

SPECIAL FEATURED ARTICLES

AFRICA RISING

"MAKING AMERICA GREAT AGAIN" AGAINST THE BACKDROP OF AN
"AFRICA RISING"?THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION AND AFRICA'S MARGINALIZATION
WITHIN U.S. FOREIGN POLICY

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ABSTRACT

This article explores what Donald J. Trump's victory in the 2016 presidential elections has meant for U.S. foreign policy toward Africa. It is devoted to answering a simple question: What do the policies associated with "Making America Great Again" mean for an African continent in the midst of profound transformations that this special issue of *The Journal of Diplomacy and International Relations* has referred to as "Africa rising"? Despite expectations that a successful businessman would usher in a new era of U.S. trade and investment, the reality of U.S.-Africa relations has been a period of continued White House neglect, intensified by unfilled Africa-related posts throughout the national security bureaucracies and especially the State Department. The Trump administration has instead pursued a military-based, counter-terrorism approach originally set in place by the George W. Bush and largely continued under the Barack Obama administrations. Other broad foreign policies, especially those related to immigration, have had negative repercussions on the African continent. Africanists have been particularly dismayed by racist, Africa-related statements, most notably by President Trump. The net result has been the exact opposite of "Making America Great Again," at least within the context of U.S.-Africa relations. The Trump administration has instead marginalized a rising Africa within the regional hierarchy of U.S. foreign policy, in essence ceding the field of maneuver for the immediate future not only to U.S. allies, such as France and Great Britain, but U.S. competitors, most notably a rising China and a resurgent Russia.

INTRODUCTION

On November 8, 2016, first-time political candidate Donald J. Trump defied expectations and was elected president of the United States

on the campaign theme of "Making America Great Again," taking office on January 20, 2017. He defeated seventeen rivals during the Republican Party primaries, as well as Democratic Party nominee Hillary R. Clinton during the general campaign. Trump's successful electoral campaign was built on an isolationist-inspired, conservative populism that emphasized four broad foreign policy themes: the destructive domestic economic impacts of unfair free trade agreements; the need to build walls to reduce the number of undocumented immigrants entering the U.S., including the deportation of those already residing within the country; the need to reduce U.S. military intervention abroad, most notably the termination and further avoidance of "dumb wars" in the Middle East, so that U.S. financial resources can be properly spent rebuilding America and especially its infrastructure; and the need to more proactively protect the American homeland from terrorist attacks from abroad. Trump's campaign themes were aptly captured in his book, *Crippled America*, which was re-released during the presidential campaign under a new title, *Great Again: How to Fix Our Crippled America*.¹ Africa not surprisingly was completely ignored in these books. It was also barely mentioned during the presidential campaign, and when it was, the focus was on the more sensationalist side of U.S.-Africa relations. Of particular note was the 2011 killing of U.S. Ambassador Robert Stevens in Benghazi, Libya, and the politically-inspired Benghazi hearings by a Republican-controlled House of Representatives that were designed to wound the presidential campaign of Hillary Clinton, who served as Secretary of State under President Barack Obama.²

The primary purpose of this article is to provide initial reflections about what Trump's victory has meant for U.S. foreign policy toward Africa. Specifically, now that we have twenty observable months (January 2017-September 2018) of U.S.-Africa relations under the Trump administration, this article is devoted to a simple question: What do the policies associated with "Making America Great Again" mean for an African continent in the midst of profound transformations that this special issue of *The Journal of Diplomacy and International Relations* has aptly referred to as "Africa rising"? Despite expectations that a successful businessman who was the co-author of a popular book, *Trump: The Art of the Deal*, would usher in a new era of U.S. trade and investment in Africa's rising economies, the reality of U.S.-Africa relations has been a period of continued White House neglect, intensified by unfilled Africa-related posts throughout the national security bureaucracies and especially the State Department. The Trump administration has instead pursued a military-based, counter-terrorism approach originally set in place by the George W. Bush administration

(2001-09) and largely continued under the Obama administration (2009-17). Other broad foreign policies, especially those related to immigration, have had negative repercussions on the African continent. Africanists have been particularly dismayed by racist, Africa-related statements, most notably by President Trump. The net result has been the exact opposite of “Making America Great Again,” at least within the context of U.S.-Africa relations. The Trump administration has instead marginalized a rising Africa within the regional hierarchy of U.S. foreign policy, in essence ceding the field of maneuver for the immediate future not only to U.S. allies, such as France and Great Britain, but U.S. competitors, most notably a rising China and a resurgent Russia.

The remainder of this article is divided into two sections. The first establishes the realities of the U.S. policymaking system that contribute to Africa’s marginalization within U.S. foreign policy, including under the Trump administration. For the purposes of this essay, reference to Africa refers to all five regions of the African continent, including North Africa and those regions that comprise Sub-Saharan Africa (Central Africa, East Africa, Southern Africa, and West Africa). A second section sets out emerging trends in Trump foreign policy toward Africa. A final section offers conclusions for the implications of Trump administration policies for the future of the African continent’s relationships with other great powers within the international system.

A POLICYMAKING SYSTEM THAT WORKS AGAINST A PROACTIVE FOREIGN POLICY TOWARD AFRICA

There are several realities of the U.S. policymaking system that work against a proactive U.S. foreign policy toward Africa. Whereas some of these are historical, marking all U.S. administrations from the founding of the American Republic in 1776 to the present,³ others are more recent and specifically tied to the Trump administration.

The first and most basic reality is the necessity of balancing domestic priorities with foreign affairs necessities, especially during a first term in office in which the ultimate priority of all presidents is to assure re-election, with simple electoral logic dictating that Africa is not a priority for the majority of the voting public. Presidents are re-elected or voted out of office principally on the basis of their domestic achievements, with public perceptions of the state of the U.S. economy playing a central role. It is no accident that the Trump administration’s first domestic legislative priority was abrogating, and when that failed, undercutting the 2010 Affordable Care Act

(ACA), typically referred to as “Obamacare.” This was a repeated domestic promise that Trump made to his base during the electoral campaign, with a “win” perceived as critical to the administration’s domestic agenda. Not surprisingly, and more in tune with classic Republican tenets, the second domestic legislative priority involved rewriting significant portions of the U.S. tax code and passing massive tax cuts. This was achieved at the end of December 2017, just prior to the one-year anniversary of the Trump administration. A third domestic priority, which has languished amid partisan rancor, involves the restructuring of the U.S. immigration system, including resolving “Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals” (DACA), or “Dreamers.” The challenge, of course, is that the White House and President Trump personally have to expend tremendous amounts of political capital to promote these and other domestic priorities, leaving little political oxygen for foreign policy initiatives, let alone those specifically targeted toward Africa.

A second historical reality of the U.S. policymaking system is that even when a White House focuses on foreign affairs during its first term in office, the African continent is neglected in favor of other international priorities. Presidents traditionally have devoted less attention to Africa compared to other regions of perceived greater concern, most notably Europe, including Russia and the other countries that were once part of the Soviet Union and that were central to the cold war struggle (1947-89), and more recently the Middle East and South Asia in the aftermath of the attacks of September 11, 2001 and the emergence of a “global war on terrorism.” Historic neglect of Africa at the highest reaches of the U.S. policymaking establishment is the direct result of a variety of factors: a president’s typical lack of knowledge and therefore the absence of a deep-felt interest in a region that historically enjoyed few enduring political links with the U.S. as compared with the former European colonial powers; a tendency to view Africa as the responsibility of those same European colonial powers, especially France, whose leaders were often willing to take the lead in crisis situations; and the impracticality of one person monitoring relations with 195 countries worldwide, including fifty-four in Africa, and therefore the necessity of delegating responsibility for handling foreign policy for those regions considered marginal to the White House. Even President Obama, the son of a Kenyan national whose presidency raised “great expectations” on the part of Africans that their continent would finally be a priority within the U.S. policymaking establishment, relegated Africa to the region of least importance in U.S. foreign policy during his administration.⁴

The Trump administration is no different, essentially being consumed

by foreign policy issues in other geographical regions of perceived greater importance, leaving little time for high-level White House attention to Africa. The regional foreign policy hierarchy that has dominated during the last twenty months is captured by the Trump administration's December 2017 *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* as well as the administration's actual foreign policy initiatives.⁵ At the top of the foreign policy hierarchy is Asia, which witnessed immediate U.S. withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), brinkmanship with North Korea and a planned presidential summit between Trump and Kim Jong-un over nuclear weapons, and confronting China on trade and intellectual property theft, which as of this writing was resulting in a burgeoning U.S.-Chinese trade war. Second place in the U.S. foreign policy hierarchy is claimed by Europe, the leaders of which have been dismayed by mixed signals over the U.S. commitment to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union, amid a clear desire on the part of President Trump to strengthen U.S. relations with Russia. The third and fourth regions of foreign policy priority are the Middle East and South and Central Asia, respectively, where the White House is committed to making the pursuit of a Middle East peace a priority, has adopted a more bellicose attitude toward Iran as part of misgivings over the Iranian nuclear deal signed by the Obama administration, undertook a military surge in Afghanistan, and expanded direct U.S. military intervention in Iraq and Syria as part of a broader military campaign against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Fifth place is claimed by the Western Hemisphere, where the Trump administration is undertaking the renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with Canada and Mexico, sparring with Mexico over the entry of undocumented immigrants into the U.S. and payment for a U.S.-Mexican border wall, and an increasingly bellicose relationship with Cuba and other perceived radical regimes in the Western Hemisphere. Where is Africa in this foreign policy hierarchy? At the very bottom.

A third historically-based policymaking reality that works against a proactive U.S. foreign policy toward Africa is congressional neglect of the African continent. A variety of constitutionally mandated prerogatives, including the confirmation of presidential appointees, the convening of hearings, and the drafting and voting of key legislation, suggests that Congress theoretically should play an important role. Like their White House counterparts, however, members of Congress historically have neglected Africa relative to other regions of perceived greater interest. Re-election pressures and time constraints imposed by terms of office (two years for Representatives and six years for Senators) force them to select

and prioritize the domestic and the international issues which will receive their attention. Since the primary objective of most members is to be re-elected, and since most U.S. citizens know or care very little about the African continent, conventional wisdom suggests that it is politically unwise to focus too much time on Africa. As a result, membership on the Africa subcommittees is among the least desired congressional positions in both houses of Congress, and is often relegated to relatively junior Representatives and Senators. Senator Jeff Flake (R-AZ), for example, elected for the first time in 2012 and who is not running for re-election in 2018, currently serves as chair of the Africa and Global Health Policy Subcommittee of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. The more veteran Representative Christopher Smith (R-NJ), elected for the first time in 1980, serves as the chair of the Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organization Subcommittee of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. The biography maintained on his congressional website nonetheless makes clear that his interests lie more with the topical aspects (e.g., Global Health) rather than the regional (i.e., Africa) aspects of his subcommittee's work.⁶

Congressional neglect of Africa ensures that even highly motivated chairpersons of the Africa subcommittees face an uphill task in pushing African issues to the forefront of congressional debate. In the absence of crisis, partisan and ideological differences within Congress prevent activist groups from achieving congressionally-mandated changes in U.S. foreign policy toward Africa. Even during short-term crises when an issue may attract the attention of a significant number of members of Congress, control of the policymaking process naturally flows to the White House and the bureaucracies of the executive branch. It is precisely for this reason that Congress in recent years has only sporadically passed Africa-related legislation. Legislative accomplishments related to foreign policy in general, let alone Africa, also have been sparse due to growing partisan gridlock in both the Senate and the House, most recently dating back to the November 2010 mid-term congressional elections in which a conservative anti-Obama wave, including many members of the ultra-conservative Tea Party Movement, captured the House and significantly reduced the Democratic Party majority in the Senate. As of the current 115th Congress (2017-19), Republicans now maintain slim majorities in both the House (237 Republicans, 193 Democrats, and 5 vacant seats) and the Senate (51 Republicans, 47 Democrats, and 2 Independents). One of the cornerstones of this conservative wave, in part at least due to the demands of Tea Party members, is little new spending outside of the global war on terrorism and especially the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria, as well as growing

pressures for cuts in existing spending, including foreign aid to Africa.⁷

The net result of White House and congressional neglect of Africa is that U.S. foreign policy toward Africa, perhaps more so than that toward any other region of the world, remains largely delegated to the high-level bureaucrats and political appointees within the bureaucracies of the executive branch. Exceptions exist, as demonstrated by the willingness of both the White House and Congress to pressure Sudan's government in 2004 to seek a peaceful resolution of civil conflict in the southern portion of the country, but these are rare occurrences typically due to pressures from grass-roots constituencies that have the ear of the president and senior congressional leaders and that most importantly are considered crucial to re-election. In the case of Sudan, for example, a wide array of Christian groups deemed essential to Republican victories in 2004 effectively lobbied both the White House of President George Bush and the Congress to "do something" to stop what they perceived as a genocidal policy that a northern-based Islamic regime was carrying out against a southern-based, predominantly Christian population, including the practice of southern Christians being sold as slaves in northern Sudan.

In order to fully understand U.S. foreign policy toward Africa, one must therefore focus on the policies and interactions of the African affairs bureaus of the traditional national security bureaucracies, such as the State Department, the Pentagon, and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), as well as their counterparts within the increasingly important economic realm, most notably the Department of Commerce. To be sure, the White House sets the overall parameters of U.S. foreign policy which impacts all regions of the world, including Africa. But the unique nature of the U.S. policymaking system ensures that specific policy initiatives related to Africa often emerge from and are coordinated by the national security bureaucracies with little White House input. The net result of what can be referred to as "bureaucratic influence" in the policymaking process is the continuation of established policies toward individual African countries, even when an administration with different beliefs than its predecessor takes office, such as in the shift from the Obama to the Trump administration.⁸

There are also policymaking realities specific to the Trump administration that work against a proactive U.S. foreign policy approach to Africa. The first involves the inherent instability associated with governance as marked by the high turn-over in Trump administration senior leadership positions. This has been a dilemma across cabinet-level and executive office positions, including those related to U.S. foreign policy, as aptly captured in the best-seller by Michael Wolff, *Fire and Fury: Inside the Trump White*

House.⁹ During the first twenty months of the administration, the position of National Security Advisor – the lead foreign policy expert in the White House – has been held by three individuals: Michael T. Flynn (January-February 2017), former U.S. Army Lieutenant General and director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, who was replaced after lying to Vice President Michael R. Pence about his contacts with Russia; U.S. Army Lieutenant General H. R. McMaster (February 2017-April 2018), who was replaced after numerous policy disagreements with President Trump; and the current holder of the office, John R. Bolton (April 2018-present), a neo-conservative member of the George W. Bush administration who served as U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations. Similarly, Secretary of State Rex W. Tillerson (February 2017-March 2018) was fired on the very day that he returned home from a tour of five African countries – Djibouti, Chad, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Nigeria – which was the first such overseas visit to the African continent by a senior member of the Trump foreign policy team. Tillerson was replaced by Mike Pompeo, also of the neo-conservative wing of the Republican Party, who served as Trump's CIA director (January 2017-March 2018), and prior to that as elected member (R-KS) of the House of Representatives (2011-17). Imagine the potential confusion on the part of the senior African policymakers who met with Tillerson – often their first senior interaction with the new administration – as to what Tillerson's firing means for the future of U.S. relations with their individual countries. Indeed, the Brookings Institution heralded Tillerson's trip, just prior to his departure, as "the beginning of a dialogue that will inform a yet to be released U.S.-Africa strategy."¹⁰ The critical point is that it is unlikely that an administration with such high turnover at the top will foster a proactive foreign policy, let alone one toward a region of the world (Africa) of least importance to that administration. Indeed, such high turnover makes it difficult to effectively manage even the more limited goal of effectively implementing existing foreign policy objectives.

A second reality specific to the Trump administration that works against a proactive U.S. foreign policy approach to the African continent involves the growing number of legal scandals that are enveloping the Trump White House. At the heart of these scandals is the investigation into potential Trump campaign collusion with Russia to interfere in the 2016 U.S. presidential elections, as well as potential Trump administration involvement in covering up these activities after entering the White House in January 2017.¹¹ This investigation has been led since May 2017 by Special Counsel Robert S. Mueller III, with several former White House officials being charged with crimes, such as Paul Manafort (Trump's former campaign

chair) and Michael Flynn (Trump's first National Security Advisor). One of the unanswered questions as of this writing was whether President Trump would be willing voluntarily or would be compelled by Special Counsel Mueller to be interviewed under oath. To this Justice Department-initiated probe can be added a number of private law suits and scandals, ranging from a lawsuit that the Trump-owned family businesses have violated the "Emoluments Clause" of the U.S. Constitution by accepting payments from foreign governments to stay at Trump hotels, to the more salacious allegation that Trump had authorized hush money just prior to the 2016 presidential election to hide an affair with an adult film star, Stephanie A. Gregory Clifford, who goes by the name Stormy Daniels. Scandal is not unique to the Trump White House, as witnessed by the Watergate hearings that ultimately forced President Richard Nixon to resign in 1974, and the impeachment hearings surrounding the Monica Lewinsky affair under President Bill Clinton, who was impeached by the House but not convicted by the Senate. What is unique is that the Trump scandals have dominated the first year of the administration, increasingly occupying political space that otherwise could be used for domestic and foreign policy initiatives. The net result is that an already neglected African continent finds itself further marginalized within the regional hierarchy of U.S. foreign policy.

EMERGING IMPACTS OF TRUMP ADMINISTRATION FOREIGN POLICY ON AFRICA

It is important to remember, however, that Africa's marginalization does not mean that Africa has remained unaffected by U.S. foreign policy under a Trump administration. To the contrary, the last twenty months have witnessed the emergence of numerous broad foreign policy initiatives, with significant impacts on U.S. foreign policy toward Africa. The following is not meant to be exhaustive, but rather indicative of key emerging trends in Trump administration foreign policy toward Africa.

It was widely expected immediately following the 2016 election that a business-savvy Trump would usher in a new era of business-friendly trade and investment that characterized the first 171 years of U.S.-Africa relations from 1776 to 1947, as well as the 12-year interregnum (1989-2001) in between the more national security-oriented cold war (1947-89) and global war on terror (2001-16) eras.¹² From this perspective, Trump is the embodiment of an "America First," economically-driven foreign policy that not only is proper, but that had correctly dominated U.S.-Africa relations for a total of 183 years of the American Republic's 242-year history. Expectations

rose as Trump filled senior administration positions with business-friendly members of the corporate world, such as Tillerson as Secretary of State (former CEO of ExxonMobil), Steven Mnuchin as Secretary of Treasury (former investment banker and manager at Goldman Sachs), Wilbur Ross as Secretary of Commerce (former independent investor through his WL Ross & Co. private equity firm), and Gary Cohn as Director of the National Economic Council (former president of Goldman Sachs), which typically serves as the president's top economic advisor. A common denominator of these and other senior appointees, which was applauded in African circles, was a firm belief in the global benefits of free trade.

Optimism has faded, however, with the departure of many of these appointees, most notably Tillerson and Cohn, amid the rise of the more populist wing of the Trump administration, which criticizes the destructive domestic impacts of free trade, and therefore is more prone to pursue a restructuring of U.S. free trade agreements and the imposition of protectionist tariffs. The destructive domestic economic impacts of "unfair" free trade agreements was one of the foreign policy hallmarks of Trump's successful presidential campaign, and its growing centrality in Trump administration foreign policy is demonstrated by the rising policy influence of Robert Lighthizer, U.S. Trade Representative (former lawyer and partner at Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP, and deputy trade representative under the administration of Ronald Reagan). Lighthizer has become the public face of the administration's determination to restructure existing free trade agreements (e.g., pulling out of the TPP and re-negotiating NAFTA); the imposition of tariffs on steel and aluminum products from China, the EU, and other global partners such as Canada and South Korea; and Trump's comments that "trade wars" are not necessarily a bad thing, in that America can "easily win them."

Although originally not on the radar screen of Trump administration officials, the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), originally signed under the Clinton administration and currently including thirty-eight African countries, has now entered the emergent trade conflicts of the Trump administration. Specifically, the Trump administration announced in April 2018 that it was suspending duty-free privileges enjoyed by African countries such as Rwanda that had raised tariffs on used clothing imported from the United States. "The move is an extension of Trump's 'America First' stance seen in the ongoing tariff battle between the U.S. and China," explain two observers, who further note that the business-friendly Trump administration is "being lobbied by the Secondary Materials and Recycled Textiles Association, which says a ban will lead to the loss of 40,000 U.S. jobs

and negatively impact the environment with pounds of textile waste ending up in landfills.”¹³ This announcement followed on the heels of Lighthizer’s August 2017 participation in a two-day ministerial meeting in Lome, Togo, designed to review AGOA. The larger issue of great concern to Africans is what these events portend for U.S.-Africa free trade and specifically AGOA’s future, which although set for renegotiation in 2025, is expected to be altered much sooner.

A second aspect of the early months of the Trump administration involved the filling of senior administration positions with military personnel, or what Trump refers to as “the Generals.” John F. Kelly, retired Marine Corps General, was originally appointed Secretary of Homeland Security, the first time that a military officer had been named to this post, and subsequently was tapped to serve as Trump’s White House Chief of Staff, after Reince Priebus was fired in July 2017. As already noted, the position of National Security Advisor was first held by Flynn (retired U.S. Army Lieutenant General) and subsequently by McMaster (acting duty U.S. Army Lieutenant General). And, James N. Mattis, retired General, U.S. Marines Corps, was appointed Secretary of Defense. This latter choice was noteworthy, in that this position historically has been held by a civilian, with the only exception in the modern era occurring under the administration of President Dwight D. Eisenhower, himself a former General. Together the Trump Generals have guided the most military-influenced White House in the post-World War II history of the United States. They also ensured that a military-based counter-terrorism approach would serve as the focal point of Trump foreign policy toward Africa.

The practical implications of this approach was the Trump administration’s embrace and strengthening of inherited national security initiatives, typically set in place by the Bush administration in the post-9/11 era and continued by the Obama administration. One of the best examples of this inherited national security structure is the set of three regionally-based, counter-terrorism programs in the Islamic coastal regions of the African continent, including the Trans-Saharan Counter-Terrorism Initiative (TSCTI) that includes North Africa; the Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA) that is responsible for the “Greater Horn of Africa;” and the East African Regional Strategic Initiative (EARSI), which replaced the East African Counter-Terrorism Initiative (EACTI). These counter-terrorism initiatives are buttressed by the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM), which is responsible for coordinating U.S. military interventions on the African continent; the International Military Education and Training (IMET) and other U.S. military aid programs; and the Gulf

of Guinea Initiative, the primary goal of which is to gradually build up an effective regional security program capable of ensuring the safe transport of oil resources to the United States.¹⁴

Together these regional security programs provide useful insights into Trump administration foreign policy toward Africa, which like its predecessors under the Bush and Obama administrations, divides the African continent into at least four spheres of variable foreign policy interest: (1) those regions (North and East Africa, inclusive of the Horn of Africa) destined to receive priority attention due to their connection to the wider Middle East, sizeable Muslim populations, and U.S. struggle against global terrorism; (2) regional powers, typically Nigeria and South Africa, but also including Algeria, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, and Senegal, that are perceived as crucial to the maintenance of regional stability and U.S. foreign policy initiatives; (3) countries deemed important to U.S. economic interests, most notably oil-producing countries, especially in the Gulf of Guinea; and (4) the remainder of Africa, which remains relegated to the back-burner of U.S. foreign policy. Not surprisingly, U.S. foreign policy especially focuses on those countries in which core foreign policy interests intersect, as in the case of Algeria, a regional power with oil resources that is considered crucial to combating perceived terrorist threats in North Africa.

The essence of the Trump approach to Africa has been the increased militarization of U.S. foreign policy, with an emphasis on providing the military with a freer hand to counter potential terrorist threats. For example, the Trump administration authorized the expansion of U.S. drone strikes in Libya and Somalia from drone facilities in Djibouti, Italy, and Tunisia, and reached an accord with Niger to fly armed drones from the capital of Niamey.¹⁵ The U.S. military has also undertaken direct air strikes against ISIS and Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) affiliates in Libya and Somalia.¹⁶ As of 2018, AFRICOM oversaw the presence of nearly 6,000 U.S. troops in Africa, approximately 2,000 of which are U.S. Special Operations forces.¹⁷ These expanding operations, as well as a Trump White House directive to give the Pentagon a freer operational hand, has led to the deaths of U.S. soldiers in counter-terrorism operations, such as in Niger in December 2017, widely reported on in the U.S. press and contributing to a debate about the proper role of U.S. forces in African military theatres.¹⁸ These debates notwithstanding, Trump’s spring 2018 shake-up of his foreign policy team, which includes appointees from the more “neo-conservative” wing of the Republican Party, including Pompeo as Secretary of State and Bolton as National Security Advisor, ensures the further intensification of this military-based, counter-terrorism approach to Africa.

The militarization of U.S. foreign policy toward Africa is part of a “profound shift” in U.S. foreign aid policy proposed by the Trump administration that favors military aid and funding over that typically targeted for diplomacy and development.¹⁹ The Trump administration’s intentions in this regard were captured in the Fiscal Year 2018 budget request, which envisioned reducing by as much as 30 percent funding to the State Department and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), further proposing that the two be folded into one agency. Especially hard-hit by the proposed budget were health, development and peacekeeping programs, including the Obama era-Power Africa initiative, but not the Bush-era President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). These budget-cutting pressures were resisted by the U.S. Congress in the budget that was released in March 2018. According to that budget, the Congress only approved a 6 percent cut in State Department and other foreign operations from that authorized in Fiscal Year 2017; a total of \$54 billion was authorized (Saldinger 2018). An inherent challenge in this budget is that it adds to the U.S. deficit, which is already envisioned to increase due to the tax cuts passed in December 2017. Although significant cuts to African aid were avoided in Fiscal Year 2018 (which was already six months old as of bill passage), the months leading up to Fiscal Year 2019, which begins October 1, 2018, witnessed the re-emergence of deficit hawks seeking to reduce what was decried as a “ballooning budget”; development and diplomacy-oriented aid and funding, especially that targeted toward Africa, may be the first to go. President Trump, and his Ambassador to the United Nations, Nikki Haley, have also underscored that the administration will be “taking names” to determine which countries stand with the U.S. at the United Nations, especially regarding the controversial White House decision to move the U.S. embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.²⁰

President Trump has been much more successful moving forward with conservative social issues favored by the Christian fundamentalist base of the Republican Party. The earliest example of this trend, which had important implications for U.S. health policy on the African continent, occurred on January 23, 2017, just three days after the inauguration, when Trump officially re-instated U.S. restrictions on international family planning policies officially known as the “Mexico City Policy” but typically referred to by critics as the “global gag rule.” Originally put in place under Ronald Reagan, maintained by George H. W. Bush senior, lifted by Clinton, re-imposed by George W. Bush, and lifted once again by Obama, the Mexico City Policy remains a charged ideological policy that serves as a litmus test on both sides of the abortion debate. As explained on the Population Action

International (PAI) website, this policy ensured during the Reagan and all following Republican administrations, including that of Trump, that no U.S. family planning assistance could be provided to foreign non-governmental organizations (NGOs) “that use funding from any other source to: perform abortions . . . provide counseling and referral for abortion; or lobby to make abortion legal or more available in their country.”²¹ In essence, the Mexico City Policy places U.S. health assistance to Africa and other regions of the developing at the center of the abortion debate in the United States. This policy, and others like it, are either reversed or re-instated by an administration intent on demonstrating the fruits of electoral victory to its supporters, whether “pro-choice” members of the Democratic Party or “right-to-life” members of the Republican Party.

The Trump administration’s concern over undocumented immigrants entering or already residing in the U.S. was fused with the need to prevent any further terrorist attacks on the U.S. homeland, to launch a foreign policy initiative – the so-called “Muslim ban” – in the early months of the administration, with important impacts for several African countries. A first Executive Order 13769, “Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States,” was signed on January 27, 2017. This order, which was challenged in court, limited travel from seven predominantly Muslim countries, including three in Africa (Libya, Somalia, and Sudan), and lowered to 50,000 the number of refugees that could be admitted into the U.S. in 2017. Confronted with legal challenges, the Trump administration issued a revised Executive Order 13780 on March 16, 2017, followed by Presidential Proclamation 9645 on September 24, 2017. The revised order restricted travel from a variety of Muslim-majority and non-Muslim countries, including the African countries of Chad, Libya, and Somalia. Sudan was removed from the original list. The U.S. Supreme Court on December 4, 2017 permitted the ban to go into effect, pending the resolution of legal challenges.

This series of bans not surprisingly has caused ill-will and trepidation over potential travel to the U.S. among Muslim populations throughout the African continent, especially in North and East Africa. Moreover, the Trump administration’s determination to aggressively restructure the U.S. immigration system via executive fiat in the absence of comprehensive legislation has affected both undocumented Africans residing in the United States, as well as those with legal standing. For example, in March 2018, the Trump administration allowed the expiration of the Deferred Enforced Departure program for Liberians, originally established by the Clinton administration in 1999 that permitted several thousand Liberians fleeing

civil war in their country to temporarily live and work in the United States. The Trump administration has ended the “temporary protected status” for these and other immigrant groups in the U.S., including from Sudan, typically giving them one year to return home or to face deportation, essentially “arguing that conditions have significantly improved” in their countries of origin.²² In the case of the Liberians, this means uprooting families, including children, who have lived in the U.S. for nearly two decades.

The intensification of debate between the Trump administration and Democrats over immigration policy in January 2018 resulted in a now infamous statement about African, Haitian and other immigrants of color by President Trump in the Oval Office that quickly went viral throughout the African continent: “Why are we having all these people from s***hole countries come here?” The reaction on the part of Africans was swift, and highly negative. Cyril Ramaphosa, who as of February 2018 had assumed the presidency of South Africa, captured the sense of a continent by calling Trump’s comment “really, really derogatory” and “hugely offensive.” He further noted of President Trump: “It demonstrates precisely the type of leader he is.”²³ Critics note that this was not the first time that Trump had used such language. In June 2017, for example, he reportedly noted that undocumented Nigerians living in the United States would not “go back to their huts” in Nigeria.²⁴ Although President Trump issued a letter to fifty-four African leaders indicating that he “deeply respects” Africa and its peoples, the potential damage to perceptions of the United States and U.S.-Africa relations was immense.²⁵ “Of all the vile, offensive Trump comments, what he said about Haiti and Africa might have been the worst in the eyes of people overseas,” explained R. Nicolas Burns, former Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs at the State Department. “It was a cruel, ignorant, blanket indictment of entire countries. The blow to U.S. credibility is real and long-lasting.”²⁶

A final dimension of Trump administration foreign policy toward Africa involves the president’s disavowal of democracy promotion as a foreign policy priority. Historically speaking, when the normative goal of promoting democracy has clashed with a strategic goal, whether anti-communism during the cold war or counter-terrorism during the post-9/11 era, the strategic goal typically has won, often associating the U.S. with unsavory African regimes.²⁷ U.S. presidents during the post-World War II era nonetheless have demonstrated varying levels of commitment for the promotion of democracy and human rights, ranging from the more concrete policies of the administration of Jimmy Carter, to the more rhetorical flourishes of the administration of Ronald Reagan. The Trump

administration has disavowed both the rhetoric and the actual policies of democracy promotion, instead pursuing a “transactional” approach based on U.S. national security and economic interests. It is precisely for this reason that Trump has publicly praised U.S.-allied “strongmen” when it suits Trump administration policies. An excellent case in point is Trump’s praise for Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, who took power in a military coup d’état in 2013, and subsequently “won” elections in 2014 and 2018. What matters for the Trump administration is not whether el-Sisi is democratically elected, but rather his support for a comprehensive Middle East peace process, as well as coordination with the U.S. in a wider war against ISIS and other perceived radical Islamist groups.

CEDING THE FIELD OF MANEUVER IN AFRICA TO U.S. ALLIES AND U.S. COMPETITORS?

This essay began with a simple question: What do the Trump administration policies associated with “Making America Great Again” mean for an African continent in the midst of profound transformations that this special issue of *The Journal of Diplomacy and International Relations* has aptly referred to as “Africa rising”? The simple answer is the marginalization of a rising Africa within the regional hierarchy of U.S. foreign policy, in essence ceding the field of maneuver for the immediate future not only to U.S. allies, such as France and Great Britain, but U.S. competitors, most notably a rising China and a resurgent Russia.

In terms of U.S. allies, Africa’s enduring relationship with Europe as a result of European colonialism historically has prompted U.S. presidents to look upon the continent as a special area of influence and responsibility of those same European powers. U.S. presidents have therefore generally deferred to European sensitivities and maintained a low profile during routine periods when one of these has taken the lead on a particular foreign policy issue. This European component of U.S.-Africa policies was best summarized in 1968 by George Ball, Under Secretary of State in the Kennedy administration, who noted that the U.S. recognized Africa as a “special European responsibility,” just as European nations recognized “our particular responsibility in Latin America.”²⁸ Although these spheres of influence have been increasingly broached by both sides of the Atlantic during the last fifty years, there is no disputing the fact that the White House from Kennedy to Obama continued to look to its European allies – especially France and Great Britain, and to a lesser degree, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Portugal, and Spain – to take the lead in their former colonial territories.

It is arguable that the Trump administration has adopted this stance to a degree not seen in recent history, and in fact harkening back to 1968 when Ball made his classic statement. To be sure, the Trump administration will take the lead in undertaking military strikes against perceived terrorist threats in countries and regions considered to be of strategic importance to the U.S., as witnessed by recent strikes in Libya in North Africa or Somalia in East Africa. The difference with the Trump administration is a very public ceding of responsibility to the former European colonial powers for major undertakings on the African continent, and especially those requiring a more extensive U.S. physical or financial presence. A case in point is Libya, which as a result of Arab Spring-inspired civil conflict resulted in an Obama administration-supported and NATO-led military campaign that ultimately led to the overthrow of the Qaddafi regime. In the aftermath of Qaddafi's overthrow, Libya not only became a transit point for undocumented immigrants seeking entry into the European Union, but ground zero in North Africa for continuing civil war and the emergence of ISIS and AQIM-allied Islamist groups. When "implored" by Italian Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni for the U.S. "to step up its 'critical' involvement in Libya, a former Italian colony," Trump responded by thanking Italian leaders "for your leadership on seeking stabilization in Libya, and for your crucial efforts to deny ISIS a foothold in the Mediterranean," but then rebuffed his Italian counterpart by noting, "I do not see a role in Libya I think the United States has, right now, enough roles. We're in a role everywhere."²⁹ This case is not unique, but rather indicative of the Trump administration's isolationist-inspired, conservative populism that the European powers should be responsible for their former colonies across the Mediterranean. In short, the Trump administration is ceding the field of maneuver to the European allies, which are expected to take the lead.

The Trump administration's neglect of the African continent is also potentially ceding the field of maneuver to U.S. great power competitors, most notably Russia and China. It has been argued, for example, that the lack of a proactive Libya policy on the part of the Trump administration is paving the way for a resurgent Russia under Vladimir Putin to reassert Russian influence in the wider Middle East and North Africa, and subsequently Sub-Saharan Africa. "The instability in Libya and North Africa may be the most significant near-term threat to U.S. and allies' interests on the continent," explained Thomas D. Walhauser, Lieutenant General, U.S. Marine Corps, and AFRICOM Commander, in congressional testimony in March 2017. "But perhaps just as concerning, he indicated, were intelligence reports that Russia was helping a former Libyan general turned military strongman in

a fight for control over the country's government and vast oil resources."³⁰ A related trend occurred in Egypt in December 2017, when el-Sisi's Egypt, in "what appeared to be a snub to the Trump administration," was seriously negotiating with the Putin regime to permit Russian military jets the use of Egyptian military bases and air space.³¹ "If completed," continues Kirkpatrick, "the agreement would give Russia its deepest presence in Egypt since 1973, when Cairo expelled the military of the Soviet Union and instead became Washington's closest Arab ally."

The rising role of China on the African continent is even more serious for the future foreign policy influence of the United States, in that China's current influence lies predominantly in the economic realm. Economically speaking, there exists a growth industry of scholarship devoted to China's evolving relationship with Africa, ranging from Philip Snow's classic book, *The Star Raft: China's Encounter with Africa* (1988), which begins with the arrival in October 1415 (361 years before the founding of the American Republic) at the Ming palace in China of a giraffe from Malindi (present-day Kenya), to the more recent and globally-oriented Martin Jacques, *When China Rules the World: The End of the Western World and the Birth of a New Global Order* (2009; see also Rachman 2016). Although space constraints do not allow for a full exposition of this topic, three brief points suffice: First, whereas U.S. exports to Africa increased from \$10.96 billion in 2000 to \$21.81 billion in 2015, China's exports to Africa during this same period had increased to \$102 billion, nearly five times the U.S. total (Wroughton 2017).³² In terms of investment, pro-U.S. Ethiopia, which historically has served as a U.S. client state in the Horn of Africa, is illustrative: Whereas the U.S. has invested \$550 million in recent years, China has invested \$15 billion (twenty-seven times the U.S. amount) during the same period, including building the African Union headquarters, a new rail line linking the capital, Addis Ababa, with the coast, and a ring road in the capital. To this can be added the fact that as of July 11, 2017, the Chinese government opened a military base in Djibouti, its first military base on the African continent, marking the true beginning of a Chinese military presence. In short, China has already dwarfed U.S. trade and investment on the African continent, and if past is prologue, it will eventually surpass the U.S. presence in the strategic realm as well. Current Trump administration policies arguably ensure that this will happen sooner rather than later.

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