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GUEST EDITOR'S NOTE

EARL CONTEH-MORGAN

Africa has often been the focus of contradictory attention that has oscillated between the labels of a physical obstacle to travel between Europe and the East, a geostrategic continent, a collection of failed or failing states, to now a geo-economically important continent with potentially viable markets because of its many and rapidly growing economies endowed with strategic minerals. With the dawn of the 21st century and the reality of strategic rivalry between the United States and China, coupled with the global involvement of middle and emerging powers in particular Russia, Japan, Turkey, Iran, and India many issues are coming to the fore. Africa is now experiencing a new “scramble” for its strategic minerals, the buying power of its growing middle class, its significant choke points, its diplomatic importance and growing influence in international organizations, among others. This does not mean that the great potential of African states along with their promises do not lack challenges. In fact there are perennial challenges such as existential insecurities in food, health, and political rivalries which generate refugees and migration. The continent contains states that are confronted by violent extremism and terrorism; many are still plagued by bad governance, the structural violence of corrupt institutions that generate relative economic deprivation and the insecurity that comes with the abundance of small arms or light weapons, among many other problems.

This special issue on Africa and the great, middle, and emerging powers is focused on underscoring both the promises and challenges that come with the continent's interactions with the U.S., China, India, Iran, and Russia. It also

includes analyses of topics like migration, China in Africa, implications of the U.S. and Chinese presence on the continent, and the roles of India and China in commercial transactions. It is comprised of both articles and commentaries on various topics involving external powers and their differing policy postures aimed at: (i) promoting their geostrategic and economic interests; (ii) containing radical Jihadism and other forms of violence that could harm their commercial interests; and (iii) forging closer military, economic, and diplomatic ties with African states.

While the prospects for Africa seem to be growing brighter, the continent is also plagued by the “push” and “pull” of migration as the most marginalized are making the perilous journey to Europe because of a lack of opportunities for them in the continent. Joseph Bangura’s article examines current African migration by situating it within the context of historical ties between Europe and the Americas since the 15th century. Second, he also views African migration today through factors such as the globalization of labor, the push of skilled Africans, severe unemployment and frequent social upheavals, among others. Bangura argues that African migration simultaneously deprives the continent of highly skilled professionals and increases the professional pool of receiving countries.

In a world that is becoming increasingly radicalized, many parts of Africa are plagued by terrorism. This has provoked the response of great powers like the U.S. and China to try and contain the violence of terrorism in order to protect their interests. Hayat Alvi’s article focuses on terrorism in the continent and argues that violent extremist organizations see Africa as a safe haven from which to launch their operations. The reasons for this is the fact that it is home to failing or failed states, the deterioration of human security related to climate change, natural disasters, and perennial high levels of poverty within groups. She concludes by saying that good governance, improvement in human security in the areas of income, health, governance, and overall basic human needs are the solution to violent extremism.

The presence of civil conflicts in some African countries has attracted many peacekeeping operations in the continent. Angela Thompson’s article examines the scope and complexity of peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts in the continent. She links these efforts to the role of European imperialism and Africa. She however goes on to argue that there is a distinct difference between imperialism and current peacebuilding efforts within the continent. She even suggests that peacekeepers and peacebuilders could enhance their effectiveness by drawing lessons from the imperial past and in particular by enhancing civic participation in peacebuilding and rethinking the way peacebuilding in Africa is viewed. Her article delves into a nuanced examination of peacebuilding by linking it to undertones of imperialism while also distancing it from the histor-

ical phenomenon. It is a sophisticated critique of peacebuilding that provokes deeper thoughts about the movers and shakers of international interventions in Africa.

Africa has moved from marginalized to geostrategic importance and has therefore attracted the attention of great and emerging world powers. Conteh-Morgan's analysis specifically focuses on the presence of the two largest economic powers, the U.S. and China, and their militarization and securitization of the continent. While the U.S. focuses largely on containing violent extremism, China focuses on economic engagement and more recently on peacekeeping and military security to protect its economic interests. Conteh-Morgan examines the role of both powers in the militarization and securitization of the continent within the context of rivalry and cooperation. The common objective is to protect their vested interests on the continent and their overall national interests.

Fodei Batty specifically examines the political economic role of China in Africa. He argues that while China may be contributing to economic development in the continent, it nonetheless could undermine its interests because of its non-conditional foreign policy approach to incumbent regimes whether authoritarian or democratic. He specifically argues that China's policy of ignoring corruption, human rights violations, and the like, could eventually stir up opposition to its presence in Africa and be counter-productive to its national interests in Africa. He further argues that China's contribution to development will create a middle class that is likely to revolt against China's engagement with African dictators and approach to investments in the continent.

Jeffrey Lefebvre's article is a coherent and rigorous analysis of Iran's engagement with Africa from the time of the Shah to the present era of U.S. sanctions against the country. His analysis is detailed and underscores the efforts by Iran to widen its diplomatic ties with African states. His chronological sketch of Iran-Africa relations covers the periods of diplomatic offensive by Iran in Africa, from its continued search for allies in order to escape isolation and sanctions, to the current era of Saudi-Iranian rivalry. Iran's foray into Africa during these periods was either to contain communism during the Cold War, create a status quo friendly to the Islamic Republic or enhance its national and international security in the face of hostility by the great powers like the U.S. and Europe.

The commentary by Cyril Obi, underscores the role of oil as a strategic resource in China-Africa relations. Oil diplomacy and investments define and shape a great deal of China's engagement with the continent, and especially with oil-producing countries like Nigeria. He argues that contrary to the view that China's relations with Africa constitute a 'new colonial scramble for resources,'

Obi instead offers the alternate view that the African elite in petro-states are in fact in a position to shape relations with China that either will or will not contribute to national or continental development.

Wioletta Nowak in her commentary compares and contrasts the role of China and India in Africa between 2008 and 2017. She argues that China has surpassed India in its economic engagement with Africa due largely to the 2008 financial crisis. She comments that while commercial relations by the two powers with Africa make for a win-win situation, some of China's policies undermine Africa's indigenous businesses. This is especially so in cases where China inundates Africa's markets with goods that undercut African goods and contribute to the failure of African business ventures.

Maxim Matusevich in his commentary underscores Russia's determination to reassert its superpower status by engaging in an increasingly assertive African policy. It does so through military support of African regimes and arms trade as well as mineral extraction. His commentary examines the historical complexity of Russia's ties with Africa during the Cold War. Matusevich argues that Russia like China does not pretend to embrace neoliberal democratic values but is rather focused on strengthening its political, military, diplomatic, and commercial ties with the continent, especially in the areas of weapons sales.

In recent years, despite the activities of some of the great powers, Turkey has also increased its presence in the African continent, especially in Somalia. Ash Rossiter and Brandon Cannon in their article tackle the issue of Turkey's military presence in Somalia. As they argue about the benefits of the Turkish presence they emphasize the fact that the misuse of the term "base" has led both politicians and pundits to mischaracterize Turkey's military training role in Somalia as a projection of hard power.

In the last article of this issue, Pamir Sahill reinterprets the war on terror discourse through the lenses of a poststructuralist critical discourse analysis. Through this perspective Sahill intends to foresee how the discourses used until now would impact future American policies in the Middle East.

Through a wide range of articles, this issue aims to bring to its readers a comprehensive framework on the past, present, and future of Africa, a continent which played a crucial role many years ago and is returning again to the attention of the great powers. Will there be a new scramble or not, remains a question to be answered. ■

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