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**Africa Symposium 2020: Advancing  
Africa's Peace, Security, and  
Governance—Major Themes**

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# Africa Symposium 2020: Advancing Africa's Peace, Security, and Governance

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## Introduction

In 2020, Africa celebrates some significant milestones. This year represents 20 years since Africa's regional and continental institutions adopted the principle of non-indifference, paving the way for African states to intervene in cases of political and military instability. It also marks 30 years since Africa's states began to adopt principles of democratic governance. To facilitate a forward-looking conversation on Africa's peace, security, and governance, the Institute for Defense Analyses and the Woodrow Wilson Center Africa Program jointly organized *Africa Symposium 2020: Advancing Africa's Peace, Security, and Governance*, held March 11, 2020, at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. The symposium drew approximately 115 participants from academia, government, and civil society. This summary highlights the major points of the four panels featured at the Africa symposium, as well as the perspectives offered by representatives of the U.S. government. The appendix contains the symposium's agenda.

The symposium convened leading scholars and practitioners to discuss Africa's democratic dividend, conflict-management reforms in Africa, women and youth as stakeholders in the continent's peace and security, and Africa's external stakeholders. In addition, senior members of the U.S. government provided perspectives on Africa's role in the U.S. National Defense Strategy. Ms. Whitney Baird (Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for West Africa and Security Affairs), Mr. Pete Marocco (Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for African Affairs, DASD), and Ms. Magdalena Bajll (National Intelligence Manager for Africa) provided their unique insights. Major General Christopher Craige, Director of Strategy, Plans, and Programs at the U.S. Africa Command (USAFRICOM), delivered the keynote address.

U.S. government officials affirmed America's commitment to Africa's security. Government officials outlined several priorities of the U.S. government policy in Africa. First, a common theme by many of the U.S. government representatives was the need to curb China's and Russia's influence in Africa, which is considered destabilizing. Similarly, the representatives pointed out the importance of developing counter-narratives and highlighting America's advantages. Ms. Bajll noted that there could be opportunities where the United States could cooperate with other external partners in Africa. Second, the U.S. government is focused on American businesses, aiming to expand opportunities for American businesses and work with African governments to help level the playing field. Third, America is committed to supporting peace, ending conflict in Africa, and responding to humanitarian emergencies. In the Sahel, in particular, the United States is part of the peace process in Mali and recently named a special envoy, Dr. Peter Pham, for the region.

In addition to the above, Ms. Baird noted that the youth bulge presented an opportunity, but it could also fuel insecurity, as violent extremist organizations appeal to youth who face poor economic prospects and disenfranchisement. Ms. Baird further noted that the United States supports its partners by investing in their militaries, intelligence capabilities, law enforcement, diplomacy, and economic initiatives.

DASD Marocco assured the audience that the United States was not reducing its commitment to Africa. Addressing concerns that a review of USAFRICOM's posture in Africa may result in a reduced presence on the continent, DASD Marocco assured the audience that the United States is not withdrawing from Africa and the Department of Defense (DoD) was not approaching the review as a wholesale reduction to its commitment to Africa. DASD Marocco explained it is a routine examination to ensure DoD has the right forces, with the right resources, in the right places to best meet the priorities outlined in the National Defense Strategy. In fact, all Combatant Commands would undergo review; USAFRICOM happened to be scheduled first. DASD Marocco outlined the extent of DoD's engagement across Africa, noting that in addition to the U.S. military in Africa, the DoD also provides training, supports dialogues, promotes cooperation, and shares intelligence. DASD Marocco specifically highlighted the National Guard Bureau's State Partnership Program, which expanded its network to 16 African countries with the addition of Ethiopia within the last 12 months. Finally, DASD Marocco closed with emphasizing the value of a "whole-of-government" approach to addressing security challenges and enhancing mil-mil engagements across Africa.

Major General Craige underscored the importance of Africa to U.S. security. He emphasized USAFRICOM's three cross-cutting themes: partnering for success, competing to win, and maintaining pressure on the networks. First, partnering for success entails bringing together a diverse network of allies, U.S. government agencies, multinational coalitions, and African partner nations. One concrete example of such a partnership is the U.S. National Guard's State Partnership Program. Currently, 15 African militaries have partnerships with state National Guards. Second, Major General Craige emphasized that partnerships depend on trust, for which USAFRICOM must compete. Building trust and long-term relationships between USAFRICOM and African partner nations is critical to addressing shared security interests. It entails developing programs that improve the capacity of African partner nations to counter extremism; provide military training, including maritime security; and help control infectious diseases. Third, Major General Craige discussed the need to disrupt malign foreign influences in Africa. As one example, USAFRICOM offers to review contracts—even those with other nations—to highlight areas of vulnerability. Major General Craige concluded that without U.S. support, the partnership between the United States and Africa will weaken, allowing Russia and China to further expand their influence.

## Africa's Democratic Dividend

Professor E. Gyimah-Boadi, co-founder and CEO of the Afrobarometer, a pan-African research and polling institution, and Professor Jaimie Bleck of Notre Dame University led the discussion on the achievements and challenges of Africa's ongoing democratization projects. The panel was moderated by Mr. Jon Temin, Africa Director at Freedom House. Acknowledging that multiparty elections are the norm across Africa—sustained by civil society, opposition parties, and media—they noted continuing citizen dissatisfaction with the supply and delivery of democratic governance and democratic goods (as confirmed by data from Afrobarometer surveys). Democracy in some countries, like Ghana, Botswana, and Malawi, is thriving, but there are worrying signs. Afrobarometer records dramatic slides in Benin, Guinea, Zambia, and Tanzania, among others. Other troubling indicators include a decline in Africans' support of a free media, weak electoral institutions, and uneven quality of elections.

Moreover, results from Afrobarometer surveys reveal that citizens judge their countries as democratic when the elections are deemed to be free and fair, government is accountable and economic opportunities increase, but there is disappointment across the continent. The supply of democracy falls far short of African citizens' demand for democracy. Afrobarometer reports the supply of democracy at 34 percent, that is, the percentage of African citizens who rate their country as a full democracy or one with minor problems *who are also* satisfied with democracy in their country. The demand for democracy is 42 percent; that is, the percentage of African citizens who prefer democracy *and also reject* military rule, one-party rule, and authoritarianism.<sup>1</sup>

Turning to Mali, Professor Bleck noted that Mali has pockets of democracy; it is distributed unevenly across the country. Conflict-mitigation mechanisms that date to the 1300s remain in use, citizens can gather and associate freely, and freedom of the press exists. But to citizens in Mali, the state is weak and ineffective—demonstrated by the outsourcing of public goods and security. Many Malians have little contact with the state, other than through predatory taxation—a divide especially pronounced between rural and urban populations. Indeed, Mali rests precariously on the brink of collapse.

Survey results in Mali obtained by fieldwork conducted by Bleck echoed Afrobarometer's results, showing that multiparty elections alone were insufficient to build state capacity to affect the rule of law, protect citizens, and provide services. There is a general pessimism and lack of confidence in the Malian state. Many Malians feel unprotected by the state. Malian youth, in particular, do not feel engaged, optimistic about the future, or valued. The protest movements occurring elsewhere on the continent have not spared Mali, but they have been smaller and the gains limited. Through protests, Malians have exerted pressure to improve trash collection, road repairs, and other government services.

To reap the promises of democracy, national and international bodies should focus on engaging youth and creating sustainable opportunities. In fact, Professor Gyimah-Boadi noted that youth tend to be more pro-democracy; the international community will miss an opportunity to deepen democracy by failing to engage this population.

## **Conflict Management and Reforms**

In 2000, the new Constitutive Act of the African Union (AU), as it transitioned from the Organization of African Unity (OAU), took the extraordinary step of condemning non-constitutional changes of government and allowing member states to intervene in cases of genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. The continental body shifted from a policy of non-interference to one of non-indifference. In practice, this has resulted in African states intervening in conflicts, contributing peacekeepers, and deploying peace-support operations. Led by Professor Paul Williams, of The George Washington University, and moderated by Dr. Stephanie Burchard, with IDA's Africa Program, the panel pointed out that while the AU has made tremendous strides, it still suffers from capacity, financial, and technical challenges.

The AU has drastically improved its ability to conduct and deploy peace support operations. Since 2003, within the framework of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), the AU has authorized or endorsed 16 peace support operations, with mandates that included peacekeeping; peace enforcement; stabilization; civilian protection; demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration; election monitoring and support; peacebuilding; regime support; and support to VIPs. Support to peace-support operations has increased steadily. In 2003, the first year the AU deployed peacekeepers, member states contributed 3,250 troops to AU missions; in 2019, AU member states deployed 20,626 to AU missions. At 22,000 troops at its height, the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) is the organization's largest. As with other peace support operations, however, the AU cannot support AMISOM independently. External partners have provided critical support to AMISOM, and APSA generally. Consequently, Professor Williams notes, "partnership peacekeeping" more accurately describes the reality of peace support operations in Africa. In this regard, the United States provides the primary lethal and equipment support; the EU provides non-lethal support; and other partners contribute financial resources and backstop operations. Professor Williams further clarified that the AU's rapid deployment capacity, namely the African Standby Force, has not materialized. Instead, ad hoc coalitions or regional economic communities, with troop contributions from member states, have played that role.

Financing the AU's peace support operations and building its professional workforce has been challenging, Professor Williams reported. From its inception in 2000 to 2015, none of the AU member states contributed to the AU's peace fund. Currently, fewer than 30 of the AU's 55 member states have paid their full contributions; 5 member states have

not paid at all. In 2015, to build the peace fund, as well as develop financial independence, the AU members agreed to impose a .02 percent levy on imports from outside the continent. This has raised \$164 million to date; the target from 2020 is to raise \$400 million annually. Developing the AU's professional staff has also proved difficult. In total, there are 1,720 personnel at the AU Commission, 1,000 short-term contractors; and 193 personnel in the peace and security department—but the AU needs many more.

The AU has outperformed the OAU in terms of responding to conflict, but it falls short of having achieved its objectives or addressing the root causes of conflict. Several challenges remain. Importantly, the AU must address the changing nature of responses to conflict and other threats that Africa faces. The G5 Sahel Joint Force and the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) represent the rise of ad hoc coalitions in response to conflict. These coalitions lie outside APSA's framework, which emphasizes a regional response to conflict. The AU must more clearly address whether and how to support the G5 Sahel and the MNJTF and manage the precedents they set. Coalitions like the G5 Sahel and MNJTF are also outside the traditional concept of a peacekeeping mission; with these new missions, the host state provides troops; accountability and compliance structures are weak; and peacemaking initiatives are vague. In a related challenge, the AU must also respond to threats besides those posed by armed conflict—such as organized crime, pandemics, environmental stressors, natural disasters, and cyber crimes—which also threaten security. These other threats will require the AU to go beyond deploying land-based soldiers and police officers. For example, organized crime requires law enforcement, police, and anti-corruption measures; preparing for pandemics, such as Ebola, entails shoring up health infrastructures.

### **Stakeholders in Africa's Peace and Security: Women and Youth**

Women and youth are increasingly considered critical to sustaining peace and security in Africa. Moderated by Dr. Ashley Bybee, of IDA's Africa Program, and comprising Ms. Sandra Pepera, Director for Gender, Women, and Democracy at the National Democratic Institute, and Dr. Marc Sommers, an internationally recognized expert on youth and conflict in Africa, this panel emphasized strong linkages between including women and youth, realizing democratic dividends, and peace. Youth are often subjected to violence by the state, violence against women is common, and both groups remain excluded from democratic processes and influential social discourse.

Drawing on his own research, Dr. Sommers explained that youth frequently experience state repression, exclusion, marginalization, and generational differences with elders. The last experience is especially pronounced in West Africa. Societies stereotype youth—males, in particular—as violent. But Dr. Sommers noted that most youth are not violent; most do not join armed groups. And yet, state repression and violence against youth is common. State violence correlates with increased activity by violent extremist

groups. By aggressively targeting youth, states thus threaten to undermine their own security, Dr. Sommers warned. In addition, the lack of opportunities for youth makes it challenging to attain expected adulthood milestones, such as marriage, when poor employment prospects make it difficult to pay a bride price. These unmet markers of adulthood invite public humiliation. To recruit adherents, violent extremist organizations counter these realities with gender-specific recruitment strategies, including male youths' fears of emasculation, and fears of failed adulthood, and, sometimes, anger at the state.

Africa has the largest numbers of youth on the planet. Dr. Sommers noted that in spite of their demographic dominance, many youth (in Africa, as well as globally), rather than feeling valued, are excluded. Without a venue to peacefully voice their concerns, most youth may resort to social protests. UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2250, adopted by the UN Security Council in 2015, called for including youth in peace and security processes.<sup>2</sup> UNSCR 2250 also provides the international community with an advocacy tool and a mechanism to give youth a voice in political matters, which, Dr. Sommers argued, governments should consider as a means of engaging this group more actively. In a bid to decrease the marginalization of youth, Dr. Sommers implored international advocacy organizations to ensure diversity in their programs—to reduce participation solely by elite youth—and to promote dialogue between community elders and youth leaders.

Ms. Pepera highlighted research demonstrating that women's engagement leads to more peace agreements and more sustainable peace. Among intra-state conflict, currently the dominant type of conflict, gender is a cross-cutting factor across the main drivers of conflict—inequality, exclusion, and marginalization. Women's value to peacebuilding lies in their tendency to work across boundaries, faith groups, and ethnicities. Citing new research, Ms. Pepera pointed to the bonds of associational trust that develop between women as they work together in church groups, holidays, and festivals. These bonds are key to building and maintaining a country's resilience to a range of shocks—political crises, insecurity, pandemics, or natural disasters. Despite this, there is great resistance to including women in peace processes. Ms. Pepera referred to a study of 80 peace processes that showed that 56 percent of resistance to including women stemmed from elite stakeholders.

Ms. Pepera argued that national, community, and personal security are intricately linked. Intimate partner violence correlates to violence in society writ large. Referencing *The First Political Order*, a newly published book by Hudson, Bowen, and Nielson, Ms. Pepera further emphasizes that inequality between men and women within the household reflects societal and political inequality.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, societal constructs and practices—such as unequal property rights, polygamy, bride prices, sex ratios, general violence against women, and femicide—stem from household practices, or “the first political order.”



Citing Georgetown University's Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Index, Ms. Pepera maintained that a higher gross domestic product (GDP) does not translate into less violence against women.<sup>4</sup> To this point, she noted that Rwanda sits at the top of the WPS Index, while countries with higher GDPs rank much lower. According to Ms. Pepera, other factors, in particular commitment and political will, are critical to reducing violence against women. In excluding women, communities bear a heavy price. They risk forgoing development, increasing insecurity, and diluting peace.

## **Africa's Evolving External Stakeholders**

In the last decade, engagement between Africa and the rest of the world has expanded considerably. Mr. Judd Devermont, Africa Director at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, and Dr. Lina Benabdallah, Wake Forest University political science professor, led the panel discussion, moderated by Mr. Michael Morrow, of the Woodrow Wilson Africa Program, on the increasing number of external stakeholders vying for a foothold on the continent. The panel focused particularly on the strong relationship between China and Africa.

Interest and engagement in Africa from the international community has surged. For example, Mr. Devermont noted that from 2010 to 2015, at least 150 new embassies were built in Africa, and trade and investment have been steadily on the rise over the past decade. Several countries, which have not had a presence in Africa, are developing strategies toward the continent, including Malta, Czech Republic, Serbia, Azerbaijan, Vietnam, Korea, and Thailand. Others are redesigning or deepening relations, including Russia, Israel, India, and Canada. Some countries use their investment and engagement with Africa to promote domestic agendas—China exerts pressure to refuse recognition of Taiwan, and Turkey has pressured African governments to close down Gulenist schools.<sup>5</sup> Trade and investment are also on the rise; Mr. Devermont reported that 65 countries have increased their trade with Africa. In contrast, U.S. engagement is at its lowest level since the Eisenhower administration—only two African heads of states have been accorded state visits under President Donald Trump. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has only visited the continent twice, in contrast with Secretary Hillary Clinton's four visits and Secretary Colin Powell's six visits. While many countries have hosted or participated in multiple summits on Africa, the United States has only hosted one. Still, Mr. Devermont noted, the United States has several tools that can be leveraged for increased engagement and improved relations: it retains a deep reservoir of trust and good will; wields significant cultural power; and has a record of programmatic successes, like the President's Emergency Plan for Aids Relief (PEPFAR).

To understand Africa's place in China's foreign policy, Dr. Benabdallah emphasized the diplomatic perspective, market interests, and strategic considerations. From a material perspective, the relationship between Africa and China is not one of equals, which is

similar to the relationship Africa has with other countries in the global north. But China distinguishes itself from Europe by emphasizing its non-colonial history. It signals a different power dynamic that is less overtly predatory.

Intervention in Africa by China extends beyond humanitarian concerns. Diplomatically, Africa is important for support in the UN, where African nations comprise the largest regional voting bloc. Relatedly, Africa helps China strategically, providing opportunities for China to build legitimacy as a responsible and significant global player. Moreover, the appearance of competition between China and the West contributes to China's global strategy.

Economically, Africa is a source for consumer goods, not just extractive- and service-sector products. Africa also faces challenges in harnessing its economic potential, as the continent must expand its infrastructure and provide more and more jobs for its rapidly growing population. These potential consumers create additional opportunities for Chinese companies to launch new products and build new markets for old products. Africa's more intricate connection to the international community also means that insecurity in Africa affects countries outside the continent.

Professor Benabdallah emphasized China's investment in Africa's human capital. Many have focused on China's economic statecraft and lack of conditionality for loans and aid. These are important—especially considering that within the African context, democratic dividends materialize as economic advancement and as development projects that provide access to services, like water and electricity. The Chinese government provides these goods. However, human capital investment—in the form of increasing opportunities for students and diplomats—has been the most effective tool in strengthening Africa-China relations. China has offered political party training, scholarships, joint military drills, and long- and short-term military officer training. Professor Benabdallah stressed that these initiatives do not just focus on government officials—diverse sectors of society have these opportunities. Moreover, the programs are consistent and long-standing. For example, the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) has met every 3 years since 2000. This consistency, Professor Benabdallah underscored, serves to develop history, institutions, and trust—as well as to cast China as a norm-maker, an important function for any global power. As further evidence of the premium on human capital, Professor Benabdallah noted that compared with 2015, the 2018 FOCAC summit had more scholarships than loans.

China's engagement with Africa on trade and political relations is the continent's most significant. But Chinese investment and engagement do not crowd out the United States, Mr. Devermont argued, referencing data that show that U.S. and Chinese investment exhibit similar surges and declines. Mr. Devermont further argued that Chinese investment is not a zero-sum game: investments and engagement by other nations can benefit all. For example, during recent hurricanes in the Indian Ocean, India provided assistance to

Madagascar and Mozambique. And as the Somali security situation continues to remain intractable, Somalia receives humanitarian assistance from Arab countries.<sup>6</sup>

Security challenges in Africa have drawn in a broad set of international actors. Mr. Devermont recounted that the rise of violent extremism and subsequent migration crisis have influenced Europe's politics; the Ebola epidemic in West Africa affected peacekeepers, in particular Filipinos; drugs trafficked from Latin America pass through Guinea-Bissau and the Sahel, en route to Europe, creating law enforcement challenges; and piracy in the Horn of Africa required the arming of commercial ships and the creation of many task forces. The United States must keep innovating and thinking of new ways to connect with African nations. Both presenters noted that while few people remember which countries built which roads, many remember personal interactions and connections.

## Conclusions

Africa Symposium 2020 highlighted the continent's advancements in establishing democratic institutions, conflict-management mechanisms, and Africa's increasingly significant role in the global community. Yet critical challenges remain in how to increase institutional capacities to address conflict and how to integrate important stakeholders to advance peace, security, and democracy. A cross-cutting message centered on more robust engagement of citizens—in particular, youth and women—by national governments and international bodies, in a bid to increase support for democratic norms and discourage the growth of violent extremist organizations. Panelists also underscored the need for the United States to engage robustly with Africa, building on the advantages of soft power, through diplomatic initiatives, and by developing innovative ways to remain connected.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Mattes, "Democracy in Africa: Demand, Supply, and the 'Dissatisfied Democrat,'" *Afrobarometer Policy Paper*, No. 54, February 2019, 4, 13, 17.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Security Council, "Resolution 2250 (2015)," S/RES/2250 (2015), December 9, 2015, [https://undocs.org/S/RES/2250\(2015\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/2250(2015)).

<sup>3</sup> Valefrie M. Hudson, Donna Lee Bowen, and Perpetua Lynne Nielsen, eds. *The First Political Order* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020), <http://cup.columbia.edu/book/the-first-political-order/9780231194662>.

<sup>4</sup> Women, Peace, and Security Index, Georgetown University, <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/the-index/>.

<sup>5</sup> Gulenist schools are linked to Fethullah Gulen, a U.S.-based Turkish cleric, who the Turkish government alleges was responsible for the failed 2016 July coup (see: Jenny Norton and Cagil Kasapoglu, "Turkey's Post-Coup Crackdown Hits 'Gulen Schools' Worldwide," September 23, 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-37422822>).

<sup>6</sup> See for example: Qatar Fund for Development, "The State of Qatar Sends the Second Batch of Humanitarian Aid to the Brothers in Somalia," November 10, 2019, <https://qatarfund.org.qa/en/the-state-of-qatar-sends-the-second-batch-of-humanitarian-aid-to-the-brothers-in-somalia/>; Maggie Fick, "Harboring Ambitions: Gulf States Scramble for Somalia," May 1, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-somalia-gulf-analysis/harboring-ambitions-gulf-states-scramble-for-somalia-idUSKBN1I23B4>.



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