



**Wilson Center
Africa Program**

**Africa: Year
in Review
2016**

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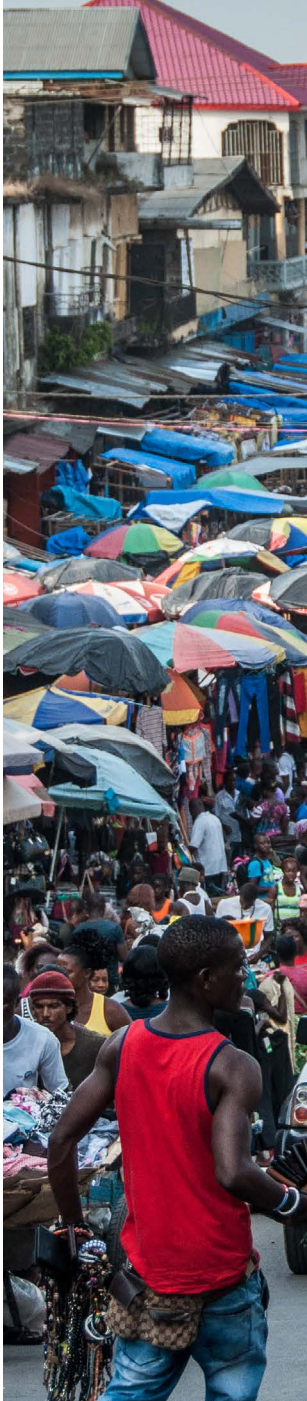
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Africa: Year in Review 2016



A Letter from the Director

2016 was an eventful year for Africa and for the world, with important implications for U.S.-Africa relations. The Wilson Center Africa Program asked experts, scholars, and policymakers to weigh in on the most important and impactful events on the continent in 2016. They responded with this collection of brief and insightful essays. In some cases multiple perspectives on the same development—the Gambia’s elections and the International Criminal Court—highlighted both areas of concurrence and disagreement.

The election of Donald Trump created surprise and shock across the political spectrum and around the world. While some see opportunity for Africa from this non-traditional politician, others are concerned about the president-elect’s campaign rhetoric and how it might translate into foreign policy come January 20, 2017.

Some commentators were struck by the opportunities presented by Africa’s tech sector, highlighted by Mark Zuckerberg’s trip to the continent. On the flip side, others were concerned about the increasing tendency by some African leaders to restrict Internet access at critical times in the democratic process, thereby curtailing citizens’ democratic space and rights.

The democracy landscape changed significantly in 2016. While a number of African countries suffered democratic setbacks, not so Benin, which consolidated its democratic governance with its sixth presidential and legislative election since 1992. The elections in the Gambia struck a chord with many first hailing the result as a victory for democracy, only for uncertainty to prevail, threatening that country’s maiden steps towards democracy after 22 years of rule by President Jammeh. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, a slow-motion constitutional crisis was unleashed by delayed elections, while in Burundi, the conflict kicked off by 2015’s elections continued. Amid

Page 4 and 5 image: Photo by Mark Fischer. Creative Commons.

the continued turmoil of conflict in a number of central African countries as well as the broader Horn of Africa region, Uganda played a positive role in alleviating the plight of refugees, taking in thousands of refugees in a crisis that gets far less press than the Mediterranean refugee crisis.

Insecurity continued to be a major source of concern for the continent. A dip in security sector financing offered an opportunity for measures that could be taken in the years ahead to reform it in order to more effectively deliver security for ordinary African citizens. Other commentators highlighted the ongoing security challenges in Chad, in the Sahel, and with United Nations peacekeeping missions. Amidst all of these challenges, the United States, including through U.S. Army Africa, has continued to build partnerships and relationships aimed at helping build African security capacities.

The decision of South Africa, Burundi, and the Gambia to withdraw from the International Criminal Court provoked a heated discussion as well as concern across the continent and internationally. A number of countries defended the role of the Court, while others highlighted the need for reforms in order for the Court to have legitimacy on the continent.

Sudan remains a key actor in the region, and in 2016 it sought to play a constructive role despite strained relations with the United States. In South Sudan, meanwhile, efforts to find a solution to the continuing conflict showed slow progress. On the international front, the UK's "Brexit" represents uncertainty, but also opportunity. China is playing an increasingly assertive role on the security front, and is reconfiguring its foreign policy priorities, with implications for African countries.

We thank all of the authors for their contributions. As 2017 begins, we must reflect and draw insight from the key developments of this past year, to capitalize on successes, and to address the challenges to come.

Dr. Monde Muyangwa
Director, Africa Program





A warehouse in Ethiopia. Photo by Synergos Institute. Creative Commons.

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TRADE, INVESTMENT, AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The election of Donald Trump to the U.S. presidency may highlight the business opportunities available in the U.S.-Africa relationship. Other essays focus on the promise of tech entrepreneurship, as well as the dark side of Internet access and government control.

Expanding Economic Relations Under a Trump Administration

Dr. Mima S. Nedelcovych

The election of Donald J. Trump as President of the United States on November 8 signaled what may be a major shift in U.S.-Africa relations and policy. The simple answer is that we currently don't know what the Trump Administration's policy toward Africa will be. President-elect Trump's presidential campaign did not shed much light on his foreign policy approach toward Africa.

Let's start with what we do know: We know that President-elect Trump outlined that U.S. foreign policy will put American interests first. Trump has said that he wants the U.S. to get out of the "nation-building" business, while assuring its own security interests. The fact that his Cabinet is lined with generals gives us a good indication that special attention will be paid to countries threatened by extremism. We also know that Donald Trump is a businessman who is always on the lookout for good deals. Now, how that translates into foreign policy is unclear, but we can safely predict that U.S.-Africa engagement will likely take a private sector approach to development—a "trade, not aid" strategy that will draw on private sector expertise.

The Obama Administration has been leaning in this direction with signature initiatives like the Power Africa plan to double access to electricity in Africa; the extension of the African Growth and Opportunity Act; two U.S.-Africa Business Forums; and the "Doing Business in Africa" campaign to strengthen U.S.-Africa trade and investment ties.

The Initiative for Global Development (IGD), the organization that I lead, is a network of African and global business leaders who are committed to sustainable development and inclusive growth through business investment. Over the past decade, African homegrown businesses have rapidly expanded and matured to become engines of growth on the continent, creating more than 80 percent of jobs in their countries.

When President-elect Trump enters office, the new Administration will discover a number of African countries with thriving and dynamic markets and a vibrant private sector with good deals to be made. As more countries get their business environment right, more opportunities will present themselves. A U.S. policy that encourages and favors countries that offer an enabling environment for the private sector will deliver long-term stability and sustainable development. A U.S. policy that promotes greater trade opportunities and investments in Africa's private sector can only lead to stronger economies and prosperity in both Africa *and* America.

Who would want to pass up that deal?

A Global Stage for Africa's Rising Tech Entrepreneurs

Mr. Grant Harris

When Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg made his first trip to Sub-Saharan Africa in August and September of 2016, he shone a spotlight on a phenomenon that gets all too little attention: Africa's tremendous entrepreneurial potential in the technology sector. His visit highlighted exciting advances in tech hubs and mobile money systems—where Nigeria and Kenya are global leaders—as well as innovations like Ushahidi, a digital platform using crowd-sourced data to map demographic events. This message of creativity and dynamism—beamed to Zuckerberg's 78 million Facebook followers and amplified further by the press—provides a valuable counter-weight to the dominant narrative of violence and poverty in Africa.

Zuckerberg's trip was a valuable reminder to U.S. companies—especially in Silicon Valley—of the many opportunities in Africa. While Facebook, Uber, Google, and others have realized what's at stake in Africa, many other companies are missing out—not only on growing markets for their products, but also on the region's increasing number of young, tech-savvy entrepreneurs eager to apply software development in a myriad of new ways.

And they have the entrepreneurial spirit to do it: relative to almost all other regions, Africans surveyed by the 2015/2016 Global Entrepreneurship Monitor report showed significantly higher confidence in their ability to start a business and lower fear of failure. Moreover, Africa's demographics (a young and increasingly connected population) and consumer trends suggest that opportunities for entrepreneurship are only going to grow. By the end of 2016, Africa was expected to reach over one billion mobile subscribers, while mobile broadband connections are predicted to hit the same milestone in the next five years.

To capitalize on these exciting developments, governments can improve access to finance and education, and support entrepreneurial-led economic growth. Hopefully enabling policies, Africa's continued tech advances, and high-profile trips like Zuckerberg's will spur even greater Silicon Valley investment in the region's tech industry.



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A Dark Year for Internet Freedom

Ms. H. Nanjala Nyabola

2016 will be remembered as the year when African tyranny declared war on the Internet. Although it was not the first time an African state had switched off social media to stifle dissent—Egypt pioneered the practice on the continent during the Arab spring—2016 was the year that such broad switch-offs became standard practice. Chad, Uganda, Burundi, Gabon, and the Gambia all switched off all or parts of their access to the Internet during contentious elections to varying outcomes. Similarly, Ethiopia switched off the Internet in the wake of protests across the country and gruesome images of state repression and brutality in response. In the Gambia at least, it seems not to have altered the outcome, as the incumbent Yahya Jammeh lost the election. In all the other cases, the suppression of the freedoms of speech and association may have altered the outcome of the elections.

Effectively shutting down citizen journalism on electoral and human rights violations is a desperate measure that speaks volumes about the state of democracy in some countries on the continent. After seeing the heady days of the post-Cold War era and having survived the violence of democratic adjustment in the 1990s, there was every reason to believe that somewhat-free and sort-of fair elections would become the new normal. Instead, some of the continent's military leaders swapped their fatigues for suits and commandeered voting processes to legitimize their rule. While each of continental Eastern Africa's 10 countries regularly conducts elections, only Kenya and Tanzania have had regular changes in government through elections since 1994.

The rise of the Internet as a place where citizen journalism can flourish and individuals can communicate without the mediation of state-controlled or influenced media has greatly undermined the near-complete control these military strongmen have over information. And this has them rattled. Today, it is nearly impossible to produce an unchallenged "official narrative." Arguably—and hopefully—this assault on freedom of speech and association signals the last, desperate, and feeble kicks of a dying approach to governance on the continent.



Soldiers of the Burundi National Defence Forces serving with AMISOM.

Photo by AMISOM Public Information, public domain.

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SECURITY, CONFLICT RESOLUTION, AND PEACEBUILDING

Defense sector financing from both domestic and external sources dipped, and greater structural challenges remain. Other essays address refugees in Uganda, unrest in Chad, fragility in the Sahel, U.S. military assistance, and struggles in UN peace missions.

Financing Security for All in Africa

Dr. Raymond Gilpin

Domestic and external sources of defense sector financing are expected to fall marginally in 2016, with implications for security across the continent. Data compiled by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute in April 2016 revealed a 5.3 percent fall in military and police spending between 2014 and 2015, following a sustained, decade-long rise. This reduction, which was largely the result of fiscal constraints imposed by the global downturn in commodity prices, did not address the structural imbalance which sees a disproportionately high percentage of fiscal allocations in Africa's security sector devoted to wages and salaries.

External sources of funding for Africa's security sector have also showed signs of weakening. The Security Assistance Monitor, which tracks U.S. foreign assistance globally, reported a slight drop in military and police assistance to Africa between 2014 and 2015. In spite of the marginal decrease, annual U.S. assistance to Africa's security sector has been above \$2 billion, consistently, since 2010. While important, external assistance is not without its challenges. First, external assistance tends to be threat-focused and does not always align with domestic priorities. Second, unintended consequences (like the hardening of praetorian guards and poor interoperability) are rife. Third, donations and sales have significant domestic fiscal (and financial life-cycle) implications which are often overlooked. Fourth, security assistance processes are opaque, both in African countries and among external partners (very few of whom publish comprehensive details of security assistance or have effective oversight mechanisms).

Increased spending alone will not guarantee security in Africa. The challenges with domestic and external financing in Africa's security sector, to a large extent, derives from the dearth of national security strategies in African countries. These strategies could link available and anticipated resources to the attainment of sustainable national security goals. Such strategies would entail prioritizing domestic alignment, strengthening regulatory institutions, and implementing measures to enhance the coordination of external assistance.

The last decade witnessed significant progress in the design and management of financing initiatives that support economic and social development, starting with the 2005 Paris Declaration and culminating in the 2015 Addis Agenda for Action. These measures have helped promote transparency, align available resources with specific targets, coordinate external assistance, and improve the management of domestic resources. A similar process should be initiated in Africa's security sector. The continent's security is a layered phenomenon that requires financing models that are predictable, aligned, adequate, focused, and accountable.

Sahel Stabilization Emerges as Continental Priority

Dr. Sophia Moestrup

As if harsh environmental conditions, ungovernable spaces, and underdevelopment weren't enough, the Sahel region was exposed to tremendous pressures by external existential threats in 2016. An increased frequency of terrorist attacks has drawn attention to this remote and landlocked region, where porous borders, weak state institutions, and widespread poverty have facilitated the operation and expansion of jihadist groups. Fragile democratic states in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso struggle to protect their citizens and assert control in the face of these violent extremist groups.

Burkina Faso recently transitioned to democracy, following the unexpected fall of former autocrat Blaise Compaoré in October 2014. Niger had a highly contentious presidential election early in 2016, with the runner-up campaigning from jail. In Mali, a 2012 coup and Tuareg-rebellion left deep scars that are slow to heal. Moreover, progress on implementing the June 2015 peace accord between Tuareg-led separatist groups and the government has been glacial, which has inhibited the government's ability to exercise authority over the entire national territory. As a result, insecurity is spreading, spilling over into neighboring Niger and Burkina Faso. In Niger, an attack on a Malian refugee camp in the Tahoua region in October compounded challenges already faced by Nigerien security forces battling Boko Haram fighters in the easternmost part of the country. In Burkina Faso, repeated assaults on security posts along the Mali border have followed the al-Qaeda attack in the capital Ouagadougou in January that killed nearly 30 people.

These flashpoints of insecurity expose the rivalries and competition between extremist groups—ISIS and al-Qaeda—that vie for influence in the sub-region. Most Sahel watchers agree that deeper collaboration among security agencies in the three countries is needed, but recognize that long-term stability can only be acquired through military victories coupled with strong democratic institutions. Inclusive and effective governance will provide the strongest bulwark against the spread of violent extremism.

Better governance would provide benefits for the citizens of the Sahel, and at the same time allow these Sahelian states to serve as buffer against the further spread of extremism to other parts of the continent.

Austerity and Unrest in Chad

Dr. Alex Thurston

Chad is a counterterrorism partner for the United States, but the Central African country's politics became turbulent in 2016. President Idriss Déby, who took power in 1990, won April's elections overwhelmingly, according to official results. Yet since that time, his government's austerity measures have caused unrest, including protests and strikes by students, professors, civil servants, and judges.

The unrest is unlikely to topple Déby. But the disturbances reflect a growing rejection of the unofficial social contract that Déby has offered. In recent years, the government has provided security and delivered economic growth in exchange for the population's acquiescence to de facto one-party rule. The contract is now strained, partly due to factors beyond the government's control—low global oil prices prompted the move toward austerity in Chad, a small oil producer where oil is nevertheless crucial to government budgets. The government has demanded greater royalties from international oil companies, but Exxon and others have not yet agreed to pay. Meanwhile, austerity and economic inequality have led some Chadians to criticize the government's management of oil revenues.

Another factor driving austerity is security expenditures. Ironically, one of the same features that makes Chad an attractive counterterrorism partner for the West—Chad's ability to deploy combat-ready troops outside its borders, including in Mali and Nigeria—has now contributed to domestic unrest. The costly fight against Boko Haram has strained the budget. Chadians have questioned not only government spending, but also the treatment of soldiers: from April to August, Chad witnessed a political drama over the disappearance of at least twenty soldiers. Human rights groups suspect the men had been detained after voting against Déby.

Chad's unrest suggests that some of the United States' counterterrorism partners in Africa are more brittle than they seem. The long-ruling regimes that offer reliability, continuity, and strength—including Uganda's Yoweri Museveni, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front, and Déby—periodically face pronounced domestic dissent. Such unrest does not always topple regimes (although it can, as Burkina Faso's Blaise Compaoré learned in 2014), but it should give American policymakers pause: leaning heavily on such partners for counterterrorism help can exacerbate the strains they face.

Losing Legitimacy? UN Peace Missions in Africa

Dr. Ann L. Phillips

2016 was a difficult year for UN peace missions in Africa. Missions in the Central African Republic (CAR), South Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and Mali are at high risk of failure. Inability or unwillingness to protect civilians as well as widespread sexual exploitation and abuse call into question the legitimacy of missions in Africa.

In South Sudan, Protection of Civilians (POC) is the top UNMISS priority. Yet UNMISS troops have failed to protect thousands of civilians in POC sites from internal and external violence. They also failed to protect civilians in Juba when government and opposition forces attacked them at a UN-protected site. Genocide now looms in this new state. Reports and indicators in recent months have provided ample warning; civilians have no confidence that UN peacekeepers will even try to protect them. Legitimacy is lost.

In CAR, UN peacekeepers as well as non-African peacekeepers operating alongside the UN mission, have actively violated the very people they are to protect. A unit from the Republic of Congo murdered at least twelve people that they had arrested in March 2014. Later, Congolese and other MINUSCA peacekeepers engaged in sexual exploitation and abuse of women and girls across CAR. The situation was so egregious that the head of mission was fired and the offending troops were sent home. Although expulsion marks an increased UN effort to discipline troops for criminal behavior, repatriation is inadequate punishment in the eyes of the victims.

These are just two examples of pervasive problems. Where locals do not trust peacekeepers or know whether to fear insurgents, government troops, or peacekeepers more, the mission cannot succeed. And where peacekeepers are not trusted, their lives are at greater risk, creating a vicious cycle that has come to dominate high-profile UN peace missions in Africa. If not reversed, the legitimacy of UN peace missions will continue to decline, leaving vulnerable populations in Africa with no good options. No alternative organization exists to take on the mission. An unintended by-product could be a significant reduction in U.S. financial support for UN peacekeeping generally by an incoming Administration whose pre-election rhetoric appears disdainful of international organizations and multilateral alliances.

African Horizons: Supporting Africa's Progress Through Long-term Security Cooperation

Major General Joseph P. Harrington

Africa's progress matters to the security and prosperity of the United States and our allies in Europe. In the last ten years, Africa demonstrated favorable trends in economic growth, development, and governance. This year, with a real GDP growth of 3.6 percent, Africa remained the world's second fastest growing economic region behind East Asia, surpassing the global average growth of 3.1 percent, according to the *African Economic Outlook 2016* report. Despite recent progress, Africa may face continued political and security challenges in 2017. High unemployment rates and growing and increasingly urbanized populations raises the potential for organized crime and recruitment of the disenfranchised by Islamist militant groups. African Horizons is U.S. Army Africa's approach for assisting African partners in facing complex security threats by engaging on a small scale with the intent of long-term strategic benefits through security cooperation and enduring engagements.

As part of our long-term security cooperation effort, U.S. Army Africa (USARAF) conducted four Accord-series exercises in 2016 with more than 41 African countries. These exercises replicated United Nations and/or African Union missions that focused on peace and stability operations. With more than 1,000 military personnel from 14 participating African nations, this year's Central Accord exercise in Libreville, Gabon was the most robust event executed since the Accord Series Program began in 2013.

In addition to the Accord-series exercises, USARAF conducted more than 300 security cooperation activities in 2016 that provided training to more than 7,000 African soldiers. The training focused on peacekeeping operations and strengthening a wide set of key functional capacities in medical, intelligence, logistics, command and control, and countering improvised explosive devices. The effect of USARAF's security cooperation activities is strategic because small teams of U.S. soldiers share invaluable knowledge and develop enduring capabilities that enable our partner's ability to fight the threat of violent extremist organizations.

In the last year, USARAF conducted more than 120 partner engagements with more than 19 African nations and facilitated four Regional Leader Seminars that focused on developing long-term regional cooperation and solutions to complex security problems. During this

year's African Land Forces Summit (ALFS) in Arusha, Tanzania, which is USARAF's central strategic engagement, more than 37 army chiefs from across the continent gathered to discuss numerous security issues, including army readiness, future conflicts, and post-conflict operations preparation. At ALFS, Lieutenant General Paul Mihova, the Zambian Army Chief, attested that his soldiers, who trained the previous year with U.S. soldiers at Southern Accord 15, USARAF's largest exercise in 2015, are now successful contributing in peacekeeping operations in the Central African Republic. He credited their level of accomplishment to the training they received.

On the horizon, USARAF will continue to deepen relationships with African partners through the Accord-series exercise program, security cooperation activities, and other engagements. In 2017, USARAF will emphasize increased security cooperation in regions that are impacted by the threat of violent extremist organizations, including the Lake Chad region. Our efforts are geared towards building upon the positive momentum we have experienced so far. African units comprise more than 50 percent of today's United Nations peacekeeping forces in Africa, compared to when Africans represented approximately 25 percent of these forces a decade ago. USARAF will continue to support Africa's progress through these long-term security cooperation activities with the purpose of developing future African armies capable of securing their nations and region against today's security threats.



An officer from the Burkina Faso army salutes as international flags march past him during the Western Accord 16 Opening Day Ceremony May 2, 2016. *Photo courtesy of U.S. Army Africa.*



Vote counters with CENI, the electoral management body of the Democratic Republic of Congo, during the 2011 elections.

*Photo by MONUSCO / Myriam Asmani.
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INCLUSIVE GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP

Benin notched another free and fair election, further consolidating its democratic governance. Other essays focus on the Gambian election, the continuing crisis in Burundi, and DRC's delayed election.

Consolidating Democracy in Benin

Dr. Landry Signé

On April 6, 2016, the inauguration of Patrice Talon as the President of the Republic of Benin heralded another successful democratic transfer of power in one of West Africa's most stable democracies. Patrice Talon succeeded outgoing President Thomas Yayi Boni (who completed his two constitutional terms), after winning the second round of the presidential election over Yayi's preferred candidate, French-Beninese national Lionel Zinsou. Since Benin's first democratic elections in 1991, the transfer of power has been fairly peaceful and democratic, while such transfers have remained sporadically unconstitutional in some other countries.

Three key factors explain Benin's successful democratic consolidation: the quality of institutions with acceptable horizontal accountability, a strong vertical accountability, and a vibrant civil society promoting diagonal accountability.

The quality of institutions was established by the Constitution of December 11, 1990, and is the foundation for the institutionalization of horizontal accountability (checks and balances). According to the BTI 2016 Benin Country Report, despite occasional attempts by the executive to interfere in the functioning of the legislative and judicial institutions, those bodies have, for the most part, affirmed their independence and ability to act effectively as a counterbalance to the executive. For example, President Yayi Boni was unable to change the Constitution to secure a third presidential term.

The strong level of vertical accountability also explains Benin's successful democratic consolidation. This vertical accountability is illustrated by the ability of citizens to choose and replace their leaders through free, fair, transparent, regular, and meaningful elections as well as by inclusive processes marked by substantial levels of participation, competition, and pluralism. Due in part to this accountability, Benin has seen no less than six successful presidential and legislative elections.

The quality of institutions, especially as related to the strength of the mechanisms of horizontal, vertical, and diagonal accountability (strength of the civil society), are critical factors in building democracies, whether in poor or rich African countries. However, as citizens also expect development dividends, economic performance is important to consolidating democracy. Under these circumstances, and in partnership with their African counterparts, the United States can (i) develop appropriate trade and investment policies to vigorously support accountable African leaders in their quest for economic prosperity, and (ii) support initiatives aimed at understanding and strengthening horizontal, vertical, and diagonal accountability in Africa.

The Crisis in Burundi

Mr. Steve McDonald

Now almost two years after the elections of 2015 and the attendant protests and violence, there seems to be little progress toward a solution to the crisis in Burundi, once a poster child for post-conflict reconciliation and recovery. Daily killings are occurring, now mostly unreported in the Western press. At least 1,000 people, probably more, have died since May 2015. Most recognized opposition leaders are abroad in Rwanda or various European capitals. An internationally sanctioned “Inter-Burundi” dialogue effort is underway, led by the distinguished former President of Tanzania, Benjamin Mkapa, but it seems to be making little headway.

Most recently, a December 6 communiqué from Mkapa’s office described recent meetings with Pierre Nkurunziza, the President of Burundi, and “other stakeholders” in which he laid out his roadmap for an agreement by June 2017 between all parties. Mkapa stated that all had agreed to engage in “non-violent opposition” as well as the “legitimacy of the Burundi Government.” Mkapa also cited an improved security situation.

However, few of the many opposition forces arrayed outside the country, including at least one known to be training armed militia, are on board and the main group, known by its French acronym CNARED, has asked for Mkapa to resign given his remarks about the “legitimacy” of the government. Whereas Bujumbura and the main cities seem calm at present, inside Burundian sources say that targeted killings, imprisonments, and torture continue, mostly out of the eye of the public and press. Mkapa acknowledged all is not right, saying he understood concerns over limitations in political space and underscored the need for “open and frank deliberations in this regard.”

It appears that most international players, including the United States, see the elections of 2020 as their goalpost, and hope that the Mkapa dialogue and continued pressures from outside will ameliorate the violence until such time as a new government can be put in place. The problem is that no current opposition leader or close associate of Nkurunziza seems positioned to take control in 2020 and, as the pundits say, a successor might be worse at governance than Nkurunziza and just as dictatorial.

The United States’ own presidential transition gives little hint of what Africa policy will emerge under a new Secretary of State, leaving the United States sidelined. What is needed now is a refocusing on engaging all the Burundian parties. The new U.S. Ambassador there, Anne Casper, is in a position to reach out to the ruling party. By driving home the need for application of rule of law, respect for human rights, and need for inclusion, we can only hope that Nkurunziza and his allies will begin to listen.

The Gambia's Shaky Democratic Transition

Ms. Kamissa Camara

The Gambia is the smallest country on mainland Africa and it has been one of the last remaining dictatorships on the continent. President Yahya Jammeh, whose collection of titles include Excellency, Sheikh, Professor, El-Hadj, and Babili Mansa (builder of bridges), took over in a 1994 military coup as a junior army officer. He has since ruled the country with an iron fist, cracking down on the media, violating human rights, and spreading fear among dissidents.

On December 1, 2016, about two million Gambians went to the polls in a presidential election whose outcome many thought was a foregone conclusion. To everyone's surprise, the Gambian Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) declared Adama Barrow, the main opposition candidate, winner. Despite speculations about whether or not Yahya Jammeh would accept election results, Babili Mansa congratulated Barrow and promised to accompany him during the transition period.

As world leaders were commending the Gambia's election and President Jammeh for leading the way for stability and prosperity in his country, the Gambia's outgoing president went on national television yet again to reverse the election results because of alleged fraud with the IEC's vote tabulation. "Too good to be true" some said about Jammeh's initial acceptance of election results. Too good or not, it looks like Jammeh will not get away with it this time.

Following the election, the U.S. Secretary of State, John Kerry, qualified the Gambian elections as the beginning of a "new era in The Gambia." He commended Jammeh for respecting the results of the election, and the Electoral Commission for its transparent handling. It is not Jammeh's loss that made the election historic. It is him conceding defeat in the smoothest way possible that did. By now refusing to step down, Jammeh has unleashed the worst fears among Gambians in the country and in the diaspora. With only a short week to celebrate Jammeh's defeat, the release of political prisoners, and the Gambia's return to the International Criminal Court, Gambians are now distraught. Will a military intervention be needed to remove Jammeh from the presidential seat? Will ECOWAS' diplomatic efforts be enough for him to officially step down? Should President-Elect Adama Barrow be sworn in in January, will he have the clout necessary to protect his rule from Jammeh's interference?

Questions are many, answers are scarce. The Gambia's December presidential elections have done one thing: they have upheld the voices of its citizens. A real democratic privilege.

President Jammeh’s “Impossible” U-Turn Over the Election

Dr. Arsène Brice Bado

“I take this opportunity to congratulate Mr. Adama for his victory. It’s a clear victory. I wish him all the best and I wish all Gambians the best. As a true Muslim who believes in the almighty Allah I will never question Allah’s decision. You Gambians have decided,” President Yahya Jammeh said on Gambian national TV on December 2, 2016. This initial concession of electoral defeat by the very eccentric Jammeh was a real bombshell that would have an impact far beyond the borders of this tiny West African country. Who would have dared think that Jammeh, who once promised to rule the Gambia for a billion years, would accept electoral defeat? Cracking down on opposition leaders a few months before the election, barring international electoral observers except those from the African Union, and cutting off international calls and Internet access on election day were among the measures that suggested there was no way that the December 1 election would deliver a different outcome than those of the previous four presidential elections won by President Jammeh in the 22 years since he came to power through a military coup. Despite all these conditions, the Gambia’s Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), very courageously, preserved the election results.

President Jammeh’s initial concession of electoral defeat seemed to hold up a lesson to many of his peers who strive to stay in power by all means. A week after his concession, President Jammeh changed his mind over the election results. Indeed, with his U-turn over the election results, Jammeh has publicly gone the wrong way down a one-way street, prompting unanimous international condemnation and the threat of a military intervention to remove him from power. More importantly, within the Gambia, Jammeh faces huge resistance. In early January 2017, the 67 clerics of the Gambia Supreme Islamic Council and the Gambia Christian Council courageously and unanimously told Jammeh to relinquish power in the interest of peace. There is no doubt that a new dawn is rising on the country.

The transition of power in the Gambia would open avenues for improving relations with the United States. The Gambia’s eligibility for preferential trade benefits under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) was suspended in 2015. In 2016, the United States imposed a visa ban on the Gambia’s government officials after the country failed to provide passports to Gambian nationals being deported from the United States. The transition would therefore have a significant positive impact on U.S. relations with the Gambia, a small country with an important role in fighting illegal migration and international drug trafficking.

The Democratic Republic of Congo: A Political Alternation

Father Emmanuel Bueya

In 2016, many incumbent presidents in various Central African countries still clung to power. In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the desire of the incumbent to cling to power brought about a confrontation between citizens yearning for political change and President Joseph Kabila and his majority party seeking to preserve the status quo. President Kabila reached the end of his second term in 2016 and was constitutionally prohibited from seeking a third. However, the government has delayed the elections, citing, among other reasons, an inability to organize elections as scheduled in November 2016. In 2006, the presidential elections had two rounds. In 2011, there was only one round. In both cases, however, elections were held. In 2016, instead, President Kabila appealed to the Congolese people for a national dialogue in order to ensure a peaceful transition after the end of his second term. The political crisis facing the country and the constitution has been called the “glissement” or slippage, because of the election delays.

In addition, the political class in DRC is divided into many antagonistic groups with conflicting political agendas. The majority of the population is frustrated and wants political change through the elections that do not include the incumbent President.

In order to prevent a total implosion, a political dialogue was organized in October 2016 (cf. United Nations resolutions 2277) with the mediation of the former Togolese Prime Minister, Edem Kodjo. Unfortunately the dialogue was not inclusive. The current national dialogue, which started in December 2016 under the Conference of the Catholic Bishops, has produced a transition agreement that includes holding elections in 2017. However, since independence in 1960, the Congolese people have gone through 22 national dialogues without any significant progress in democracy.

Nonetheless, democratic alternation through elections is a peaceful way for the citizens to choose and to control their leaders.

Uganda Takes in Refugees: Addressing a Global Challenge

Ms. Helen Kezie-Nwoha

Increased displacement and migration has been one of the most dominant issues of 2016. The debate has been about addressing the root causes of migration and displacement to lower the number of people—specifically Africans—moving to more developed countries, many times using crude means. Between 2015 and 2016, about one million people crossed dangerous terrain and the turbulent Mediterranean Sea to Europe, and approximately 3,000 lives were lost.

While the focus has been mostly on the Mediterranean refugee crisis, little attention has been given to the crisis in Africa. The East African region hosts the highest number of refugees on the continent and some of the longest wars in countries like Somalia, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, with brewing or resurgent conflicts in Burundi, the Central African Republic, and South Sudan.

Due to its geographic location within the region and its very progressive refugee law, Uganda hosts hundreds of thousands of refugees, predominantly from Somalia, Eritrea, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and South Sudan. South Sudan's 2015 peace agreement has failed to provide much-needed peace, resulting in a massive surge of South Sudanese fleeing into Uganda. In November 2016, Uganda witnessed an influx of over 3,000 South Sudanese refugees crossing into the country each day, spurred by renewed violence in the 5-year-old country. According to the United Nations High Commission on Refugees, in September 2016, the total number of South Sudanese refugees in Uganda surpassed 1 million, with women and children forming the majority.

Uganda has been able to mobilize land and resources from its citizens and humanitarian aid from development partners to provide basic needs for these refugees. Uganda has done this despite the fact that the greater north of the country is still recovering from effects of the decade-long Lord's Resistance Army insurgency.

By showing empathy and taking in large numbers of refugees, Uganda has demonstrated to the world that even with limited resources, African countries have managed to positively take on the challenge of absorbing refugees from neighboring countries.



The premises of the International Criminal Court in The Hague, The Netherlands.

Photo by UN Photo/Rick Bajornas, Creative Commons.

When Threats Become Reality: African Countries Withdraw from the ICC

Mr. Anton du Plessis and Ms. Otilia Anna Maunganidze

After years of expressing discontent with the International Criminal Court (ICC) and threatening a withdrawal, 2016 was the year it finally happened—at least for three African states. In early October, news came from Burundi that the parliament had voted to withdraw from the Rome Statute of the ICC. By the end of October, both Burundi and South Africa had officially notified the United Nations (UN) Secretary General that they no longer wanted to be part of the ICC system. The Gambia quickly followed suit—making three withdrawals by African states in under a month.

The reasons given by these countries vary, but they encapsulate issues at the heart of discontent for critics of the Court: immunity of heads of states; an unequal international criminal justice landscape that has resulted in only cases from Africa before the Court; the intervention (or, as some may view it, interference) of the UN Security Council; peace versus justice; and dissatisfaction with how the Court operates.

By the time the ICC states' annual meeting, the Assembly of States Parties (ASP) to the Rome Statute, began on November 16, there was speculation that South Africa, Burundi, and the Gambia had opened the floodgates to mass withdrawal. This raised additional concerns that the ICC's existence and legitimacy were under threat. While a few other African countries have hinted at withdrawal, several took the opportunity at the ASP to reaffirm their commitment to the Court, namely Botswana, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Lesotho, Mali, Nigeria, Tunisia, and Senegal. Many of these are countries that had traditionally not been very vocal on ICC issues. Their primary message was that efforts should be focused toward ensuring universal justice, and that this cannot be achieved if countries leave the ICC.

But these affirmations of support are not enough. It is now time for the ICC and African states to confront the difficult challenges facing them. For the ICC this means demonstrating that it is a legitimate and effective court willing to hear the concerns of Africans. African states too must come to the table. Calls for constructive dialogue and critical engagement must be heeded.

What will 2017 bring? With the election of a new African Union chairperson set for January, it will be interesting to see where the candidates stand on the issue, and whether they are bold enough to express themselves strongly in favor of ending impunity for these crimes.

The ICC: A Big Deal?

Mr. Nii Akuetteh

Numerous worthy contenders make selecting Africa's most consequential news story hard. The African National Congress' self-inflicted wounds? African Union (AU) counterterrorism reforms? Rich countries imposing neoliberalism externally (Egypt, Nigeria, Sudan, Ghana) while blaming that assault on the working class for unleashing white tribalism internally?

Selecting one is hard, but doable—my choice is Burundi, South Africa, and the Gambia announcing they are quitting the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Admittedly the ICC is imperfect. But unless reversed, this decision will unleash weighty and harmful consequences. More African countries (perhaps the entire AU?) could leave. Africa's post-colonial history is sprinkled with unpunished mass atrocities, especially Rwanda, which galvanized Africa into the ICC's driving force and largest bloc. Consequently, an African exodus would cripple, and possibly destroy, the Court.

The ICC's collapse would be catastrophic and indict us thus: Confronting mass atrocity, our age blinked. We returned to the bad old days of open season on the lives, liberty, and resources of vulnerable communities, especially African ones. We embraced impunity.

"Truly terrible," you say. "But why should the ICC's African migraine become America's headache?" Consider why. The prevailing establishment narrative—that, with bigger fish to fry, a preoccupied Washington neglects the ICC but wishes it well—is false. In truth, American administrations have closely monitored and coerced the Court. It required shaming for Clinton to sign the Rome Statute extremely late. Clinton declined to submit it to the Senate for ratification and the country never joined the Court. The Bush Administration proved worse. Brandishing a new law (the American Service Members Protection Act, condemned by Europe as "the Hague invasion law") and diplomatic tool (bilateral immunity agreements), Washington first prohibited any U.S. cooperation with the ICC. It then bullied other countries to follow suit. The politicians even ignored Pentagon warnings that this position harmed American security. Seemingly, Obama's administration displayed less hostility. Still, it too has not made the country a Court member. Yes, Obama did exhort and assist Africans to pursue mass atrocity suspects. But even that help rests on the same iron double standard: Americans and favored allies remain above international law.

The bottom line: Yes, the ICC is harmed by Africa's exodus. But the exodus merely emulates more damaging, pre-existing hostility from Washington—and Moscow and Beijing. The next step in forestalling catastrophe: American and African civil societies must partner to make their politicians more ICC-friendly.



South Sudanese football fans celebrate their national team's win in 2015.

*Photo by UN Photo/JC McIlwaine.
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SUDAN AND SOUTH SUDAN

After the breakdown of a tenuous peace agreement, continued bloodshed in South Sudan has led to fears of genocide. U.S.-Sudan relations remain prickly, but Sudan remains a key player in the region.

The Evolution of U.S.-Sudan Relations

Ambassador Nureldin Satti

Without changing the basic premises that have always defined the U.S. approach to Sudan, the year 2016 saw the Obama Administration make a last-gasp attempt to improve relations. Following the normalization of U.S.-Cuba relations and the conclusion of the nuclear deal with Iran, many observers were wondering whether Sudan would be next on the normalization list.

As early as 2012, Washington conveyed to Khartoum its decision to abandon its policy of regime change in Sudan and to adopt that of a “soft landing,” which would encourage Sudanese President al-Bashir to become “part of the solution,” rather than continuing to be “part of the problem.” More specifically, Washington encouraged President al-Bashir, who has been under a warrant of arrest issued by the International Criminal Court since 2007, to take several measures, including to: a) engage seriously in the talks with the armed groups in Darfur and in the “two areas” of South Kordofan and Blue Nile with a view to stopping the war; b) put an end to human rights violations; and c) create space for dialogue and prepare the ground for a national dialogue with the aim of the creation of a truly democratic state.

The U.S. drive to improve relations with Sudan became more pronounced following the quasi-collapse of the state in South Sudan and Washington’s recognition that Sudan was indispensable for peace and stability in South Sudan. Moreover, the regional situation has changed drastically in the last two or three years, particularly given increasing insecurity in parts of the region including Libya, Central African Republic, Somalia, and the Sahel. Some European countries have signed agreements with Sudan to garner its assistance to curb migratory flows. Prompted by its worsening economic situation, Sudan has shown a willingness to play a positive role by helping to resolve problems at the regional level.

Paradoxically, while the Obama Administration belatedly exerted all efforts to help Sudan stop the war in Darfur and the two areas and to seek Sudan’s help in ending the conflict in South Sudan and in settling regional problems, it also renewed, once more, longstanding sanctions against Sudan and continues to maintain Sudan on the “Terror List.” This is despite the Administration’s recognition that Sudan has cooperated with the United States on terror issues.

The options of full normalization or increased confrontation have been left hanging. Proponents of the Islamist regime in Khartoum think that they can cut a better deal with the incoming Republican administration in Washington. Judging by past experience, nothing is less certain.

Bloodshed in South Sudan: The Risk of Spiraling Into Genocide

Dr. Getachew Zeru Gebrekidan

Since South Sudan descended into civil war in December 2013, the conflict has left tens of thousands dead and more than 2.5 million people displaced. To deal with the crisis, several strategies at the local, regional, and international level have been undertaken, but no strategy has been able to produce convincing results in ending the violence between the warring parties and reconciling the population. The prospect for achieving a durable peace in South Sudan remains gloomy. In August 2015, intense international pressure and the threat of sanctions led to a peace deal that eventually brought former First Vice President Riek Machar, one of the main combatants, back to Juba in April 2015. However, hopes of peace were soon dashed when clashes erupted in August 2016.

The United Nations Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide has warned that there are many warning signs the already horrific war in South Sudan could escalate into genocide. For instance, there is extreme ethnic polarization, which has been fueling a cycle of revenge; many instances of hate speech and inflammatory stereotyping; widespread and systematic attacks against civilians on the basis of their ethnic background; atrocities intended to dehumanize particular populations; and targeted killings and rape of members of particular groups. This situation is getting worse as the government of South Sudan has ceased to exercise a monopoly over coercive power, and its ability to deliver public services, provide basic security, and administer justice is virtually nonexistent. The conflict has also proved that the UN peacekeepers deployed in the country have not been able to stop such atrocities.

To prevent an imminent genocide and move forward with the implementation of the peace agreement signed in August 2015, neighboring countries can unify and act collectively through the African Union or the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), an East African regional economic community that has played a role in mediating the conflict. Russia and China can also join the United States to impose an arms embargo on the country and further targeted sanctions on the individuals who have been the biggest spoilers to lasting peace. Warring parties and all South Sudanese stakeholders can fully cooperate with the UN-authorized 4,000-strong Regional Protection Force, which aims to create a political environment conducive to achieving peace and stability in South Sudan. This force must avoid any duplication of the mandate given to the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS).



The African Union in Addis Ababa.
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China and Africa: Trends and Policies

Mr. Winslow Robertson

Most of the trends in Chinese economic engagement with African countries coming into 2016 have held: a growth of trade, a diversification of (the actually quite small) foreign direct investment, and an expansion of security interests. Africa, in and of itself, is still an area of low importance to Chinese policymakers. However, two important developments in the Africa-China relationship signal an evolution of Chinese overseas policymaking that may prove to be quite different than in years past.

First, on the security front, the creation of a naval base in Djibouti and the death of Chinese peacekeepers in South Sudan could point to a more muscular foreign policy in the African continent. China has never really adhered to its stated policy of “Non-Interference,” though as a rhetorical tool it has been quite powerful. Instead, China has generally taken great pains to ensure that its influence in foreign countries remained hidden. That may no longer be the case as China projects power overseas. Whether that means security on the African continent will change or not is still difficult to predict, but the openness of Chinese interference is new and will elicit reactions, for good and ill.

Second is the question of China’s strategic direction in Africa. “One Belt One Road” (OBOR), one of President Xi Jinping’s signature foreign policy initiatives, is an attempt to promote physical and commercial connectivity from China to Europe, across Asia and Africa, and to promote Chinese goods and services in the process. How OBOR changes China-Africa relations is uncertain. Will Africa be left out of OBOR, will Africa be folded into it and have no distinct policy goals outside of OBOR itself, or will there be different policy planks for Chinese overseas policy? For example, what does it mean when China announced that the Port of Lamu, a major transport and infrastructure project in Kenya being built by China Communications Construction Company, would be folded into OBOR just a few months after its initial announcement in the spring of 2013? The implication was that Lamu was being treated as a distinctly new project, so that Lamu was part of an OBOR strategy even though it was announced prior to OBOR. Will China essentially double-dip in terms of international commitments, so that a billion dollar project is counted twice, once toward “Africa” and another towards “OBOR”? Chinese diplomats have battled mightily to make Africa matter more for Chinese policymakers, but it seems that OBOR might take the oxygen out of that effort, and an amorphous, undefined initiative like OBOR might do more harm than good for African interests. If everything is part of OBOR, then nothing really is.

Brexit and Africa: Beyond the Doom

Mr. Olusegun Sotola

The United Kingdom referendum to withdraw from its membership in the European Union (EU) has generated global concerns. The terms of exit will determine exactly what will change, but the decision has implications and lessons for Africa.

Brexit is a lesson for Africa in deciding the directions of the continental unions. The major driver of the “Leave” vote in the UK was the EU-dictated immigration policy and a sense that the EU was weakening British sovereignty. The African Union is still struggling with elementary aspects of forming an EU-type union, as a common passport is just being floated and more than 50 percent of member countries still require visas to visit other African countries. Nevertheless, Brexit still offers insights into the development of such a union. Brexit shows the importance of getting policies around common currencies and passports/immigration right. While the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has a common passport that allows member nationals to traverse the region without visas, it has yet to achieve its common currency plans, which have been postponed several times. There is a high level of fragility in the political system and the ECOWAS region is not yet mature enough for that level of integration.

In terms of direct implications, trade and remittances are likely to grow for Africa after Brexit. For Nigeria, for example, the UK and United States are the largest sources of remittance. The UK is estimated to have at least 1 million Nigerians, who were responsible for 33 percent of the remittances to Nigeria in 2015. Remittances have grown on an upward trend since 2006, which they will continue to, and will most likely grow to more than \$25 billion post-Brexit. Presently, trade between Africa and the UK is meager, as the UK’s share of Africa’s total exports is just 5 percent. If China’s political system were to be similarly upturned, Africa should be much more worried because China’s share of the continent’s exports is 20 percent. Trade with the UK will most likely increase post-Brexit, as British companies look further outward given the possible loss of markets in the EU. Given this situation, it appears likely that the UK will seek to negotiate new trade agreements and terms including with Africa, thereby creating more two-way trade with the continent.

A Global Trifecta Will Shape Africa in 2017

Ms. Vivian Lowery Derryck

In 2016, Africa has been rocked by a seismic trifecta of Brexit, the U.S. presidential election, and the Gambian election—all with unexpected outcomes that will have profound implications for the continent in 2017.

The trifecta began when Britons voted to leave the European Union, revealing an underbelly of resentment of foreigners and general dissatisfaction with the direction of government policies.

U.S. voters then elected Donald Trump, the candidate who linked global trade to job loss, pledged an inward-turning United States, and exposed a massive cultural gulf between liberals and conservatives as many of the latter accepted the anti-Muslim, anti-immigrant views the candidate espoused.

In the Gambia, the strong, well-organized Civil Society Coalition on Elections and the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding developed a seven-party coalition led by real-estate businessman Adama Barrow to defeat incumbent Yahya Jammeh, the mercurial president who seized power in a 1994 coup, trampling state institutions and violating human rights for 22 years. The consequences of these three unanticipated outcomes are still unfolding. Generally, the outcomes were good for African democracy, but potentially damaging in economic and migration terms.

In all three countries, the state's established electoral mechanisms and institutions were challenged but functioned smoothly, reinforcing the legitimacy of the electoral process. In each case, the resiliency of political parties was tested and re-affirmed. Moreover, the Gambia proved that a strong political party/civil society-based campaign can win a competitive election, even in a country with a repressive dictator.

Democracy is stronger in each country for the loser's acceptance of the outcome, though passionate opposition views endure. David Cameron's resignation, Hillary Clinton's concession speech, and Jammeh's initial acknowledgment of defeat are models that can help civil society and the rule of law prevail in highly contested African elections.

In a further sign of deepening African democracy, when President Yahya Jammeh reneged on his earlier concession, basic tenets of democracy were further strengthened when

the Economic Community of West African States attempted to intervene and add the full authority of the 15 member states to reinforce the fundamental election precept of accepting the decision of the majority of voters and the rule of law. Though the delegation was initially turned away, the precedent of regional institutional support for free and fair elections was further cemented.

The economic and immigration consequences of Brexit and the U.S. election are less positive for Africa. The Trump victory may mean less overall U.S. attention to Africa and a relaxation of pressure on repressive regimes. As British and U.S. publics demand more inward-turning policies, their aid levels may fall, allowing other foreign actors, primarily China, to increase their influence in the region. President-elect Trump's plan to review all trade agreements might lead to amendments to the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), since it has no reciprocity agreements. Immigration will likely become more difficult to the United Kingdom and United States.

Trifectas often yield winners, but the inward-turning, anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim undertones suggested by Brexit and Mr. Trump's election require African resilience and strong efforts to forge regional and multi-regional partnerships to succeed in a new global landscape.



Bustling Kampala, Uganda at rush hour.

The Africa Program

The Africa Program works to address the most critical issues facing Africa and U.S.-Africa relations, build mutually beneficial U.S.-Africa relations, and enhance understanding about Africa in the United States.

The Program achieves its mission through in-depth research and analyses, including our blog Africa Up Close, public discussion, working groups, and briefings that bring together policymakers, practitioners, and subject matter experts to analyze and offer practical options for tackling key challenges in Africa and in U.S.-Africa relations.

The Africa Program focuses on four core issues:

- i. Inclusive governance and leadership
- ii. Conflict prevention and peacebuilding
- iii. Trade, investment, and sustainable development
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