



# The World is Coming to Sub-Saharan Africa. Where is the United States?

By Judd Devermont

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## THE ISSUE

- **Sub-Saharan Africa's foreign counterparts are forging closer partnerships with the region** because they see new openings for trade and investment, as well as growing threats from terrorism, criminality, epidemics, and irregular migration. Just like China, these countries believe that Africa is increasingly important to a wide range of economic, security, and political goals.
- **This uptick in engagement represents a sea change in Africa's foreign relations.** While many of these countries—including China and the Gulf States—have been involved in the region for decades, the sheer number of countries and significant influx of resources have reshaped the landscape.
- **The United States paradoxically is stepping away from the region while the rest of the world is leaning in.** This shrinking posture not only forgoes opportunities for U.S. trade and investment, it also precludes the United States from shaping outcomes in the region—and beyond.

It has been a busy summer for sub-Saharan Africa. By the end of August, the region will have welcomed chief of state visits from Argentina, Brazil, China, France, Germany, Russia, South Korea, Turkey, and the United Kingdom. These leaders travelled to the continent for a variety of reasons, including to attend multilateral summits, advance bilateral relations, and sign new economic deals. President Mauricio Macri of Argentina and President Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey, for example, participated in the BRICS summit in South Africa in July. Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India visited Uganda in the same month, pledging to open 18 new embassies in Africa. Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany will lead a high-level business delegation to Ghana, Nigeria, and Senegal in late August.<sup>1</sup> This surge in foreign attention presents new opportunities and challenges for sub-Saharan Africa. Equally important, it risks undercutting U.S. influence if the United States passively stands on the sidelines.

## DEEPENING RELATIONS BY ANY MEASURE

The flurry of high-level foreign travel is part of a broader increase in global engagement with sub-Saharan Africa. Chinese activities in Africa may grab the most headlines, but the reality is that the region is receiving more attention from its traditional partners as well as new entrants. From trade to security cooperation to diplomatic presence, the international community is strengthening its ties to Africa.

- **Trade and Investment.** Between 2010 and 2017, more than 65 countries increased their overall trade with sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>2</sup> For instance, India in 2016 became the region's second largest trading partner.<sup>3</sup> Russia and several Eastern European countries, including Bulgaria and Serbia, have doubled their trade with African counterparts. In addition to China, East Asian countries such as Indonesia and Thailand have considerably increased their trade with the region.

# NEW FOREIGN EMBASSIES IN SUB SAHARAN AFRICA (2010-2015)



The following countries have established 2 new embassies in sub-Saharan Africa between 2010 and 2015:  
 Algeria, Argentina, Australia, Belarus, Egypt, Georgia, Iraq, Ireland, Israel, Kuwait, Mexico, Morocco, Netherlands, Ukraine, Vatican City

The following countries have established 1 new embassy in sub-Saharan Africa between 2010 and 2015:  
 Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Colombia, Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea, Denmark, Fiji, Guyana, Kazakstan, Malaysia, Nepal, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, Portugal, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovak Republic, Sri Lanka, United States

## Chinese activities in Africa may grab the most headlines, but the reality is that the region is receiving more attention from its traditional partners as well as new entrants.

- Security Cooperation and Military Sales.** In the past eight years, China and Japan have opened military bases in Djibouti; Turkey established a presence in Somalia; the United Arab Emirates (UAE) placed troops in Eritrea and Somaliland; and India acquired land in the Seychelles to develop a naval base.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, Russia has increased its defense support and arms sales to Angola, the Central African Republic, Nigeria, and Uganda.<sup>5</sup> And international involvement in the continent's stability is an ongoing affair. The European Union deployed a training mission to Mali in 2013 and one to the Central African Republic in 2015. A multinational combined joint task force, established in 2009, works with the European Union's Operation Atalanta and naval ships from China and India to deter, prevent, and repress acts of piracy off the Horn of Africa.
- Diplomatic Engagement.** Since 2010, more than 150 new embassies have been established in sub-Saharan Africa. Turkey leads the pack with 16 new diplomatic posts, and Qatar is running a close second with 12 new embassies, according to the University of Denver's Diplometrics Project. Several countries have unveiled new policies toward Africa or launch their own summits. In a recent report, Chatham House noted that Poland launched its "Go Africa" initiative in 2013 and Hungary followed with its "Opening to the South" policy in 2015. Other regions have made similar moves. Kuwait hosted the third Africa-Arab Summit in 2013, pledging \$1 billion in low-interest loans and the same amount

in investments to African states.<sup>6</sup> Indonesia held its first Indonesia-Africa Forum this year, and Japan will host the seventh Tokyo International Conference on African Development in 2019.

### WHAT'S THE DRAW?

Sub-Saharan Africa's foreign counterparts are forging closer partnerships with the region because they see new openings for trade and investment, as well as growing threats from terrorism, criminality, epidemics, and irregular migration. Just like China, these countries believe Africa is increasingly important to a wide range of economic, security, and political goals. Many global leaders seem to agree with the recent statement of President Michel Temer of Brazil that Africa has become a "permanent priority." African governments, of course, have welcomed this influx of new partners for similar reasons.

## SHIFTS IN TRADE WITH KEY FOREIGN PARTNERS (2010-2017)

	2010 TOTAL TRADE	2017 TOTAL TRADE	CHANGE
RUSSIA	\$1.6 billion	\$4.2 billion	2.6 x
THAILAND	\$4.7 billion	\$10.9 billion	2.3 x
TURKEY	\$3.1 billion	\$6.1 billion	1.9 x
INDONESIA	\$3.8 billion	\$7 billion	1.8 x
CHINA	\$91.2 billion	\$165.4 billion	1.8 x
MEXICO	\$994 million	\$1.4 billion	1.4 x
INDIA	\$32.8 billion	\$11.9 billion	1.4 x
QATAR	\$408.8 million	\$581.8 million	1.4 x
SAUDI ARABIA	\$8.1 billion	\$9.7 billion	1.2 x
GERMANY	\$22.2 billion	\$24.6 billion	1.1 x
UNITED ARAB EMIRATES	\$13.9 billion	\$11.5 billion	0.83 x
ITALY	\$14.7 billion	\$11.7 billion	0.81 x
FRANCE	\$26.3 billion	\$20.7 billion	0.79 x
SOUTH KOREA	\$12.7 billion	\$9.9 billion	0.78 x
PORTUGAL	\$7.5 billion	\$5.5 billion	0.73 x
UNITED KINGDOM	\$20.7 billion	\$13.9 billion	0.68 x
JAPAN	\$20.8 billion	\$13.8 billion	0.66 x
BRAZIL	\$13.5 billion	\$6.5 billion	0.48 x
UNITED STATES	\$80.3 billion	\$36.7 billion	0.46 x
CANADA	\$10.5 billion	\$4.7 billion	0.45 x



## ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES ABOUND

Africa's international partners crave access to the region's growing consumer base and mineral wealth, and clearly do not want to be shut out of a dynamic marketplace. With the region set to add another 1.3 billion people by 2050, many countries see significant potential to sell their goods and employ the region's labor force.<sup>7</sup> As Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan noted in 2016, "we have a feeling in our gut that in Africa, where possibilities abound, Japan can grow vigorously."

- **Telecommunications.** One of the most alluring prizes is Africa's telecommunication industry. According to a recent report by the GSMA trade association, the region's subscriber base was 444 million in 2017 and is poised to increase at a rate that is more than double the global growth rate through 2022. This tantalizing opportunity has drawn in European and Chinese companies, as well as smaller state-owned telecommunication companies from around the world; Vietnam's Viettel, for instance, has bought stakes in companies based in Burundi, Cameroon, Mozambique, and Tanzania. Foreign investors are especially excited by Ethiopia's pending sale of its state-owned telecommunication company. With more than 60 million mobile and fixed-lined subscribers, wireless operators are eager to gain access to this market.<sup>8</sup>
- **Global Food Industry.** The global food industry also is seeking to serve Africa's expanding number of consumers, selling basic agricultural products and processed foods. In part because African farmers have struggled to increase their agricultural output, several foreign companies are filling the void. Thailand has been a consistent exporter of rice to the region, though China is entering the market with gusto; according to customs data, China increased its sale of rice tenfold between 2016 and 2017.<sup>9</sup> As an example of the untapped potential of processed food sales, a joint venture between Indonesian and Singaporean companies has cornered the market for instant noodles in Nigeria, which is worth \$600 million a year.<sup>10</sup>
- **Natural Resources.** Foreign government continue to invest in Africa's precious minerals and energy resources. However, there is a new urgency to exploit new oil and gas finds and develop cobalt and other battery minerals, which are key for smart phones and electric cars.<sup>11</sup> Multinational companies and firms from Australia and Canada to Brazil and Malaysia are scouring continent to monetize this resource bonanza. The region's potential is also yielding deals

for technical assistance with established energy producers. President Cyril Ramaphosa of South Africa, for example, announced in July that Saudi Arabia is investing \$10 billion in his country's energy sector, including building oil refineries.<sup>12</sup>

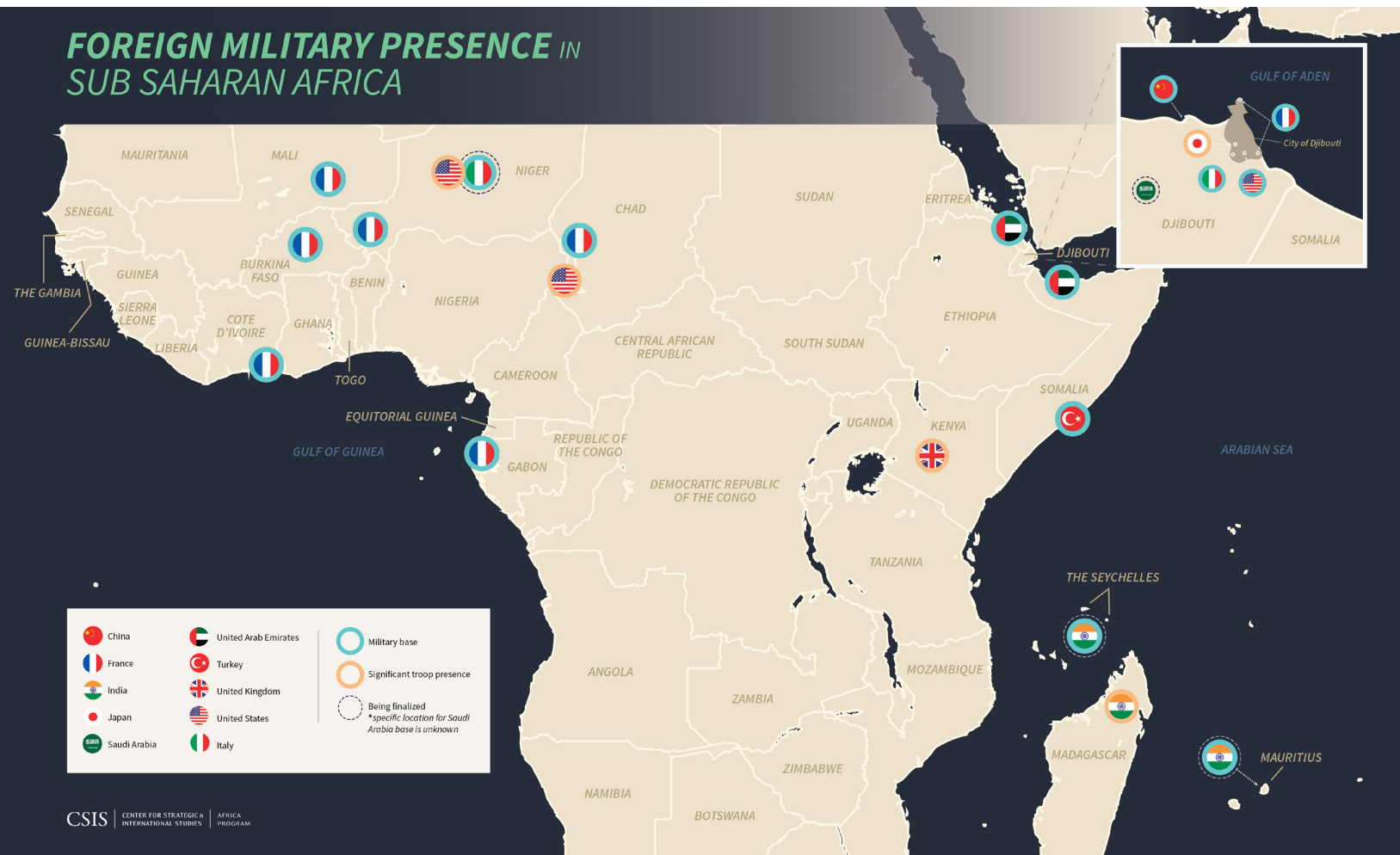
In addition, foreign governments view sub-Saharan Africa as an outlet for some of its excess capacity. One of the many reasons why China is ramping up its engagement in Africa is because Beijing has to export its manufacturing and infrastructure sectors. As the Brookings Institution points out, China is looking to move manufacturing chains to lower-wage locations. It has established Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in Ethiopia and other countries for this purpose.<sup>13,14</sup> China, however, is not the only foreign country to favor this arrangement. Olam International, a Singaporean company, is operating an SEZ in Gabon,<sup>15</sup> and India signed a deal in Mauritius, which has subsequently been contested in court.<sup>16</sup>

## SECURITY THREATS RISING

While these economic opportunities underpin many of the region's strengthened partnerships, the array of transnational threats emanating from sub-Saharan Africa also act as a powerful "pull" factor. The region's foreign interlocutors are deeply troubled by the terrorist threats, criminality, disease, and large population flows radiating from sub-Saharan Africa.

- **Terrorism.** European countries have shown considerable concern about terrorist threats from the Sahel, spurring 26 governments to send troops to Mali.<sup>17</sup> In a meeting in July with President Muhammadu Buhari of Nigeria, President Emmanuel Macron of France committed to "intervene and maintain our presence in Africa and the Sahel to fight against terrorism."<sup>18</sup> The Europeans, in particular, worry about al Qaeda affiliates, IS branches, and Boko Haram threatening their citizens and facilities. Similarly, Turkey and several Gulf States fear al Shabaab's capacity to sow violence and strike targets in the Horn of Africa, driving these governments to play prominent roles in state-building initiatives; in 2013 and 2018, al Shabaab attacked Turkey's embassy and military base in Mogadishu, respectively.<sup>19, 20</sup>
- **Piracy and the Drug Trade.** The international community has been vigilant about the maritime threats off the Gulf of Guinea and Horn of Africa. According to the International Maritime Bureau, all of the crew kidnappings in 2018 have occurred in the Gulf of Guinea.<sup>21</sup> And while piracy off Africa's east

## FOREIGN MILITARY PRESENCE IN SUB SAHARAN AFRICA



coast has declined, attacks in early 2017 underscores the region's continued vulnerability.<sup>22</sup> Africa's role in trafficking drugs has been a persistent problem, drawing the attention of European, South American, and South Asian governments. According to the 2017 UN World Drug Report, two-thirds of the cocaine smuggled between South America and Europe passes through West Africa, and Kenya, Nigeria, and Tanzania have seen the significant increases in the traffic of opiates passing from Pakistan and Afghanistan to Western destinations.

- Global Health.** The Ebola epidemic in West Africa in 2014 was an alarm bell for the international community. The outbreak, which left more than 11,000 dead, prompted the Philippines to quarantine its peacekeepers<sup>23</sup> and Colombia, Haiti, and Jamaica, among others, to ban travel to West Africa.<sup>24</sup> China stepped up, along with the United States, to support the establishment of an African Centers for Disease Control.<sup>25</sup> The recent Ebola outbreaks in the Democratic Republic of the Congo serve as reminders

that infectious diseases are an international problem; the World Health Organization received funding from Canada, Germany, Japan, Norway, the United States, the United Kingdom, the European Union, and several NGOs and global foundations to stop the spread.<sup>26</sup>

- Irregular Migration.** In addition, European countries have been seized with the challenge of irregular migration across the Mediterranean, coaxing several governments to focus on sub-Saharan Africa. For example, Germany has unveiled a Marshall Plan with Africa to address mass migration, and Italy's parliament approved a deployment of up to 470 troops in Niger to help mitigate the trafficking of people toward Europe.<sup>27</sup>

### GLOBAL INFLUENCE INCREASING

Finally, many of Africa's foreign counterparts want to harness the region's political sway at the UN and secure their support in international rows. It is difficult to advance a UN Security Council (UNSC) resolution without the support of Africa's three non-permanent members.

## *Rather than rely exclusively on the United States and former colonial powers, Africans are crisscrossing the globe to ink deals with foreign governments.*

Indeed, more than 60 percent of UNSC's efforts concern African issues.<sup>28</sup> It is also important to win over African delegations in the UN General Assembly (UNGA) where the continent has the largest and most unified voting bloc. China and Russia have targeted African governments to support their position on the South China Seas and Crimea. Israel clinched Togo's support and eight additional African abstentions on the UNGA motion condemning recognition of Jerusalem as its capital.<sup>29</sup>

Foreign governments, moreover, see Africans as important allies in geostrategic spats. Since earlier this year, the UAE and Qatar have pressured Africans to choose sides or face the consequences. In May, China swayed Burkina Faso to drop its recognition of Taiwan.<sup>30</sup> In August, Saudi Arabia received the backing of Eritrea and Somalia in its dispute with Canada.<sup>31, 32</sup>

### **DISRUPTING THE STATUS QUO IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA**

This uptick in engagement represents a sea change in Africa's foreign relations. While many of these countries—including China and the Gulf States—have been involved in the region for decades, the sheer number of countries and the significant influx of resources have reshaped the landscape. Rather than rely exclusively on the United States and former colonial powers, Africans are crisscrossing the globe to ink deals with foreign governments. This is an enticing opportunity for African governments to diversify partnerships and use this interest to accelerate the region's economic growth. Examples of these partnerships include:

- In July, the UAE's port operator DP World signed a deal to build a logistic hub outside of the Malian capital to handle some four million tons of cargo annually.<sup>33</sup> DP world is also present in Senegal, Somalia, South Africa, and, until recently, Djibouti.<sup>34</sup>
- In June, Singapore's deputy prime minister visited East Africa, discussing opportunities with Kenyan counterparts for cooperation in port operations, aviation, and fintech, among other sectors, and

signing a bilateral investment treaty and air serve agreement with Rwandan officials;<sup>35</sup> Rwanda, in fact, routinely calls itself the "Singapore of Africa."

- In July 2017, Chile signed an MOU with South Africa to cooperate in the mining and minerals sector.<sup>36</sup> A month earlier, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa facilitated an exchange between Chilean government officials, its private sector, and representatives from Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, and Zambia to share best practices and explore joint ventures.<sup>37</sup>

Africa's new partners are assisting humanitarian responses and deploying troops and trainers to tackle security challenges, elevating them as influential players in an arena that used to be primarily the purview of the West and the UN. This development provides African states with an array of choices for partnerships and sets the stage for collaboration for a diverse set of stakeholders.

- According to Tufts University's Feinstein International Center, Muslim and Arab countries contributed nearly 30 percent of the aid during the Somali famine in 2011-2012. Many of these countries later broadened their support to include training for security services and direct budgetary support to the Somali federal government.<sup>38, 39</sup> Seizing on this engagement, then-Prime Minister David Cameron in February 2012 invited representatives from over 40 governments, multilateral organizations, and Somali authorities to London to commit to addressing Somalia's enduring challenges.<sup>40</sup>
- In the past year, Saudi Arabia has pledged \$100 million to the G5 Sahel, comprised of military contributions from Chad, Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger. Russia likewise indicated it is training regional law enforcement agencies to address the terrorist threat in the Sahel.<sup>41, 42</sup> President Macron, who has been very outspoken in his support for the regional force, seems eager to leverage this new international response to achieve his government's objective of greater stability in northwest Africa.

### **AND INTRODUCING NEW CHALLENGES**

While the benefits are clear, sub-Saharan Africa's integration presents some significant challenges. If this new dynamic is poorly managed, it could derail the region's progress and entangle it in international disputes.

Look at what is happening in the Horn of Africa. The split between the UAE and Saudi Arabia on one side and Qatar

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and Turkey on the other has unsettled this part of Africa and threatens to unravel some of Somalia's hard-earned progress. President Mohammed Abdullahi Mohammed Farmajo of Somalia has refused to choose sides, leading the UAE to disband its military training program for the national army.<sup>43</sup> Even more damaging, the UAE has tried to pit Somalia's federal member states against the center. Five of Somalia's federal member states have objected to Farmajo's handling of the Gulf rift and aligned themselves with Abu Dhabi.<sup>44, 45</sup>

It is certain that this sort of dispute will happen again. As more countries invest financial, diplomatic, and military resources into sub-Saharan Africa, the potential for disagreement, disputes, and destabilizing behavior will increase.

### **WHERE DOES THIS LEAVE THE UNITED STATES?**

The United States paradoxically is stepping away from the region while the rest of the world is leaning in. Rhetoric aside, the U.S. government seems less willing to continue to act as a "partner of choice" for sub-Saharan African states. From proposed cuts to foreign assistance to reductions in military deployments, the United States is poised to take a backseat.<sup>46</sup> This shrinking posture not only forgoes opportunities for U.S. trade and investment, it also precludes the United States from shaping outcomes in the region—and beyond. Instead of welcoming or wrestling with this rise in global interest, the U.S. government appears either unaware or unconcerned (except when it comes to China and Russia).

There is still time to implement a course correction. Below are five recommendations to preserve U.S. influence, as well as advance U.S. objectives in the region.

- **Contest the Narrative.** Assistant Secretary of State Tibor Nagy took over as the State Department's top diplomat on Africa in July, and has already made some

headway in challenging perceptions that the United States does not care about Africa. It is an important start, but more is required. It is imperative that the U.S. government up its public diplomacy game, elaborate on its objectives, and communicate directly to African publics and foreign governments that the United States is ready to resume a leadership role. In part because U.S. engagement in sub-Saharan Africa has been a bipartisan issue, the Trump Administration should consider planning a second U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit. It has been more than four years since the inaugural event occurred under President Obama.

- **Start Talking to Everyone.** The United States needs to broaden its partnerships, investing more time into building relationships with Abu Dhabi, New Delhi, and Tokyo (as it does with London and Paris). It is high time that the Department of State assign an "Africa watcher" to Beijing and other capitals that have become key players in Africa. When and where appropriate, it should replicate David Cameron's London Conference on Somalia to construct new international architecture around difficult problem sets. On a smaller scale, the United States should convene trilateral meetings with select African countries and other foreign powers to address issues of mutual concern.
- **Serve as an Honest Broker.** When international quarrels threaten to engulf African states, the U.S. government has an opportunity to step in and act as referee to protect U.S. interests and forestall further negative developments. This is what former Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Chester Crocker did in southern Africa, negotiating the Cuban withdrawal from Angola in the 1980s. It allowed the United States to stay above the fray, while ensuring U.S. equities were advanced. This is what is desperately needed in the Horn of Africa.
- **Define U.S. Strategic Advantages.** The United States cannot be everywhere in sub-Saharan Africa, and its private sector is unlikely to bid on every deal on the table. A more thoughtful approach to U.S. comparative advantage is overdue. A recent report by the Atlantic Council makes this case for U.S. companies vis-à-vis Chinese ones, highlighting that the United States is best positioned to dominate in the service sector, financial realm, agribusiness, and renewable energy. This approach needs to be duplicated for the security space where the United States, for instance, could do more on defense



institution building and the strengthening of regional forces' logistical capacity.

- **Establish a Division of Labor.** The United States has finite resources to spend in sub-Saharan Africa. Clearly, it is not always the most credible messenger. The growing number of interested foreign governments presents an opportunity to burden-share responsibilities and crowdsource complex problems. Embracing a new set of countries could inject new resources into the fight against criminality and extremism. For example, the Malaysians could share their deep experience on combating piracy and the Colombians could offer a few pointers on counterinsurgency tactics. Fostering a deeper bench of partnerships means bringing different skillsets, talents, and experiences to prevent local problems in sub-Saharan Africa from become global crises. ■

***Judd Devermont** is the director of the Africa Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Washington, D.C.*

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