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Times they are A-changin': Africa at the Centre Stage of the new (II) Liberal World Order

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Amid a renewed Global Power competition, Africa's abundance of natural resources, its exponential demographic development, and the current expansion of militant Islamist groups in the region, increases its strategic importance and pushes the continent to the center stage of international relations. This brief explores Africa's position in this changing global context and examines major actors' presence in, and stance towards, Africa on the global arena. It does this while arguing that as the competition for influence and access to resources in Africa is intensified, Western actors need to become clearer about their interests, avoid ill-perceived imposition of conditionalities – unless they are willing to risk access and follow them through – and adopt a case-by case approach to states on a continent as diverse as Africa.

For decades, Africa has been considered the continent apart, a region distant from the rest of the world, often talked about as a passive victim of colonization, poverty and famine and scene for ethnically tainted armed conflicts, eccentric dictators, and more recently a new breeding ground for expanding violent extremism groups. Yet, while Africa certainly is disproportionately affected by armed conflicts, poverty and violent extremism, the continent is also hosting the largest reserve of natural resources in the world, with 30 percent of the critical minerals that power the world, the importance of which Russia's invasion of Ukraine only has served to underline.

Africa's booming demographic development will make the continent the biggest market in the world with over a quarter of the world's population in just 30

years, illustrating its socio-economic importance, while from a diplomatic perspective, the region holds three non-permanent seats in the UN Security Council and represents one of the largest regional voting groups with 28 percent. Far from distant, the current global power competition and Africa's rising strategic importance pushes the continent to the center stage of the world order, permanently debunking the myth of Africa as a region apart.

This brief explores Africa's position in this changing global context and examines major actors' presence in, and stance towards, Africa on the global arena. It does this while arguing that as the competition for influence and access to resources in Africa is intensified, Western actors need to become clearer about their interests, avoid ill-perceived imposition of conditionalities – unless they are willing to risk access and follow them through – and adopt a case-by case approach to states on a continent as diverse as Africa.

Notwithstanding such an approach, the current global competition for resources is likely to reinforce the recent authoritarian wave that Africa is experiencing. In a competitive global market, incumbent governments will gain leverage and reduce agency from the populations. This situation may undermine possibilities for common approaches towards peace, security, and stability in the long-term, and consequently also hamper socio-economic relationships. Therefore, Western actors, and in particular the EU due to its geographical closeness, also need to maintain support for local civil societies and 'agents of change' stimulate creative thinking about representation, democracy and accountability, while avoiding resorting to

imposition. In sum: carefully balance the need for short-term access with long-term collaborations and recognize that no 'one-size-fits-all' can be applied to a region of 54 states.

NO WORLD APART

It has been a Western intellectual project – from colonial administrators to Cold War International Relations scholars – to present Africa as a distant and marginalized corner of the globe – 'shielded from the outside world, as though it were another planet', in the words of one former French colonial governor.¹ This imagery nonetheless better reflects the prejudices of its framers than the reality, for African polities and peoples have been no less embedded in the international system than their counterparts elsewhere. European colonialism and its legacy have arguably ensured this even more intensely in the contemporary era than in many other parts of the world – albeit more often based on profoundly asymmetrical and extractive relationships.²

Even within this context, though, it is difficult to make a case for Africa's insignificance within global politics. Angola, for example, became a major Cold War battleground during the 1970s and 1980s when Cuban troops intervened in support of the rebel group (and later governing party) Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (MPLA) in their civil war conflict with the US-backed União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola (UNITA). The authoritarian governments of Mengistu Haile Mariam of Ethiopia (1977–91) and Siad Barre of Somalia (1969–91) skillfully played Washington and Moscow off against one another, leveraging financial, military and diplomatic support both for their regimes and to fund their efforts during the 1977–8 war for control of eastern Ethiopia ('Ogaden').

Contemporary African states have, for the most part, been incorporated into the international system on deeply unequal terms – in particular through colonialism and its legacy, but also in relations with non-Western or non-colonial actors who have maintained the inequality. Yet this does not mean that they are - or have been – weak

or marginal players as a result. Many African governments and politico economic entrepreneurs have secured agency domestically and globally precisely through 'mobilizing resources . . . from their (possibly unequal) relationship with the external environment'.³

Africa was not, therefore, peripheral to Cold War geopolitics. The Cold War nonetheless provided a macro-framework which structured African states' relationships with the major powers and vice versa. It provided Western and Soviet/Soviet-aligned states with a central rationale and narrative for supporting or undermining African governments or rebel movements – just as it opened up considerable space for certain regimes or insurgencies to promote themselves within these narratives. However, the collapse of the USSR – and, with it, the end of the Cold War – dramatically altered the global environment and African states' relationships with major powers. Moscow's clients across the continent lost a powerful patron and ally, while Washington felt much less pressure to bolster its own African partners in the absence of the Soviet threat. Many African leaders and governments who had deftly exploited Cold War politics found themselves, in the words of Ugandan president Yoweri Museveni, 'orphaned' in the new world – though, as Museveni added, 'a little neglect would not be so bad'.⁴ However, the time of 'neglect' is now over, and Africa finds itself again at the center stage of a global power competition.

CHINA: BUILDING ROADS AND PALACES IN AFRICA

Chinese interest in Africa is preceding the current global power competition, historically with the ideological Mao diplomacy, and more recently with a long-term focus on infrastructure projects on the continent, most aptly illustrated in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) from 2013. The latter has seen 46 African states signing onto the BRI, representing over 1 billion people. Yet, China's investments in Africa started well before the BRI, with the founding of the Forum of China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2000, leading the way for the establishment of approximately 10,000 Chinese enterprises in Africa, resulting in one million Chinese citizens making Africa their permanent home since then. Bilateral trade between

China and Africa has been rising 35% in 2021 from only a year earlier to \$254 billion, making China's plan to surpass the EU as Africa's biggest trade partner by 2030 not seem too farfetched.⁵

Billion-dollar loans from China's state-backed banks to African governments for the construction of roads, ports or airports by Chinese state-owned enterprises, often with reimbursement linked to the extraction of natural resources have raised concerns about a Chinese "debt-trap diplomacy" in Africa. In the two decades from 2000 to 2020 China lent \$160bn to African governments, of which almost two-thirds were for infrastructure, priding itself to have a "demand-driven" approach. Yet, while some observers say that there is little claim to the debt-trap accusations, China's ruthless self-interest and opaque deals have certainly allowed for corruption and assisted authoritarian African leaders to stay in power.⁶ The "deal of the century" which was signed in 2007 with then DRC president Kabila, swapping mining rights for infrastructure projects, was for example reported to include millions of dollars for the Kabila family while providing only marginal benefits for the country itself. The recent "Congo Hold-up" investigation,⁷ which showed the Kabila family 'siphoning' at least \$138 million from state coffers during a decade, reinforces such an interpretation.⁸

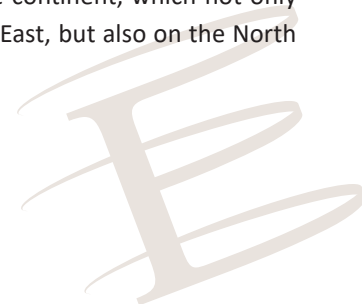
Finally, China's "palace-diplomacy", which includes lavishing African rulers with personal benefits, such as building luxury palaces, is another means by which China ties African leaders closer. The \$22 million presidential palace in Burundi, one of the poorest countries in the world, and a six-story \$100 million parliament building in Zimbabwe are cases in point here.⁹ China has also made sure to buttress African leaders' positions before elections, increasing both funding and construction speed of infrastructures in election years. African leaders' home provinces receive approximately 70% more than those provinces without leaders, a figure which increases to 134% during election years, thus clearly showing how personal political considerations are part of the bilateral engagements.¹⁰ China's relatively slow and steady economic engagement on the African continent has

kept its broad presence under the radar, contrary to Russia, whose financial situation does not allow for similar types of economic collaborations, yet whose focus on arms trade has earned its dealings with the continent the epithet of "Kalashnikov diplomacy".

RUSSIA'S KALASHNIKOV DIPLOMACY & PLAUSIBLE DENIABILITY

Russia's relationship with Africa is just as China's not a new feature, yet it has intensified substantially following Russia's invasion in Georgia in 2008, the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and more recently, the invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Russia's 'pariah-status', exemplified by the latest and most onerous sanctions regime by Western states, which has included a freezing of Russian assets and banks while locking Russia out of the international payments system has seen the last two decades' socio-economic development rapidly being undone. In search for new markets and spheres of influence, Africa is thus witnessing a renewed interest which is intensifying as Russia's global position is declining.

The build-up of Russia's interest on the continent was illustrated in the first Russia-Africa summit in Sochi in October 2019, which gathered 43 African Heads of States, a significant majority of the continent's states. The same meeting produced economic deals for a value of over \$13 billion¹¹ and bilateral defense contracts between Russia and more than 30 African countries, mainly regarding the supply of military armament and equipment.¹² These deals follow the larger trends of increased trade between sub-Saharan Africa and Russia, which saw a 156% increase in the decade between 2010-2019, and confirms Russia's position as the largest weapons supplier for African states with 44% of recorded arms imports in 2017-2021.¹³ The latter trend contributing to Russia's unflattering, yet strategic, "Kalashnikov Diplomacy" reputation.¹⁴ Regional powers Nigeria and Ethiopia officialized military collaboration deals in the summer of 2021,¹⁵ and exemplifies the geographical scope of Russia's engagement on the continent, which not only extends itself from West to East, but also on the North – South axis.



Russia's influence on the African continent is thus dominated by its military presence: both the official, state-based engagements, and the complementing unofficial private relations. The latter is most visibly illustrated by the Russian-owned network of mercenaries, called Wagner. Understood as more than a traditional Private Military Company (PMC), and less than a direct government owned tool of influence, Wagner is the epitome of 'plausible deniability': allowing Russia to influence without accountability in several African states. Wagner's preference for involvement in weak and conflict affected states with exploitable natural resources where it can prop up leaders in fragile positions or fight non-state armed actors, combined with its looting and killing of civilians have rightfully earned it a callous reputation.¹⁶ Headed by Russian business man Prigozhin, surnamed the Putin's chef due to his catering contracts with Kremlin, who up until September this year denied the group's existence, Wagner has managed to play above its weight in several African states.¹⁷ Present in Libya, Sudan and briefly in Mozambique, the group has marginalized Western actors in states like Central African Republic and Mali, where European Training Missions have suspended their operational activities due to Wagner's involvement with the national armed forces,¹⁸ while it rapidly moved into former French military camps in Mali, following the counter terrorism operation Barkhane's withdrawal.

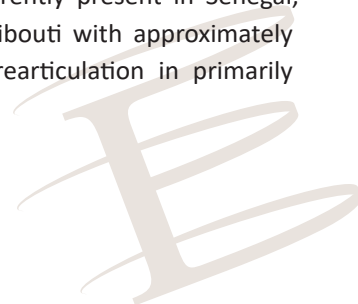
Russia's influence on the continent is also conducted through massive campaigns of disinformation on social media and via fake news' channels, some of which are financed by Prigozhin's network. Research has identified three main types of narratives broadcasted through these outlets in Mali, but which are likely to be applicable to other states as well: a first, positive narrative which praises the Russian collaboration and the Russian 'instructors', as Wagner mercenaries are labelled by host governments. A second narrative concerns Western partners and specifically France, depicting them and their interventions in negative terms, often termed 'neocolonial'. Finally, a third type of stories are those glorifying the most recent African leaders in states where Wagner or Russia is heavily involved – or plan to increase its influence, such as Mali, CAR and Burkina Faso – often associating the leaders to

iconic historical characters, such as Che Guevara.¹⁹ These types of disinformation campaigns are also examples of Russia managing to play above its weight with relatively limited means. Yet, while increasing, Russia's presence in Africa remains limited in comparison to China and Western actors.

FRANCE: YOU CAN CHECK OUT ANYTIME YOU LIKE, BUT YOU CAN NEVER LEAVE

By far the most visible European country on the African continent, France has a long, and often complicated relationship with many of its former colonies, most recently illustrated by the diplomatic breakdown of relations between Mali and France in early 2022.²⁰ Following decades of (in)famous *FrancAfrique* relationships on economic, military, political and personal levels - seen as neo-colonial and permissive to corruption by critics - more recent French Presidents have attempted to redefine and transform the relationship between the former colonial power and the continent to a more equal, transparent and accountable rapport, yet have so far only had limited success. While Macron's efforts to restore cultural artefacts²¹ and acknowledge France's role in the Rwandan genocide²² have been welcomed as building blocks for new relations, his attendance of Chad's authoritarian leader Déby's funeral in 2021 was a step back, and a stark reminder of France's strategic support of certain non-democratic regimes on the continent, including Rwanda's Kagame.

France has been most visible in Africa through its military presence with 89 military interventions in Africa between 1960-2015.²³ Six operations have been initiated since the beginning of the 2000's, with the regional counter terrorism operation Barkhane deployed to the Sahel region being France's longest external military operation since the war in Algeria. As Barkhane left Mali in August 2022 after 9 years, widespread anti-French sentiments have made France's future military presence in the region subject to both internal and external debates. Whereas predisposed forces are currently present in Senegal, Ivory Coast, Gabon and Djibouti with approximately 3,000 troops, Barkhane's rearticulation in primarily



Niger, Chad and Mauretania makes the total number of French troops in Africa nearly 6,000,²⁴ similar to the figure deployed by the US and Wagner.²⁵ The French President's announcement in July 2022 of a "rethink" of France's military presence in Africa²⁶ has nevertheless already led to a wish for a smaller and less visible presence, especially in the Sahel region, where demonstrations against France's military presence in Niger and more recently anti-French demonstrations, following the latest coup in Burkina Faso, confirm France's complex status.

France's perceptible role in Africa has made it the primary target of Russia's disinformation campaigns and an easy scapegoat for populist (transitional) governments on the continent who fail to deliver security to their own populations. Within the EU and behind closed doors, France is at times also drawing criticism for its driving role on the continent, while there is a palpable fear from other European actors of being associated with the recent anti-French sentiments in the Sahel region. Yet, whereas there are reasons to question some of France's foreign policy decision on the continent at large, there is also a need to acknowledge that no other European state is capable of intervening as quickly in case of crisis, willing to spend similar financial resources for operations, let alone sacrifice troops, in Africa. As France is unlikely to want to leave the African continent, and since the EU wants to increase its engagement in the region, a balance should be struck whereby France 'curbs its enthusiasm', while the EU, rather than hide behind it, intensify its visibility to avoid accusations about being a French instrument, and channels France's drive.

THE EU'S COMPLEX, COMPREHENSIVE AND FRAGMENTED APPROACH

The EU's presence in Africa is characterized by its own identity traits as a supranational regional body: it is fragmented with a multitude of different types of presences, it is complex and bureaucratic because of the various organs and funding schemes involved, and it is comprehensive, covering a broad bandwidth of activities. As Africa's main trading partner, the EU has numerous economic partnerships, like the five Economic Partnership

Agreements (EPAs) applied with 14 sub-Saharan countries in Africa, or the €212 billion worth of stocks making the EU the first supplier of foreign direct investment (FDI) to Africa in 2018, well ahead of the US with €41 billion or China with €39 billion.²⁷ Even in Official Development Assistance (ODA) and humanitarian aid, the EU represents the most important external actor, with 55.2% of all ODA in 2019, with the US as the second most important provider, contributing less than half of that with 22.7%.²⁸

Despite the EU's prominent place when it comes to trade, ODA and FDI, the EU is well aware of China's steadily increasing influence on the African continent. In a bid to rival the latter's Belt and Road initiative and offer alternatives to African partner states, the EU launched the Global Gateway at the end of 2021, an initiative focused on transport, digital, climate, energy, education and research amongst others.²⁹ Just a week before the long-awaited AU-EU summit in 2022, the EU earmarked over €150 billion of the €300 billion budget of the Global Gateway project between 2021–2027 for the African continent, showcasing the importance of the region for the EU.³⁰ Whereas the Gateway initiative is directly targeting Chinese influence on the transport and infrastructure sector, the EU has also attempted to strengthen its credibility as a security actor more broadly through the recently adopted Strategic Compass, outlining the plan for strengthening the EU's security and defence policy by 2030 and to enhance its influence in partner countries.

One of the instruments through which the EU is supposed to act and influence is via the new European Peace Facility (EPF). Launched in 2021 the EPF - an off-budget financial instrument - has for the first time allowed the EU to fund lethal equipment, military training and infrastructure in partner countries where the EU is engaged in capacity building. Long lamented as a considerable deficit by EU officials in military training missions, the EPF has thus made it possible to deliver integrated support packages in partner states within and beyond Africa, something that its predecessor, the African Peace Facility was unable to do. A hotly debated initiative within the EU, given the tensions between the EU's wish to promote liberal

values and its efforts to maintain influence in competition with other global security actors,³¹ the EPF's €5 billion budget for the period of 2021-2027 has so far also been used to maintain support to African-led Peace Support Operations, most notably the AU's mission in Somalia: AMISOM. A €600 million Assistance Measure has been earmarked in this regard to the AU between 2022-2024. Support packages of military equipment have been given to specific EUTM missions, including EUTM Mali and the newly established EUTM Mozambique, providing the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) operations with more leverage in their partner states, but also provoking questions about the risks related to providing lethal equipment to militaries susceptible of working with Wagner.³² In the case of Mali, however, the EU quickly interrupted EPF for the FAMA, underlining the importance of its safeguard measures.

Africa is the continent where the EU has deployed most CSDP missions, with 8 missions currently underway. Four military operations in Somalia, Central African Republic, Mali and Mozambique and three civilian missions, two of which are complementing the EUTM missions in Mali and Somalia, covering institution building and training of the internal security forces, such as the police, gendarmes, and customs. New CSDP operations have been discussed for Niger, Burkina Faso and the Gulf of Guinea, yet given the recent coup in Burkina, it seems unlikely to be established in the immediate future. The military CSDP operations have met with considerable difficulties in Mali and CAR following Wagner's establishment in the two states, evoking questions about the future of the operations. In contrast, the latest military operation, developed in Mozambique in 2021, has a narrower, more attainable mandate, with the aim to train a fixed number of companies in the navy and the special forces, yet no broader institution building of the security sector. Whether this type of short-term, limited and more pragmatic operations are the future for EU's training missions is up for discussions, yet the Strategic Compass envisions a reinforcement of the CSDP missions and operations through more rapid, flexible decision-making processes and agility in their conduct, a development which will be welcomed by officers in the field.

FROM "SHITHOLE RHETORIC" TO DIPLOMATIC VISITS: US STEPPING UP THE GAME

US's presence and influence on the African continent is relatively broad but remains limited in scope in comparison to the EU's comprehensive approach. The Trump legacy on US-Africa relations is bitter, as Trump's characteristic lack of tact and decency was particularly felt on the African continent in both words and action, states which he infamously referred to as "shit-hole countries", (debatable if this epithet is more or less insulting than Brussels' "hell-hole" label).³³ US foreign direct investment in Africa decreased from \$50.4 billion in 2017 to \$43.2 billion in 2019, while US-Africa trade fell from a high of \$100 billion in 2008 to \$41 billion in 2018, thus far from living up to the Trump administration's "Prosper Africa" plan.³⁴

US military engagement on the continent was highly mediatized and criticized following the killing of four American soldiers during a Special Forces operation in Niger in 2017, leading to discussions about a reduced military presence on the continent, which nevertheless did not seem to materialize.³⁵ Diplomatically, Trump's travel ban affecting seven African states, Somalia, Sudan, Libya, Chad, Tanzania, Nigeria and Eritrea, not only damaged bilateral relations with aforementioned states, but US' reputation on the continent more broadly.³⁶ From a development perspective, Trump's decision to block federal funding for United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) promoting family planning and NGOs that provide abortions and counselling for terminations of pregnancies (following a reinvigoration of the Mexico City Policy), also implied long-term negative consequences for women's living conditions in African states.³⁷ Militarily, economically, diplomatically and from a development perspective then, the US-Africa relations were at a low point during the Trump presidency, even though some African leaders embraced his lack of interest.

The Biden administration has so far made significant efforts to reverse the Trump legacy with Foreign Secretary Anthony Blinken making an unprecedented three visits to

the continent in just 10 months.³⁸ The new US Strategy towards sub-Saharan Africa from 2022 is also making it clear that Africa is a priority region for the US, not only as a scene in which to counter influence from China and Russia, but also because of its increased strategic importance from an economic and demographic perspectives. Unsurprisingly therefore, the new administration has reversed plans to draw down its military presence and decided to maintain the US current 27 operational outposts. AFRICOM's new theater strategy outlines continued military collaborations to degrade VEOs and strengthen African partners with new investments, including funding military construction projects on the continent for more than \$330 million between 2021 and 2025, with long-term 20-year plans for the development of Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV), ISR and drone warfare capabilities.³⁹

US foreign assistance for sub-Saharan Africa remains on the last decade's funding levels, with around \$7.7 billion annually.⁴⁰ Priority areas include global health and fostering peace and security. Linked to the former, the Biden administration also rescinded the Mexico City Policy, unlocking funding for family planning and abortion rights, (a measure which ironically has not managed to reverse anti-abortion laws in the US itself).⁴¹ As the humanitarian crisis in the horn of Africa is intensifying, the US provided an additional \$1.3 billion in humanitarian aid in July this year,⁴² thereby maintaining focus on the region where it also has invested significant military efforts to combat violent Islamist extremists. More broadly, with Trump gone from office, the US has made it clear that Africa is of strategic importance for the country, specifically in relation to its competition for influence with China and Russia.

WHAT'S NEXT? AGENCY, AUTHORITARIANISM AND ACCESS

As external actors' interest in Africa is intensifying, two broader developments are currently playing out on the continent, both of which are shaping, and will continue to shape, relationships within Africa and beyond: the increase of militant Islamist violence and the democratic decline.

Africa has seen a 300% increase of militant Islamist violence on the continent over the past decade. Since 2019, violent events linked to the militant groups have doubled, with over 95% of the increase being located in the Western Sahel region together with Somalia.⁴³ As both local and external attempts to stop this expansion have failed so far, negotiations with jihadist groups seem to be unavoidable at some point in the near future. Local communities in the Sahel have already attempted ad-hoc discussions with diverse results, yet national-level deals currently seem to be out of reach for various reasons.⁴⁴ While a different context, lessons from Afghanistan's negotiations with the Taliban have however shown that the future for women, access to education, culture and for non-Muslims is likely to be dark. African leaders need to consider this in potential future discussions, yet as Alex Thurston points out 'local solutions' might involve a significant islamisation, illiberal perspectives and illiberal rhetoric.⁴⁵ External actors will therefore also have to envision what type of relationship – if any – that they could build with such actors, lest they should be able to do so.

Authoritarian actors more broadly are also multiplying on the continent, with the current democratic decline being accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021, only 8 sub-Saharan African countries were considered free by the Freedom House Index annual report. Postponed and rigged elections, restrictions of media, brutal repressions of demonstrations (most recently in Chad),⁴⁶ and circumvention of presidential term limits have become the norm rather than the exception in many states, with authoritarian and semi-authoritarian rulers more or less skillfully convincing foreign actors to maintain financial support and investments by paying lip service to democratic norms.⁴⁷ While many Western states officially have supported democratic governance through electoral support measures, they have also undermined the former when accepting the results of rigged elections and continuing partnerships after coup d'états, earning them accusations of hypocrisy. At the same time, if Western actors withdraw their support or suspend their collaborations, Russia or China are keen to take over, thus decreasing possibilities for both short and long-term influence and access.

In the face of increasing competition from non-Western actors on the continent during the current authoritarian wave, the space for influence from pro-democratic Western actors has thus continuously diminished. The recent energy crisis - putting especially European states in an unfamiliar situation of demand for access - in combination with African rulers being fed-up with lessons on human rights and good governance from former colonial powers, seems to tip the balance between a value- and an interest-based approach in favor of the latter. The new Strategic Compass, and instruments like the EPF and more flexible CSDP operations, are signs of this. So is the reluctant co-existence of EUTM and French military operations in the same states as Wagner, because in spite of sanctions, vocal discontent and the designation of red lines being crossed, France did not really leave Mali voluntarily and EUTM remains engaged even if operational activities are suspended. Sustaining relationships to maintain access and influence trump thus the desire to move out when Wagner or Russia enter.

Yet, by maintaining relationships – however superficial they may be - in the face of authoritarianism and competition - Western states can, in addition to keeping access, also continue to observe and report possible human rights abuses by mercenaries, state forces and violent extremist organizations in states like Mali or CAR. While such human rights reports and shaming exercises appear to have little short-term effects, in the long term they are likely to become a nuisance for the host government and may serve to increase pressure for more accountability. Yet, neo-conservative speeches with imperialist and racist undertones, like Joseph Borrell's earlier this fall, are only likely to undermine whatever influence Western actors could have, in addition to hollowing out their credibility more broadly.⁴⁸

African leaders have an increasingly broad range of external partners to choose between and Western actors need to carefully balance their approaches to engage with the continent's states. Approaches in plural, as it is a continent of 54 states with significantly different economic, cultural, and political contexts. Adopting a "one-size fits all approach" to engage with states on the continent is

therefore doomed to fail. So is any attempt to impose hypocrite or unrealistic token conditionalities which can be outmaneuvered by non-Western actors. This is not to say that Western actors should abandon support for democratic governance and human rights, but rather than impose formal structures, back local initiatives to more equal divisions of power while stimulating creative and critical thinking. Such an approach will increase Western states' attractiveness as partners, without losing sight of long-term objectives like peace, security, development and stability for African populations.

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