurts-african-economies.

107 Ibid.

108 Shaun Jayaratnam, "US-China Trade War and Its Impact on Africa," *How We Made It in Africa*, September 16, 2019, https://www.howwemadeitinafrica.com/shaun-jayaratnam-us-china-trade-war-and-its-impact-on-africa/63692/.

reduction in GDP for resource-rich countries by 2021.[109] For South Sudan and Angola, which rely on China's demand for resources for more than a quarter of their exports, the consequences could be catastrophic.[110] A 1.9 percent GDP reduction for major oil-exporting countries—including countries such as Angola, Nigeria, the Republic of the Congo, and Equatorial Guinea—is also expected by 2021.[111]

The Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention Headquarters

US-Sino tensions have carried over to the building of a new Chinese-funded Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) headquarters in Addis Ababa.[112] The construction feud is an example of the larger arena of competition over the World Health Organization (WHO), from which the Trump administration terminated its funding relationship[113] while China pledged an additional $30 million.[114] Washington fears that if construction is agreed to by AU member states and goes through, China will gain footing over Africa's health management, further displacing the United States. This tension could amount to the loss of critical US support for the Africa CDC. A Trump administration official claimed that "If the Chinese build the headquarters, the US will have nothing to do with Africa CDC," citing fears that with increased access, China could steal genomic data stored within CDC branches.[115]

5G and the Technology Cold War

US efforts to protect its intellectual property from Chinese cybertheft, and to protect its national security infrastructure from espionage, have produced an urgent drive to decouple future technologies from China. This has been described as a Technology Cold War.[116] Driving the decoupling of the established technological supply chains has been US rhetoric and restrictions on exports of high-tech goods and services to China (namely, semiconductors, cloud computing, and 5G), as well as tariffs put in place by both countries.

Both powers have proven that they are willing to weaponize global trade and supply chains in the decoupling.[117] The Trump administration has labeled Huawei and ZTE national security threats, fearing that Huawei may pass data along to the Chinese government.[118] In May, the administration banned Huawei and its suppliers from using US technology in any of its manufacturing or production.[119] US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has also threatened not to share intelligence with countries employing Huawei systems.[120] China has most recently responded with its own "unreliable entities list," threatening restrictions for American companies doing business with China like Apple, Qualcomm, and Boeing if it is perceived that they partake in any "discriminatory actions" against Beijing.[121] China has also shown that it will block imports from trade partners involved in foreign policy disputes, like it did with Canada's canola exports in 2019.[122] The tech decoupling has inevitably raised the stakes for US-Sino competition and is expected to come with devastating economic ramifications: Deutsche Bank's global head of tech estimates that a Tech Cold War could cost the sector more than $3.5 trillion over the next five years.[123]

109 Devermont and Chiang, "Innocent Bystanders."

110 The Observatory of Economic Complexity, "Where Does the United States Import From? (2017)," accessed September 9, 2020, https://oec.world/%20en/visualize/tree_map/hs92/import/usa/show/all/2017/.

111 African Development Bank Group, *African Economic Outlook 2019*, January 2019, https://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Publications/2019AEO/AEO_2019-EN.pdf.

112 Peter Fabricius, "SA Urged to Stop China Building Africa Disease Control Centre HQ in Addis Ababa," *Daily Maverick*, June 9, 2020, https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-06-09-sa-urged-to-stop-china-building-africa-disease-control-centre-hq-in-addis-ababa/#gsc.tab=0.

113 Jason Hoffman and Maegan Vazquez, "Trump Announces End of US Relationship with World Health Organization," *CNN*, last updated May 29, 2020, https://www.cnn.com/2020/05/29/politics/donald-trump-world-health-organization/index.html.

114 Laura Kelly, "China to Donate Additional $30M to WHO Following US Halt in Funding," *The Hill*, April 23, 2020, https://thehill.com/policy/international/494310-china-to-donate-additional-30m-to-who-following-us-halt-in-funding.

115 Katrina Manson and David Pilling, "US Warns over Chinese 'Spying' on African Disease Control Centre," *Financial Times*, February 6, 2020, https://www.ft.com/content/cef96328-475a-11ea-aeb3-955839e06441.

116 Reshma Kapadia, "Add a Trade War with China to the Covid-19 Worry List," Barron's, May 4, 2020, https://www.barrons.com/articles/add-a-trade-war-with-china-to-the-covid-19-worry-list-51588608806.

117 Ian Bremmer and Cliff Kupchan, "Risk 2: The Great Decoupling," Eurasia Group, last updated March 19, 2020, https://www.eurasiagroup.net/live-post/risk-2-great-decoupling.

118 David McCabe, "F.C.C. Designates Huawei and ZTE as National Security Threats," *New York Times*, June 30, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/30/technology/fcc-huawei-zte-national-security.html.

119 Ana Swanson, "US Delivers Another Blow to Huawei with New Tech Restrictions," *New York Times*, May 15, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/15/business/economy/commerce-department-huawei.html.

120 Amy Mackinnon, "For Africa, Chinese-Built Internet Is Better than No Internet at All," *Foreign Policy*, March 19, 2019, https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/03/19/for-africa-chinese-built-internet-is-better-than-no-internet-at-all/.

121 Kevin Rudd, "The Trade War, Economic Decoupling, and Future Chinese Strategy towards America," Asia Society Policy Institute, June 13, 2019, https://asiasociety.org/policy-institute/trade-war-economic-decoupling-and-future-chinese-strategy-towards-america.

122 David Common and Melissa Mancini, "Canola Growers Caught in Middle as Canada-China Relations Sour," *CBC*, last updated May 15, 2019, https://www.cbc.ca/news/business/national-canola-canada-china-trade-1.5135241.

123 Dion Rabouin, "From Tariffs to TikTok: The U.S.-China Trade War Quietly Escalates," *Axios*, July 16, 2020, https://www.axios.com/us-china-trade-war-tariffs-tiktok-huawei-135dec88-7de3-42e9-9981-209bae3bf279.html.

India, too, is active in the competition over tech, having banned fifty-nine Chinese-owned apps, including WeChat and TikTok.[124] The policy, announced following border clashes with China in June, echoed American concerns of censorship, surveillance, and espionage in citing "national security" as its motivation. While the ban itself is not that significant—India's user base is comparatively low—when viewed through the lens of an escalating digital Cold War, the move seems to indicate that India is nudging its way toward the United States and working to lessen its reliance on China.[125] In tandem, these interests appear to signal diminishing prospects of a Huawei contract for the construction of India's own 5G network, as they appear to be in favor of a growing alignment with the United States that will likely extend to other geopolitical positions.[126]

In this current tech tug of war, the United States may in fact be better positioned than China.[127] Analysts suggest that US sanctions are projected to create supply constraints for Huawei within three to twelve months of July 2020, implicating quality and volume of output moving forward.[128] In his campaign, President-elect Biden has already committed to allocating national funds to prioritize the development of the United States' own 5G infrastructure in collaboration with its democratic allies.[129] Further, some experts suggest that Huawei's dominance in 5G technology will be overridden by new software-driven systems like Open Radio Access Networks (O-RAN).[130] O-RAN technology standardizes the design of hardware and software used in telecommunications infrastructure and allows companies to use general-purpose equipment rather than the closed systems of the few companies dominating the vendor market. The United States retains a competitive edge in this software, and already has firms such as Parallel Wireless installing O-RAN in Africa.[131]

As the United States presses its European allies to publicly sanction Huawei and phase out the use of Chinese-built components, a key question will be whether the same "us or them" imperative will be pressed upon African nations. US refusal to share intelligence or trade secrets with African states that rely on Chinese telecommunications infrastructure could pose a dramatic threat to African nations' abilities to deal even-handedly with both powers, especially because China has already built upwards of 70 percent of the continent's 4G networks.[132]

In a worst-case scenario, African countries will be forced to decide who will supply their growing consumer bases not only with smartphones and internet infrastructure, but e-commerce, mobile payments, and financial services as well.[133] If forced to choose between the United States and China, some African nations will consider it an easy choice. Chinese internet suppliers remain the most cost-effective option for African governments, and countries like Zimbabwe continue to make deals for controversial products such as facial recognition software.[134] But if African nations are faced with a loss of American aid or reduced access to American companies and technology, the choice will be ruinous indeed.

Chinese-Held African Debt

African nations have increasingly exploited Chinese lending and investment, and China now claims a 40 percent share in Africa's infrastructure boom.[135] Some view China's big-ticket projects, which have poured in to fill the continent's infrastructure gap, as ambitious investments accelerating the continent's recovery "from centuries of slavery, colonialism, neo-colonial domination, and now COVID-19."[136] Western powers have read the situation

124 "India Bans 59 Chinese Apps Including TikTok, WeChat, Helo," *Economic Times*, last updated July 29, 2020, https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/tech/software/india-bans-59-chinese-apps-including-tiktok-helo-wechat/articleshow/76694814.cms.

125 Jai Vipra, "India Has Chosen Sides in the US-China Tech War," *Nikkei Asian Review*, July 7, 2020, https://asia.nikkei.com/Opinion/India-has-chosen-sides-in-the-US-China-tech-war.

126 Gideon Rachman, "India Picks a Side in the New Cold War," *Financial Times*, June 22, 2020, https://www.ft.com/content/d74d9bda-6822-4f85-9d48-a285a9effe07.

127 David Ignatius, "The U.S. Has a Stronger Hand in Its Tech Battle with China than Many Suspect," *Washington Post*, July 21, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-us-has-a-stronger-hand-in-its-tech-battle-with-china-than-many-suspect/2020/07/21/76129704-cb79-11ea-91f1-28aca4d833a0_story.html.

128 Ibid.

129 Joseph Biden, Jr., "Why America Must Lead Again: Rescuing U.S. Foreign Policy after Trump," *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2020, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-01-23/why-america-must-lead-again.

130 Ignatius, "The U.S. Has a Stronger Hand in Its Tech Battle with China than Many Suspect"; "Open RAN, What Is It?" VIAVI Solutions, accessed August 11, 2020, https://www.viavisolutions.com/en-us/solutions/wireless/o-ran#:~:text=An%20Open%20RAN%2C%20or%20Open,software%20elements%20from%20different%20vendors.

131 Parallel Wireless, "Parallel Wireless Helps to Deliver on MTN's OpenRAN Vision across Africa," *Cision PR Newswire*, press release, November 12, 2019, https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/parallel-wireless-helps-to-deliver-on-mtns-openran-vision-across-africa-300956366.html.

132 Mackinnon, "For Africa, Chinese-Built Internet Is Better than No Internet at All."

133 Bremmer and Kupchan, "Risk 2: The Great Decoupling."

134 Mackinnon, "For Africa, Chinese-Built Internet Is Better than No Internet at All."

135 Shepard, "What China Is Really Up To in Africa."

136 Dennis Munene, "BRI Provides Path to Social, Economic Development," *China Daily Global*, last updated June 2, 2020, http://global.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202006/02/WS5ed5a35fa310a8b24115a0fe.html.

Box 4. Sino-Zambian Discourse: The Worst-Case Scenario

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Leading up to the August 2021 general elections in Zambia, the international issue likely to dominate the rhetoric of political campaigns is Zambia's storied relationship with China. The issues are likely to center on controversial treatment of Zambian workers in Chinese-owned firms, the increasing ownership of Zambian land by Chinese citizens, and Zambia's significant external debt to China and the attendant repercussions of this reality. On the labor front, Miles Sampa, the mayor of Lusaka, Zambia's capital city, made headlines in May 2020 when he embarked on unannounced and unbidden inspections of Chinese-run firms. The deplorable conditions of the firms and the inhumane treatment of Zambian workers that he found were apparently so inexcusable that he closed some offending firms.

To ordinary Zambians, some of whom are victims of workplace oppression, Sampa's methods provided much-needed relief. However, the complaisant attitude of the government toward Chinese enterprises came as a shock to ordinary Zambians. The minister of home affairs, Charles Banda, issued an oblique threat against Sampa, reprimanding him for what he thought was going beyond a mayor's legal prerogative. He urged that those charged with rescinding trade licenses should do so rather than the mayor. He was also concerned that Sampa's inspections and punitive measures could sully Zambia's relations with foreign countries and discourage would-be investors. Sampa was forced to issue an unqualified apology to foreign (read Chinese) investors for his actions.

The Sampa saga demonstrates just how intrinsic China has become to Zambia's economic situation. The current Zambian government has forfeited the confidence of mainly Western investors and international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The government's unsustainable foreign borrowing, the collapse of the local currency, and the deteriorating political condition have caused international disillusionment. In its desperate bid to maintain some semblance of liquidity, the government is likely to be drawn even deeper into China's orbit. What, then, is the worst-case scenario of Zambia's increased dependency on China?

The ominous possibilities for increased dependency on China are manifold and run an array of issues from political and economic to social. At the political level, Zambia's democracy could be under threat, especially regarding parliamentary oversight and judicial impartiality in checking the activities of the country's executive. On the issue of debt, the government proposed an amendment (Constitutional Amendment Bill Number 10) to remove legislative oversight on contraction of debt and ratification of international treaties by the government. It is not purely by happenstance that the bill comes at a time when the country is under immense pressure to reconsider its debt relationship with external players, mainly China. Alfredo Baldini, a former IMF representative to Zambia, incurred the ire of the Zambian government when he warned against such borrowing. Curtailing parliamentary oversight is likely to deal a mortal blow to Zambia's democracy and the requisite separation-of-powers principle.

(Continues on page 21)

quite differently, with US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo accusing Beijing of entrapping African countries in "an enormous amount of debt…on incredibly onerous terms that will impact African people for an awful long time."[137] Pompeo's message matches the tone of former National Security Advisor John Bolton and the Trump administration's broader Africa policy.[138] The administration has endeavored to paint China's engagement as predatory, citing fears that China could seize assets in Zambia and Djibouti, for instance (see Box 4 above, written by Emmanuel Matambo).[139] But an alternate argument would be that African nations have strategically embraced Chinese lending knowing that the loans could be overturned by future governments, likely without ramifications.

137 "China-US Rivalry in Africa Fuelled by Coronavirus," *BBC*, June 9, 2020, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-52966148.

138 John R. Bolton, "Remarks by National Security Advisor Ambassador John R. Bolton on the the *[sic]* Trump Administration's New Africa Strategy," speech, Heritage Foundation, Washington, DC, December 13, 2018, National Security Council, https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-national-security-advisor-ambassador-john-r-bolton-trump-administrations-new-africa-strategy/.

139 Krishnadev Calamur, "Africa Is the New Front in the U.S.-China Influence War," *The Atlantic*, December 13, 2018, https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/12/trump-national-security-adviser-unveils-new-africa-strategy/578140/.

Box 4. Sino-Zambian Discourse: The Worst-Case Scenario *(continued)*

Economically, Zambia's rising debt to China is likely to compel the Zambian government to act in ways that might be beneficial to China, albeit at the expense of Zambian citizens. The mushrooming of small-scale and noncritical Chinese businesses in Zambia threatens ordinary Zambians already involved in such ventures, and those wishing to be. At the state level, precipitous dependency on China could influence the country's behavior toward other investors. The liquidation of Konkola Copper Mine (KCM), Zambia's biggest copper employer at the time, whose major shareholder was Vedanta Resources from India, was understandably seen as a backhanded ruse to wrest Konkola from Vedanta and give it to China as a way of repaying Zambia's debt to China. The continued uncertainty over KCM imperils the circumstances of the many Zambians who worked at the mine, and squanders copper exports that are the mainstay of Zambia's economy.

The social sphere of Zambian-Sino relations is also likely to be fractured by deeper dependency on China. For decades after the establishment of Zambian-Sino relations, politicians and diplomats were in charge of dictating the trajectory of these relations. However, China's going out policy, its industrial ambitions, and the incursions of private-owned enterprises and ordinary Chinese citizens into Zambia have given birth to a deeper social dimension to Zambian-Sino relations. Politicians and diplomats are no longer the sole deciders of the tenor of relations between the two countries. In an ideal setting, one would expect a respectful and mutually beneficial, or win-win (to use China's parlance), relationship to be the nature of this emerging social interaction. However, Zambia's deteriorating economy and increasing unemployment levels are likely to drive many Zambians into desperation, seeking employment even in unideal conditions that Sampa noted at some Chinese enterprises. This is likely to result in sidestepping labor legislation on the part of Chinese employers, mainly through casualization of labor and the preclusion of union membership. In a wider society, Chinese residing in Zambia might see no incentive in treating their Zambian counterparts with respect. A foretaste of this was clear when a Chinese restaurant in Zambia barred a Zambian from using it, labelling him a foreigner. Such occurrences are expected in a relationship of clearly defined lines of superiority and inferiority. It is also noteworthy that Zambians have retaliated, sometimes violently, toward Chinese citizens.

The May 2020 murder of three Chinese nationals at a clothing factory betokened the volatile subnational relationship between Zambians and their Chinese counterparts. The Zambian government's supine attitude toward Chinese enterprises and citizens in Zambia might provoke more frustration for Zambians who might feel they have no recourse but to take matters into their own hands. Understandably, the government would be hard-pressed to be more assertive in its dealings with China because of Zambia's dependency on Chinese investment and debt. However, this dependency carries the potential of destroying Zambia's democracy and economy even further. In addition, in the eyes of many Zambians who are concerned about China's carte blanche in the country, the once-vaunted Zambian-Sino relationship, once characterized as a relationship between "all-weather friends," could morph into one between a marauding economic giant (China) and a desperate and hapless supplicant (Zambia).

Washington's fears about debt-trap diplomacy are in all probability overblown, an extension of conflated views pursued through the lens of its own turbulent relationship with China (China is also the United States' largest creditor, with lending totaling more than $1.1 trillion, compared with Africa's estimated $140 billion in indebtedness).[140] But as many African nations face slowed or negative economic growth, China's intentions are certainly being put to the test. Forty percent of low-income countries in the region are in debt distress, with Djibouti, Zambia, the DRC, and Angola identified as being at the highest risk of defaulting on repayment obligations.[141] Djibouti, for example, has accrued $1.2 billion in loans from China for a free trade zone, deep sea port, railway, and water pipeline to Ethiopia;

140 "Major Foreign Holders of Treasury Securities," US Department of the Treasury, accessed August 20, 2020, https://ticdata.treasury.gov/Publish/mfh.txt; "Chinese Loans to Africa," China Africa Research Initiative, accessed August 20, 2020, http://www.sais-cari.org/research-chinese-loans-to-africa.

141 Joe Bavier, "Don't Expect Debt Relief, United States Warns Africa," *Reuters*, June 24, 2019, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-africa/dont-expect-debt-relief-united-states-warns-africa-idUSKCN1TP144; Courtney Goldsmith, "Is a New Debt Crisis Mounting in Africa?" *World Finance*, August 5, 2019, https://www.worldfinance.com/special-reports/is-a-new-debt-crisis-mounting-in-africa.

A worker drinks a beverage as pedestrians pass by a construction site of Lagos Rail Mass Transit system in Lagos in October 2013.
Credit: REUTERS/Joe Penney

its debt now exceeds 20 percent of its GDP.[142] Ethiopia's Chinese-funded Addis Ababa–Djibouti Railway has ended up costing the country $4.5 billion, or a quarter of its total 2016 budget.[143] The nation now owes half of its external debt ($13.5 billion) to China, making it second in indebtedness only to Angola ($20 billion).[144]

Many African nations are now demanding debt forgiveness from Beijing. China, along with other G-20 members, has agreed to a temporary freeze on bilateral debt payments (both principal and interest) for least-developed countries, which will be applicable to forty sub-Saharan African countries.[145] At June's Extraordinary China-Africa Summit on Solidarity against COVID-19, President Xi also announced that Chinese interest-free loans maturing in 2020 would be written off.[146] But Chinese interest-free loans account for what is estimated to be only 5 to 9 percent of total Chinese lending to Africa.[147] The G-20 debt freeze does not cover

142 Shashank Bengali and Neha Wadekar, "Coronavirus Threatens China's Belt and Road. What Happens When It Wants Half a Trillion Dollars Back?" *Los Angeles Times*, May 20, 2020, https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2020-05-20/coronavirus-strikes-chinas-belt-and-road-initiative.

143 Shepard, "What China Is Really Up To in Africa."

144 Julia Payne and Dmitry Zhdannikov, "Exclusive: Angola Cuts Oil Shipments to China as It Seeks Debt Relief," *Reuters*, June 5, 2020, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-angola-china-debt-oil-exclusive/exclusive-angola-cuts-oil-shipments-to-china-as-it-seeks-debt-relief-idUSKBN23C1LY#:~:text=By%20far%2C%20its%20biggest%20creditor,across%20the%20southern%20African%20country.

145 Cagan Koc, Rich Miller, and Eric Martin, "G-20 Backs Temporary Debt Relief for World's Poorest Nations," *Bloomberg*, last updated April 15, 2020, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-04-15/g-20-supports-time-bound-suspension-of-debt-for-poor-nations; Cara Anna and Aya Batrawy, "Richest Countries Agree to Freeze Poorer Nations' Debt," *Associated Press*, April 15, 2020, https://apnews.com/d9a2f0e1997004d791ae626003da5216.

146 Cobus van Staden, "Not Much Give from China in Its Relationship with Africa," *Daily Maverick*, June 28, 2020, https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2020-06-28-not-much-give-from-china-in-its-relationship-with-africa/#gsc.tab=0.

147 Laura He, "China Is Promising to Write Off Some Loans to Africa. It May Just Be a Drop in the Ocean," *CNN Business*, last updated June 19, 2020, https://www.cnn.com/2020/06/19/economy/china-xi-jinping-africa-intl-hnk/index.html; Yun Sun, "China and Africa's Debt: Yes to Relief, No to Blanket Forgiveness," Africa in Focus, April 20, 2020, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2020/04/20/china-and-africas-debt-yes-to-relief-no-to-blanket-forgiveness/.

private bondholder debt, which accounts for 31 percent of Africa's total debt load, and many of the Chinese loans in question were made by private or state-owned Chinese banks that would possibly not be subject to the G-20 agreement.[148] Most critically, President Xi has not moved to cancel any of Africa's $150 billion in concessional loans, credit lines, or development financing.[149]

According to the Italian Institute for International Political Studies, "China does not have a comprehensive external debt management system including a workable debt sustainability evaluation framework or a unified debt restructuring mechanism for its external borrowers."[150] Instead, China is maintaining its preference to deal bilaterally.

Murky details have emerged regarding negotiations between Beijing and Ghana, Angola, and Zambia,[151] and bilateral debt restructuring talks are known to be in the works between China and Nigeria and China and Kenya.[152] However, in the absence of a rapid, blanket solution, Africa is looking at a piecemeal, protracted process of bilateral renegotiations, debt restructuring, and refinancing.[153]

With global supply chains disrupted, construction on select BRI projects indefinitely postponed, and financial pressure mounting for Africa and China, it is clear there is an increasing sense of urgency for both sides. As China faces its own looming economic plateau, it will not likely move closer to loan cancelation or large-scale debt write-offs. Yet, Africa will most certainly require more relief. African nations will be incentivized to get all they can from China now, with significant consequences for African development if the Chinese tap runs dry sooner than expected. This is especially true as the United States, EU, and India have proven to be insufficient substitutes for Chinese infrastructure construction and lending. One thing, however, is increasingly clear: For China, remaining mute on the increasing demands for debt relief has the potential to overshadow any soft diplomatic gains or legitimacy acquired through its African COVID-19 donation diplomacy, with political consequences that will likely make a hard line on debt a nonstarter.

Reshoring Supply Chains

The pandemic has exposed weaknesses in Western supply chains that are too-heavily dependent on China and has strengthened a preexisting push to reshore and diversify the source of key manufactured products and equipment. Rhetoric surrounding reshoring has intensified in the United States, with a push for more products to be "America Made."[154] It is not yet clear how this reshoring will play out. In many instances, the process may involve nearshoring—moving supply chains closer by, to Mexico, for example—or simply diversifying chains to reduce dependence on any one country.[155] But advancements in reshoring may create increased conflict between the major powers as they seek to acquire limited supplies of the key minerals used to create electrical components and medical products.

Several mineral-rich nations, such as the DRC, Ghana, Guinea, South Africa, and Zambia, are key to both US and Chinese interests. Those that produce lithium, cobalt, and manganese are essential to the production of lithium-ion batteries, for example—a necessary element of electric vehicles.[156] However, while these minerals are frequently mined in African countries, the majority of the production process is controlled by China.[157] As the United States pushes to gain more control over these supply chains, African countries may be caught in the middle of resource battles between the United States and China, and will have to navigate the political consequences of their choices.

148 van Staden, "Not Much Give from China in Its Relationship with Africa."

149 Ibid.

150 Lu Jiang, "China's Lending to Africa: A Giant's Vulnerabilities," Italian Institute for International Political Studies, July 24, 2020, https://www.ispionline.it/en/pubblicazione/chinas-lending-africa-giants-vulnerabilities-27023.

151 Agatha Kratz, Allen Feng, and Logan Wright, "New Data on the 'Debt Trap' Question," Rhodium Group, April 29, 2019, https://rhg.com/research/new-data-on-the-debt-trap-question/.

152 Soto, "Nigeria Won't Seek Eurobond Waiver, Eyes China for Relief"; Eric Olander, "Kenya-China Debt Relief Talks Stall," *The China Africa Project*, July 10, 2020, https://chinaafricaproject.com/2020/07/10/kenya-china-debt-relief-talks-stall/.

153 Yun Sun, "China's Debt Relief for Africa: Emerging Deliberations," *Africa in Focus*, June 9, 2020, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2020/06/09/chinas-debt-relief-for-africa-emerging-deliberations/.

154 Humeyra Pamuk and Andrea Shalal, "Trump Administration Pushing to Rip Global Supply Chains from China: Officials," *Reuters*, May 4, 2020, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-usa-china/trump-administration-pushing-to-rip-global-supply-chains-from-china-officials-idUSKBN22G0BZ.

155 Shefali Kapadia, "The 5 Ws of Reshoring Supply Chains," *Supply Chain Dive*, July 13, 2020, https://www.supplychaindive.com/news/5-ws-reshoring-supply-chains-diversify-localization/579943/.

156 Tsisilile Igogo, Debra Sandor, Ahmad Mayyas, and Jill Engel-Cox, *Supply Chain of Raw Materials Used in the Manufacturing of Light-Duty Vehicle Lithium-Ion Batteries*, Clean Energy Manufacturing Analysis Center, National Renewable Energy Laboratory, August 2019, https://www.nrel.gov/docs/fy19osti/73374.pdf.

157 Benchmark Mineral Intelligence, "Benchmark Minerals' Simon Moores Warns Senate US a 'Bystander' in Battery Arms Race," Benchmark Mineral Intelligence Blog, February 6, 2019, https://www.benchmarkminerals.com/benchmarks-minerals-simon-moores-warns-senate-us-a-bystander-in-battery-raw-materials/.

Section 3: African Ambition: Pathways to Resist Cold War–Style Competition

The trends and flashpoints outlined in Section 2 present the risks associated with a tenuous bipolar world order between the United States and China. Namely, such a dynamic leaves African nations vulnerable to coercion, conflict, and the loss of economic opportunity. This section begins by briefly reflecting on African experiences during the US-Soviet Cold War competition, underscoring the harmful effects on African nations and thus the urgency of avoiding a replay. It then outlines the specific opportunities that exist for African agency and ambition to overcome the power competition of the imminent era.

The Last Cold War

While the looming Cold War is an economic one, the original Cold War was an ideological battle over the threat of communism. It created rival camps for arms and aid across the African continent, fueling conflicts and reducing opportunities for trade and collaboration. A precedent of foreign intervention was set, as the United States and Soviet Union intervened to support their ideological allies. Proxy wars developed in Angola, Mozambique, and the Horn, and the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) infamously plotted to assassinate the Congolese leader, Patrice Lumumba. CIA support of the coup that led to his execution was partially responsible for the emergence of dictator Mobutu Sese Seko.[158] US arms sales to African countries during the period between 1950 and 1989 totaled $1.5 billion, largely going to Liberia, Somalia, Sudan, and Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo), sowing the seeds of conflict in what remain today some of Africa's hottest flashpoints.[159]

The period entrenched bilateral relations and competing aid regimes as the status quo. African countries faced tacit ideological conditionalities when trying to attract aid, and were largely limited in both aid and trade to one camp. This occurred as the United States and Soviet Union scrambled to secure resources and keep them out of the other's hands, as was evidenced in economic competition over uranium in the DRC and oil in Angola.[160] Not only did this zero-sum competition limit African countries' geoeconomic options abroad, but the imposition of rival camps dampened post-colonial attempts at pan-Africanism and incentivized African leaders to pursue strategic self-interest, with clear residual effects today.

Understanding that the Cold War was detrimental to African development, how can African countries position themselves to confront new power dynamics between the rival great powers that are also being described as a Cold War? The bad news is that the coronavirus has intensified present threats from health and food insecurity, conflict, and financial instability, potentially pushing Africa's development timeline significantly back and reducing the resources available for collaboration. The good news is that the pandemic does not undo Africa's underlying growth dynamics, meaning that Africa's long-term prospects remain bright as long as the COVID-19 storm can be weathered.

This recovery, though, will have to occur in an environment of strategic contestation, with African nations navigating increased foreign competition while executing their own agency.

This section discusses some key opportunities for African countries to bend the global dynamic more in their favor. Opportunities emphasized include the following: collaborating around COVID-19, implementing the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), building out self-sufficiency and agribusiness capacity, reshoring supply chains, exploiting South-South trade, leveraging Chinese debt, and managing tech competition.

Collaboration on COVID-19: "Necessity Is the Mother of Invention"

The coronavirus has presented a unique opportunity to realize pan-African-led approaches to combat continent-wide challenges. As a result of the pandemic, new partnerships between African states and multilateral institutions, nongovernmental organizations, and the private sector have already emerged, laying foundations that can be leveraged in the post-pandemic world. These pandemic partnerships, largely driven by the AU and the Africa CDC, revolve around common principles of cooperation, coordination, collaboration, and communication, and their scale

158 Atomic Heritage Foundation, "Proxy Wars during the Cold War: Africa," August 24, 2018, https://www.atomicheritage.org/history/proxy-wars-during-cold-war-africa.

159 Kofi Nsia-Pepra, "Militarization of U.S. Foreign Policy in Africa: Strategic Gain or Backlash?" *Military Review*, January-February 2014, https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/military-review/Archives/English/MilitaryReview_20140228_art010.pdf.

160 Atomic Heritage Foundation, "Proxy Wars during the Cold War: Africa."

and structure provide lessons that will be critical to any future pan-African effort.[161]

At the onset of the pandemic, the AU Commission acted expediently to collaborate with member states, the Africa CDC, and the WHO to establish the Africa Task Force for Coronavirus (AFTCOR) and develop the African Continental Strategic Plan for COVID-19.[162] The task force was divided into six streams to address issues ranging from testing capacity to supply chain management and border screenings.[163] It also provided guidance, technical training, up-to-date statistics, and member support, later becoming the official conduit for COVID-19 donations from the Jack Ma Foundation.[164] Other initiatives, including the Partnership to Accelerate COVID-19 Testing (PACT) and efforts to engage youth in a pan-African COVID response through the African Youth Front on Coronavirus, have also emerged under AU and Africa CDC auspices.[165]

Public-private partnerships with key stakeholders including donors, banks, and pan-African business organizations have also materialized. One such example is AfroChampions, which emerged out of the Ebola virus crisis, and has mobilized to raise a target amount of $150 million to support the continental pandemic response and procure necessary medical supplies. The funds are being contributed by a coalition of African banks, including Ecobank, Standard Bank, and Equity Bank,[166] as well as several private equity firms and healthcare companies in the form of an African Anti-COVID-19 Fund.[167] The African Development Bank has also created a COVID-19 Response Facility, providing $10 billion to African member state governments and the private sector.[168] The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank have each contributed $18 billion toward mitigating the effects of the coronavirus on the continent, and have unveiled a range of financing options and policy tools.[169]

Another cornerstone pan-African initiative has been the Africa Medical Supplies Platform, a joint venture between the Africa CDC and the African Export-Import Bank (Afreximbank).[170] The platform, which was initially developed to supply medication to prevent maternal and infant deaths, has been co-opted to provide a one-stop-shop for African countries to purchase bulk medical supplies at reduced prices. Ethiopian Airlines and South African Airways have partnered in delivering the goods to shipment hubs in northern and southern Africa.[171] This endeavor not only has allowed African states to leverage their collective purchasing power and secure supplies of critical equipment and medical resources during COVID, it has set an example of what could be gained by leveraging regional bulk purchasing power under the AfCFTA.

African lending institutions have also stepped up, engaging in pan-African economic measures to mitigate the coronavirus's financial devastation. The West African Development Bank (WADB) has dispersed 120 billion CFA francs through 15 billion CFA franc loans—worth the equivalent of €23 million—to each of its eight member states, in addition to freezing member states' debt.[172] Afreximbank has announced a $3 billion Pandemic Trade Impact Mitigation Facility to help central banks in African countries deal with the economic impacts, including trade defaults,

161 Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, "AU and Africa CDC Launch Partnership to Accelerate COVID-19 Testing: Trace, Test and Track," press release, April 21, 2020, https://africacdc.org/news-item/african-union-and-africa-centres-for-disease-control-and-prevention-launch-partnership-to-accelerate-covid-19-testing-trace-test-and-track/.

162 Bience Gawanas, "COVID-19: Strong International Partnerships Key to Bolstering Africa's Response," Office of the Special Adviser on Africa, United Nations, press release, https://www.un.org/en/africa/osaa/statements/statement1.shtml; Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, *Africa Joint Continental Strategy for COVID-19 Outbreak*, March 5, 2020, https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/38264-doc-africa_joint_continental_strategy_for_covid-19_outbreak.pdf.

163 John N. Nkengasong and Wessam Mankoula, "Looming Threat of COVID-19 Infection in Africa: Act Collectively, and Fast," *The Lancet*, Vol. 395 (February 27, 2020): 871, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7124371/.

164 Aloysius Uche Ordu, "The Coming of Age of the Africa Centres for Disease Control," *Africa in Focus*, April 15, 2020, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2020/04/15/the-coming-of-age-of-the-africa-centers-for-disease-control/.

165 Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, "AU and Africa CDC Launch Partnership to Accelerate COVID-19 Testing: Trace, Test and Track"; African Union Office of the Youth Envoy, "African Youth Front on Coronavirus," May 6, 2020, https://auyouthenvoy.org/ayfocovid19/.

166 Aubrey Hruby, "African Private Sector Mobilizes COVID-19 Response," *AfricaSource*, Atlantic Council, April 20, 2020, https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/africasource/african-private-sector-mobilizes-covid-19-response/.

167 "Coronavirus - Africa: African Union and African Private Sector Launch COVID-19 Response Fund," *Africanews*, last updated April 7, 2020, https://www.africanews.com/2020/04/07/coronavirus-africa-african-union-and-african-private-sector-launch-covid-19-response-fund/.

168 African Development Bank Group, "African Development Bank Group Unveils $10 Billion Response Facility to Curb COVID-19," press release, April 8, 2020, https://www.afdb.org/en/news-and-events/press-releases/african-development-bank-group-unveils-10-billion-response-facility-curb-covid-19-35174.

169 World Bank Group, "World Bank Group and IMF Mobilize Partners in the Fight against COVID-19 in Africa," press release, April 17, 2020, https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/04/17/world-bank-group-and-imf-mobilize-partners-in-the-fight-against-covid-19-in-africa.

170 Carien du Plessis, "African Countries Unite to Create 'One Stop Shop' to Lower Cost of Covid-19 Tests and PPE," *The Guardian*, June 22, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/jun/22/the-power-of-volume-africa-unites-to-lower-cost-of-covid-19-tests-and-ppe.

171 Peter Fabricius, "Ramaphosa Launches Platform for Covid-19 Supplies in Africa," *Daily Maverick*, June 19, 2020, https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-06-19-ramaphosa-launches-platform-for-covid-19-supplies-in-africa/.

172 Ibrahim Mayaki, "A United Africa against the Pandemic," *AfricaRenewal*, April 3, 2020, https://www.un.org/africarenewal/web-features/coronavirus/united-africa-against-pandemic.

related to the pandemic.[173] Others like the Development Bank of Southern Africa and the Eastern and Southern African Trade and Development Bank have prioritized investments to ensure member state liquidity and boost the production of personal protective equipment (PPE) on the continent. Further, the Africa Finance Corporation's successful issuance of a $700 million Eurobond in June reflects the resilience and attractiveness of these institutions as platforms to promote recovery and growth.

The pan-African approach to tackling the continent's COVID pandemic has demonstrated the innovative, collaborative ways partnerships between the public and private sector, regional economic communities, and multilateral organizations—supported by international funders—can be developed to create African-led solutions. It has also demonstrated the power of Africa-wide procurement platforms, which can continue to be built out post-pandemic, including by developing end-to-end supply chains and leveraging the sheer scale of purchases to secure cost-effective supplies of critically needed equipment and medical resources.

Building off this momentum, African states must further enhance the legal and institutional capacities of their multilateral institutions to ensure entities like the Africa CDC and the AU can autonomously manage projects, procurement, finances, auditing, and social and environmental safeguards to build their efficacy and scope.[174] Key to this will be securing funding. Some frameworks exist and can be built on: In 2001, African leaders signed the Abuja Declaration, making a pan-African commitment to allocate at least 15 percent of annual country budgets to improving the health sector.[175] Yet, only two countries—South Africa and Rwanda—have met these obligations.[176] Accountability and commitment to the frameworks/mechanisms in place must be reinforced, or overreliance on external funding and implementation will continue.

Trade Integration and the AfCFTA

Trade integration—notably through the AfCFTA—presents another opportunity for African countries to reduce the risks of a new Cold War–like system. As foreign powers in Africa fight for influence, the decision to establish an African free trade area is even more important to break from chronic external economic dependency and strengthen African countries together against forces that seek to divide—and, as a result, weaken—them.[177] Though the implementation of the AfCFTA has been delayed due to COVID, when it does come into force the UN Economic Commission for Africa has estimated that the AfCFTA could boost intra-African trade by 52 percent by 2022 (compared with 2010 trade levels), eating into external reliance and facilitating additional cooperative bonds between African markets.[178]

Though most concur that the AfCFTA could provide a critical boost to African economies, questions linger about implementation and how to manage foreign interest in key sectors in what is a very large common market. Kenya, for example, has tried to pursue both its commitment to the AfCFTA and a bilateral trade deal with the United States. While this move has caused a great amount of controversy, as it could very well weaken bloc negotiating power and increase intra-African trade barriers, it may prove to be a test case for how countries navigate competing multilateral and bilateral options.[179] Kenya has claimed to have delayed negotiations on a US-Kenyan FTA to allow for the AfCFTA to come online, but clearly there is an urgency to implement the agreement and for it to begin producing benefits. There is also a question about how much influence individual countries like Kenya can exert on the United States, which has been determined to pursue bilateral rather than regional trading agreements.

To facilitate the successful implementation of the AfCFTA in the meantime, African countries should work in parallel to improve the logistics surrounding cross-border trade. This should include investing in logistics facilities, harmonizing standards and regulations, streamlining customs regulations, and prioritizing cross-boundary infrastructure projects.[180] The coronavirus has spotlighted some of these needs as, for example, countries have dealt with rising infections among truck drivers and determined how

173 Afreximbank, "Afreximbank Announces $3-Billion Facility to Cushion Impact of COVID-19," press release, March 24, 2020, https://www.afreximbank.com/afreximbank-announces-3-billion-facility-to-cushion-impact-of-covid-19/.

174 Ordu, "The Coming of Age of the Africa Centres for Disease Control."

175 African Union, Abuja Declaration on HIV/AIDS, *Tuberculosis and Other Related Infectious Diseases*, Abuja, April 24-27, 2001, https://au.int/sites/default/files/pages/32894-file-2001-abuja-declaration.pdf.

176 Japhet Biegon, "19 Years Ago Today, African Countries Vowed to Spend 15% on Health," *African Arguments*, April 27, 2020, https://africanarguments.org/2020/04/27/19-years-africa-15-health-abuja-declaration/.

177 Abishek Mishra, "India, Africa and the Quest for Reformed Multilateralism," *Expert Speak*, May 26, 2020, https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/india-africa-quest-reformed-multilateralism-66763/.

178 Loes Witschge, "African Continental Free Trade Area: What You Need to Know," *Al Jazeera*, March 20, 2018, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/03/african-continental-free-trade-area-afcfta-180317191954318.html.

179 Kimberly Ann Elliott, "Would a U.S.-Kenya Trade Deal Throw African Integration Off Course?" *World Politics Review*, February 18, 2020, https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/28541/would-a-u-s-kenya-trade-deal-throw-african-integration-off-course.

180 Kartik Jayaram, Kevin Leiby, Acha Leke, Amandla Ooko-Ombaka, and Ying Sunny Sun, "Reopening and Reimagining Africa," McKinsey & Company, May 29, 2020, https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/middle-east-and-africa/reopening-and-reimagining-africa.

Representatives and heads of state assemble at the opening ceremony of the thirty-third African Union Summit in Addis Ababa, February 2020. *Credit:* Flickr/Paul Kagame

to manage commercial border transit amid varied regimes of health and travel restrictions.[181] Optimistically, countries have emphasized regional collaboration, establishing border screenings, and testing to combat the virus while also protecting key regional trade and movement of goods.[182]

Reshoring Supply Chains

Though most of Africa has been disconnected from significant supply chains globally, there are potential opportunities for elements of supply chains to be relocated to Africa. If African countries can act quickly, there may be increased economic opportunity to help offset the short-term repercussions of the pandemic-related recession. This has already come to fruition in the textile industry, for example. Although production was cheaper in Bangladesh, some companies relocated parts of production to Ethiopia to diversify their supply chains and reduce risk.[183] Moving chains to Africa could be a particularly attractive choice for European countries, as African production facilities would be closer than those located in Asia, sometimes a mere four-to-six-hour flight away. Based on current economic connections, North and East Africa are the regions most likely to benefit from the diversification of supply chains.[184] In particular, health services and automobile industries are set to benefit.[185]

PPE production is most likely to receive a pandemic boost. For example, the Moroccan Ministry of Industry, Trade, Investment, and the Digital Economy has supported initiatives to boost local production of medical equipment, prompting Moroccan corporate executives to express

181 Andrew Wasike, "East African Truckers Face Backlash from COVID-19," Anadolu Agency, May 17, 2020, https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/east-african-truckers-face-backlash-from-covid-19/1843735.

182 "COVID-19 Impact on Agriculture: Assessment of Recovery Efforts," *Africanews*, last updated July 9, 2020, https://www.africanews.com/2020/07/09/covid-19-impact-on-agriculture-assessment-of-recovery-efforts-analysis/.

183 Nicolas Martin, "As Coronavirus Disrupts Supply Chains, Could Africa Profit?" *Deutsche Welle*, May 14, 2020, https://www.dw.com/en/as-coronavirus-disrupts-supply-chains-could-africa-profit/a-53435112.

184 Ibid.

185 Ibid.

hope that "this will be a launch pad for the medical industry in the country." Morocco successfully reached a daily production capacity of ten million masks by twenty-four factories and began exporting the surplus[186] and retooled aeronautics firms to build ventilators.[187] In Ethiopia, the Mastercard Foundation has invested in repurposing small businesses to produce basic PPE,[188] similar to the efforts of Kenyan textile manufacturers Rift Valley Textiles (Rivatex) and Kitui County Textile Centre (Kicotec), which have turned their vertically integrated textile mills into factories producing goods such as face masks and hospital linens.[189] Senegal has made waves by partnering with British biotech company Mologic to use 3D printing to find a homegrown solution to the region's ventilator shortages, while Dakar's Institut Pasteur has been working on a rapid test for COVID-19 to be distributed across the continent.[190] Ghana has paired with US company Zipline to employ drone technology to deliver tests and protective gear to the country's remote areas.[191] And Zimbabwe has co-opted university and technical college campuses to transform them into "COVID response factories," producing hand sanitizers, face masks, gowns, and aprons.[192]

Another opportunity for shifting production back to Africa is through the pharmaceutical industry. Africa as a whole produces only 3 percent of the global supply of drugs;[193] however, the African Development Bank notes that "Africa's pharmaceutical industry is the fastest growing in the world," with the potential to evolve into a $40-60 billion a year industry in the coming years.[194] Drug production in African markets faces a number of barriers: the continued importation of essential foreign-made compounds, a lack of infrastructure, a lack of financial resources for expensive research and design, and brain drain (doctors relocating internationally), for starters.[195] That being said, South Africa and Egypt are examples of two countries beginning to produce formerly imported active ingredients locally,[196] and Ethiopia is in the midst of constructing a pharmaceutical manufacturing industrial park.[197]

To further increase the opportunity for self-sufficiency, existing pan-African frameworks like the Federation of African Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Associations (FAPMA) and African Medicines Agency (AMA) need to be fully ratified and scaled up to "advance regulatory reliance, mutual recognition, and risk-based regulatory practices."[198] While increased domestic African pharmaceutical production is more of a wishful, long-term aspiration than an immediate reality, expanding the local industry has the real possibility of improving accessibility to life-saving medication, decreasing foreign reliance, and improving health across the continent.

These examples support models to harness existing technologies and infrastructure that can be employed to build local capacity and generate innovative African solutions. Challenges exist—namely, a reliance on international partnerships for funding and local supply chain issues like access to enough raw materials (i.e., cotton shortages)[199]—but seizing opportunities to create end-to-end supply chains has significant potential in markets such as Egypt, Ethiopia, Rwanda, and South Africa.

Self-Sufficiency and Agribusiness

The greatest market opportunities for Africa lie in agriculture, which already contributes 23 percent of sub-Saharan

186 Ahmed Eljechtimi, "Morocco Clears Disposable Face Masks for Export," *Reuters*, May 11, 2020, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-morocco/morocco-clears-disposable-face-masks-for-export-idUSKBN22N2U1.

187 Ahmed Eljechtimi, "Moroccan Companies Begin Ventilator Production," *Reuters*, April 10, 2020, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-morocco-ventilator/moroccan-companies-begin-ventilator-production-idUSKCN21S1ZV.

188 "Program Supports Ethiopian SMEs as They Shift to Manufacturing PPE," Mastercard Foundation, https://mastercardfdn.org/program-supports-ethiopian-smes-as-they-shift-to-manufacturing-ppe/.

189 Jeremiah Kiplang'at, "From Making Uhuru's Signature Shirts, Rivatex Now Wages War on Covid-19," *Nation*, April 14, 2020, https://www.nation.co.ke/kenya/business/from-making-uhuru-s-signature-shirts-rivatex-now-wages-war-on-covid-19-647366.

190 Carley Petesch, "African Nations Find Solutions to Shortages in Virus Crisis," *The Christian Science Monitor*, May 11, 2020, https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Africa/2020/0511/African-nations-find-solutions-to-shortages-in-virus-crisis.

191 Ibid.

192 Ibid.

193 Cécile Barbière, "Africa Takes Steps to Make Medicine More Affordable," *Euractiv*, March 28, 2018, https://www.euractiv.com/section/development-policy/news/africa-takes-steps-to-make-medicine-more-affordable/.

194 "Health in Africa: Building an African Pharmaceutical Industry," *New African Magazine*, June 29, 2017, https://newafricanmagazine.com/15654/.

195 Ibid.

196 Emily Kaine and Jude Nwokike, "Scaling Up African Pharmaceutical Manufacturing in a Time of COVID-19," *Africa in Transition*, May 22, 2020, https://www.cfr.org/blog/scaling-african-pharmaceutical-manufacturing-time-covid-19.

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198 Kaine and Nwokike, "Scaling Up African Pharmaceutical Manufacturing in a Time of COVID-19."

199 Devon Maylie, "As Apparel Orders Drop, One Manufacturer in Africa Turns to PPE," International Finance Corporation, May 2020, https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/region__ext_content/ifc_external_corporate_site/sub-saharan+africa/news/as+apparel+orders+drop%2C+one+manufacturer+in+africa+turns+to+ppe.

Box 5. Opportunities for African Markets to Take Advantage of Reshoring

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The COVID-19 crisis and shifting geopolitical tensions have galvanized the world's largest economies to reconsider China's central role in many global supply chains and outline policies that will support a more resilient trade system. This trend extends beyond the United States and its ongoing strained trade relations with China. The United Kingdom and France are seeking to reshore supply chains to Europe, while Japan and Australia have committed to doubling down on alternative supply chains in India.[1] The partnership between Japan and India builds on the Japanese announcement to invest $2.2 billion in domestic supply chains to shift production away from China.[2] As Japan, Australia, and India launch their plans to diversify and strengthen supply chains in the Indo-Pacific region this year, the United States and European countries should look to African nations for a needed step toward supply chain resilience.[3] With an increased push for reshoring and nearshoring efforts, African countries have the immediate opportunity to capture a greater share of the value chains in key sectors such as lithium battery production.

The geopolitical opportunity is being reflected in US politics. Bipartisan legislation in Congress is driving the restructuring process of public and private sector supply chains. Most recently, the Senate passed this year's National Defense Authorization Act, which allocates $740 billion for national security programs, including provisions to strengthen US supply chains against China, especially in the medical and defense sectors.[4] These measures were passed with strong bipartisan support to promote American economic competitiveness and counter domestic dependence on China after the coronavirus pandemic exposed supply chain vulnerabilities. Over 1,800 American companies, including Apple, General Motors, and Pfizer, have reshored parts of their operations as of January 1, 2019, a process that will likely continue to accelerate in order to strengthen and diversify supply chains.[5]

Beyond the immediately relevant supply chains critical for public health and national defense, the United States has opportunities to boost competitiveness in growing sectors such as electric transport, battery storage, and telecommunications. The search for alternative and sustainable energies has shaped demand such that battery metals have become an extremely important commodity, increasing the importance of control over their supply chains. China dominates the supply chain for electric vehicles and energy storage by refining nearly 60 percent of lithium and over 93 percent of manganese in production, in addition to hosting the majority of manufacturing and assembly.[6] Currently, the United States has no choice but to rely on China; however, it can address this imbalance over time by making deeper partnerships with African countries, some of which are home to some of the most important minerals for transport technologies. Countries such as the DRC, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and Namibia are of strategic importance to establishing more lithium battery production outside of the current supply chain in Asia.

Integrating African countries into US supply chains can achieve the diversification of production necessary to overcome crises and ensure the country's competitiveness and security, as well as increase opportunities in and partnerships with African nations.

1 Kiran Sharma, "Japan, India and Australia Aim to Steer Supply Chains around China," *Nikkei Asian Review*, September 1, 2020, https://asia.nikkei.com/Economy/Trade/Japan-India-and-Australia-aim-to-steer-supply-chains-around-China.

2 Isabel Reynolds and Emi Urabe, "Japan to Fund Firms to Shift Production out of China," *Bloomberg*, April 8, 2020, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-04-08/japan-to-fund-firms-to-shift-production-out-of-china.

3 Shruti Srivastava and Isabel Reynolds, "Japan, India and Australia to Seek Supply Chain Pact," *Bloomberg*, August 21, 2020, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-08-21/japan-india-and-australia-are-said-to-seek-supply-chain-pact.

4 Lindsay Wise, "Senate Passes Defense-Policy Bill with Bipartisan Support," *Wall Street Journal*, July 23, 2020, https://www.wsj.com/articles/senate-passes-defense-policy-bill-with-bipartisan-support-11595530292; Phil Mattingly and Lauren Fox, "Lawmakers Eye Options for Removing Key Parts of Supply Chain from China," CNN, May 18, 2020, https://www.cnn.com/2020/05/18/politics/china-supply-chain-congress-reaction/index.html.

5 Ana Swanson and Jim Tankersley, "Companies May Move Supply Chains out of China, but Not Necessarily to the U.S.," *New York Times*, July 22, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/22/business/companies-may-move-supply-chains-out-of-china-but-not-necessarily-to-the-us.html; "The 5 Ws of Reshoring Supply Chains," *Supply Chain Dive*, accessed September 15, 2020, https://www.supplychaindive.com/news/5-ws-reshoring-supply-chains-diversify-localization/579943/.

6 Benchmark Mineral Intelligence, "Benchmark Minerals' Simon Moores Warns Senate US a 'Bystander' in Battery Arms Race, *Benchmark Mineral Intelligence*, February 6, 2019, https://www.benchmarkminerals.com/benchmarks-minerals-simon-moores-warns-senate-us-a-bystander-in-battery-raw-materials/; Donald Chung, Emma Elgqvist, and Shriram Santhanagopalan, *Automotive Lithium-Ion Battery (LIB) Supply Chain and U.S. Competitiveness Considerations*, Clean Energy Manufacturing Analysis Center, June 2015, https://www.energy.gov/sites/prod/files/2015/06/f23/Lithium-ion%20Battery%20CEMAC.pdf.

Africa's GDP.[200] The continent holds tremendous potential thanks to its abundant land resources, amounting to roughly 65 percent of the world's uncultivated arable land.[201] However, Africa also has the largest yield gap in the world, as farmers in sub-Saharan Africa on average produce just half a ton of grain per acre, or one-sixth of comparable US, Chinese, or European yields.[202]

The pandemic has presented a unique opportunity to pivot the African agricultural industry toward self-sufficiency. As countries have enacted export bans on staple foods like rice and poultry, there is substantial incentive for African countries to increase their own production of key commodities.[203] Dr. Owusu Afriyie Akoto, Ghana's minister for food and agriculture, even described the pandemic as "a golden opportunity for Ghana to optimize our potential for food production to meet domestic needs and exports."[204] The Nigerian government has already begun its own effort to shift toward self-reliance during the pandemic,[205] particularly through its Economic Sustainability Plan, which includes a mass agricultural program intended to create five million jobs.[206] The program supports agricultural value chains and outlines large-scale farming projects, government procurement, outgrower schemes, agro-extension programs, and partnerships with large private sector purchasers. Support for local food markets and transport systems will be critical to protect the global supply chain, echoing calls from the World Food Programme, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, and United States Agency for International Development.[207]

With the aid of existing technology, African farmers could raise yields four-fold to two tons of grain per acre, not only feeding themselves more efficiently but eventually building the infrastructure to make Africa a net food exporter. Increased use of artificial intelligence technology and other digital tools are also proving to be an effective way to increase productivity, attract more youth to farming, and combat the damage of climate change on crops.[208] As the World Bank, donor countries, and large corporations invest in African agriculture, their technology, private cash, and infrastructure will be critical to development. But equally important is the need to protect the land rights of smallholder farmers, who make up roughly 70 percent of the continent's labor force.[209]

As African countries face the coronavirus and its daunting implications for food insecurity, measures taken to support farmers could have lasting effects. OCP Africa, a subsidiary of the Moroccan phosphate company OCP Group, has developed emergency response programs to help African farmers through the crisis.[210] Since April, OCP Africa has been aiming to secure stable incomes for farmers through donations to pandemic response programs like "Women in Agribooster," which supports smallholder female farmers in Ghana.[211] This type of programming is intended to have a more sustainable impact beyond the pandemic, addressing larger roadblocks in African agriculture. Women make up the vast majority of African farmers, and if they were provided the same access to land, credit, and fertilizer as men, they could boost food production by as much as 30 percent.[212]

As the COVID-19 crisis contributes to increasing food insecurity on the continent, these pandemic responses present an opportunity to support African agriculture in a way that will improve long-term self-sufficiency, productivity, and sustainability for African farmers, both big and small.

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201 "How to Grow a Fortune in the Golden Fields of Africa," *CNBC Africa*, July 2, 2020, https://www.cnbcafrica.com/economy/2020/07/02/how-to-grow-a-fortune-in-the-golden-fields-of-africa/.

202 Joel K. Bourne, Jr., "The Next Breadbasket," *National Geographic Magazine*, July 7, 2014, https://www.nationalgeographic.com/foodfeatures/land-grab/.

203 "Trade Restrictions on Food Exports Due to the Coronavirus Pandemic," *Reuters*, April 3, 2020, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-trade-food-factbox/trade-restrictions-on-food-exports-due-to-the-coronavirus-pandemic-idUSKBN21L332.

204 Owusu Afriyie Akoto, "Press Briefing by the Minister on COVID-19 Pandemic (April 2020)," Ministry of Food & Agriculture, Republic of Ghana, August 21, 2020, http://mofa.gov.gh/site/media-centre/press-briefing/330-press-briefing-by-the-minister-on-covid-19-pandemic-april-2020.

205 Aubrey Hruby, "Will COVID-19 Be a Wake Up Call for Africa's Largest Economy?" *Brink News*, July 26, 2020, https://www.brinknews.com/will-covid-19-be-a-wake-up-call-for-africas-largest-economy/?sf236222431=1.

206 Economic Sustainability Committee, *Bouncing Back: Nigeria Economic Sustainability Plan*, June 2020, https://media.premiumtimesng.com/wp-content/files/2020/06/ESC-Plan-compressed-1.pdf.

207 World Food Programme, *Global Report on Food Crises 2020*, April 20, 2020, https://www.wfp.org/publications/2020-global-report-food-crises.

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212 Bourne, Jr., "The Next Breadbasket."

Taking Advantage of South-South Cooperation

Advancing South-South partnerships to better benefit Africa is another opportunity African states can explore to counteract exploitative relationships and achieve more sustainable development. The Global South has become more of an economic power player in recent years, with the bulk of global economic growth happening in developing and middle-income countries, predominantly based in the Global South.[213] South-South trade expanded from $34 billion in 1995 to $595 billion in 2012, and a plethora of new initiatives aimed at fostering Southern political, economic, and social relations have emerged.[214] South-South Cooperation (SSC) aims to use international organizations, academic institutions, civil society organizations, and private-public sector collaboration to reduce (and eventually eliminate) the need for aid through a mixture of capacity building, technology transfer, knowledge exchange and research, and Southern partnerships.[215]

While the foundations for Africa to succeed through SSC have been laid, Africa has yet to fully invest. Challenges lie in African nations' political and emotional approaches to SSC partnerships, as they have largely played the role of beneficiary—not stakeholder.[216] These development partnerships still rely on a bilateral South-South aid-provider dynamic and remain deeply imbalanced. Citizen buy-in and bottom-up engagement are also lacking, as are budgets dedicated to facilitating SSC partnerships and policy forums in Africa for partnerships. China's proclamation of itself as a South-South development partner presents another consideration. While the country goes to great lengths to frame itself as a developing country peer, its partnerships reproduce the same asymmetrical trade relationships as the West: boom-bust commodity market cycles, limited diversification, domestic institutional constraints, limited tariff exceptions, and increasing debt.[217] Regardless of the partner, these are the types of deficiencies that SSC efforts should try to mitigate.

Opportunities for equitable Southern partnerships do exist, though. India, with its history of nonalignment, shared experience as a colonized nation, and advocacy of self-agency and self-determination, is a leading favorite. The subcontinent has attempted to frame itself as both an ally and a teacher to many African nations, championing South-South empowerment through such initiatives as the Duty Free Tariff Preference Scheme and targeted investments in capacity building and skills development. India has also called for reforming the Non-Aligned Movement, stating that "short, effective multilateralism remains the only answer," pushing back against alignments and alliances that it feels are rooted in colonialism and the Cold War ideologies.[218] Even India's relationship with Africa is not without its flaws, however. The subcontinent has been criticized for its poor track record on delivering grants, loans, lines of credit, and scholarships;[219] instances of land grabbing;[220] and commodity-heavy African imports (largely based in extractive industries and raw materials) in comparison to its exportation of high-end consumer goods.[221] Critically, like other examples of SSC, there is thus a continued need to bridge the gap between rhetoric and practice.[222]

Africa must therefore take more agency in directing the terms of its partnership engagements with India and other SSC relationships. To develop this, experts recommend that Africa mainstream SSC into national development strategies; develop stronger policy and institutional frameworks for SSC; make efforts to foster an environment for civil society organizations; and expand ownership of SSC.[223] Despite the aforementioned shortcomings, SSC

213 "What Is South-South Cooperation and Why Does It Matter?" *UN News*, March 20, 2019, https://www.un.org/development/desa/en/news/intergovernmental-coordination/south-south-cooperation-2019.html.

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220 Anuradha Mittal, "Indian Land Grabs in Ethiopia Show Dark Side of South-South Cooperation," *The Guardian*, February 25, 2013, https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/poverty-matters/2013/feb/25/indian-land-grabs-ethiopia#:~:text=Global%20development-,Indian%20land%20grabs%20in%20Ethiopia%20show,of%20south%2Dsouth%20co%2Doperation&text=Indian%20companies%20are%20the%20largest,land%20for%20agro%2Dindustrial%20projects.

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222 Mishra, "How Indian and Chinese Involvement in Africa Differs in Intent, Methods and Outcomes."

223 Meja, "Making South-South Cooperation Partnerships Work for Africa."

remains a vital opportunity for more equitable, African-led development in fields such as agriculture, urbanization, human rights, trade, health, and climate change mitigation.

Chinese-Held Debt: An African Opportunity?

As an increasing number of Africa's powerhouse economies face recession and negative economic growth, how China will respond to the inexorable wave of loan defaults has been at the top of the international community's minds. Analysis from the Rhodium Group and the China Africa Research Initiative shows that fears of continent-wide asset seizures and debt-for-equity swaps have likely been overblown.[224] Instead, Africa's Chinese-held debt is China's problem, and this debt is increasingly exposing China's vulnerabilities as well as opportunities for a massive structural change in the region's power dynamics.

The legality of Africa's debt to China is being challenged in several nations. This includes Kenya, where activists are demanding the disclosure of the terms of credit agreed to in building the Chinese-funded rail link from Mombasa to Nairobi and the renegotiation of loan terms, some arguing that the contract was illegitimate,[225] and Zambia, where activists and policy makers have been arguing that the country's billions from China were borrowed under obfuscatory conditions and without the consent of parliament.[226] Countries like Sudan are also making compelling cases that debts agreed to by previous dictatorial or unelected regimes should be invalid. Some African nations are attempting to renegotiate BRI projects, including Tanzanian President John Magufuli, who decided to cancel construction on a port in Bagamoyo in April 2020. The port was slated to be funded by a loan worth $10 billion from China and Oman, agreed to under his predecessor, Jakaya Kikwete. According to the director general of the Tanzania Ports Authority, the loan conditions were poorly negotiated.[227]

The China Africa Research Initiative at Johns Hopkins University has found that China has not seized property or used courts to enforce debt payments, despite misguided reports surrounding China's infamous "seizure" of a Sri Lankan port.[228] A Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson has reiterated these findings, stating "China never presses countries in difficulties for debt payment," preferring bilateral "consultation" instead.[229] Such bilateral consultation will likely give African nations the opportunity to renegotiate repayments in a manner that is satisfactory for them, as Ethiopia did with its major commercial railway loans in 2018.[230]

In actuality, China does not have that much leverage over its borrowers. There is also little precedent of penalties for nonpayment, as in the case of Zambia's still unpaid Mao-era Tazara Railway loans.[231] Even in cases where loans from Chinese entities do contain provisions that would in theory force them to surrender state assets if they could not repay, China has too much at stake, its investments and economy too entangled, to wantonly destroy the soft diplomatic power it has been accumulating for decades.[232] Perhaps even more than this, Africa is a political necessity for China. African countries have a tendency toward bloc voting in multilateral institutions, and as the "largest single regional grouping of states," African countries could be a considerable source of political support for China in upcoming UN votes.[233]

The reality is that, to some extent, African nations have China over a barrel: African debt to China is just a drop

224 Agatha Kratz, Allen Feng, and Logan Wright, "New Data on the 'Debt Trap' Question," Rhodium Group, April 29, 2019, https://rhg.com/research/new-data-on-the-debt-trap-question/; China Africa Research Initiative, "Debt Relief with Chinese Characteristics," public event, Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies, Washington, DC, June 18, 2020.

225 Mohammed Yusuf, "Kenya's Chinese-Built Railway Proves Pricey," *Voice of America*, September 24, 2020, https://www.voanews.com/africa/kenyas-chinese-built-railway-proves-pricey?utm_source=Media+Review+for+September+25%2C+2020&utm_campaign=Media+Review+for+September+25%2C+2020&utm_medium=email.

226 Alonso Soto and Matthew Hill, "Africa Starts to Have Second Thoughts about that Chinese Money," *Bloomberg Businessweek*, July 22, 2020, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-07-22/chinese-credit-fuels-debt-crisis-in-africa.

227 Fumbuka Ng'wanakilala, Brenda Goh, and Cate Cadell, "Tanzania's China-Backed $10 Billion Port Plan Stalls over Terms: Official," *Reuters*, May 22, 2019, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-tanzania-port/tanzanias-china-backed-10-billion-port-plan-stalls-over-terms-official-idUSKCN1ST084.

228 The initiative found that the "seizure" was actually a privatization and not a debt-for-equity swap as reported by various media outlets. See Soto and Hill, "Africa Starts to Have Second Thoughts about that Chinese Money."

229 Joe Parkinson, James T. Areddy, and Nicholas Bariyo, "As Africa Groans under Debt, It Casts Wary Eye at China," *Wall Street Journal*, last updated April 17, 2020, https://www.wsj.com/articles/as-africa-groans-under-debt-it-casts-wary-eye-at-china-1158711580.

230 Yunnan Chen, "Ethiopia and Kenya Are Struggling to Manage Debt for Their Chinese-Built Railways," *Quartz Africa*, June 4, 2019, https://qz.com/africa/1634659/ethiopia-kenya-struggle-with-chinese-debt-over-sgr-railways/.

231 Soto and Hill, "Africa Starts to Have Second Thoughts about that Chinese Money."

232 Two loans to Uganda—$325 million to upgrade Entebbe International Airport and $1.4 billion for a power plant in Karuma—contain the provision, although the Ugandan government has not yet defaulted. See Parkinson, Areddy, and Bariyo, "As Africa Groans under Debt, It Casts Wary Eye at China"; Lu Jiang, "China's Lending to Africa: A Giant's Vulnerabilities."

233 Rayna Martinez, "Chinese Soft Power, Africa, and the United Nations General Assembly," master's thesis, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 2015, https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3491&context=thesesdissertations.

in the bucket, and thus even if widespread loan deferrals and nonpayment were to occur, China can afford to take the economic loss.

Other African nations can and should follow suit by leveraging their growing populations and market potentials to not only restructure or extend loan repayments, but pit other foreign interests against Beijing's investments. African states can again turn to Ethiopia's example, where Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed modernized the state's economy and privatized state-owned businesses to attract money from the World Bank, the IMF, and Western donors to counteract China's growing investments and stronghold.[234]

The bottom line is that China needs Africa. Not only are its business interests intertwined—more than ten thousand Chinese-owned firms currently operate in Africa[235]—China needs Africa to consume $113.2 billion worth of its exports.[236] More than this, China desperately needs Africa's raw and natural resources: Angola's and South Sudan's crude oil; Zambia's copper; South Africa's iron ore; the DRC's cobalt. As American business interest in the continent increases, African governments should capitalize on their positions of strength and be more aggressive in pursuing creative ways to see their debt burdens restructured, renegotiated, and reduced.

While the Trump administration has been adamant that it will not help African states with their Chinese debt—over claims that it is akin to putting money directly into Beijing's pockets—it too is facing pivotal opportunities.[237] The United States could use its position in the global financial system to leverage support for Africa, whether through multilateral partnerships, negotiations with the IMF and World Bank, or private lenders. This will be especially important to African nations in the short term, as pandemic relief will need to come in the form of budget support, which the private sector alone cannot supply. And China's influence in the IMF and World Bank is nowhere near that of the United States. This prospect of positive US engagement on behalf of Africa in multilateral fora, however, may be more likely under the incoming Biden administration.

Managing Tech Competition

In the battle over technology, there are growing opportunities for African countries to adjust their positioning. While the competition for communications tech is often framed as a choice of US or Chinese 5G, other options like O-RAN may provide flexible alternatives.[238] O-RAN's standardized design allows companies to use general-purpose equipment rather than closed systems, meaning that African nations could avoid having to sign lock-in contracts with large vendors like Huawei and Ericsson, while developing broadband capabilities at reduced cost.[239] Whereas traditional 2G, 3G, or 4G networks require expensive, bulky equipment to deploy and maintain, making setup in rural communities without mobile signals intensive and costly to undertake, O-RAN architectures offer scalable 2G, 3G, 4G, and 5G software-based networks in a cost-effective way, both in terms of deployment and continued operations.

O-RAN is beginning to be rolled out in Africa, with suitors including the Ghana Investment Fund for Electronic Communications (GIFEC), MTN Group, and Vodafone. GIFEC is currently working to deploy O-RAN in unconnected Ghanaian communities;[240] Africa's largest telecommunications company, MTN Group, announced it will deploy O-RAN to more than five thousand sites across twenty-one markets in November 2019;[241] and Vodafone has also started testing O-RAN in the DRC, Mozambique, and South Africa.[242] All three are using the American firm Parallel Wireless, proving that Chinese core networks are not the only game in town.

234 Simon Marks, "How an African State Learned to Play the West Off China for Billions," *Politico*, February 7, 2020, https://www.politico.com/news/2020/02/07/ethiopia-china-west-power-competition-110766.

235 Fan Yu, "Africa Beginning to Push Back against China's 'Predatory' Strategy," *Epoch Times*, last modified January 5, 2020, https://www.theepochtimes.com/is-africa-beginning-to-push-back-against-chinas-predatory-lending_3193701.html.

236 Jevans Nyabiage, "China's Trade with Africa Grows 2.2 Per Cent in 2019 to $US208 Billion," *South China Morning Post*, January 18, 2020, https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3046621/chinas-trade-africa-grows-22-cent-2019-us208-billion.

237 Joe Bavier, "Don't Expect Debt Relief, United States Warns Africa," *Reuters*, June 24, 2019, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-africa/dont-expect-debt-relief-united-states-warns-africa-idUSKCN1TP144.

238 "Open RAN, What Is It?" VIAVI Solutions.

239 Abubakar Idris, "Parallel Wireless' OpenRAN Is Helping African Telcos Save Money," *TechCabal*, May 22, 2020, https://techcabal.com/2020/05/22/parallel-wireless-openran-is-helping-african-telcos-save-money/#.

240 Vaughan O'Grady, "Connectivity Deal Targets Underserved Communities in Ghana," *Developing Telecoms*, April 22, 2020, https://www.developingtelecoms.com/telecom-technology/wireless-networks/9462-connectivity-deal-targets-underserved-communities-in-ghana.html.

241 "MTN to Deploy 5,000 OpenRAN Sites from Parallel Wireless in Africa," *Light Reading*, November 12, 2019, https://www.lightreading.com/mtn-to-deploy-5000-openran-sites-from-parallel-wireless-in-africa/d/d-id/755585.

242 Vodafone, "Vodafone Pioneers Innovative Network Tech to Increase Suppliers and Extend Rural Internet Access," press release, October 7, 2019, https://www.vodafone.com/news-and-media/vodafone-group-releases/news/vodafone-pioneers-innovative-network-tech-to-increase-suppliers-and-extend-rural-internet-access.

Box 6. Elements of Global Tech Competition

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Over the past decade, competition between the United States and China in Africa has evolved beyond natural resource extraction and infrastructure investments to a contest for technological leadership and innovation.

Chinese government and industry in particular have taken a deeper interest in African tech markets. Chinese phone maker Transsion Holdings has become Africa's top smartphone maker, selling more than eighty million phones per year.[1] Huawei has built about 70 percent of the continent's 4G networks and is actively pursuing 5G contracts.[2] In 2020, it partnered with South African telecom Rain to launch South Africa's first 5G transport network. Tenco, ZTE, Tencent, Alibaba, and now ByteDance are similarly making investments in countries from Mali to Ethiopia. Under pressure from multiple dissatisfied Western governments, ByteDance has been quietly planting seeds for its social media app, TikTok, in Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa.[3] It aims to usher in a new age of African influencers, who are themselves influenced by China.

In the realm of tech infrastructure and investment, Washington cannot alone compete with China and hope to win. The Trump administration's efforts to impede Chinese companies through regulation and concerns over African national security have also been so far ineffective, additionally hampered by images of American political and racial tensions that dampen US soft power efforts in the region. If it is to successfully rival China in Africa, the United States will have to rely more heavily on strategically aligned emerging middle powers with economic and political potential and diplomatic effectiveness among African policy makers and publics, such as South Korea, India, and Japan. In an effort to sidestep US-Sino competition, some sub-Saharan leaders have already begun to engage these powers across trade and investment, infrastructure, and technology.

Relations between Rwanda and South Korea, for example, have been burgeoning since 2013 when Rwanda's government signed a deal with Korea Telecom (KT) Corporation to roll out high-speed 4G internet in the country.[4] South Korea has been slow to develop an Africa policy, although under President Moon Jae-in, an agenda focused on youth, technology, and entrepreneurship has started to emerge. There is considerable alignment with US objectives, and Washington should consider South Korea a potential partner to share responsibilities and work toward mutual policy goals. Last June, the US Trade and Development Agency announced its "Access Africa" initiative to support the development of information and communications technology infrastructure in sub-Saharan Africa.[5] This effort is ripe for collaboration. So, too, are efforts aimed at supporting African tech entrepreneurs. Through its Korea-Africa Foundation, Korea's Ministry of Foreign Affairs supports Korean start-ups in Africa and cooperation between African and Korean entrepreneurs. With 618 active tech hubs across the continent as of 2019 and investments made by US companies including Amazon, Facebook, and Google, support to Africa's tech entrepreneurs could be a potentially important long-term strategy.

As African governments increasingly look to avoid the crossfires of US-Sino competition, emerging middle powers are playing a more important role. In the last four years, India has established technology training centers in Madagascar, Zimbabwe, The Gambia, Lesotho, and Rwanda. The centers provide tech assistance and training with applications across industries, including renewable energy and agriculture. More assertive forays by such powers present a tactical opening for Washington to deepen strategic partnerships for tech infrastructure, investment, and education. Together with its partners, the United States should in this way push forward shared goals and policies, offering a fresh and compelling technology alternative to China in Africa.

1 Bloomberg News, "'King of Africa' Smartphone Maker Heads for Shanghai Star Board," *BloombergQuint*, September 11, 2019, https://www.bloombergquint.com/china/-king-of-africa-smartphone-maker-heads-for-shanghai-star-board.

2 Momoko Kidera, "Huawei's Deep Roots Put Africa beyond Reach of US Crackdown," *Nikkei Asia*, August 15, 2020, https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Huawei-crackdown/Huawei-s-deep-roots-put-Africa-beyond-reach-of-US-crackdown/.

3 "TikTok Is Doubling Down on Africa & Fuelling a Match Made in Heaven," *WeeTracker*, November 4, 2020, https://www.weetracker.com/2020/11/04/tiktok-in-africa/.

4 David Smith, "Rwanda Strikes 4G Internet Deal with South Korean Telecoms Firm," *The Guardian*, June 11, 2013, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jun/11/rwanda-4g-internet-south-korea.

5 United States Trade and Development Agency, "USTDA Launches Access Africa Initiative," press release, June 14, 2019, https://www.ustda.gov/ustda-launches-access-africa-initiative/.

Conclusion

The novel coronavirus pandemic has accelerated shifts in the spheres of interest and influence of Africa's traditional external powers on the continent, deepening competition and carving out space for emerging players.[243] The era has ushered in heightened resource competition, a global economic downturn, and a burgeoning US-Sino trade and tech war that will likely result in nations being forced to pledge their specific allegiances, with potentially disastrous results. Nowhere would the ramifications be more detrimental than for Africa, where a new Cold War is a sobering possibility. In the context of this unfolding zero-sum game, there is a risk that Africa's decisions would be neither clear nor choices.

In considering its own Africa policy, the United States must also take into consideration that if such camps or non-aligned groupings were to form, the current administration's moves toward nationalism and insularity are making China out to be the relatively more attractive multilateral/globalist partner. The reality is that the United States has lost power at an institutional level to China and will be a less important player in Africa in the coming years. China and the EU will step up to fill the gaps, with their specific policy decisions in this regard shaping the dynamics of competition on the continent. African leaders will need to position themselves to adapt to these shifting forces, with proactive, pan-African responses most likely to achieve an Afro-Century.

Fortunately, Africa has more agency than is generally acknowledged. To mitigate the disastrous consequences of another Cold War, its states must commit to multilateralism and leverage their pan-African advantage to maximize the continent's collective bargaining power and avoid the formation of rival camps. The opportunities here are many. Pathways to exploit this agency and execute African-driven solutions to continent-wide challenges have emerged around COVID-19 relief measures, Africa-wide procurement platforms, and reshored PPE supply chains. Further opportunities can be realized by implementing the AfCFTA, building out self-sufficiency and agribusiness capacity, capitalizing on South-South trade, leveraging Chinese debt, and managing tech competition to Africa's advantage.

Denis Sassou Nguesso, President of the Republic of the Congo; Yoweri Museveni, President of Uganda; João Lourenço, President of Angola; Paul Kagame, President of Rwanda; and Félix Tshisekedi, President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, attend the Quadripartite Summit in Luanda, Angola, on August 21, 2019. Credit: Flickr/Paul Kagame

243 See *Emerging Powers in Africa: Key Drivers, Differing Interests, and Future Perspectives*, Policy Center for the New South, November 2020, https://www.policycenter.ma/publications/emerging-powers-africa-key-drivers-differing-interests-and-future-perspectives.

Appendix: Traditional Postures of the External Powers in Africa

United States

US policy toward Africa has tended to be largely consistent across administrations and is relatively bipartisan, probably because Africa has been of low strategic interest, and consequently, US engagement in Africa has been limited. While a slow shift toward "trade, not aid" has been underway for years, the United States has remained primarily focused on distributing aid and promoting stability through support to peacekeeping operations, security cooperation, and democracy promotion activities.[244] Following the 9/11 attacks, the United States also began to focus on combating extremism in Africa, leading to the establishment of the United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) in 2007 and the launch of counterterrorism campaigns in the Horn of Africa and the Sahel. There is a current deployment of between 6,000 and 7,500 US troops across fifty countries on the continent.[245] Even before COVID-19, however, the Department of Defense was already reviewing ways to shift more resources toward China and Russia, and its growing disinterest in Africa was epitomized by leaked plans of a military drawdown from the Sahel.[246]

US soft power in Africa has historically been generated by Hollywood and admiration of the American melting pot, but also by flagship aid initiatives. No program has generated as much goodwill as the $90 billion President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), which has reportedly saved over nineteen million lives, mostly in Africa.[247] Since PEPFAR was launched by the George W. Bush administration, the United States has remained the largest donor to the African continent, with $11.2 billion in official development assistance in 2017, or 21 percent of total contributions.[248]

But the United States has struggled to translate these aid initiatives into hard influence. US humanitarian and development assistance is largely inflexible, meaning that it cannot easily be withdrawn or used as a bargaining chip, and is often taken for granted. US misadventures in Iraq have also led some Africans to suspect that American aid is a Trojan horse, intended to facilitate a grab for African oil. (This belief persists even as US imports of African oil have dwindled to historic lows.) US counterterrorism strikes, which in some cases have produced unacceptably large numbers of civilian casualties, and associated US support of nondemocratic regimes, have also been sources of antagonism.[249] The Trump administration's travel bans and the president's use of racist and inflammatory language to refer to African countries have further added to the trust deficit.[250]

The dip in American soft power is vexing, because it occurs just as the US government is seriously attempting a long-promised pivot toward "trade, not aid." The African Growth and Opportunity Act has provided favorable market access to eligible African nations since 2000, but is unlikely to be renewed in 2025.[251] The US government is instead trying to replace it with bilateral trade agreements (the first of which is now being negotiated with Kenya) and an all-of-government Prosper Africa initiative, inaugurated in 2018. In 2019, fearing China's growing economic footprint, the United States made efforts to further retool and respond, by launching the US International Development Finance Corporation (DFC), which has an expanded investment cap of $60 billion.[252] The forthcoming Prosper Africa Trade and Investment (PATI) program is expected to provide significant monetary support toward targeted commercial programming in Africa. If done correctly, these initiatives could significantly boost the volume of US investments in Africa.

244 Alex Vines, "Trade Not Aid: Obama's Africa Legacy," Chatham House, September 20, 2016, https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/trade-not-aid-obama-s-africa-legacy.

245 Salih Booker, "America's Disdain for Black Lives Extends to Africa," *Foreign Policy*, June 12, 2020, https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/06/12/america-disdain-black-lives-extends-africa-militarization-africom-somalia-trump-police-brutality/.

246 Cooper, Gibbons-Neff, Savage, and Schmitt, "Pentagon Eyes Africa Drawdown as First Step in Global Troop Shift."

247 The US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, "2018 PEPFAR Latest Global Results," 2019, https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/PEPFAR-Latest-Results_WAD_2019.pdf.

248 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Development Aid at a Glance: Statistics by Region, 2. Africa*.

249 VOA News, "US Not 'Adequately' Investigating Airstrikes that Killed Somali Civilians, Rights Group Says," *Voice of America*, June 16, 2020, sec. Africa, USA, https://www.voanews.com/africa/us-not-adequately-investigating-airstrikes-killed-somali-civilians-rights-group-says; Bronwyn Bruton and Paul D. Williams, "Cut-Rate Counterterrorism," Foreign Policy, October 8, 2013, https://foreignpolicy.com/2013/10/08/cut-rate-counterterrorism/.

250 Julie Hirschfeld Davis, Sheryl Gay Stolberg, and Thomas Kaplan, "Trump Alarms Lawmakers with Disparaging Words for Haiti and Africa," *New York Times*, January 11, 2018, sec. U.S., https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/11/us/politics/trump-shithole-countries.html.

251 "African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA)," Office of the United States Trade Representative, accessed September 9, 2020, https://ustr.gov/issue-areas/trade-development/preference-programs/african-growth-and-opportunity-act-agoa.

252 US International Development Finance Corporation, "DFC Approves Nearly $900 Million for Global Development Projects," press release, March 12, 2020, https://www.dfc.gov/media/press-releases/dfc-approves-nearly-900-million-global-development-projects.

By June, the United States had provided $400 million in largely health and humanitarian assistance to African nations in response to the coronavirus pandemic.[253] In the short term, it is possible that the pandemic will put downward pressure on budgetary allocations to Prosper Africa and PATI, which will slow US efforts to compete with China. (Already, on July 17, President Trump ordered the brand-new DFC to redirect some lending toward the domestic pandemic response.)[254] But the post-COVID reshoring of supply chains will increase US interest in select African markets over the longer term, accelerating US private sector efforts to gain market share. And preventing China from using the African theater to needle US forces in the Atlantic and Red Sea regions will remain an objective of the incoming administration. It is also likely that the United States will continue to be less willing to invest in counterterrorism responses in Africa, as American military resources are needed to contain Chinese aggression in other parts of the globe.

European Union

African insecurity and poverty are viewed by policy makers as direct challenges to European security, particularly in the forms of irregular migration and terrorism. Though new arrivals have decreased dramatically from their peak in 2015, the European Union (EU) maintains substantial interest in preventing migration and in mitigating fragility in the Group of Five (G5) Sahel countries—Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger—where threats of terrorism, organized crime, food insecurity, trafficking, and weak state structures combine. COVID-19 is likely to exacerbate each of these threats, resulting in more displacement and extremist views in the region. Containing these threats will remain a top priority for the EU and for NATO's southern strategy.[255]

The EU and its member states have invested heavily in aid programs on the continent. The EU provides roughly $6 billion a year in aid to Africa, which has generated significant goodwill in various corners of the continent.[256] The fact that many European aid efforts—such as the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa and Germany's proposed "Marshall Plan with Africa"—have explicitly targeted reducing the flow of African migrants to Europe,[257] however, has sometimes reinforced a perception that aid is self-serving and designed to erect barriers, not to build bridges. The EU has made efforts to address that dynamic, especially since 2007 when it established the Joint Africa-EU Strategy,[258] and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has recently been emphasizing a new partnership of equals.[259] However, the long-standing power imbalance between Africa and its former colonizers—and the constant European emphasis on halting migration—has created a relationship that is often seen less as a partnership and more as a precarious and uneasy coexistence.

History and proximity also produce a robust trade relationship. The twenty-seven EU member states are collectively Africa's main trade in goods partner, accounting for 31 percent of the continent's exports and 29 percent of its imports, dwarfing those of China.[260] The European trade relationship has often been criticized as extractive—the EU tends to import raw goods and energy, while exporting manufactured goods back—and some policies, such as the imposition of Economic Partnership Agreements, are perceived as unhelpfully exposing nascent African industries to global competition.[261] But, broadly speaking, the frequency of trade is a source of mutual benefit that has enhanced European soft power across the continent.

Because EU interests are rooted in the European continent's proximity to Africa, the COVID-19 pandemic is unlikely to fundamentally alter the calculus of engagement. The EU has created the Team Europe approach to respond to the global effects of the pandemic, including by pledging in April an initial €3.25 billion in aid to the African continent and making a commitment to vaccine

253 Kenneth Staley and Christopher Runyan, "Digital Briefing on USAID's Ongoing Development Priorities and COVID-19 Assistance Response in Africa," US Department of State, June 4, 2020, https://www.state.gov/digital-briefing-on-usaids-ongoing-development-priorities-and-covid-19-assistance-response-in-africa/.

254 Franco Ordoñez, "Trump Redirects Foreign Aid Agency to Work on Pandemic. Congress Has Questions," NPR, July 17, 2020, https://www.npr.org/2020/07/17/891896361/trump-redirects-foreign-aid-agency-to-work-on-pandemic-congress-has-questions.

255 Ambassador (Ret.) Alexander Vershbow and Lauren Speranza, *More in the Med: How NATO Can Refocus Its Efforts in the South and Italy Can Lead the Charge*, Atlantic Council, October 22, 2019, https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/report/more-in-the-med-how-nato-can-refocus-its-efforts-in-the-south-and-italy-can-lead-the-charge/.

256 Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, *Development Aid at a Glance: Statistics by Region, 2. Africa*.

257 Oxfam, *The EU Trust Fund for Africa: Trapped between Aid Policy and Migration Politics*, January 2020, https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/620936/bp-eu-trust-fund-africa-migration-politics-300120-en.pdf?sequence=1.

258 African Union and European Union, "The Partnership and Joint Africa-EU Strategy," accessed September 10, 2020, https://africa-eu-partnership.org/en/partnership-and-joint-africa-eu-strategy.

259 David M. Herszenhorn, "Von der Leyen Ventures to the Heart of Africa," Politico, December 10, 2019, https://www.politico.eu/article/european-commission-president-ursula-von-der-leyen-ventures-to-the-heart-of-africa-ethiopia-african-union/.

260 "Africa-EU - International Trade in Goods Statistics," *Eurostat*, date extracted April 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Africa-EU_-_international_trade_in_goods_statistics#Africa.E2.80.99s_main_trade_in_goods_partner_is_the_EU.

261 Mark Langan, "Europe Urgently Needs to Rethink Its Unfair Trade Deals with Africa," Dialogue of Civilization Research Institute, April 4, 2019, https://doc-research.org/2019/04/europe-trade-africa/.

equity, largely out of concern that economic devastation might further fuel migration to Europe.[262] If the recession causes a new surge of migration from Africa, it is likely that the EU or specific European states will seek to collaborate with autocratic regimes to stem the flow, as has historically been the trend. The EU has already cut migration deals with Libya and Turkey, and as it battles COVID-19, Italy has closed its ports. EU partnership with Libya has resulted in the return of migrants to detention centers where they face human rights abuses,[263] and the EU has provided €6 billion to Turkey in exchange for the return of migrants arriving in Greece, despite Turkey's lack of adequate protection for refugees.[264] These inhumane policies, meant to reduce migration at any cost, are likely to be intensified in the wake of COVID-19. Europe's need to ensure stability in proximate African regions may also lead it to take on an increasing counterterrorism role and favor Chinese interests wherever they are viewed as helping to maintain order.

China

China has hard economic interests in Africa, viewing the continent as a strategic investment vital to its long-term economic and political stability.[265] Africa's wealth of natural resources and precious minerals is essential to China's production of steel, electronics, and other manufactured goods, filling the gap in China's critical resource shortages. The majority of Africa's crude oil, iron, and copper is exported to China, and 20 percent of the country's cotton imports come from the continent as well.[266] As such, China has focused on resource extraction and infrastructure development, while also expanding military and soft power engagements in recent years.[267]

China has become a vital trade and development partner, and its continued interest in the continent is essential to the future of many African states. In the two decades since the inception of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, China has grown rapidly into Africa's largest lender, trading partner, foreign job creator, and source of foreign direct investment.[268] For reference, Sino-African trade exceeded $200 billion in 2019; Chinese foreign direct investment totaled $46 billion in 2018; and China now claims a 40 percent share in Africa's infrastructure boom.[269] Additionally, in recent years, China's lending to Africa has exceeded the combined loans of the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the Paris Club.[270] Much of this expansion has occurred under the direction of President Xi Jinping, who has promoted a vision of a more expansionist China, touting an agenda inspired by China's imperialist past to reinvigorate political and economic ties with the rest of the world and assert itself on the global stage.[271]

Where US development assistance is infamous for its red tape and governance conditionalities, China is renowned for the ease and efficiency of its deals. Chinese investment funds flow quickly and abundantly and are coupled with an ethos of "noninterference" in African affairs.[272] As a result, forty-four out of fifty-four African countries have signed some form of agreement with Beijing regarding President Xi Jinping's flagship Belt and Road Initiative.[273] Security cooperation is on the rise, too, especially in geostrategic nations such as Djibouti, where China has constructed its first overseas military base only a few miles from the US Camp Lemonnier.

Yet, African opinion of China is not universally positive. For instance, many criticize the extractive, unbalanced nature

262 *European Commission, Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of Regions: Communication on the Global EU Response to COVID-19*, April 8, 2020, https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/join_2020_11_final.pdf; European Union External Action, "The Coronavirus Response of the European Union: Over Billion Euros for Africa," press release, April 9, 2020, https://eeas.europa.eu/regions/africa/77409/coronavirus-response-european-union-over-3-billion-euros-africa_en.

263 Shoshana Fine and Terek Megerisi, "The Unacknowledged Costs of the EU's Migration Policy in Libya," European Council on Foreign Relations, July 25, 2019, https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_unacknowledged_costs_of_the_eu_migration_policy_in_libya.

264 Kondylia Gogou, "The EU-Turkey Deal: Europe's Year of Shame," Amnesty International, March 20, 2017, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/03/the-eu-turkey-deal-europes-year-of-shame/.

265 Shepard, "What China Is Really Up To in Africa."

266 Sanne Van Der Lugt, "Mapping and Comparing China's Imports from Africa," European Center for Development Policy Management, April 2014, https://ecdpm.org/great-insights/emerging-economies-and-africa/mapping-comparing-chinas-imports-africa/.

267 Mishra, "How Indian and Chinese Involvement in Africa Differs in Intent, Methods and Outcomes."

268 Shepard, "What China Is Really Up To in Africa"; Reuben Brigety, "A Post-American Africa," *Foreign Affairs*, August 28, 2018, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/africa/2018-08-28/post-american-africa.

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of trade. There are allegations that African workers have been mistreated by Chinese companies[274] and that African students in China have faced discrimination.[275] Chinese infrastructure and goods are often perceived as lower quality, and are seen as posing unfair competition to African businesses.[276] Chinese lending is also opaque, and many suspect it of being beneficial only to corrupt African elites. China's sale of spy tech and facial recognition software to countries like Zimbabwe has undermined its claims of noninterference, especially as China has emerged as the second-largest seller of arms to the continent.[277] China has responded to these complaints with an unprecedented push into Africa's media space, and the country's "donation diplomacy" during COVID-19 has earned top marks compared with the other powers.[278]

In the wake of the pandemic, China's core interests are unlikely to change, though the country's ability to pursue them in Africa may be altered. China's medium- and long-term resource demand will be unaffected, prompting continued reliance on African markets. But in light of the country's first recorded economic contraction since the 1970s, elements of China's soft power and military expansion might be put on hold.[279] China is also being forced to freeze and/or restructure its debt, including some of the $1 trillion it has lent to fund its Belt and Road Initiative, and increased calls for debt relief from African partners may increase its own economic strain and reduce focus on new projects or programming in Africa.[280]

India

Through its diaspora population, India has had a rich history of mercantilism with Africa, as well as a shared history of anticolonial struggles and independence movements. Although India has historically not played a geostrategic role in African affairs, it has often been a stabilizing force, especially through its active role in the continent's peacekeeping operations.[281] However, as India's economy has grown, so has its geopolitical, economic, and military interests in Africa, with India progressively positioning itself to exploit China's perceived weaknesses on the continent.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has laid out his vision for expanding relations in his *Ten Guiding Principles for India-Africa*, which emphasizes a narrative of "developing together as equals" to ensure that Africa does not become a "theatre of rival ambitions."[282] The narrative highlights Indian-African cooperation as "demand-driven, consultative, [and] participative" and positions India as an ally and guide, creating links to foster African development in a less opportunistic way than China, while tackling mutual issues: namely, rapidly growing youthful populations, climate change, and hunger and poverty.[283]

This is a narrative Africa appears to be buying into. When the last India-Africa Forum Summit (IAFS III) was held in 2015, all fifty-four African states and forty-one heads of government were in attendance.[284] The summit provided a platform to announce India's plan to open an additional $10 billion in lines of credit to Africa over the next five years, as well as a pledge of $100 million in India-Africa Development Fund grants, $500 million in grant assistance, and fifty thousand scholarships to African students to pursue studies in India. Coinciding with increasing investment has been a steep escalation in diplomatic engagements, as well as the planned opening of eighteen new Indian embassies in Africa and a greater focus on

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capacity building, development cooperation, and economic and technological initiatives.[285]

After China, India has become the second-largest trading partner with sub-Saharan Africa, relying on Africa's supply of crude oil, gems, stones, and metals to fill its growing domestic demand. While this relationship has expanded to about 6.4 percent of Africa's total trade[286]—growing at an average annual rate of 17.2 percent since 2001[287]—it is still predominantly concentrated in a few countries: South Africa, Nigeria, and Tanzania.[288]

While the scale of India's trade with Africa is nowhere near China's, India has shown increasing interest in Africa as a geopolitical strategy. Globalization and India's desire to counteract China has, however, promoted a greater focus on the Indo-Pacific region, with a number of memoranda of understanding, defense partnerships, military trainings, and bilateral agreements emerging in recent years.[289] In addition to defense capacity building, India has used its flagship Pan-African e-Network initiative to extend its footprint in bridging Africa's digital divide, connecting fifty-three African countries to a wireless fiber-optic network in tele-education and telecommunication.[290] India also maintains soft power through its film industry's ("Bollywood") influence on and presence in West and East Africa.

In response to COVID-19, India reacted swiftly by pledging its "full support to the African continent" and leveraged its position as one of the world's largest producers of pharmaceuticals to initiate health diplomacy efforts. The country had sent by May consignments of hydroxychloroquine, paracetamol, and other drugs to twenty-five African countries, investing almost $8 million in its response.[291] It has also enlisted its defense forces to deliver food and essential medical supplies to African nations including Mauritius, Comoros, Seychelles, and Madagascar.[292] However, domestic economic concerns related to the virus and the country's own sky rocketing cases are likely to severely stunt India's capacity to provide further support.

Extended country-wide lockdown measures have also spurred a sharp economic decline for India, with an economic decline of 45 percent from April to June and an expected economic contraction of 5 percent for the current fiscal year.[293] The country is experiencing plummeting industrial, manufacturing, and service sector outputs and growing unemployment, which will likely affect the country's ability to trade at its previous levels with Africa.[294] India's economic challenges are also likely to compound other widely documented issues in Indian-African partnerships. This includes India's already poor track record on delivering its grants, loans, lines of credit, and scholarships and on implementing—in terms of speed and scope—both the Indian state's and private companies' development projects.[295]

While India has yet to pull its troops out of peacekeeping missions, scale back its construction of new embassies, or cancel the highly anticipated IAFS IV, COVID-19 puts these efforts at increased risk and their outcomes will set the tone for Indian-African cooperation post-COVID. The expansion of India's local presence in Africa is an indispensable prerequisite for reaffirming its claim to its Global South leadership. Yet, whether or not India is able to bridge the gap between its rhetoric of putting Africa first and its practice remains to be seen.

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