



## Modern Naval Diplomacy

Lieutenant-Commander Anonymous

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**Modern Naval Diplomacy**

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## ABSTRACT

The current Rules Based International Order (RBIO) is being challenged by the actions of Russia and the People's Republic of China (PRC). This has played out through an increasing non-alignment with the West at the United Nations, where both Russia's actions in Ukraine and the PRC's treatment of Uyghur Muslims have not faced unanimous condemnation. They have achieved this through no-strings attached partnerships in Africa, gaining access and influence due to their defense and development support. However, such support is not for the benefit of Africans. The PRC provides development assistance to fuel its own domestic agenda, benefiting its own citizens rather than Africans. Conversely, Russia offers defense support to maintain an image of strength and relevance in the world as it continues to wane. Despite their intents, both are visible on the continent, profiting as a result.

The United States (US) is waking up to this fact and has taken efforts to revamp its own approach towards the continent. Focusing primarily on development such an approach will take time to bear fruit. If the US wants to see tangible results today it must take a page from history and pursue the use of naval diplomacy. The US can show its commitment to a renewed partnership with Africa by employing its most flexible and effective tool, the human element. For an investment of under two weeks time the US Navy (USN) can have its ships transit south and around Africa, rather than using the Suez Canal. This provides the opportunity to make port calls in some 30 coastal African states, who will benefit from the goodwill of sailors (and their wallets), as well as improved maritime security. There is no better way to help turn Africa's potential into opportunity than with a visible presence on the ground, gaining access and influence as a result.

## CH. 1: INTRODUCTION

The Russian invasion of Ukraine served as a wakeup call for many in Europe and around the world for reasons that evoke concerns of a global degradation in the likes not seen in the past century. For the United States (US) the realization was even more stark, with the perceived Rules Base International Order (RBIO) idealized by the Western world beginning to show its limitations. The increase in non-alignment at the United Nations (UN) when it came time to cast votes in the condemnation of Russia's actions in Ukraine showed the West that despite efforts to shape the world in its likeness there will still be times when not everyone is on its side. In addition to these non-alignment votes regarding the war in Ukraine, the People's Republic of China (PRC) benefited from the same deterioration in the RBIO when it came time to debate its treatment of Uyghur Muslims.<sup>1</sup>

A significant portion of the non-alignment votes signaling this deterioration of the RBIO came from the Global South, a reference to the underdeveloped regions of Central and South America, Africa, the Middle East, and parts of Asia. To understand how this

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<sup>1</sup> Mahama Tawat, "Russia-Ukraine war: decoding how African countries voted at the UN," *The Conversation*, March 8, 2022, <https://theconversation.com/russia-ukraine-war-decoding-how-african-countries-voted-at-the-un-178663>.

happened, and what can be done about it, this paper will focus specifically on Africa and how the external influences of the US, the PRC, and Russia have had an impact on the RBIO. The significance of Africa cannot be downplayed, as its 54 countries make up the largest UN General Assembly (UNGA) voting bloc totaling 28% percent of the votes. The impacts of such a vital continent being non-aligned with the West has sounded the alarm for policymakers, calling to question previous strategies and seeking renewed engagement going forward. Previous US-Africa policies pushed a moral agenda and forecasted US ideals when interacting with African states, unlike the *no-strings attached* approaches of the PRC and Russia. This allowed them to seize the initiative on the continent, gaining *access* and *influence* as a result of their willingness to work in *partnership* with all who were willing.

By examining the state of Africa today it will be evident that Africa possesses what General Stephen J. Townsend of the United States Army, previous Commander of the US Africa Command (AFRICOM), categorized as “Potential vs. Obstacles... Opportunities vs. Challenges”. In the annual Posture Statement before the Senate Armed Forces Committee in March 2022 he describes Africa as a complex strategic environment that is “ripe with opportunity but burdened with challenges”, a continent holding “tremendous geo-strategic significance” that is evolving in the face of “competing forces of prosperity and poverty, peace and conflict, plenty and famine, good governance and corruption and democratic backsliding”. AFRICOM’s approach to the continent aims to “maintain America’s strategic access and influence” through a “coordinated, Diplomacy-Defense-Development effort that teams will allies and partners to achieve shared security objectives, and advance shared principles.”<sup>2</sup>

The *Diplomacy, Defense, and Development* (3D) approach has been used by the US over the past 20 years to represent a whole of government approach between the Department of State (DoS), Department of Defense (DoD), and the US Agency for International Development (USAID). These three organizations provide the foundations for the promotion and protection of US National Security interests worldwide. This is especially true when working in “complex environments abroad [that are] marked by conflict, crisis, and fragility.”<sup>3</sup> The 3Ds will be used as a framework in this paper to analyze the strategies and approaches by the US, the PRC, and Russia towards Africa to secure *access* and *influence*. The term *diplomacy* will be used in referring to this *access* and *influence*, with the strategies taken by each of these external actors aiming to either gain *diplomacy* or deny their adversaries the same. Recent non-alignment at the UN shows how the PRC and Russia have used this *diplomacy* through strengthened *partnerships with* Africa to weaken the RBIO.

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<sup>2</sup> *Investing in America’s Security in Africa: A Continent of Growing Strategic Importance: Testimony before the Senate Armed Forces Committee*, 117<sup>th</sup> Cong. (2022) (statement of General Stephen J. Townsend, United States Army, Commander, United States Africa Command), 1-5.

<sup>3</sup> Beth Cole and Carla Koppell, “Fostering Diplomatic-Defense-Development (3D) Cooperation in Responding to Complex Crises,” December 6, 2017, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2017/12/fostering-diplomatic-defense-development-3d-cooperation-responding-complex>.

Chapter 2 will highlight many of the *challenges* and *opportunities* that Africa faces today, as well as how they have been used by external actors in a quest for *diplomacy*. A brief history of US-African relations over the past decades will then be given in Chapter 3, before outlining the new US strategy for the continent and how it plans to use a *development* approach in achieving its goals. Chapter 4 will then explore how the PRC has used a *development* approach combined with positive messaging to great effect, although the true reasons for this strategy was to support a domestic agenda rather than benefit Africans. Chapter 5 will show how Russia has used a *defense* approach alongside its propaganda arm to do the same, with Russia's search for domestic legitimacy acting as the main driver of their strategy on the continent.

Recognizing that a US *development* approach will take some years to bear fruit, Chapter 6 will show how Africa fits into the broader US Defense and Naval strategies, as well as how the US Navy (USN) can use a *soft power* approach on the continent to better achieve US objectives. The USN is a responsive and flexible way to use *defense* to support *development* and gain *diplomacy* on the continent as a result. Employing a *soft power* approach is vital to establishing the conditions for successful *development* on the continent. It is also self-supporting, as improvements to regional and maritime security can reassure investors, who then undertake the projects necessary to improve human security conditions. Such improvements will further reduce the *challenges* faced on the continent, decreasing risk and lowering the cost of financing to catalyze additional growth.

Chapter 7 will outline how a *soft power* approach by the USN is not a new concept, and how minor modification to force deployments can support a broader 3D approach towards Africa. Employed effectively, the USN can support both *development* and *defense* goals in the age of strategic competition. By routing naval vessels south to transit around Africa, rather than through the Suez Canal, the US gains an opportunity for *partnership* and to gain *diplomacy* with around 30 coastal African states. This approach would add just under two weeks time to a vessel's transit while providing strategic opportunities to conduct port calls in this vital region. These port calls can be used to showcase American goodwill and reaffirm a US commitment to *partnership with Africa*, gaining *diplomacy* as a result.

Finally, Chapter 8 will conclude by summarizing the key points of this paper, reiterating the importance of working in *partnership with Africa*, not just *in Africa*. If the US is truly serious about its new strategy towards Africa it must remain cognizant of history. Neither its *potential* nor *obstacles* should be exploited by external actors. A recent report by the World Bank anticipates that the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) could lift 30 million Africans out of extreme poverty, boost the incomes of nearly 70 million people, and generate \$450 billion in income by 2035.<sup>4</sup> None of this will be possible without the responsible actions and continued support of external actors, no

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<sup>4</sup> The World Bank, "Free Trade Deal Boost Africa's Economic Development," June 30, 2022, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/trade/publication/free-trade-deal-boosts-africa-economic-development>.

matter who they are. The difference will ultimately lay in the weight of their actions and not of their words.

## CH. 2: AFRICA TODAY

### Overview

Africa is as vast as it is diverse, being both the second-most populous and second-largest continent after Asia. It is nearly 12 million square miles (about 20% of the total landmass on Earth) and contains the world's second-largest rainforest. A 2021 estimate put the population around 1.4 billion people, of all religions and faiths who speak upwards of 3,000 different languages. Four of the world's "megacities", or urban and metropolitan areas that have more than 10 million inhabitants are located in Africa.<sup>5</sup> The continent also contains "six strategic chokepoints and sea lines of communication, enables a third of the world's shipping, and holds vast mineral resources". When the container ship *Ever Given* got stuck in the Suez Canal in 2021, 12% of global shipping was impacted over the course of 6 days.<sup>6</sup>

While Africa holds vast amounts of *potential*, there are also many real or potential *obstacles* to its sustained *development* and growth. The African Union (AU) has a plan to provide African solutions to African problems, but the continent still lacks the range of resources necessary to realize these goals without external assistance. Unfortunately, these external actors have their own interests in the continent, with the current state of competition in Africa likened to a renewed Cold War.<sup>7</sup> These interests range from fostering the continent's *potential* thereby creating *opportunities* (either for Africa or themselves), to exploiting the continent's *challenges* placing *obstacles* in the way of its *development* and prosperity. The true intentions of external actors in Africa matters. With 54 states *fully recognized* by both the AU and the UN, making up the single largest UN voting bloc, Africa has received renewed focus on the world stage. It is these votes that are being vied for in determining a new RBIO, and it is important to understand how the *opportunities* and *challenges* on the continent are being leveraged to gain this influence.

### Opportunities & Challenges

#### Opportunities

While often only framed in Western news sources as a land of chaos and despair, there are a multitude of reasons for engagement and strengthening of *diplomacy* in the region. With *opportunities* abound, by 2050 Africa will have 25% of the world's population and one of the youngest workforces at a time when population growth continues to decline and societies age throughout the rest of the world. Africa produces roughly 10% of the world's oil output, is home to nearly 10% of the natural gas reserves,

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<sup>5</sup> Britannica, "Africa," accessed March 1, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Africa>.

<sup>6</sup> Peter S. Goodman and Stanley Reed, "With Suez Canal Blocked, Shippers Begin End Run Around a Trade Artery," *New York Times*, March 29, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/26/business/suez-canal-blocked-ship.html>.

<sup>7</sup> Hippolyte Fofack, "Africa and the new Cold War: Africa's development depends on regional ownership of its security," *Brookings Institution*, May 19, 2022, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2022/05/19/africa-and-the-new-cold-war-africas-development-depends-on-regional-ownership-of-its-security>.



and contains a third of the world's mineral reserves and rare earth metals. As the world seeks to wean itself off oil usage, tamping down on global warming and preserving the environment, these mineral reserves and rare earth metals have become increasingly more important. There are also vast sums of money to be made with the green energy revolution, much as when oil and gas was discovered in days of old.<sup>8</sup>

Leaning forward, Africa will need to ensure that these industries do not solely remain extractive in nature. States who possess these minerals and metals must seek ways to add to their value chain by exporting goods such as solar panels, batteries, and electric motors, rather than the raw materials that offer little economic return. Building these manufacturing capabilities will help ensure that sovereign wealth is maintained in the countries that these minerals and metals are located, rather than exported for the benefit of external actors. Such vast natural resources, a young labor force, and a growing population that promotes new markets and industries can culminate to turn the continent's *potential* into real and tangible *opportunities*. The effective implementation of strategies laid out in the AU's *AGENDA 2063* may hold the key to reducing poverty, boosting incomes, and improving human security across the continent.

## Challenges

Equally important to Africa's growth and development is addressing the *challenges* which present various *obstacles* for the continent, not only in implementing *AGENDA 2063*, but also in providing this human security that continues to affect the livelihoods of millions of Africans. One must remember that "this enormous potential will be squandered unless the weapons of war, which still roar across much of Africa, are silenced and the deterioration of the continent's security conditions is reversed." Studies have further shown that high institutional and social fragility exists in at least six African states, while medium or high-intensity conflicts rage in at least 14 states. This has resulted in a nearly 10-fold increase in conflict-related deaths over the past decade, which saw the loss of life climb to over 20,000 in 2020.<sup>9</sup> The responsible utilization of natural resources and minerals offer great *potential* for the continent. However, the exploitation of these sectors will only further diminish the conditions of human security, allowing the continent's *challenges* to continue impacting its vulnerable populations.

Despite contributing to only 3.8% of the carbon emissions that contributed to global climate change, Africa and the Global South are suffering the consequences. Recent years have seen increases in flooding and rising sea levels, drought and extended dry seasons, extreme temperatures and precipitation, water scarcity, and other biological hazards.<sup>10</sup> The result of these events is the destruction of communities leading to homelessness and forced migration, diminished agricultural yields leading to famine and

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<sup>8</sup> Britannica, "Africa," accessed March 1, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Africa>.

<sup>9</sup> Hippolyte Fofack, "Dawn of a second Cold War and the Scramble for Africa" (Brookings Institution, May 2022), 1-3, <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Dawn-of-a-Second-Cold-War.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> CDP, "CDP Africa Report: Benchmarking Progress Towards Climate Safe Cities, States, and Regions," March 2020, <https://www.cdp.net/en/research/global-reports/africa-report>.

food scarcity, as well as a lack of clean water contributing to the spread of disease and other health related concerns. Such vulnerable populations in turn become open to exploitation or recruitment by terrorists and other Violent Extremist Organizations (VEOs), require dependence on government handouts, or remain susceptible to the strongarming of autocratic regimes and juntas that fail to provide the human security conditions vital to the long-term *development* of the continent.<sup>11</sup>

### Strategy: *AGENDA 2063*

Ten years after its inception in May 2013, and labeled as the “blueprint and master plan for transforming Africa into the global powerhouse of the future,” *AGENDA 2063* is the AU’s overall strategy for the continent. It reaffirms a “Pan African Vision of an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens, representing a dynamic force in the international arena.” By recognizing that sustainable and inclusive development is required to transform Africa into the global powerhouse it envisions, *AGENDA 2063* aims to turn *potential* into *opportunity*. Focusing not only on structural *development*, this strategy seeks improvement for the hundreds of millions of Africans by addressing institutional issues such as economic and social *development*, peace and security, and the advancement of democratic governance.<sup>12</sup>

As real change does not simply happen overnight, this 50-year, long-term agenda highlights 15 *Flagship Programs* which have been identified as key initiatives for the acceleration of Africa’s *development* and economic growth. In addition to critical infrastructure, it also seeks improvements in the areas of education, science and technology, and arts and culture. While a full discussion of *AGENDA 2063* is outside the scope of this paper, a few areas worth highlighting with a *development* approach are:

- **Integrated High Speed Train Network** connecting all capitals and commercial centers throughout the continent.
- **Establishment of the AfCFTA** to both improve intra-African trade and improve Africa’s influence in global markets.
- **Implementation of the Grand Inga Dam Project** to create hydroelectric power stations across the Congo River, generating 43,200 MW of power and paving the way for Africa’s utilization of modern energy sources that are clean and affordable.
- **Establishment of a Single African Air-Transport Market** to improve intra-regional connectivity between capitals and support an economic integration and growth agenda.

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<sup>11</sup> White House, *U.S. Strategy Toward Sub-Saharan Africa* (Washington, DC: White House, 2022), 6.

<sup>12</sup> African Union, “Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want,” accessed March 1, 2023, <https://au.int/en/agenda2063/overview>.

- **Establishment of African Financial Institutions** to mobilize resources for the management and accelerated integration of the African financial sector to promote socio-economic development.<sup>13</sup>

Taken together, the programs of *Agenda 2063* will see improvements in individual living standards as well as overall state economies, raising per-capita incomes by focusing on value addition in existing sectors such as agriculture and the blue economy. These efforts and grand ambitions will require outside assistance to achieve, but “with resolve, continued commitment, perseverance and support from the international community and the UN system, we [Africa] should endeavor to make it a reality.”<sup>14</sup>

## Summary

Africa is a continent rich in resources, people, and culture that is coming to its prime on the world stage. The balance of success hangs in the next few decades on whether its *potential* can be turned into *opportunities* to achieve the goals of *AGENDA 2063*. If left unaddressed, regional instability will continue to spread and create *obstacles* and *challenges* that will have drastic impacts for the developed and developing world alike. “Africa’s potential will continue to be challenged as long as deadly conflicts divide its societies, corruption impedes economic progress, mismanagement squanders natural resources, ... and repression stifles human rights and democratic expression.”<sup>15</sup>

Africa is at an inflection point, seeking partners on the world stage that can cater to their interests and enable them towards the future. No longer will Africans sit idly by as the developed world determines their fate. For these reasons and a slew of others, the world should take notice and implement strategies that address these *opportunities* and *challenges* while driving towards a more stable and secure Africa, for all Africans. The following chapters will address the various strategies and approaches that the US, the PRC, and Russia have taken on the continent to either exploit these *challenges* or capitalize on their *potential*. With an impending Cold War playing out on the continent Africa’s *development* will ultimately depend on the regional ownership of its security. Until it can do so organically it will continue to be susceptible to external actors and influences, not all of which may have Africa’s best interests in mind.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> United Nations, “Statement of the President at the High-level Panel Discussion on The Africa we want: Support of the UN System to the African Union’s Agenda 2063,” October 13, 2014, [https://www.un.org/pga/69/131014\\_statement-hl-africa-we-want](https://www.un.org/pga/69/131014_statement-hl-africa-we-want).

<sup>15</sup> White House, *U.S. Strategy Toward Sub-Saharan Africa* (Washington, DC: White House, 2022), 6.

<sup>16</sup> Hippolyte Fofack, “Africa and the new Cold War: Africa’s development depends on regional ownership of its security,” *Brookings Institution*, May 19, 2022, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2022/05/19/africa-and-the-new-cold-war-africas-development-depends-on-regional-ownership-of-its-security>.

## CH. 3: US-AFRICA RELATIONS

### Overview

Over the past three decades the US approach towards Africa “prioritized development, including public health; trade and investment; democracy and governance; and peace and security.” Despite the vastness of these claims, the most significant contributions have been realized from the health sector. US health initiatives in Africa have “helped more than 20 million individuals living with HIV/AIDS, prevented more than a billion cases of malaria, [and] defeated an Ebola outbreak in West Africa”.<sup>17</sup> The health and surveillance infrastructure and the relationships established through these programs allowed African states to act swiftly and decisively during the COVID-19 pandemic, preventing what would otherwise have been a catastrophic situation.<sup>18</sup>

The impacts of these health initiatives cannot be understated in terms of lives saved or improved across the continent. However, HIV/AIDS and Ebola don’t even top the list of concerns for Africans largely due to the success of these programs. The focus has shifted to high rates of unemployment and a lack of job opportunities, alongside other human security and stability concerns. This creates a disconnect between the successes of existing US programs on the continent, particularly when faced with modern-day *challenges*. It also provides an opening for the US to shift focus and capitalize on pressing concerns with new initiatives, gaining *diplomacy* as a result. It must be noted that new funding will need be secured to achieve this, as there is little to no appetite to reduce spending towards successful health initiatives on the continent. As expected, achieving America’s stated objectives will come at an increased financial cost; if done correctly however, efficiencies can be had by applying existing instruments of national power to address these *challenges*.

To achieve this, we will explore how the US is attempting to shift focus on the continent by working *with* African partners to achieve *their* strategic goals. Released August 2022, the *US Strategy Toward Sub-Saharan Africa* outlines this strategy while echoing the locally applied strategies found in the 2023 US AFRICOM posture statement released five months prior. Recognizing the diverse nature of Africa, the *Sub-Saharan Africa* strategy provides a concrete plan of action for addressing the much-neglected portions of Africa. Released two months later, the *US National Security Strategy* additionally provides points for discussion that can be extracted under a “Potential vs. Obstacles...Opportunities vs. Challenges” lens.<sup>19</sup> These two strategy documents culminated with concrete action during the US-Africa Leaders Summit held in December 2022, which highlighted an economic and *development* centric approach towards the continent. The main takeaways are that the US is looking to apply a *development*

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<sup>17</sup> White House, *U.S. Strategy Toward Sub-Saharan Africa* (Washington, DC: White House, 2022), 11.

<sup>18</sup> Stephanie Nolen, “Trying to Solve a Covid Mystery: Africa’s Low Death Rates,” *New York Times*, March 23, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/23/health/covid-africa-deaths.html>.

<sup>19</sup> *Investing in America’s Security in Africa: A Continent of Growing Strategic Importance: Testimony before the Senate Armed Forces Committee*, 117<sup>th</sup> Cong. (2022) (statement of General Stephen J. Townsend, United States Army, Commander, United States Africa Command), 1.

approach in *partnership with* Africa, turning the continent's *potential* into *opportunity* and addressing shared *challenges* through the removal of *obstacles*.

## Strategy

### US Strategy for Sub-Saharan Africa

The *US Strategy Toward Sub-Saharan Africa* recognizes Africa's vital role in supporting the livelihoods of both Africans and Americans through a fruitful *partnership*. It provides a new vision for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, recognizing the *potential* for growth that can be stimulated by US influence in Africa. It also recognizes the risk of decline if the continent is left to malign actors such as the PRC and Russia. At a high level, the strategy aims to support "African agency, [by seeking] to include and elevate African voices in the most consequential global conversations". This will be accomplished through a 3D approach that is committed to working in *partnership with* African states to:

- Foster Openness and Open Societies
- Deliver Democratic and Security Dividends
- Advance Pandemic Recovery and Economic Opportunity, and
- Support Conservation, Climate Adaptation, and a Just Energy Transition.

These goals derive from the *US National Security Strategy* and the *US National Defense Strategy* to support US objectives and interests. They also reframe Africa's importance to US national security interests, reprioritizing traditional US policies "as pathways to bolster the region's ability to solve global problems alongside the United States."<sup>20</sup>

Recognizing that Africa presents "a more connected, urban, and youthful region" the *US Strategy Toward Sub-Saharan Africa* seeks to capitalize on this *potential*, turning it into *opportunities* for the benefit of Africans and Americans alike. A summary of the approach's six prongs and how they can be used to benefit an Africa centric approach are:

- **Revamp Public Diplomacy Efforts:** The US seeks first to empower the people it charges with implementing its policies on the continent, be it ambassadors or other officials, to ensure that an equal representation of women and youth is on display and accessible to both an African public and its government officials.
- **Refine and Reinvest in US Defense Tools:** This will be achieved by assisting African partners develop not only effective militaries and security forces, but also ones that are legitimate and accountable to an open and democratic society. With this goal in mind, they will further be capable of combatting corruption, advancing reform, and promoting regional peace and security.

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<sup>20</sup> White House, *U.S. Strategy Toward Sub-Saharan Africa* (Washington, DC: White House, 2022), 4.

Such capacity building efforts are the bread and butter of the current US defense approach on the continent and will be discussed further in Chapter 6.

- **Support Sustainable Development and Resilience:** In recognizing the need to improve African states and institutions, the US looks to provide support not only through modernization efforts in the financial, health, infrastructure, and supply chain sectors, but also with intangibles such as the environment, diversity, equality, and inclusivity.
- **Strengthen Trade and Commercial Relations:** The US looks to double down on existing programs and policies to increase trade and investment. Presidential initiatives such as the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment, Prosper Africa, and Power Africa will be expanded to better meet African partners' needs in the healthcare, technology, energy, and agriculture sectors while helping to secure borders and support the AfCFTA.
- **Drive Digital Transformation:** By capitalizing on a growing youth population in Africa and historic limitations regarding connectivity, the US will support a digital ecosystem that offers secure communications via the internet, with an open, reliable, and interoperable backbone. This will enable the promotion of online education, through both certificate-level and undergraduate courses in the science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields.
- **Rebalance Toward Urban Hubs:** Mirroring President Biden's domestic policies for infrastructure and urban renewal, the US aims to help African partners conduct robust city planning that considers not only the traditional sectors of energy, transportation, and water and waste management, but also the impacts of climate change and climate adaptation.<sup>21</sup>

While the first two points address *diplomacy* and *defense*, the last four lean heavily towards a *development* approach. All six prongs highlight the vital importance of *partnership with Africa*, as the success of any strategy undertaken must consider the wants and needs of Africans first and foremost.

#### US National Security Strategy

The *US National Security Strategy*, from which the *US Strategy Toward Sub-Saharan Africa* was loosely derived, outlines the Biden Administration's overall plan to not only "advance America's vital interests", but also to "position the US to outmaneuver [its] geopolitical competitors, tackle shared challenges, and set [its] world firmly on a path toward a brighter and more hopeful tomorrow". It acknowledges that the future of the RBIO is at risk and that renewed American leadership will be required to turn the

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 13–15.

tide, building *partnerships* while working with all who support a free, open, prosperous, and secure world order.<sup>22</sup>

Recognizing the fallout from COVID-19 and global economic effects left in its wake, the Biden Administration seeks to “reinvigorate America’s unmatched network of alliances and partnerships to uphold and strengthen the principles and institutions” which has been crucial to the responsiveness of the US in facing shared *challenges* and *obstacles* that directly impact billions around the world. These threats are transnational and require a coordinated effort, with the US willing to “partner with any nation that shares our basic belief that the rules-based order must remain the foundation for global peace and prosperity”.<sup>23</sup>

The main takeaway for US-Africa relations from the *US National Security Strategy* stems from the section titled *Cooperating on Shared Challenges*. These *challenges* should sound familiar from Chapter 2, as many of those listed are present in or directly impact those who live in Africa. They are also important factors for the US to keep in mind regarding any *development* approach. Addressing these *challenges* in *partnership with Africans* is essential for the continent to reach its full potential:

- **Climate and Energy Security** has undeniably become an existential *challenge* that “risk[s] food and water supplies, public health, and infrastructure... further[ing] extreme heat and weather, rising sea levels, and catastrophic biodiversity loss” around the world. Long acknowledged as the solution, transitioning away from fossil fuels and towards clean energy alternatives will be required to combat such an existential challenge. Access to critical minerals is key to this strategy, as they make up the foundation of the batteries and solar panels essential to move away from conventional energy sources. Africa suffers disproportionately from the impacts of climate change while also being a significant source of the critical minerals needed globally to address this challenge.<sup>24,25</sup>
- **Pandemics and Biodefense** are another set of *challenges* that need to be addressed in *partnership with African states*. After millions perished globally from COVID-19 and recognizing that the next pandemic could be even more severe, the US will be improving early warning and disease surveillance, along with data sharing and forecasting. This cannot be achieved domestically or unilaterally, as disease knows no borders and is indiscriminate in its victims. US-Africa engagement with health initiatives has been a successful

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<sup>22</sup> White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: White House, 2022), 2–3.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 27–28.

<sup>25</sup> Amaury de Félignon and Vincent Benoît, “Putting Africa at the heart of the global energy transition, thanks to its critical minerals,” *The Africa Report*, January 27, 2023, <https://www.theafricareport.com/278151/putting-africa-at-the-heart-of-the-global-energy-transition-thanks-to-its-critical-minerals>.

relationship to date which should continue to be grown and supported to address these types of challenges in the future.<sup>26</sup>

- **Food insecurity** is no stranger to millions if not hundreds of millions of Africans. In implementing a Global Food Security Strategy, the US seeks to reduce “global poverty, hunger, and malnutrition by supporting inclusive and sustainable agriculture-led economic growth”. This will provide stability by supporting well-nourished and healthy populations that are more adaptive and resilient in a broader health, climate, and conflict context. Addressing these *challenges* in Africa is essential, as “at least one in five Africans go to bed hungry and an estimated 140 million people in Africa face acute food insecurity.”<sup>27,28</sup>
- **Arms control and Non-Proliferation** see the US working with allies and *partners* in Africa, alongside civil society and international organizations, to “strengthen arms control and nonproliferation mechanisms, especially during times of conflict when escalation risks are greater.” This becomes ever more important in unstable regions such as the Sahel, where arms can move freely and undetected by non-state armed groups working across Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Chad. These same routes can be exploited to transport nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons and risks providing a pathway to these weapons for terrorist groups such as Al-Qa’ida affiliates in West Africa or Boko Haram.<sup>29,30</sup>
- **Terrorism** has only grown and worsened over the past 20 years, becoming “more ideologically diverse and geographically diffuse.” Al-Qa’ida, ISIS, and other associated forces have capitalized on the instability in certain regions of Africa, expanding their traditional operations outward from the Middle East and Afghanistan. These groups find sanctuary in past of Africa, taking advantage of vulnerable or disenfranchised populations to recruit from and fill its ranks. The US sees a “partner-led, US-enabled” approach that improves partner capacity by “building or expanding systems to prevent, detect, and respond to threats as they develop” as the most effective way forward. It also recognizes that the best way to resolve ongoing conflicts is by addressing the root causes of radicalization, supporting effective governance, promoting stabilization, and providing economic *development*.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: White House, 2022), 28–29.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 29.

<sup>28</sup> Food Security Information Network, “2022 Global Report on Food Crises,” 2022, 19-25, <https://reliefweb.int/attachments/a73512ce-ddd2-4a6a-9be3-8b7401f44857/GRFC%202022%20MYU%20Final.pdf>.

<sup>29</sup> White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: White House, 2022), 29-30.

<sup>30</sup> Transnational Organized Crime Threat Assessment - Sahel, “Firearms Trafficking in the Sahel,” 2022, [https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tocta\\_sahel/TOCTA\\_Sahel\\_firearms\\_2023.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tocta_sahel/TOCTA_Sahel_firearms_2023.pdf).

<sup>31</sup> White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: White House, 2022), 30-31.



- **Combatting Transnational Organized Crime** aims to combat Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCOs) using the same *partnered* approach taken to combat terrorism. Like pandemics TCOs know no bounds, impacting institutions, populations, and economies across Africa by enabling the flow of drugs, human trafficking and smuggling, illegal fishing and mining, as well as a slew of other illicit activities. Such activities have a negative impact on both the US and Africa's security and stability, with TCOs "undermining the rule of law, fostering corruption, acting as proxies for hostile state activities, and exploiting and endangering vulnerable populations." Further, these TCOs enjoy freedom of movement in areas such as the Sahel or Gulf of Guinea, where militaries are under resourced or lack the appropriate capabilities and capacities to intervene.<sup>32</sup>

Shifting away from the *challenges* and looking at the *opportunities*, a more targeted *development* approach comes to light in the section titled *Build 21<sup>st</sup> Century US-Africa Partnerships*. Opening with "Africa's governments, institutions, and people are a major geopolitical force, one that will play a crucial role... in the coming decade," it offers many of the key points from the *US Strategy Toward Sub-Saharan Africa*. The main takeaways are that the US sees itself as not only an *enabler* to African states, but also as a *partner* able to hold governments accountable, working to advance peace and prosperity on the continent. It also recognizes that *investment* will be needed to drive "transformative economic growth" in order to take advantage of a "booming population, vital natural resources, and vibrant entrepreneurship, coupled with the AfCFTA". By emphasizing the message of *partnership*, the *US National Security Strategy* envisions the US working side by side African states to "achieve our shared priorities from health and pandemic preparedness to climate change". This will allow the US to leverage its relationships to combat corruption, authoritarianism, and human rights issues while strengthening ties with states to "make progress toward more open and democratic governance...imposing costs for coups and pressing for progress on civilian transitions".<sup>33</sup>

### **Approach: Development**

With the groundwork for a US *development* approach towards Africa laid, the US hosted delegations "from all 49 invited African countries and the African Union, alongside members of civil society and the private sector" in Washington, DC from 13 – 15 December 2022. In the time between the last US-Africa Leaders Summit under President Obama in 2014, US-Africa relations saw a steady decline in *diplomacy* to the tangible actions of the PRC and Russia.<sup>34</sup> Relations were further exacerbated by then President Donald Trump's referral to African nations as "shithole countries" during a

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 32.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 43-44.

<sup>34</sup> White House, "U.S. Africa Leaders Summit," accessed March 1, 2023, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/us-africa-leaders-summit>.

White House meeting of bipartisan senators in 2018.<sup>35</sup> Seeking to reengage, the 2022 US-Africa Leaders Summit was the first definitive engagement with African leadership by the Biden Administration, seeking to “strengthen ties with African partners based on principles of mutual respect and shared interests and values.” A collaborative vision with multiple stakeholders and demographics (to include women, youth, and the African diaspora) was put forth to unlock “the potential of this decisive decade”.<sup>36</sup>

With a range of topics, participants attended events discussing the role of civil societies and the African diaspora to good governance and space cooperation. Talks eventually shifted to two-way trade and investment, with a US-Africa Business Forum of “CEOs and private sector leadership from over 300 American and African companies.” These leaders came together to discuss *development* and investment in critical sectors such as health, energy, infrastructure, and agriculture. A “Deal Room” was also set up to announce the numerous *partnerships* established between US and African businesses to support a *development* approach. This resulted in over \$15 billion in “two-way trade and investment commitments, deals and *partnerships* that advance key [*development*] priorities.”<sup>37</sup>

The final day of the summit focused on key leader engagement between nations, as well as how the US can support the AU’s *AGENDA 2063*. By reinforcing a peaceful, prosperous, and secure Africa focused on inclusive growth and sustainable *development* the US can ensure “an Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice, and the rule of law”. With these three days of engagements and discussions the US aimed to show how a *partnership* with the US would address the various *challenges* and *opportunities* through a *development* approach. Unlike in the past, this was achieved without mention of the actions of the PRC or Russia on the continent. The importance of this cannot be understate, as previous approaches towards the continent were outwardly focused on countering the PRC and Russia, failing to focus on what Africans really needed out of a *partnership* with the US.<sup>38</sup>

## Summary

Much of America’s approach towards Africa has been reactive rather than proactive with the rise of strategic competition, instead of seeking a true *partnership*. By downplaying and messaging that the tangible actions by the PRC and Russia were all bad America neglected to see that a void was also being filled that the US was absent from. This gave Africans the impression that they were merely pawns in a modern-day Cold War, where the US was more interested in working against the PRC and Russia than they were in working in *partnership with* Africa. US messaging fell on deaf ears, while the

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<sup>35</sup> Ali Vitali, Kasie Hunt, and Frank Thorp V., “Trump referred to Haiti and African nations as 'shithole' countries,” *NBC News*, January 12, 2018, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/white-house/trump-referred-haiti-african-countries-shithole-nations-n836946>.

<sup>36</sup> Department of State, “U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit,” accessed March 1, 2023, <https://www.state.gov/africasummit>.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

PRC and Russia offered a *no-strings attached development and defense* approach.<sup>39</sup> The recent shifts to US foreign policy are a direct result of this accounting, becoming proactive vs reactive on the continent as a result. The US is now trying to engage Africans on their terms, in *partnership with* and for the benefit of Africa. Second and third order effects align with US strategic objectives, however, the messaging has been tempered with less preaching to and more *partnering with* Africa.

To build on the momentum of the US-Africa Leaders Summit, the US has stepped up its key leader engagement to the continent. When US Vice President Kamala Harris visited Africa at the end of March 2023 she was the 18<sup>th</sup> and most senior US official to do so. Earlier visits by US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken aimed to lay the groundwork for a shift “away from what has traditionally been a relationship... focused on national security partnerships to one with a focus on grassroots development.”<sup>40</sup> Despite a perceived lack of action by the US on the continent Africans still see America and its values as desirable. This bodes well as the US seeks to work in *partnership with* African states to turn their *potential* into *opportunities* while facing shared *challenges* together to remove any *obstacles* to their growth. In the near term the US can learn from the approaches of the PRC and Russia, as well as how each has benefited from addressing Africa’s *opportunities* and *challenges*. Time will tell whether a similar *diplomacy through development* approach will pay off for the US, restoring its vision of a RBIO with improved alignment at the UN.

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<sup>39</sup> Hippolyte Fofack, “Africa and the new Cold War: Africa’s development depends on regional ownership of its security,” *Brookings Institution*, May 19, 2022, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2022/05/19/africa-and-the-new-cold-war-africas-development-depends-on-regional-ownership-of-its-security>.

<sup>40</sup> Nosmot Gbadamosi, “Can Harris’s Visit Shore Up U.S. Relations With Africa?,” *Foreign Policy*, March 29, 2023, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/03/29/kamala-harris-africa-ghana-tanzania-zambia-visit-us-china>.

## CH. 4: PRC-AFRICA RELATIONS

### Overview

When it comes to strategic competition the PRC has made itself known throughout Africa, investing heavily over the past few decades through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). With *development* at the forefront of their approach, the PRC offers *no-strings attached* financing through the Export-Import Bank of China. They have been involved with the construction of massive infrastructure projects throughout the continent such as Algeria's El Hamdania Central Port, Kenya's Mombasa-Nairobi Standard Gauge Railway, and Uganda's Karuma Hydropower Project.<sup>41</sup> As though topping it all off with a cherry the PRC gifted the AU a new US \$200 million headquarters building in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The fact that the PRC planted a backdoor in the computer network that allowed them to gain access to confidential information (for over five years) should hint at the real motivation behind the PRC's approach, one that is less than altruistic.<sup>42</sup>

When it comes to the RBIO, the PRC's *no-strings attached* partnership provided the added benefit of increased non-alignment at the UN regarding its treatment of Uyghur Muslims. When it came time to debate its human rights abuses in the north-western province of Xinjian the Western led motion was not approved and the debate never occurred. This effective vote buying works against the RBIO and further weakens the UN as an institution capable of carrying out its mandate.<sup>43</sup> RBIO aside, the PRC also views Africa as their "Second Continent," which plays a vital role in their domestic policies. Rather than developing Africa for the benefit of Africa, China sees Africa as a source of cheap labor and manufacturing, as well as raw materials and natural resources that can be extracted and exploited without regard to the livelihoods of Africans or the human security concerns they face.<sup>44</sup>

Under the BRI the PRC uses the *potential* that Africa holds, but rather than turning this *potential* into *opportunity* for Africans it seeks to make its own citizens the primary benefactor. This can be overlooked by Africans confronted with an effective messaging campaign showing tangible results throughout the continent. An impression is given that the PRC is putting their money where their mouth is, providing tangible results throughout the continent. This *development* approach can be seen, touched, and utilized by Africans, and has been effective at gaining *diplomacy* as a result. Additionally, many of the megaprojects supported on the continent are dual-use, serving both civilian and

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<sup>41</sup> David Dollar, "Understanding China's Belt and Road Infrastructure Projects in Africa," (Brookings Institution, September 2019), [https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/FP\\_20190930\\_china\\_bri\\_dollar.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/FP_20190930_china_bri_dollar.pdf).

<sup>42</sup> Abdi Latif Dahir, "China gifted the African Union a headquarters building and then allegedly bugged it for state secrets," *Quartz*, January 30, 2018, <https://qz.com/africa/1192493/china-spied-on-african-union-headquarters-for-five-years>.

<sup>43</sup> Emma Farge, "U.N. body rejects debate on China's treatment of Uyghur Muslims in blow to West," *Reuters*, October 6, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/un-body-rejects-historic-debate-chinas-human-rights-record-2022-10-06>.

<sup>44</sup> Howard W. French, "China's Second Continent," accessed March 1, 2023, <https://lifeclub.org/books/chinas-second-continent-howard-french-review-summary>.

military purposes that further support the PRC's domestic *defense* goals. With recent events marking a shift towards a *development* approach the US must realize that a visible and tangible footprint is necessary to overcome its past strategies. This is especially true when US leaders must fly through airports, drive along roads, stay in hotels, and hold meetings in conference centers *all built by the PRC* when reengaging with the continent.<sup>45</sup>

## Strategy

### Forum on China-Africa Cooperation

On 29 November 2021 PRC President Xi Jinping gave remarks at the opening ceremony of the 8<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Conference of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). Occurring well before the *US Strategy Toward Sub-Saharan Africa* was released in August 2022, President Xi outlined the PRC's strategy for relations with Africa to then AU President Macky Sall. These remarks were noteworthy for a few reasons. First, they marked the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of diplomatic relations between the PRC and African states, dating back to a period when many just gained their independence from primarily Western colonizers. Second, President Xi highlighted this shared struggle "against imperialism and colonialism... [in *partnership*] toward development and revitalization," as well as how the PRC has worked side by side African states to provide "mutual assistance amidst complex changes... building a new type of international relations."<sup>46</sup>

Paralleling the shared *partnership with* Africans that much of the new US strategy towards Africa focuses on, President Xi made four proposals to build "a China-Africa community with a shared future in the new era:"

- **Fighting COVID-19 with solidarity** claims to "put people and their lives first, be guided by science... and truly ensure the accessibility and affordability of vaccines in Africa to bridge the immunization gap." Those that have been following how well the PRCs domestic COVID-19 policies played out will notice the irony here.<sup>47</sup>
- **Deepening practical cooperation** seeks to create new economic opportunities for China through *partnership with* Africa, leaning on the PRCs own experiences with poverty reduction to expand trade and investment on the continent. A Global Development Initiative that aligns with the AUs

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<sup>45</sup> Jacob J. Lew and Gary Roughead, "China's Belt and Road: Implications for the United States," (Council on Foreign Relations, 2021), [https://www.cfr.org/report/chinas-belt-and-road-implications-for-the-united-states/download/pdf/2021-04/TFR%20%2379\\_China%27s%20Belt%20and%20Road\\_Implications%20for%20the%20United%20States\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.cfr.org/report/chinas-belt-and-road-implications-for-the-united-states/download/pdf/2021-04/TFR%20%2379_China%27s%20Belt%20and%20Road_Implications%20for%20the%20United%20States_FINAL.pdf).

<sup>46</sup> Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, "Full Text: Keynote speech by Chinese President Xi Jinping at opening ceremony of 8th FOCAC ministerial conference," December 2, 2021, [http://www.focac.org/eng/gdtp/202112/t20211202\\_10461080.htm](http://www.focac.org/eng/gdtp/202112/t20211202_10461080.htm).

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

*AGENDA 2063* further aims to strengthen the digital economy and promote small and medium-sized enterprises, as well as young African entrepreneurs.<sup>48</sup>

- **Promoting green development** addresses the shared *challenge* of climate change while stating the need “to advocate green and low-carbon development, actively promote solar, wind and other sources of renewable energy... and keep strengthening our capacity for sustainable development.” It neglects to state the PRCs first place position regarding worldwide CO2 emissions, which is double that of the US and continues to rise annually. The US has showed progress in reducing its carbon footprint during this same period.<sup>49,50</sup>
- **Upholding equity and justice** notes that “peace, development, equity, justice, democracy and freedom are common values of humanity and represent the abiding aspirations of both China and Africa.” If the PRCs treatment of Uyghurs is any indication of these “abiding aspirations” then the hypocrisy of their call to “oppose intervention in domestic affairs, racial discrimination and unilateral sanctions... [while] unequivocally stand[ing] for the just propositions of developing countries” should again be apparent.<sup>51,52</sup>

If these themes sound familiar, the reader is encouraged to review Chapter 3 and the four main objectives of the *US Strategy Toward Sub-Saharan Africa*. Further contradictions to PRC proposals should become obvious in the next section, as well as with the actual implementation of the PRC’s *development* approach through the BRI.

## 2035 Vision for China-Africa Cooperation

The *2035 Vision for China-Africa Cooperation* is one of the four documents adopted at the 8<sup>th</sup> FOCAC which outlines a “mid-to long-term cooperation plan jointly developed by China and Africa.” Giving a framework for the subsequent 15 years, it aligns with the PRC’s *2035 Vision* which aims to achieve socialist modernization by 2035. A comparison conducted on the two *Vision* documents by the Brookings Institution noted that a “mutually beneficial economic cooperation [with Africa] boosts China’s economic growth and meets the demand from the Chinese domestic market, which will improve the quality of life of the Chinese people.”<sup>53</sup> These remarks, when viewed under

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Climate Trade, “Which countries are the world’s biggest carbon polluters?,” May 17, 2021, <https://climatetrade.com/which-countries-are-the-worlds-biggest-carbon-polluters>.

<sup>51</sup> Department of State, “The Chinese Communist Party’s Human Rights Abuses in Xinjiang,” accessed March 1, 2023, <https://2017-2021.state.gov/ccpabuses/index.html>.

<sup>52</sup> Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, “Full Text: Keynote speech by Chinese President Xi Jinping at opening ceremony of 8th FOCAC ministerial conference,” December 2, 2021, [http://www.focac.org/eng/gdtp/202112/t20211202\\_10461080.htm](http://www.focac.org/eng/gdtp/202112/t20211202_10461080.htm).

<sup>53</sup> Yun Sun, “An examination of the 2035 Vision for China-Africa Cooperation,” *Brookings Institution*, December 27, 2021, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2021/12/27/an-examination-of-the-2035-vision-for-china-africa-cooperation>.

the lens of Howard French's 2014 book titled *China's Second Continent*, reveal ulterior motives to the PRC's interest in Africa.

French noted the success China has had with globalization over the past several decades. He also warned that such rapid economic growth is unsustainable, resulting in overpopulation, fallout from a one-child policy, and harsh workplace competition which will dampen the PRC's continued rise. To maintain its trajectory the PRC has a need for new territory to expand to, with Africa being the perfect place to do so. This migration to Africa causes tensions between locals who see their livelihoods being taken over, creating a perception of "Chinese colonization." Oftentimes Chinese business owners only hire workers from China, and there are "complain[ts] that the Chinese are taking over their communities and lack basic respect for their culture." In terms of resource competition, French goes on to state that "China often exploits African resources, which causes a lot of political tension in African communities." Over the past several decades Chinese mining companies have profited greatly while Africans continue to face dangerous working conditions for low pay, with untold damage being caused to the environment as a result of mineral extraction.<sup>54</sup>

Another indicator that the PRC's *development* goals on the continent are less than selfless is that "China and many African countries haven an unfortunate thing in common: large-scale corruption." By taking advantage of corrupt African governments, the PRC was able to "secure more business deals and resources...gain[ing] their influence through corrupt methods like paying off government works to negotiate behind closed doors." With a track record of involvement in expensive mega infrastructure projects on the continent, often without regard for their long-term economic viability or return on investment, project completion merely results in "shoddy buildings they [locals] can't repair because they aren't familiar with the foreign technology used to build them."<sup>55</sup> It turns out that there is very little that is "mutually beneficial" to Africa when it comes to the PRC's *2035 Vision for China-Africa Cooperation*. There should also be no doubt that the PRC's actions in Africa are primarily to "improve the quality of life of the Chinese people," and not those of Africans.<sup>56</sup>

### **Approach: Development**

In 2013 the PRC proposed the BRI "to improve connectivity and cooperation on a transcontinental scale". By investing over \$575 billion in 70 "corridor economies" the PRC took concrete action to show a presence in the Global South and underdeveloped regions, seeking to "substantially improve trade, foreign investment, and living conditions for citizens in participating countries" with its many infrastructure projects. Regardless of the motivations behind the BRI and whether it is principally self-serving

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<sup>54</sup> Howard W. French, "China's Second Continent," accessed March 1, 2023, <https://lifeclub.org/books/chinas-second-continent-howard-french-review-summary>.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Yun Sun, "An examination of the 2035 Vision for China-Africa Cooperation," *Brookings Institution*, December 27, 2021, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2021/12/27/an-examination-of-the-2035-vision-for-china-africa-cooperation>.

with the durability of infrastructure up for debate, the PRC did open new markets and avenues for cheap labor and production to be imported to China.<sup>57</sup> As much as US counter messaging attempted to spin a narrative that all BRI investments were bad, the PRC has maintained a strategic mindset and made tangible inroads in these nations.

Despite China's investment through the BRI over the past decades, the post COVID-19 period has seen a reduction in financial commitments by nearly a third from 2018 to 2021. This may indicate a shift back towards a more domestic focused policy for the PRC, potentially revealing a weakness with executing their previous strategy.<sup>58</sup> This drawdown in project financing highlights that the long-term economic viability of many BRI projects was not considered for the benefit of the host nation. Analysis of the Kenyan Standard Gauge Railway revealed that even after completion it would never generate enough revenue to pay off the amounts of debt financed, with "movement of money since the project began [being] one way; from Kenyan tax payers to China." If conducted with Kenya's *development* in mind more could have been done to ensure that Africans, and not the PRC, truly benefited from the project.<sup>59</sup>

In addition to corruption in the initial contracting of BRI projects coming to light, there has been an increase in publicity with gross human rights violations, labor issues, and the negative impacts of these projects on the environment. Social media campaigns have made it difficult for the PRC to provide a positive spin on these stories through the media. Given enough time this will further erode support for the PRCs previous "goodwill" on the continent.<sup>60</sup> The PRCs approach has been to build *diplomacy* through the financing of these grand *development* projects, but perceptions could be starting to change with Africa bearing the brunt of the consequences when these projects go awry. The combination of a drawdown in financial support and such ground truth revelations of many BRI projects provides an opportunity for the US to carry forth with its own *development* goals, in *partnership with* African interests.<sup>61</sup>

## Summary

The PRCs relationship with Africa has started to sour. After decades of *development in* Africa, rather than *with Africa*, Africans are waking up to the realization that the BRI may not have had their best interests in mind despite the over 65-years of diplomatic relations between the two. At the 8<sup>th</sup> FOCAC, President Xi set out to create a

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<sup>57</sup> The World Bank, "Belt and Road Initiative," March 29, 2018, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/regional-integration/brief/belt-and-road-initiative>.

<sup>58</sup> Yun Sun, "FOCAC 2021: China's retrenchment from Africa?," *Brookings Institution*, December 26, 2021, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2021/12/06/focac-2021-chinas-retrenchment-from-africa>.

<sup>59</sup> Vincent Achuka, "Bloated costs and other shady moves behind Kenya's SGR deal secrecy," *The Citizen*, November 11, 2022, <https://www.thecitizen.co.tz/tanzania/news/east-africa-news/bloated-costs-and-other-shady-moves-behind-kenya-s-sgr-deal-secrecy-4016752>.

<sup>60</sup> Sergio Restelli, "Chinese Engagement in Africa: The Reality of the BRI," *Inside Over*, December 15, 2021, <https://www.insideover.com/economy/chinese-engagement-in-africa-the-reality-of-the-bri.html>.

<sup>61</sup> Judith Tyson, "Rising interest rates are threatening debt sustainability in Africa," *ODI*, September 28, 2022, <https://odi.org/en/insights/rising-interest-rates-are-threatening-debt-sustainability-in-africa>.



shared future between the China-Africa community. What was missing in those remarks was the self-interest of the PRC and how Africa was going to be used as a pawn in its own domestic agenda. The PRC's *2035 Vision* sees Africa merely as its "Second Continent," a source of cheap labor and manufacturing, as well as of raw material and natural resources that can be extracted and exploited without regard to the environment or workers involved. Masking the need for Africa with a desire to aid Africa through the BRI has been successful so far, gaining *diplomacy* through *development* as a result.

These BRI investments have been a key factor in securing a stronger position at the UN and weakening the RBIO with *strings attached* investments, but the longevity of this support may be waning. Post COVID-19 investment on the continent has started to drop off, leading African states to seek *partnership* elsewhere to carry out the AU's *AGENDA 2063*. The outpourings of corruption, poor labor practices, and human rights violations further weakens the PRC's position and will continue to see Africans rethinking their *partnership* with the PRC. This provides an opening for the US as it continues to revamp its approach to the continent, an approach that requires maintaining African interests at the forefront. By *partnering with* Africa, rather than *working in* Africa, the US will have more success in turning *potential* into *opportunities* while removing *obstacles* by facing shared *challenges*. At the end of the day the PRC needs Africa more than Africa needs the PRC, but the absence of US investments over the past several decades has allowed the PRC's influence to grow.

## CH. 5: RUSSIA-AFRICA RELATIONS

### Overview

Contrasting with the US and the PRC's *development* approach Russia has primarily been using a *defense* approach to generate *diplomacy* with African states. They have achieved this through various *defense* means, which are *no-strings attached* as with the PRC. In Sub-Saharan Africa Russia is the largest arms exporter by a large margin, and is willing to facilitate arms sales without the human rights conditions the US tends to require in contracting. This approach may be frowned upon by the West seeking to hold a moral high ground, but it sacrifices a *partnership* and provides inroads for Russia to gain *diplomacy*, influencing governments around the world. This is especially so in Africa, where the Wagner Group has recently been used to support autocratic regimes, dictators, and juntas.<sup>62</sup> Much like the PRC, Russia has disrupted the RBIO by gaining non-alignment at the UN through abstentions and vetoes regarding their illegal invasion of Ukraine. For an institution espousing the respect of territorial integrity at its core such an increase in non-alignment on basic sovereignty issues further deteriorates its credibility. Russia also has domestic reasons for engagement in Africa, but ones that are different than the PRC's desire to benefit its citizens at home.

The divergent nature of Russia's strategy has driven a *defense* focused approach on building *diplomacy* on the continent. In addition to arms sales and private military contractors, naval blockades and military drills have also been used to support this domestic agenda. Paired with an effective propaganda apparatus Russia's *defense* approach has gained the support of African states and provides them with domestic *legitimacy* - a key driver for its external engagement. Such activities offer Russians at home concrete examples of their *legitimacy* on the world stage, as well as giving loose support for its actions at the UN. This has allowed Russia to fare well with its domestic narrative that the Ukraine invasion is merely a "legitimate" special military operation, and that any notion of illegality is simply a manifestation of the West.

If the US wants to limit Russia's influence in the RBIO it must recognize that failure to *partner with* African and provide alternatives to a Russian *defense* approach is a losing strategy. Russia takes advantage of the *obstacles* present on the continent because the US has historically maintained a *strings attached* approach to their engagements. Rather than resolving these *obstacles* for the benefit of Africans Russia has exploited them to their advantage. With strategic competition it is necessary to *partner* and develop relationships with states that may not necessarily espouse the democratic ideals of the US and the West. Relationships take time to build and will never flourish if one side is unwilling to be flexible with their moral agenda. It is acceptable to hold partners accountable for their actions, but without communication this dialog cannot be conducted. An approach that recognizes such change doesn't happen overnight, working

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<sup>62</sup> John V. Parachini and Ryan Bauer, "What Does Africa Need Most Now: Russian Arms Sales or Good Vaccines?," *RAND Corporation*, November 17, 2021. <https://www.rand.org/blog/2021/11/what-does-africa-need-most-now-russian-arms-sales-or.html>.

over time to advance issues such as human security and good governance would be better suited than the alternative, which is ceding the narrative and doing nothing at all.

## Strategy

### Russia-Africa Summit

The first Russia-Africa summit was held in Sochi from 23-24 October 2019, seeking “a fundamentally new level of mutually beneficial partnership to meet the challenges of the 21st century.” The goal of the summit was to strengthen *partnership with* “African nations across all areas of society including politics, security, economic relations, science and technology, and the cultural and humanitarian spheres.” With 43 heads of state or government in attendance Russian President Vladimir Putin stressed state sovereignty and a willingness to provide *no-strings attached* assistance and trade deals. He further noted that “an array of Western countries are resorting to pressure, intimidation and blackmail of sovereign African governments, against which Russia was well suited to help African states push back”.<sup>63</sup>

Despite these pointed remarks, many of the high-level points from the Russia-Africa Summit’s declarations echo both those of the US and the PRC for working in *partnership with* Africa. At face value one may be mistaken of the overall intent, however words and actions tend to have a mismatch when it comes to Russian involvement in Africa. On the political front Russia seeks to “develop an equitable dialogue... on the basis of a multilateral world order” while opposing the “revision of the universally recognized principles and norms of international law and the UN Charter.” They then call for reform of the UN Security Council, going against these previous remarks, to increase the UN’s capacity “to counter the existing and new global challenges and threats.” They want to achieve this by ensuring that the “UN plays an active role in international affairs... maintaining international peace and security.” Again, the irony should not be lost with such statements ahead of Russia’s illegal invasion of the internationally recognized boundaries of Ukraine.<sup>64</sup>

When it comes to security cooperation, Russia again mirrors the approach of the US and the PRC in “addressing traditional and modern challenges in the field of security.” This includes such dinner table topics as terrorism and VEOs, “transnational crime, and trafficking in narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and their precursors.”<sup>65</sup> Much of these issues to date have been undertaken by the Wagner Group, rather than through capacity building, which favors supporting of autocrats rather than benefiting Africans. Another staple of Russia’s declaration that may seem off the mark given their invasion of Ukraine is to “enhance cooperation in post-conflict peacebuilding and

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<sup>63</sup> Evan Gershkovich, “At Russia’s Inaugural Africa Summit, Moscow Sells Sovereignty,” *The Moscow Times*, October 26, 2019, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/10/26/russias-inaugural-africa-summit-moscow-sells-sovereignty-a67916>.

<sup>64</sup> Roscongress, “Declaration of the First Russia-Africa Summit,” October 24, 2019, <https://summitafrica.ru/en/about-summit/declaration>.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

development on the African continent through implementing capacity-building programs and infrastructural projects.” One must wonder if they will offer the same level of *development* assistance to Ukrainians at the conclusion of the current conflict.<sup>66</sup> Although the Russia-Africa Summit declaration includes details of a *development* approach, their *defense* footprint has been more visible and more influential in gaining *diplomacy* with those who choose a *partnership* with them.

### **Approach: Defense**

#### Arms Sales

The most significant long-term investment that Russia has made on the continent comes from arms sales. They have a footprint in at least 21 African states and are the largest weapons exporter to Sub-Saharan Africa, with exports increasing 23% over the past four years. These sales have been used to influence military and political leadership, gaining *diplomacy* through a direct *defense approach*. Russia “has long centered on building influence to facilitate economic opportunity, obtain political support for Russian initiatives, and increase military presence on NATO’s southern flank.” Using its influence to disrupt the RBIO, Russia has blocked the appointment of sanctions monitoring officials at the UN by leaning on countries it sells arms to, such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic, Sudan, South Sudan, and Libya. This tacit show of support further plays into Russia’s domestic narrative that it is still relevant in a rapidly changing world and should not be seen as a power in decline.<sup>67</sup>

#### Private Military Contractors

Another pillar to the defense approach is the export of private military contractors such as the Wagner Group. Having developed into a key player in Africa the Wagner Group has been deployed to at least 6 African countries. Strategically, it sees the continent as one of the most attractive regions to operate due to “its many weak governments, abundant natural resources, colonial legacies, proximity to Europe, and 54 votes at the United Nations General Assembly.” Russia benefits from the Wagner Group by “deploy[ing] non-statutory forces to advance its geostrategic interests with limited financial or political costs,” although the group is often paid in cash and other natural resources such as gold by the de-facto leaders of a state.<sup>68</sup>

Another downside for African *partners* is that the Wagner Group lacks the deployed personnel necessary to “alter the security environment in African countries facing an insurgency.” What they do provide is sufficient forces “to help keep a regime in

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<sup>66</sup> Paul Stronski, “Russia’s Growing Footprint in Africa’s Sahel Region,” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, February 28, 2023, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2023/02/28/russia-s-growing-footprint-in-africa-s-sahel-region-pub-89135>.

<sup>67</sup> Parachini, John V., and Ryan Bauer. “What Does Africa Need Most Now: Russian Arms Sales or Good Vaccines?” *RAND Corporation*, November 17, 2021. <https://www.rand.org/blog/2021/11/what-does-africa-need-most-now-russian-arms-sales-or.html>.

<sup>68</sup> Joseph Siegle, “Russia’s Use of Private Military Contractors,” *Africa Center for Strategic Studies*, September 15, 2022, <https://africacenter.org/experts/russia-private-military-contractors>.

power—which is the primary means through which Moscow can leverage its geostrategic interests.”<sup>69</sup> With a stated geostrategic interest of providing security cooperation to combat *shared challenges*, Wagner’s actions on the continent are anything but beneficial to Africans. The group’s track record has not been great either, targeting civilians in more than half of all their operations since 2018” in the Central African Republic. If this wasn’t bad enough, the Wagner Group also operates alongside Mali’s armed forces, where its mercenaries “have targeted civilians in more than 70 percent of their activities, leading to a spike in civilian deaths that analysts say could fuel the ranks of Islamist insurgents.”<sup>70</sup>

### Naval Blockades

Shortly after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, second and third order effects on the African continent began to materialize. In addition to arms sales, grain exports make up the remainder of US \$20 billion in Russian trade with Africa. Another key exporter of grain to Africa is Ukraine, who at the beginning of the invasion was unable to operate its commercial ships safely in the Black Sea. This was due to a Russian naval blockade that prevented ship movements, as well as mines that were placed along sea lanes. This exacerbated an already dire situation in parts of Africa where food scarcity and famine runs rampant. Russia used propaganda to appear benevolent with its own grain contributions, as well as provide a narrative that food shortages were the result of the West’s attempts to impose a unipolar world order on the international community. Eventually Russia realized their involvement in the grain shortages would become more apparent to African states as the war continued and the food crisis worsened. This turned out to be too great a risk to their political and diplomatic credibility, with the blockade finally ended as a result.<sup>71</sup> Despite this, from the onset this tactic gave Russia more rather than less *diplomacy* due to its false narratives, providing further domestic *legitimacy* to justify their actions abroad.

### Military Drills

Russia’s membership in BRICS, which consists of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, allows it to demonstrate to a domestic audience that it retains relevancy in an evolving world order. Participation in summits and forums with member states is one way it supports this narrative, while conducting multilateral naval exercises is another. Held during the one year anniversary of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, Russia participated in naval drills alongside the PRC and South Africa off the coast of South Africa in the Indian Ocean. The timing and messaging for a domestic Russian audience was one of strength and unity beside two other BRICS partners. Named Mosi-2, this

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Elian Peltier, “Main Target of Russian Mercenaries in Africa Is Civilians, Report Says,” *New York Times*, August 30, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/30/world/africa/wagner-group-civilians-africa.html>.

<sup>71</sup> Basil Germond, “Ukraine war: Black Sea grain deal exposes Moscow’s long-term diplomatic game,” *The Conversation*, July 25, 2022, <https://theconversation.com/ukraine-war-black-sea-grain-deal-exposes-moscows-long-term-diplomatic-game-187544>.

exercise consisted of “two Russian naval vessels, three Chinese naval ships, and a South African naval frigate.” There were also reports of a Russian hypersonic Zircon missile test being conducted, but these claims were denied by Russia. While not a large naval exercise by US standards the conduct and timing of Mosi-2, coupled with the inability of Western governments to deter South Africa’s participation, hint at a broader decline of Western *diplomacy* in the Global South, a place where “Russia’s image and standing remain unaffected.”<sup>72</sup>

## Summary

Russia’s ability to employ a *defense* approach effectively in Africa has disrupted the RBIO by offering *no-strings attached* support to various regimes on the continent. This has gained Russia *diplomacy* and strengthened its foothold at the UN through non-alignment with the West. It uses this influence on the world stage, gaining abstentions and vetoes regarding its illegal invasion of Ukraine. Declarations from the 2019 Russia-Africa Summit gave a full spectrum approach to the continent. The primary and most pursued approach has been one of *defense* in the form of arms sales, private military contractors, naval blockades and other military drills. Russia can provide support to areas where the US and other Western states shy away from due to moral reasons, gifting Russia the very *opportunities* they need to maintain relevancy in an evolving world order.

When combined with its propaganda arm, Russia uses its support from African states to provide a domestic narrative for Russians that President Putin and his actions are legitimate on the world stage. Any notion of a decline in power or illegality of its actions in Ukraine is merely a manifestation of the West. To counter Russia’s growing influence on the continent the US must recognize that Russia’s *defense* approach “is a symptom of unaccountable regimes, [and] a key pillar of a U.S. response should be to further incentivize democratic processes on the continent—the strongest antidote to malign Russian influence.” This can be accomplished by providing institutional support through *development* and *defense* that aims to strengthen the “democratic institutions that can provide the domestic guardrails against autocracy and its vulnerability to external cooption. These include bolstering election management bodies, as well as strengthening African judiciaries, media, and professional militaries.”<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Sankalp Gurjar, “Russia-China-South Africa Naval Exercises & Indian Ocean Geopolitics,” *Geopolitical Monitor*, February 28, 2023, <https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/russia-china-south-africa-naval-exercises-indian-ocean-geopolitics>.

<sup>73</sup> Joseph Siegle, “Russia’s Use of Private Military Contractors,” *Africa Center for Strategic Studies*, September 15, 2022, <https://africacenter.org/experts/russia-private-military-contractors>.

## CH. 6: SUPPORTING DEVELOPMENT WITH DEFENSE

### Overview

At this point in the paper a common theme of *partnership* should be apparent. Much of the new US approach towards Africa is in *partnership with* African states, supporting their needs and wants to gain *diplomacy* on the continent. By supporting *development with defense*, the US can strengthen its *partnership with* African states by reducing the impacts of shared *challenges* such as terrorism, VEOs, and piracy. Done effectively, the removal of such *obstacles* can reduce risk for and boost the investments of a US *development* approach in-turn. Three US strategy documents from the *defense side* touch on this *partnership* further: the *National Defense Strategy* (NDS), the *Tri-Service Maritime Strategy* (TSMS), and the Joint Chiefs of Staff's *Joint Concept for Competing* (JCC). With a narrower *defense* focus in mind, we can then examine the current approach of the US in Africa with regards to capacity building and multilateral engagement. These efforts will be highlighted to support arguments in the subsequent chapter that more can and should be done with *soft power* if the US wants to strengthen its *diplomacy* with the continent in an evolving world order.

### Strategy

#### National Defense Strategy

The NDS released in October 2022 continues with the theme of *partnership* as it lays out part of its *defense* strategy for Africa. This is accomplished by “working by, with, and through our African *partners* to build states’ capability to degrade terrorist organizations and contribute broadly to regional security and stability.” With security cooperation as the main *defense* approach the US seeks to build capacity with “Allies, multilateral organizations, and regional bodies that share these [security] objectives.” The *US National Defense Strategy* aims to remove significant *obstacles* towards Africa’s growth and *development* by addressing shared *challenges*, such as the rise of terrorism and VEOs, which have the potential to harm both African *partners* and the US and its interests abroad.

Other obstacles to African *development* can be addressed by “build[ing] resilience in the face of destabilizing and potentially catastrophic transboundary challenges such as climate change and pandemics.” This cannot be accomplished alone, but rather through “mutually-beneficial alliances and *partnerships* [that] are our greatest strategic advantage – and are a center of gravity for this strategy.”<sup>74</sup> The NDS goes on to state that the US will support other interagency initiatives such as the disruption of the PRC and Russia’s malign activities in Africa.<sup>75</sup> This can range in nature from dual use development projects with *defense* applications, to private military contractors who commit human rights atrocities on the continent while propping up authoritarian regimes, as discussed in

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<sup>74</sup> Department of Defense, *2022 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2022), 2.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, 16.

Chapters 4 and 5. It is also notable that such a statement on strategic competition with the PRC and Russia made it into the NDS. Just two months after its release the US has attempted to avoid such statements, preferring instead to focus on *developing* its *partnership with* Africa for the betterment of the continent.

### Joint Concept for Competing

The February 2023 release of the Joint Chiefs of Staff's JCC acknowledges that US's adversaries are competing below the spectrum of armed conflict, gaining strategic advantage around the globe to "win without fighting," while increasing the risk that the US will "lose without fighting". By calling upon the Joint Force to "expand its competitive mindset and its competitive approaches" the Joint Chiefs have recognized that modern warfare is no longer played out tactically or with kinetic operations. No longer constrained by an operational area, these strategic influences require a whole of government approach to address. With a 3D approach the US aims to "gain influence, advantage, and leverage over other actors and ultimately achieve favorable strategic outcomes...in conjunction with its international partners".<sup>76</sup>

With the JCC, the Joint Chiefs are seeking ways to compete with and counter its adversaries' actions below the spectrum of armed conflict. This boils down to *diplomacy*, with efforts needed to regain and maintain America's strategic advantage around the world. In many regards the US is being outpaced by its adversaries, particularly in Africa and the Global South where Russia and the PRC have used their own *soft power* influences to increase non-alignment at the UN. If the aim is to "win without fighting" the US must focus on this *partnership with* the Global South. The best place to focus its attention today is in Africa. The most rapid way to do this is with its own *soft power* approach, where the USN is used as more than a deterrent force. Heeding the guidance of the JCC, the Joint Chiefs should capitalize on the USN's mobility and flexibility to reinforce a whole of government approach across the Diplomatic, Information, Military, and Economic (DIME) spectrum.<sup>77</sup>

### Tri-Service Maritime Strategy

The December 2020 TSMS is a joint publication by the US Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard that sees the PRC and Russia as "the two most significant threats to this era of global peace and prosperity." It acknowledges the current competition in the RBIO and "provides guidance to the Naval Service for the next decade to prevail across a continuum of competition—composed of interactions with other nations from cooperation to conflict." The TSMS primarily focuses on the *hard power* approaches the Naval Service is used to carrying out, however, it also touches on *soft power* themes that are valuable to employ and expand in *partnership with* Africa and the Global South.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff. *Joint Concept for Competing* (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2023), iii-iv.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, iii-ix.

<sup>78</sup> Department of Defense. *Advantage at Sea: Prevailing with Integrated All-Domain Naval Power* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2020), 1.



The call to “operate more assertively to prevail in day-to-day competition as we uphold the rules-based order and deter our competitors from pursuing armed aggression” was likely a testament to *hard power*.<sup>79</sup> This supports the construction of more ships and weapons systems in support of future naval combat in the Indo-Pacific of course. But under the light of increasing non-alignment at the UN, should it also be taken as a call to be assertive in the buildup of *diplomacy* around the world? The PRC begins to lose its competitive advantage if the US ramps up its *development* efforts in vital regions such as Africa. Likewise, Russia’s domestic narrative is diminished if the US becomes the *partnership* of choice for *defense* needs on the continent, which can only happen if they are willing to *partner* without *strings attached*. Day-to-day competition is not usually kinetic action; it is multiple actors jockeying for influence in key battlegrounds to win favor and gain support. This is something that a *hard power* approach cannot do, and one that no number of aircraft carriers positioned in the South China Sea will change.

### **Approach: Soft Power**

The current *defense* approach carried out by the US in Africa has already been one focused on the idea of *soft power*. Rather than numerous expensive warships patrolling Africa’s coast done in other regions of the world, there is more of a focus on capacity building and security cooperation. This can be seen in AFRICOM’s mission statement detailing how the US will work *with partners* on shared *challenges* such as transnational threats and malign actors, while strengthening African security forces capabilities. This approach is undertaken so that the US and Africans will be able to promote regional stability, security, and prosperity in *partnership* to support of their common interests. Recognizing that neither a *defense* or *development* approach will endure without the advancement of human rights and the rule of law, the US further uses these touchpoints to assist with the professionalization and ethical development of *partner* nation militaries.<sup>80</sup>

From a naval perspective, US Naval Forces Europe and Africa (NAVEUR-NAVAF) conducts multilateral exercises such as the express-series, which focus on “maritime domain awareness and law enforcement while promoting national and regional maritime security.” This is an area of focus that will be critical to ensuring the security and free movement of goods on the sea, a mainstay of the AfCFTA. The exercises Cutlass Express, Obangame Express, and Phoenix Express are carried out in East Africa, Western and Central Africa, and Northern Africa respectively. These exercises help build *partner* nation capabilities and coordination across Africa’s waters to “counter malign influence, aggression and activity along overlapping command seams and maritime regions.” They also provide a forum for NAVAF to share the tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) that allow for a more robust and responsive naval presence across the continent. More importantly, they act as another conduit to “reinforce a professional military ethos among African military partners,” which is essential towards supporting

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>80</sup> United States Africa Command, “What We Do,” accessed March 1, 2023, <https://www.africom.mil/what-we-do>.

openness and open societies while aiming to deliver democratic and security dividends as called out in the *US Strategy Toward Sub-Saharan Africa*.<sup>81</sup>

These naval exercises, along with others conducted by AFRICOM, provide a framework for the US to engage in *partnership with* African nations, with a focus on “increasing the capability and capacity [of these militaries] ...to serve as trained, equipped agents of stability and security in Africa.” In addition to capacity building, NAVAf forces provide maritime security and support counter-terrorism operations with air, surface, and subsurface assets to deter adversaries and enhance a common security environment. A key advantage of naval forces is the range of options they provide to *partner* nations, which includes humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, routine intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR), as well as maritime patrols and assistance combatting terrorists and VEOs. With a *soft power* approach focused on *partnership with* Africa, AFRICOM and NAVAf are able to support US *development* on the continent by removing *obstacles* and engaging on shared *challenges*.<sup>82</sup>

## Summary

Much of the current US *defense* strategy towards Africa today is focused on the common themes of *partnership* and working *with* African states. The NDS, JCC, and TSMS all highlight the importance of these strategic *partnerships* and should serve as a reminder that a robust *defense* approach with a heavy footprint on the continent is not necessary with a *soft power* approach. Heeding this call, the next chapter will outline how a shift in mindset is required for the employment of the US Joint Force to better achieve these aims, as well as how the USN can act as a versatile tool to gain and maintain *diplomacy* within strategic competition. The express-series exercises supported by NAVAf can open the door to partner nations and allow additional resources to flow into various African states, but only if the USN is used to capitalize on such an *opportunity*. History has shown the USN is capable of being a force multiplier, supporting a whole of government approach. Pursuing a *soft power* approach from the past will give the USN a greater strategic effect in gaining *diplomacy* in Africa and the Global South. While a *hard power* approach has been favored in the Indo-Pacific to date, it currently offers a less than favorable outcome for the US and ties up resources from being employed to greater effect elsewhere. The US must use the USN to its full strategic potential, through both *hard* and *soft power*. Otherwise, it will soon face the kinetic operations that may decimate it and lead to significant loss of life as tensions escalate with the PRC over Taiwan.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> White House, *U.S. Strategy Toward Sub-Saharan Africa* (Washington, DC: White House, 2022), 4.

<sup>82</sup> United States Africa Command, “U.S. Naval Forces Africa,” accessed March 1, 2023, <https://www.africom.mil/about-the-command/our-team/us-naval-forces-africa>.

<sup>83</sup> Mark F. Cancian, Matthew Cancian, and Eric Heginbotham, “The First Battle of the Next War: Wargaming a Chinese Invasion of Taiwan,” *Center for Strategic & International Studies*, January 9, 2023, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/first-battle-next-war-wargaming-chinese-invasion-taiwan>.



## CH. 7: RETHINKING DEFENSE: A SOFT POWER APPROACH

### Overview

Chapter 6 discussed how a *soft power* approach is being used by the US in Africa through AFRICOM and NAVAF. With the RBIO being contested by the PRC and Russia, each gaining influence in Africa and the Global South, it is perhaps time to expand upon this *soft power* approach to gain *diplomacy* in many of the forgotten regions of the world. The US can best showcase a desire for *partnership with* African states by ensuring constant visibility on the continent. This could be achieved, given enough time, with a tangible and measurable *development* approach as outlined in the US-Africa Leaders Summit. In the near term, however, it could also be achieved by supporting *development with defense*. By capitalizing on the flexibility and responsiveness of the USN while acknowledging the Navy's ability to support a *soft power* approach the US can improve its *diplomacy* in Africa and the Global South. Over a century ago US President Theodore Roosevelt realized the benefits of employing such a *soft power* approach. Following this example USN force deployments should be reframed with a strategic competition lens. Routing ships around Africa, rather than through the Suez Canal, is just one way this could be accomplished. By increasing the naval presence in the Gulf of Guinea and the Mozambique Channel, even if only transient in nature, the US can conduct strategic port calls to show its commitment to *partnership with* African states, gaining *diplomacy* on the continent now and into the future.

If Africa's *obstacles* and *challenges* from Chapter 2 are ignored in the same manner as the PRCs was allowed to rise, then there is a high likelihood that the continent will suffer, rather than profit from its true *potential*. Such suffering will lead to unnecessary loss of life and livelihood as the continent is succumb to its many *challenges*, presenting additional security concerns and potentially threatening US national security as a result. Recognizing that not all threats to the US are created equal, and not all priorities receive the same resources, this *soft power* approach seeks to address future *challenges* with forces that are available today. This can be accomplished by rethinking how assets are routed into theater, as well as which will have the biggest impacts gaining *diplomacy* in an age of strategic competition. A majority of USN assets go to the Indo-Pacific where the PRC is only considered to be a pacing challenge. This should not change. What should change is how the USN sends ships to their ultimate destination. The US should no longer ignore Africa and the Global South. After all, just a few decades ago the PRC was largely dismissed as a threat by the US before growing into the pacing challenge and the strategic competitor that it is today.<sup>84</sup>

When comparing the *defense* approach taken by the US in Africa with that of the Indo-Pacific, an apparent disconnect is present. The PRC has around 9,009 miles of coastline which falls under the responsibility of the US Pacific Fleet.<sup>85</sup> To address this

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<sup>84</sup> Council on Foreign Relations, "1949-2023 U.S.-China Relations," accessed March 1, 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/timeline/us-china-relations>.

<sup>85</sup> World Population Review, "Countries by Coastline 2023," accessed March 1, 2023, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/countries-by-coastline>.

pace challenge, “approximately 200 ships (to include five aircraft carrier strike groups), nearly 1,100 aircraft, and more than 130,000 Sailors and civilians” stand at the ready to act against any signs of aggression.<sup>86</sup> When it comes to Africa with its 18,950 miles of coastline, the USN has *one* ship, an Expeditionary Sea Base (ESB).<sup>87</sup> The USS Hershel “Woody” Williams (ESB 4) has a crew of 150 military and civilian mariners. It was commissioned in March 2020 and is touted as the first *warship* permanently assigned to AFRICOM.<sup>88</sup> Perhaps this mismatch in resources is due to the relative lack of a credible naval threat coming from Africa, not requiring the same dedicated presence the US employs elsewhere. It could also be attributed to antiquated thinking on how to best utilize the USN, one grounded in its performance during the Pacific War and informs a belief that the next great battle will come in the form of a *hard power* naval conflict in the South China Sea. Unfortunately, this overlooks part of the Navy’s history where it was effective using a *soft power* approach, one that maintained an image of strength through *defense* while spreading goodwill and building up the much-needed *diplomacy* sought today. It is recommended that future naval deployments take the geo-strategic environment into consideration when planning transits, port visits, and community relations projects. The implementation of these minor changes has the potential to pay dividends in gaining *diplomacy* on the world stage during a period of strategic competition.

### Soft Power in History

From 16 Dec 1907 to 22 Feb 1909 President Theodore Roosevelt dispatched 16 battleships to circumnavigate the globe. In doing so he was acknowledging that the USN could be leveraged across the DIME spectrum as a key instrument of national power, rather than merely as a tool for kinetic military action. During peacetime, hulls were painted white rather than gray as a sign of America’s strength and resolve. The global impacts of 16 battleships circumnavigating the globe produced strategic effects with 26 port calls across six continents during a 14-month deployment. In addition to providing ample opportunity for the USN to operate and train on its new ships, it showcased American sea power and its ability to provide security, humanitarian assistance, and economic injections worldwide.<sup>89</sup> With the realities of strategic competition playing out on the world stage the US must consider a *soft power* approach that seeks to add to the value chain of *diplomacy* with a low-cost naval solution.

### Refocusing the Approach

As the PRC and Russia make inroads with the Global South the US Joint Force must rethink its force deployments to capitalize on an era of strategic competition. A

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<sup>86</sup> U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, “About USINDOPACOM,” accessed March 1, 2023, <https://www.pacom.mil/About-USINDOPACOM>.

<sup>87</sup> Britannica, “Africa,” accessed March 1, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Africa>.

<sup>88</sup> U.S. Carriers, “USS Hershel Woody Williams: ESB 4,” accessed March 1, 2023, <http://www.uscarriers.net/esb4history.htm>.

<sup>89</sup> Naval History and Heritage Command, “The Great White Fleet,” January 3, 2022, <https://www.history.navy.mil/research/histories/ship-histories/the-great-white-fleet.html>.

decade ago, the USN spent over US \$180 million in ship husbanding services to non-Navy ports annually.<sup>90</sup> In December 2022 they expanded a 2020 contract to provide up to US \$2.1 billion over 10-years “for communications, force protection, general charter and hire, land transportation, utilities and other husbanding, management and integration services needed in 30 geographic regions.”<sup>91</sup> Out of this, Africa is slated to receive a whopping 1% of the contract as one of its regions. This excludes Djibouti, which adds another 7% for the continent.<sup>92</sup> That’s US \$2.1 million a year for the majority of the continent, or just over US \$55,000 *if* each of its 37 coastal states (38 including Djibouti) were to receive a share.<sup>93</sup> Conversely, a port visit by just one aircraft carrier and its over 5,000 personnel can add over US \$1 million *each day* to a local economy when these sailors are given the opportunity to “take liberty and spend their time and cash in ... stores, restaurants, clubs, hotels, tattoo parlors and more.”<sup>94</sup> Such contributions to a local economy can be significant, especially in underdeveloped regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa, where the GDP per capita in 2021 was only US \$1,633.20 (less than US \$5.00 a day!).<sup>95</sup>

The benefits do not end there for the host nation, as US military personnel “generously give back to the community in a variety of ways” whenever these port calls are made. A combination of targeted cash infusions (port visits can be strategically determined), community engagement, and volunteer opportunities that spread American goodwill should serve as the backbone of a *soft power* approach for the USN. Cash infusion aside, the more frequently port visits are made the more *opportunities* the US will have to strengthen its *partnership with* Africa. This provides additional pathways to gaining *diplomacy*, aiming to win over the hearts and minds of locals and leaving a visible and favorable mark on their communities.

A *soft power* approach can also be applied with minimal impact to current naval deployment schedules. A typical USN transit that originates in Norfolk, VA and is destined for anywhere east of Africa can save anywhere between 7 to 10 transit days by

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<sup>90</sup> Navy Supply Corps, “Standardizing Port Visit Requirements in the Pacific,” *Navy Supply Corps Newsletter*, April 22, 2013, <https://scnewsltr.dodlive.mil/Latest-Issue/Article-Display/Article/2611781/standardizing-port-visit-requirements-in-the-pacific>.

<sup>91</sup> Christine Thropp, “Navy Expands Providers Under \$2.1B Global Ship Husbanding Service Contract,” *GovConWire*, December 20, 2022, <https://www.govconwire.com/2022/12/navy-expands-providers-under-2-1b-global-ship-husbanding-service-contract>.

<sup>92</sup> Department of Defense, “Contracts for Oct. 1, 2020,” accessed March 1, 2023, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Contracts/Contract/Article/2369073>.

<sup>93</sup> United Nations, “With 38 Coastal, Island States, Africa Well Placed to Reap Benefits of Blue Economy,” February 8, 2020, <https://press.un.org/en/2020/sgsm19965.doc.htm#:~:text=Africa%2C%20with%2038%20coastal%20and,placed%20to%20reap%20these%20benefits>.

<sup>94</sup> Pacific Daily News, “Our View: Aircraft carrier visit more than just an economic boost,” September 26, 2018, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/editorials/2018/09/26/aircraft-carrier-visit-more-than-just-economic-boost-our-view/1429052002>.

<sup>95</sup> The World Bank, “GDP per capita (current US\$) – Sub-Saharan Africa,” accessed March 1, 2023, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD?end=2021&locations=ZG&start=2000>.

using the Suez Canal.<sup>96</sup> Acknowledging that any increased distance and time will cost the USN more money, in an era of strategic competition such tradeoffs must be made. They can also be accounted for by naval planners to maintain operational requirements downrange. For less than a two week investment the USN can undertake this *soft power* approach, making port calls of three to five days in any of the many coastal African ports. Regardless of which naval vessels are used for this approach, the US should gain *diplomacy* on the continent. On the high end an aircraft carrier would provide US \$3-5 million to local economies each transit alone. These port calls have the potential to impact around 30 coastal African states in the Gulf of Guinea and through the Mozambique Channel, spanning from Morocco to South Africa to Somalia. Additionally, an added naval presence in the region doubles as a deterrent for maritime security issues, providing reassurances to would-be investors that support the AfCFTA and the new US *development* approach.

The ability of the USN to deliver non-kinetic *soft power* effects during a period of strategic competition should warrant further exploration. Decisionmakers must keep in mind that “Maritime powers including the United States have long used navies to influence the behavior of allies and adversaries during times of peace.” This allows them to provide support and reassurance to partners, as well to provide an effective deterrence and credible threat to adversaries. If the goal of strategic competition is to “win without fighting” then the employment of the USN must be revisited. The US must find creative solutions to compete on the world stage with the tools it already has, influencing hearts and minds to gain the *diplomacy* which will be paramount towards maintaining influence in the RBIO.<sup>97</sup>

## Summary

To compete in an era of strategic competition it is recommended that the USN leverage its mobility and flexibility to transit areas of insecurity and visit those nations most in need, particularly in the Global South. The western and eastern coasts of Africa are a prime example of where an enhanced US naval presence would benefit local communities. This serves both to improve maritime security and reduce regional risk, promoting human development and bolstering foreign direct investment as a result. Port calls can be coordinated to provide economic injects that support many of the human security issues on the continent, and negotiations over these locations can be made with regional leadership. This can serve to advance US foreign policy interests, advancing issues such as free and open societies and improved human rights while ensuring set conditions are met prior any ships arrival. Additionally, humanitarian assistance can be provided and goodwill projects can be carried out with sailors and marines to the benefit of coastal African communities. Such actions reinforce the American image of selfless

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<sup>96</sup> Jean-Paul Rodrigue, "Geographical Impacts of the Suez and Panama Canals," accessed March 1, 2023, <https://transportgeography.org/contents/chapter1/emergence-of-mechanized-transportation-systems/suez-panama-canal-geography-impacts>.

<sup>97</sup> Jonathan Masters, “Sea Power: The U.S. Navy and Foreign Policy,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, August 19, 2019, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/sea-power-us-navy-and-foreign-policy>.

service for the betterment of all, one that should be seen around the world and not masked as a standby and reactionary force awaiting its demise in the Pacific.

History shows that a *soft power* approach will be far more effective in strategic competition, benefitting countless nations rather than concentrating attention and resources on a limited few. Each of these states has a vote at the UN, no matter how big or small, and their interests matter to maintaining a functional RBIO. Focusing on Africa, but equally applicable to the rest of the Global South, a *soft power* approach that supports investment and promotes *development* goals with the USN should be explored. The ability to provide maritime security, as well as stimulate the economy through these vital and visible human interactions allow the USN to best leverage its most valuable resource, its human element. Afterall, what better way to for America to restore a balance in the RBIO than by showcasing what a free and open society can accomplish for the betterment of all?



## CH. 8: CONCLUSION

Russia's invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 signaled a new era of conflict on the world stage, one that has played out strategically and shown the vulnerabilities of the RBIO. Both Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine and the PRC's treatment of Uyghur Muslims should not be tolerated. That the UN has been unable to enforce the basic tenets of a RBIO by holding nations accountable for their actions should sound an alarm to the risks of the West losing out in strategic competition. With a *no-strings attached* to their *defense* and *development* approaches both Russia and the PRC have increased Western non-alignment at the UN through their *partnerships with* Africa and the Global South. This has given them a level of *access and influence* that the US now aims to recreate, hoping to restore its position in the evolving world order.

The PRC established a foothold in Africa through its Belt and Road Initiative, capitalizing on a key *opportunity* to build *diplomacy*. They did this by taking a *development* approach that has provided critical infrastructure in the neglected areas of the world, places where the West tends to shy away from. Conversely, Russia gained *diplomacy* on the continent by taking advantage of its *challenges* with a *defense* approach. Their *no-strings attached* arrangements continue to bolster autocratic regimes and weaken democracies in already fragile states. Regardless of the approach taken, the days of Western neglect towards the Global South have come to an end. The US is now scrambling to gain *diplomacy* any way that it can, pursuing renewed *partnerships with* Africa to address both its *opportunities* and *challenges*.

The US tends to “think of being at peace or war... [but] our adversaries don't think that way.” It is this rational that has resulted in a US military tailored for *hard power* conflict, spending hundreds of billions of dollars annually to be capable of delivering kinetic effects around the globe on short notice. This force design is no longer valid with strategic competition, where Western adversaries seek to “alter the current international system, advance their national interests, gain strategic advantage and influence, and limit US and allied options.” There is no doubt that a capable and credible military is an effective *hard power* deterrent. However, if credibility and *partnership* on the world stage are the new objectives then a *soft power* approach is better suited to these aims. The USN is a flexible and agile force capable of supporting such a *soft power* approach. With a modest investment of just two weeks time, routing naval vessels around the south of Africa rather than transiting them through the Suez Canal, the US could jumpstart its relationship with coastal African states and strengthen this *partnership*. President Roosevelt reminds us that those who “speak softly and carry a big stick... will go far.” In a time of strategic competition there is no better way to carry out this *big stick diplomacy* than with the USN.<sup>98</sup>

Today, there is more and more evidence that “African countries see an opportunity to play the United States, China, and Russia... against one another.” These

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<sup>98</sup> Cathal J. Nolan, *Ethics and Statecraft: The Moral Dimension of International Affairs* (Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2004).

African states are “making various calculations based on their perception of what is right or wrong for them... [and] the real debate to be had is not whether African countries control their own diplomatic destiny, but how their agency, which is ever present, is being exercised.”<sup>99</sup> With *AGENDA 2063* the AU has a plan to develop itself into a global player and exercise this agency by turning its *potential* into *opportunity*. However, Africa will still require *partnership* with external actors to achieve this vision. Recognizing this fact, the strategic effects of being present in such a vital region with a *soft power* approach, one where the US is vying for *diplomacy*, cannot be undersold. The time has come to showcase American goodwill and reaffirm a US commitment to *partnership with* Africa, capitalizing on its human element. Afterall, it is this human element that truly sets the US apart from its adversaries and should be the key focus of any US engagement around the world.

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<sup>99</sup> Ebenezer Obadare, “A New Scramble for Africa?,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, May 2, 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/new-scramble-africa>.

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